Finding Hope: Guatemalan War Orphans' Responses to the Long-Term Consequences of Genocide

Shirley Heying

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FINDING HOPE:
GUATEMALAN WAR ORPHANS’ RESPONSES TO THE
LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF GENOCIDE

by

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B.S., International Business, Saint Cloud State University, 1993
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Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the orphan alumni of the *Hogares Santa María de Guadalupe* residential home in Santa Apolonia, Chimaltenango, Guatemala, who will always be a profound inspiration in my life. I also dedicate this dissertation to the tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers who made the *Hogares* a loving, nurturing home for orphaned children in the wake of the most brutal period of Guatemala’s history.
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FINDING HOPE: GUATEMALAN WAR ORPHANS’ RESPONSES TO THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF GENOCIDE

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ABSTRACT

The most brutal period of genocide in Guatemala, known as *la violencia* and denoting the period of 1978-1983, left tens of thousands of mostly Maya indigenous children orphaned. In this dissertation, I present results from research I conducted with war orphans who are now adults and who were raised at a permanent residential home for orphaned children in Santa Apolonia, a majority Maya Kaqchikel Highlands town. Comparing 20 of these war orphans with 20 of their peers from the town of Santa Apolonia, I found that orphans had suffered greater long-term consequences from the genocide. Relative to their peers, orphans reported more genocide-related childhood trauma and ongoing effects of that trauma, greater economic challenges in adulthood because of economic loss sustained from the death of parents and property destruction brought about by *la violencia*, and more severed familial and community ties, which dramatically shifted their centers of socialization and enculturation during their most formative years of childhood.

Nonetheless, orphans in my research project reported higher levels of emotional resiliency and post-traumatic growth and higher rates of college and advanced education enrollment than their peers, allowing them to outpace their peers economically and
professionally. In addition, despite having lost familial and natal community ties, orphans asserted a deeply-rooted sense of identity and belonging in the Guatemalan nation-state today, based on a more fluid conceptualization of identity that allows for a simultaneous internalized sense of continuity and active participation in creative practices. Experiencing neither “identity loss” nor an “identity crisis,” orphans are actively and creatively adapting to their situations and contexts as orphaned survivors of genocide and maintaining a sense of profound rootedness that cannot be destroyed by external forces. Based on these findings with a particular group of war orphans, I illustrate that even in the long-term aftermath of the most brutal, inhumane violence, genocide survivors, by engaging in creative and constructive practices, can overcome adversity and build a life of hope.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“People [in Guatemala] are still paying for the psychological, social, and economic costs of the disaster which befell them and are likely to do so for generations to come” (Zur 1998:307).

Standing in the tiny kitchen of House 4 next to the central hearth as I helped dry the last few lunchtime dishes, I gathered up the courage to ask tía Chenta what her experience was like during the most brutal period of Guatemala’s 36-year civil war. It was late 1995 and after more than a year of living in Guatemala as a volunteer at a permanent residential home for orphaned children, I had developed sufficient Spanish language skills to hold a reasonable conversation with adults. I came to know tía Chenta during the first year of my two-year volunteer service and in that time, she and her two teenage daughters often shared bits and pieces of what had happened in their tiny aldea (hamlet) in 1980. However, I had never heard the full story and was certain that I was either missing or had misunderstood some elements of the story. Having developed confianza (trust) with tía Chenta and her daughters, I felt confident enough to ask her about what had happened that caused her to become a widow and her two daughters to become “huérfanos parciales” (partial orphans), a term used throughout the Guatemalan Highlands to identify children who had one parent who was murdered or “disappeared” during the civil war.

Tía Chenta was one of the 25 caregivers called tías (or aunts) who were employed by the Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe permanent residential home to care for children who had been orphaned during la violencia, the most brutal period of the civil war (1978
to 1983). Having been widowed during la violencia, tía Chenta came to work at the home in the early 1990s in order to earn a wage to financially support herself and her two daughters. Within a year of employment, she was able to bring both of her daughters, who were ages 13 and 14 at the time, to live with her at the home. Arriving as a naïve international volunteer in October of 1994, I knew little of what had happened in Guatemala just over a decade earlier. As my Spanish language skills improved, I began to learn more about the civil war and genocide from individuals such as tía Chenta, the Catholic sisters and the staff of the home, as well as from orphans themselves.

Finishing up sweeping the floor in the kitchen and placing the broom in the corner, tía Chenta motioned for us to head to the adjoining dining area and to have a seat at the large picnic-style table. Tía Chenta’s youngest daughter Irma, who had been helping me with the dishes, sat next to her mother and put her arm around her. Taking a deep breath, tía Chenta began to tell me about the most horrible experience of her lifetime. She began by remembering how cold it was that evening in late 1980 in the small aldea where she and her husband had built a tiny, simple home on his familial property. She continued by recalling that night had fallen and she was sitting next to the central hearth with Irma, just a newborn at the time, in her arms. Her oldest daughter Sofia, not quite two years old at then, sat nearby playing on the dirt floor. Tía Chenta’s husband was preparing to go to bed after a hard day of working in his agricultural fields. Suddenly there was a raucous outside and tía Chenta’s husband cautioned her not to move. Within seconds, a group of men forced their way into the small home and demanded that tía Chenta’s husband accompany them immediately to a nearby military post. Her husband refused knowing full well that if he accompanied the men, he would likely never return to his family. Tía
Chenta and her husband had heard plenty of recent stories of neighbors and villagers in adjoining aldeas who were taken from their homes by Guatemalan military soldiers or civil patrol members and were brought to the nearby military base where they were either murdered or “disappeared” (murdered and their bodies disposed of in an undisclosed location). Fearing for his life, tía Chenta’s husband refused to accompany the men, none of whom tía Chenta or her husband recognized as being from the local area.

At this point of the story, tía Chenta’s oldest daughter, Sofia, came out of her room that was located just off to the side of the dining area. Sofia sat on the other side of her mom and held her hand. Squeezing Sofia’s hand in recognition of her emotional support, tía Chenta continued her story by recounting that after her husband refused to leave their home, the group of men dragged him out of the house and into the small adjacent patio (or courtyard). Tía Chenta quickly followed behind the men with Irma in her arms and Sofia holding onto her corte (traditional skirt). She begged the men to leave her husband alone. The men shouted at her to keep quiet, but tía Chenta desperately shouted for them to leave her husband in peace because he had done nothing wrong. The men quickly retorted by accusing her husband of being a “communist subversive” and a supporter of the Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrilla insurgency that had been gaining ground in the western Highlands at the time. Tía Chenta’s husband had nothing to do with the insurgency campaign or the guerrillas, but tía Chenta’s pleas for the men to leave her husband alone did not make a difference.

Hearing the scuffle in the patio, family members who lived next door ran to tía Chenta’s side. Tía Chenta continued to plead with the men as they began hitting her husband and tossed him to the ground. The men threatened to kill tía Chenta’s husband if
he did not begin to admit his guilt. Innocent, tía Chenta’s husband had nothing to confess and begged the men to stop beating him. The men continued to threaten him, telling him that they would kill him if he did not confess to being a guerrilla. In a panic, tía Chenta screamed that the men would have to kill her as well. “Kill me too! I cannot live without my husband! You will have to kill me too!” Tía Chenta clearly recalls shouting. Fed up with tía Chenta’s pleas, one of the men shoved her backwards. Fortunately, tía Chenta maintained her balance and her grip on baby Irma in her arms. The men continued hitting and kicking her husband who cowered on the ground writhing in pain. Recognizing the gravity of the situation and the futility of tía Chenta’s pleas, family members rushed to the patio and quickly scooped up Sofía after working hurriedly to loosen the tight grip she had on her mother’s corte during the scuffle. Another family member grabbed tía Chenta and tried to pull her away from the group of men in order to save her life, but tía Chenta struggled to stay in the patio and continued to beg the soldiers to kill her too because she did not know how she would raise two children alone.

After continued struggle, Tía Chenta was pulled to the side of the patio by a number of relatives who were well aware that if she stayed, she too would be murdered by the soldiers, which would leave her children completely orphaned. Tía Chenta gave in to the desperate pleas of her husband’s family members and ceased her physical struggle to remain in the patio. Terrified by what was occurring, tía Chenta wept inconsolably as her husband’s relatives rushed her, along with her two girls, down the hill and away from her home. As they neared the bottom of the hill where they had planned to seek refuge in the home of another relative, tía Chenta heard the gunshot ring out and echo across the small
Tía Chenta remembers cringing in absolute horror because she knew at that moment that her husband had been murdered by the unfamiliar men.

At this point in the story, the tears that had begun to well up in tía Chenta’s eyes spilled over and began to roll down her cheeks. Irma hugged her mother, tears running down her face as well. Sofia embraced her mother’s arm and continued to firmly hold her mother’s hand as she lowered her own head and with her free hand, brought her delantal (traditional apron) up to her face and hid behind it as she cried, wiping away the tears. I remained speechless, nearly too horrified to cry. I knew that tía Chenta was widowed during la violencia, but I had no idea what she had witnessed or suffered first hand at that moment. I did not know what to say, and my throat was in knots. Breaking the silence and extreme intensity of the moment, tía Chenta wiped her eyes, took a deep breath and said, “And that is why I can never marry again! I never want to suffer through that kind of pain again because I could never endure it again!”

Tía Chenta’s recounting of that horrifying night made a lasting impression on me that forever changed my own life trajectory. As I entered the second year of my volunteer service, I continued to learn what I could about la violencia from the tías, staff, orphans and the Catholic Sisters at the residential home, as well as from community members who lived in the town of Santa Apolonia where the home is located. I was embarrassed that I knew so little about a brutal war that ultimately erupted into genocide in a country that was not so far away from the United States. Even though I was only in elementary school and then junior high at the time of la violencia, I did remember hearing about the war in Nicaragua from U.S. national news reports during that same period. Yet, I knew
nothing of what had happened in Guatemala\(^1\). To counter my ignorance, I sought to find out what I could from the people who actually lived through that period as I continued to offer my services as a volunteer working at the *Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe* residential home for orphaned children.

Leaving the children, tíás, staff and Catholic sisters after completing my two-year volunteer term at the *Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe* permanent residential home—simply called *Hogares*\(^2\) for short by everyone at the home and in the town where it is located—was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do in my lifetime. Even though there was a constant flow of Catholic sisters, staff and volunteers arriving and leaving the *Hogares*, the exit of so many adults who cared for and mentored this group of orphans was often difficult for the children. As I hugged the last of the children in the crowd who gathered around the *Hogares* pickup truck that was scheduled to take me to the airport, 8-year-old Victor with the largest tears in his eyes looked up at me and in between sobs, managed to blurt out in syncopated measure with all honesty and sincerity, “Why can’t you just stay here until you die?!” How does an adult answer a question like that? How could I explain to Victor that the two-year deferment on my federal student loans for my undergraduate education was about to expire and that I needed to go home.

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\(^1\) Laurie Levinger (2009) also questions why she had not been more aware of the Guatemalan genocide when it was occurring. She contributes the general lack of knowledge in U.S. society regarding the Guatemalan conflict to the low level of U.S. media coverage at that time. To illustrate her point, Levinger conducted an article search for the period of 1976 through 1996 with three major U.S. newspapers: the New York Times, Washington Post and Boston Globe. Not unexpectedly, Levinger’s article search rendered far fewer articles on the conflict in Guatemala than on those in Nicaragua and El Salvador. For example, the Washington Post published 361 articles on the conflict in El Salvador and 242 articles on the Nicaraguan conflict, while it only published 70 articles from 1976 to 1996 on the Guatemalan conflict (2009:17). Thus, Levinger contends that the general lack of media coverage certainly played a role in limiting U.S. citizens’ awareness of the Guatemalan conflict, especially during the period of *la violencia*.

\(^2\) I will refer to the *Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe* permanent residential home as simply either *Hogares* or “the home” throughout the remainder of this dissertation. While the word “*hogares*” translates directly to the plural word “homes,” I will use the single term “home” to refer to the *Hogares* as an overall residential home program for children.
to make money to pay off my college education? I was at a loss for words. All I could do was promise that I would be back to visit and that I would never forget any of them… and I wondered if they believed me.

The 95-minute drive from the Hogares to the international airport was the most emotionally-difficult trip that I had ever taken to the capital. I had experienced so much during my two years in Guatemala and I was deeply perplexed by what I had learned of what had happened there, especially during the period of la violencia. The question that I could not seem to answer was how it was that people did not just lie down and give up under such great torment. I could not understand how tens of thousands of people who were tortured and persecuted, and who had lost so much could keep going in life. I also thought more specifically about the kids that I had just left behind, wondering what would happen to them in adulthood when they no longer had the protection and support of the Hogares.

Life was by no means perfect at the Hogares. The environment was often chaotic and unpredictable with 125 children from newborn to 18 years of age. Fights between kids commonly broke out, younger orphans misbehaved, teenage orphans often rebelled against adult authority, problems between the home and the townspeople commonly emerged, and contention often existed between the tías, Catholic sisters, staff and volunteers who had different approaches to working with children. Working at the Hogares in the mid-1990s as adults was a tough, demanding job because there was no separation between life and work as the children’s needs were not necessarily something that fit squarely into an 8-hour workday. As adults, we did our best to give each child the attention that she or he deserved and to meet their needs whenever possible under the best
conditions, but certainly there were moments in which the orphans’ needs were not being adequately fulfilled. Therefore, life at the Hogares was not without challenges and problems; however, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, which is based on my fieldwork conducted in 2007 and 2008, the home did provide a stable, loving and nurturing environment for orphans until they became adults at the age of 18 and officially left the home. After leaving the home, orphans were without the financial support of the Hogares. Therefore, orphans faced the daunting task of striking out on their own once their enrollment ended. During my volunteer service, I witnessed first-hand the departure of several of the first group of orphans enrolled at the Hogares. Some in this group of orphans had transitioned fairly well into adulthood, while others had an extremely difficult time with the transition.

On my flight back home to Minnesota, I promised myself that I would not forget what I had learned in Guatemala and that I would try to do something so that the orphans’ experiences and those of their family members, such as tía Chenta, would not be forgotten. After several years of working to pay off undergraduate student loans, I enrolled in the anthropology graduate program at the University of New Mexico and roughly ten years after initially leaving the Hogares as a volunteer, I returned to conduct dissertation research. Based on my previous volunteer experience and subsequent yearly visits to the Hogares, I decided to conduct a dissertation research project specifically focused on better understanding the experiences of orphans who I had come to know when I was a volunteer and who are now adults.

Research Plan

Central Research Questions
In order to gain a better understanding of the particular experiences of orphans who were enrolled at the *Hogares* and of their transition into adulthood as survivors of genocide, I developed three central research questions for my dissertation. **First,** what are the long-term consequences of *la violencia* that continue to affect orphans today in adulthood? **Second,** how have orphans responded to the challenges that the long-term consequences have presented in their life experiences? **Third,** how have the long-term consequences of *la violencia* and the ways in which orphans have responded to the resulting challenges influenced orphans’ own sense of identity and belonging in the Guatemalan nation-state today? With these three central questions as the primary focus of my research, I requested and received permission from the director and staff of the *Hogares* to establish the home as my residential base during fieldwork. From the *Hogares,* I conducted research with a group of the home’s alumni, as well as with a group of their peers from the town of Santa Apolonia in which the *Hogares* is located, which I detail below.

**Research Setting**

The *Hogares Santa María de Guadalupe* operates as a permanent residential home for orphaned children. It was founded in 1985 by the Latin American Province of the School Sisters of Saint Francis in the Highland town of Santa Apolonia, located in the *departamento* (department) of Chimaltenango. This region of the country was especially devastated during *la violencia* as the military used it as part of a major route for

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3 Many international volunteers and visitors commonly call the *Hogares* simply “the orphanage.” However, the *Hogares* was developed as a home and the word *orfanato* (orphanage) carries with it much stigma in Guatemala. Therefore, the Catholic sisters, staff, orphans, alumni and townspeople do not use the term “orphanage” when referring to the *Hogares.* Instead, they refer to the *Hogares* as a home. Therefore, I also reference the *Hogares* as a home and not as an orphanage throughout this dissertation.

4 *Departamentos* in Guatemala are similar to states in the United States.
infiltrating the Highlands in its brutal counter-insurgency campaign. Consequently, villages and indigenous peoples along this route in Chimaltenango were often accused of supporting Leftist guerrillas. Even though most residents had nothing to do with the guerrilla movement, they commonly became the primary victims of military-led murders, disappearances, torture and displacement. Jim Handy notes that in 1983, a private aid organization surveyed the departamento of Chimaltenango and revealed the following data:

In the region survey, 7 of 27 small villages had less than three-quarters of the number of families resident in the village one year earlier. In 11 communities over 20 per cent of the family units were headed by widows. A total of 15 communities had been abandoned for close to a year; and all but five were expected to receive either no or a severely limited harvest in 1983. Some communities were virtually wiped out. Chuabaj Grande had only 25 of 240 families remaining, 15 of them headed by widows. Paquixio had 100 of 200 families, Panicuy, 15 of 40. These rather cold statistics represent families shattered, lives lost and years of suffering as the communities, always sunk deep in poverty, struggled to rebuild [1984:277].

Recognizing the devastation and despair that had occurred in Chimaltenango in particular, the School Sisters of Saint Francis made an imperative decision to establish a program in the region specifically aimed at caring for war orphans.

The School Sisters of Saint Francis (a Catholic Franciscan order of religious women based out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin with mission sites around the world) were initially forced to flee Guatemala during la violencia. Having received death threats and under constant fear of ongoing political violence, the Catholic sisters and young women training to become Catholic sisters in Guatemala left for Chiapas, Mexico in the early 1980s. However, the Catholic sisters recognized the growing needs of the Guatemalan people and became intent on returning to serve in solidarity with the people who had

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5 The history of the School Sisters of St. Francis in Guatemala and of the Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe presented here derives from the numerous conversations that I have had over the past 17 years with the Catholic sisters and staff of the home, as well as from various internal documents at the Hogares.
remained in the country despite the tumultuous state-sponsored violence that was fully underway. The Catholic sisters and young women in training went back to Guatemala in 1982, but were prevented from returning to their former mission sites because of impending death threats and further interrogation by the military. Refusing to be coerced by military threats, the Catholic sisters looked for other areas of need and established new mission sites where they could best serve the people and communities most devastated by la violencia. Within a relatively short period of time of returning to the country, the Catholic sisters initiated new projects in marginal areas of Guatemala City and in the departamento of Alta Verapaz.

Through their initial work in these newly-established mission sites, the Catholic sisters became increasingly aware of the thousands of orphans and widows living in despair within the country, especially in the Highlands. Taking a risk, the Catholic sisters decided to work toward meeting the needs of orphans and their surviving family members by establishing a home for both indigenous and ladino children orphaned during la violencia. After nine months of initial investigative and preparatory work, the Catholic sisters were invited by Bishop Eduardo Fuentes Duarte of the Sololá Diocese to establish the home in the town of Santa Apolonia, Chimaltenango (a midway point between the eastern and western borders of the diocese and located in the middle of the central route used to infiltrate the Highlands during la violencia). The Catholic sisters were also familiar with the region as they had provided pastoral services to parishioners in the area prior to fleeing the country. Aware of their previous work, the Bishop of the Sololá Diocese invited the Catholic sisters to live in the rectory of the Catholic Church located in Santa Apolonia in order to reinitiate the Catholic sisters’ pastoral work, while they also
began laying the groundwork for opening their proposed home for orphaned children. In return, the Bishop and the diocese agreed to give the Catholic sisters a 99-year lease free of charge for adjoining church property where construction of the home for children could begin. By February of 1985, the first of eight homes was completed and the Catholic sisters began accepting orphaned children. Over the next couple of years, seven more homes were constructed and the Hogares was in full swing, nurturing and educating up to 125 orphaned children of all ages and backgrounds.

Structure of the Hogares

The Hogares initially consisted of eight small homes designed to replicate typical homes in the Guatemalan Highlands. Each home was equipped with four bedrooms, a dining room, a kitchen with a common pollo (or brick hearth) and a bodega (storeroom) for the home’s extra supplies and foodstuffs. An average of ten children lived in each home where they were cared for by the tías—indigenous and ladino women who were mostly widowed during la violencia—and who lived with and provided daily care for the children, while also helping them maintain their primary Mayan language skills (e.g., Kaqchikel, K’iche’, etc.). With an average caregiver-to-child ratio of one-to-three, the Hogares offered the children guidance, care and nurturing in a family-style environment rather than in an institutional-type setting. Today, the Hogares consists of six small homes as the number of orphans enrolled has since decreased in the post-war era. Created to replicate a family environment as much as possible, the Hogares continues to focus on helping children overcome loss and separation from family now due to family violence, illness and extreme poverty, while meeting their primary needs.
In addition to providing a nurturing and family-like home environment, the *Hogares* offers children access to formal education. Formal education is provided through the local public schools. This permits orphans to further develop social skills with children outside of the home and to more fully integrate into local community life. Consequently, when orphans arrive at the *Hogares*, they are immediately enrolled in the local schools where they are placed in grades according to their prior educational experience and academic abilities. Many orphans initially came from distant and more isolated villages and therefore, often lacked any formal education prior to arriving at the *Hogares*. They also had little or no Spanish language skills. With limited exposure to formal education and Spanish, many of the initial groups of children that were enrolled in the *Hogares* were placed in one of the initial primary grades, regardless of their age. Once placed at the appropriate educational grade level, the children attended school daily in order to meet the Guatemalan educational standards for completing *primaria* (elementary education) and *básico* (secondary education). Today, most children arrive at the home with some formal education and Spanish language skills. To further supplement their formal education, *Hogares* has consistently offered additional tutoring directly at the home in subjects such as Spanish language, math, reading and science in order to further assist the children with advancing their formal educations. The tutoring offered by the *Hogares* has been vital in helping the children make considerable gains in their academic skills and in preparing them for post-secondary education.

The *Hogares* also supplements the children’s formal education by providing vocational training. When the children reach the age of twelve, they are required to choose one of four vocational tracks offered at the home: shoemaking, carpentry, sewing
or agriculture. Once the children have selected a vocational track, they are required to attend their designated vocational workshop daily (Monday through Friday), using an alternating schedule with their formal education classes (most formal education classes take place either in the morning for elementary school or in the afternoon for junior high school during each weekday). The children attend the shoemaking, carpentry and sewing workshops directly at the Hogares, as the workshops are located within the home complex itself. The agricultural students work on several nearby plots of land that were purchased by the Catholic sisters over the years in order to help provide agricultural training, while at the same time raising crops to help sustain the home. All of the vocational workshops are taught by local trade specialists who bring with them a variety of practical work experiences and skills that help the children gain considerable ground in attaining vocational skills. These instructors also work to develop healthy relationships with the children and to serve as positive role models at a time when the children are in the most need of adult mentorship and guidance. Combining vocational training with formal education, the Hogares is designed to foster the development of children’s academic, technical and social skills in order to help them gain improved access to more sustainable employment and life opportunities once they become adults and are on their own in adulthood.

The Children at the Hogares

Initially the Hogares was established to specifically assist war orphans who had lost one or both parents in the counter-insurgency attacks, massacres and village burnings during la violencia. In many instances, the children had lost their fathers in these brutal attacks and could no longer be economically supported by their widowed mothers. For
many widows, economically maintaining their families once their husbands either were murdered or disappeared was virtually impossible because they had little or no marketable job skills or formal education with which to secure wage-labor employment. Many widows also lost most of their belongings and land during *la violencia*, leaving them with no resources with which to eke out even a most basic sustainable living for their children. This experience was quite common for many families because of the high rate of widows in Chimaltenango (CITGUA 1989). Unable to economically sustain their families and fearing for the lives of their children, many widows brought their children to the *Hogares* as a last resort and a final hope for meeting their children’s basic needs. However, as the *Hogares* moved past the 1980s and weathered the initial aftershock of the most brutal years of *la violencia*, children continued arriving due to other circumstances.

Many of the children who arrived at the *Hogares* after the 1980s were abandoned, abused or neglected by family members. In some cases, extended family members brought children in fear of their safety at home as their parents suffered from extreme mental illnesses or substance addiction and frequently threatened their children physically. In other cases, widowed parents may have died due to illness or violence, leaving their children completely orphaned and with no other family members either willing or financially able to care for them. Other children came as a result of their single or widowed parents’ inability to financially support them. With no other means of financial support, these parents looked to the *Hogares* as a viable and often last resort for providing their children with any sort of hope for survival and a better future.
Despite the end of Guatemala’s civil war and military tyranny marked by the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the need for a nurturing home for orphaned, abandoned and neglected children continued. When the Catholic sisters began their work at the Hogares, the original aim was to care for war orphans and to close the home after these children had become adults. However, the constancy of social and economic strain upon families within Guatemala has created and continues to create an ongoing need for the home. Therefore, an end to the need for the Hogares in Santa Apolonia remains to be seen. Today, children who arrive at the Hogares range in age from newborn to 17 years of age, originate from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and now reside in the town of Santa Apolonia.

The Town of Santa Apolonia

The Hogares is located in the rural Guatemalan Highlands in the majority Maya Kaqchikel municipality (similar to that of a U.S. county) of Santa Apolonia. The municipality of Santa Apolonia is one of 16 municipalities in the departamento of Chimaltenango, which is the eighth largest of the 22 departamentos in which Guatemala is divided (INE 2002). Figure 1 presents a map of Guatemala’s departamentos and Figure 2 presents a detailed map of the specific departamento of Chimaltenango.
Figure 1: Map of the 22 Departamentos (Departments) of Guatemala. Chimaltenango is denoted as number 12 on this map and the black star indicates the national capital of Guatemala City (Zonu.com 2011a).
Figure 2: Map of the Departamento of Chimaltenango. The municipality of Santa Apolonia is denoted as number 2 on this map. The capital city of the departamento, also named Chimaltenango, is denoted with an asterisk in the municipality identified as number 6 on the map (Zonu.com 2011b).

Located 92 kilometers northwest of the national capital of Guatemala City, the municipality of Santa Apolonia is 96 square kilometers in area, has a total population of 11,859 people and consists of the main cabecera (or central municipal town that serves as the administrative seat of the municipality) that is also named Santa Apolonia. The municipality also consists of 12 aldeas and 26 caseríos (tiny settlements) (Gall 1983; Hawkins 1984; Hendrickson 1995; Hill and Monaghan 1987; INE 2002; Moore 1973; Rodríguez Rouanet 1996; Wagley 1957). Figure 3 presents a detailed map of the municipality of Santa Apolonia.
In the pre-Columbian period, the region that now encompasses the municipality of Santa Apolonia was part of the Kaqchikel kingdom. At the time of the Spanish conquest, the capital of the Kaqchikel Empire was the post-classic site of Iximché, which is located just over 8 kilometers to the southwest of the town of Santa Apolonia and 3 kilometers from the larger neighboring town of Tecpán (Gall 1983; Hill 1992). The area that encompasses the Santa Apolonia municipality today initially was considered an annex to
the neighboring municipality of Tecpán and as such, was expected to supply Tecpán residents with the pottery that Santa Apolonia has become known for throughout its history (Gall 1983; Hill 1992). In fact, Santa Apolonia has had such a long tradition of pottery-making that early accounts of the Santa Apolonia region from over 300 years ago report on the inhabitants’ ceramics skills and production. In the 17th century, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán wrote in his work entitled Recordación Florida that “[t]he vicinity [of Santa Apolonia] is formed by 330 Indians who pay tribute. All the Indians in this place are potters who along with their corn crops live comfortably on small farms” (cited in Gall 1983:544). In the late 1700s, Archbishop Pedro Cortes y Larraz visited the Tecpán diocese and after a short trip to Santa Apolonia wrote, “[R]egarding the politics of the Indians, it appears to me that in the town of Santa Apolonia, they work much with pottery, especially [making] jars and large water jugs” (cited in Gall 1983:544). Even today, several families in the town of Santa Apolonia continue the long-standing tradition of making pottery and selling their wares at local markets and to the occasional tourists and international volunteers who visit the town. Figure 4 presents images of pottery-making and of the pottery style for which Santa Apolonia is renowned.
Figure 4: Pottery of Santa Apolonia. (Left) “El Tinaja”—A Kaqchikel potter crafts a tinaja, or water carrying vessel, from the clay that is unique to the Santa Apolonia region. Photo by research collaborator Mery Martín. (Right) A completed pot made in Santa Apolonia in the particular Santa Apolonia style. Photo by author.

The cabecera (or central governmental seat) of the municipality of Santa Apolonia is the town also named Santa Apolonia (or Saint Apollonia in English) after the saint who met her demise by having all of her teeth pulled out or shattered. Consequently, Saint Apollonia is considered the patroness of dentistry and people with tooth pain. The feast day of Saint Apollonia is celebrated February 9th each year. The town of Santa Apolonia is located just two kilometers off of the Pan-American Highway, which is Guatemala’s “primary transportation artery” (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003:1) that links the western border of Chiapas, Mexico with Guatemala City and then onto the eastern border of El Salvador. The road that connects the town of Santa Apolonia to the Pan-American Highway meets at the point that locals call “el entronque” (the junction). It is at el entronque that local townspeople and villagers often wait to catch public transport via rural busses that take them to the capital or west-bound toward the tourist areas of Sololá, Panajachel or Xela (the colloquial name for the western city of Quetzaltenango). Initially,

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6 All remaining photos presented in this dissertation were taken by the author unless otherwise stated.
the road that leaves the Pan-American Highway, heads to Santa Apolonia and continues on toward the town of San José Poaquil at the end of the route consisted of a rustic dirt road that was often impassible at various points during heavy rainy seasons. However, the entire 14 kilometer length of the road was reconstructed with asphalt in the period of 1998 to 1999 under the presidency of Alvaro Arzú with federal funding, which allowed for improved road conditions and consistent transport between San José Poaquil and Santa Apolonia, and the Pan-American Highway more generally. Figure 5 presents a photo taken in 2010 of a second phase of reconstruction of *el entronque* between the Pan-American Highway and the entrance road to Santa Apolonia and ultimately San José Poaquil.

The town of Santa Apolonia, with an urban population of roughly 4,291 inhabitants (85% indigenous and 15% *ladino*), is nestled at the base of the Highland mountain peaks of *Cojulyá* and *Chuitzá* to its west. The town looks out over the Xejul valley to the east where the Agua, Acatanango and Fuego volcanoes can be seen in the distance, with the
Fuego volcano regularly expelling large puffs of sulfuric smoke into the air. The town of Santa Apolonia is positioned at 7,200 feet above sea level and is considered to be *tierra fría* (cold earth) because the higher elevation permits a cool year-round climate that can sometimes even cause frost in the dry season, but also supports the town’s primary industry of agriculture (Gall 1983; Hill 1992; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003). The main crops grown in the region include corn, black beans, legumes, wheat and regional fruit. Recent growth in agricultural exportation in the region has also spurred the addition of broccoli, cauliflower, snow pea, strawberry and cabbage crops grown for international commerce rather than local home consumption (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Fischer and Benson 2006). In addition to agriculture, other small commercial endeavors in Santa Apolonia include two sawmills (a consequence of which is grave deforestation in the area), a limestone processing business, various independent trucking businesses that transport earth, lumber and other large materials, and a variety of small general goods stores that sell everything from groceries and school supplies to home-baked bread and traditional Kaqchikel *cortes* and *huipiles* (traditional skirts and blouses). There are currently two elementary schools (one public, one private) and a cooperative middle school that serves the children and adolescents of the town and immediately adjoining area. Town teenagers who wish to attend high school (called *diversificado*) must attend school in either neighboring Tecpán, the *departamento* capital city of Chimaltenango or one of Guatemala’s larger cities, including the national capital itself.

The town of Santa Apolonia is roughly six town blocks long by three blocks wide. The center of the town is flanked on the south side by the newly renovated municipal building. The Catholic Church is located on the north side of the central plaza and a small
municipal park is situated between it and the main municipal building. The political structure of the town includes a mayor and 6 council members (2 representatives and 4 councilors) (Municipio de Santa Apolonia 2007). In the past 15 years, the number of evangelical churches in the town has grown exponentially. Today, there is an evangelical church on nearly every other block in the town. The Hogares remains one of the largest entities in Santa Apolonia, serving approximately 80 children and employing 20 full-time staff. Figure 6 is a photo of the town of Santa Apolonia taken from the cemetery hill located just south of town.

![Figure 6: The town of Santa Apolonia in 2008. The picture was taken facing north.](image)

**Positionality**

My prior status as a volunteer at the Hogares allowed for unique researcher positionality during my study. I have known all of the orphans that I interviewed for my project for well over 17 years now. They were teenagers when I initially served my two-year volunteer term at the home from October 1994 to November 1996. During this initial period of living with this group of orphans, I was positioned as a mentor. I helped
tutor them in their studies, conducted many recreational activities with them and coordinated a trip to the east coast of Guatemala that for many was the first time they had traveled beyond the Highlands area. Over the two years that I initially lived as a volunteer with this group of orphans, I was able to establish a bond with them as a mentor that would carry over into my dissertation research.

After my volunteer term ended in late 1996, I continued to visit the Hogares every year until I began graduate school in 2002. At that time, my visits to Guatemala became less frequent due to school and financial constraints. In the summer of 2005, however, I returned to the Hogares for a five-week period to evaluate the feasibility of carrying out research with the older alumni. I did not want to assume that they would be willing to work with me, especially given the sensitive nature of this research and the potential triggering of past trauma it could cause by revisiting painful memories. To my surprise, however, the orphan alumni were more than willing to participate and continued to express their desire to now help me with my “studies” by participating in my research project. While orphans astoundingly expressed outright enthusiasm for participating in my research project, I continued to take a cautionary approach as I did not want my prior position as a volunteer mentor to make them feel obligated to participate. After conducting preliminary interviews with nine orphan alumni, I found that their enthusiasm was genuine rather than forced. For example, after several of the preliminary interviews, some orphans expressed gratitude for being able to share their stories and to talk about their experiences as war orphans, something that they had not been explicitly asked to do before. This sentiment is reflected in one participant’s response in a preliminary interview: “Nobody ever asked me about my experiences or feelings before. It feels good
to talk about them” (Preliminary Interview 1, 7/25/2005). Reassured by orphans’ enthusiasm for my proposed research project and inspired by the potential this project could have in validating their experiences as orphaned genocide survivors, I requested and immediately received full permission and support from the *Hogares* director and staff to conduct dissertation research with the alumni. I returned to the *Hogares* in April 2007 and began 11 months of full dissertation research.

When I returned to Santa Apolonia in April 2007, I initially lived at the *Hogares* itself and shared a space in the volunteer annex building within the *Hogares* complex. This initial residence allowed me to reestablish my connections with current orphans and *Hogares* staff, while participating in daily life at the home. Immediately after my arrival, I began providing tutoring assistance to current orphans enrolled and helped in the administrative office. I also participated in various activities such as serving as a translator for a U.S. contingent of medical professionals who used the small *Hogares* medical clinic to provide a free week-long health clinic for the townspeople and other local residents in the area. After an initial two-month period of residing at the *Hogares*, I then moved into a small two-room portion of a house the Catholic sisters own that is located just a few blocks to the north of the *Hogares* in the town of Santa Apolonia. Despite the separate residential living situation, I continued to go to the *Hogares* every day in order to continue participating in daily life at the home. However, my new residential location allowed me to reintegrate back into the general community of Santa Apolonia (I already knew many of the residents from my initial volunteer experience in the mid-1990s). It also gave me access to a more neutral space where research participants could come for interviews in a more confidential setting instead of at the
Hogares where the Catholic sisters, staff or current orphans could potentially overhear confidential interview conversations (although it turned out that most participants preferred to be interviewed in their own homes for convenience). I remained at the community residence for the remainder of the research period, which terminated in late May 2008.

Research Participants

I conducted preliminary dissertation research in the summer of 2005 for five weeks and completed 11 months of dissertation research during the period of April 2007 through May 2008. With the permission of the Hogares director and staff, I began my full dissertation research by utilizing the Hogares enrollment database—one which I established for the administrative office during preliminary research in the summer of 2005—to randomly select 20 orphan alumni to participate in my research project. The enrollment database consisted of the names, birthdates, enrollment dates, reasons for being enrolled and other pertinent demographic information of all of the Hogares alumni and currently enrolled children. At the time that this study was conducted, there was a total of 80 Hogares alumni. I determined that interviewing 20 of the alumni (or 25% of the total number) would allow for a sound study design as it would gather information from a sizeable percentage of the overall number of alumni and simultaneously would be a feasible number of individuals with whom to conduct the more time-consuming ethnographic interviews and general research I had proposed. The final 20 Hogares alumni chosen to participate were selected by utilizing the random sample feature in Microsoft Excel to draw a simple random sample (Bernard 2002) of alumni whose birthdates fell between 1973 and 1983 (preceding and including la violencia) and that
consisted of a total of 10 females and 10 males. However, in recruiting the 20 selected orphans to participate, it was much more difficult to arrange interviews with the males as most were living in urban centers and working fulltime jobs that required a Monday through Saturday work schedule. Therefore, I randomly selected two additional females to interview, ending up with a total of 12 female and 8 male adult orphans who had work schedules that would permit time for interviews without a major inconvenience to them or their families. The majority of orphans identify themselves as either direct victims of la violencia (i.e., one or both of their parents were murdered or disappeared in the genocide) or indirect victims (i.e., one or both parents died from consequences that orphans themselves identify as stemming from the genocide such as alcoholism, illness or suicide). I discuss the various orphan statuses in detail in Chapter 4.

In order to try to understand the experiences particular to orphans versus experiences that were common for most children growing up in the Highlands during the genocide, I chose to develop a comparative study design for my research project. To establish a comparative design, I elected to also interview a group of 20 of the orphans’ peers (10 females and 10 males) from the town of Santa Apolonia with whom orphans went to elementary and junior high school, and had established friendships in childhood and adolescence. Before participating in my research project, I asked each of the 20 selected orphans to provide the names of several individuals they considered close peers from the town of Santa Apolonia. The names of over 40 peers who are roughly the same age as the 20 orphan participants were collected and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where a simple random sample of 20 was also drawn. All 20 peers selected to participate happen to reside in the town of Santa Apolonia, which made it easier for both the males
and females to participate in interviews given their work schedules and their close residential proximity. While the group of orphans differed slightly in the number of female versus male participants when compared with the group of their peers, no major differences based on gender in either the qualitative or quantitative results emerged from the data culled from my research project.

Once the simple random samples of participants from both orphan and peer groups were drawn, I approached each potential participant and presented a brief orientation of the research project. At the close of the orientation, I asked each individual if they would be interested in participating in my project. Surprisingly, every individual who was asked to participate in my project and who had a work schedule that could accommodate an interview immediately agreed and consequently, gave voluntary consent to participate. I had expected that a few of the peers, especially the 11 that I did not already know well, would not be interested in participating, but that was not the case.

Once the randomly-selected 20 orphans and 20 peers agreed to participate in the project, I followed the recommendation of the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the University of New Mexico that conducted a full review of my research project. The IRB members were concerned that signatures of participants could jeopardize their anonymity and safety following participation as any research dealing with Guatemala’s genocide still may be considered contentious within the country and could bring about negative repercussions for the individuals who participate. Therefore, in place of signed formal voluntary consent forms, I asked participants to demonstrate voluntary consent through the completion of particular research forms that were void of contain personal identifiers.
Research Methods

The research methods that I utilized in my project consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative methods included semi-structured interviews with participants, as well as observations during interviews, daily life and special events. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 60 questions that covered four primary topic areas that had emerged as common themes for orphans during preliminary research: politics, economics, identity and trauma. I conducted the interviews in Spanish as all participants speak fluent Spanish as their primary or secondary language. Many participants are also fluent in Mayan Kaqchikel or Ki’che; however, they all maintain a high level of Spanish fluency, which allowed me to interview the participants directly without a translator. I digitally recorded the interviews with participants’ permission and left out all personal identification information in the recordings for protective measures. Interviews typically lasted 45 to 55 minutes on average and took place either at the participant’s home or at a location the participant deemed a safe place. I transcribed the recorded interviews and coded them with NVivo 7 qualitative software following my research period in Guatemala in order to determine emergent themes across the four topic areas. I also recorded my observations of the interviews and of daily life at the Hogares and in the town of Santa Apolonia using Microsoft Word and later coded the text using NVivo 7 software in order to similarly extract themes that commonly emerged.

I collected quantitative data via a close-ended population survey, as well as through three distress and trauma assessment instruments. The close-ended population survey consisted of a fixed number of questions with forced-choice answers and scales (Bernard 2002) that captured participants’ personal and demographic information such as identity,
family status, educational levels, location of residence and current employment. Distress and trauma experienced by both groups of participants were assessed via three Spanish-version, empirically-tested psychometric measures: the Symptom Checklist 90 Revised [SCL-90-R] (Derogatis 1983), the Revised Civilian Mississippi Scale [RCMS] (Norris and Perilla 1996) and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory [PTGI] (Weiss and Berger 2006). Each of these trauma assessment instruments and the reasons that I selected them for use in my research project are described in detail in Chapter 4.

The final research tool that I utilized in this study was a spatial mapping technique (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte 1999) that plots each participant’s current residential location on a map in order to determine the distance in kilometers between their residences and the town of Santa Apolonia. Spatial mapping also helped identify whether participants currently reside in a rural or urban setting, further illuminating economic patterns and choices regarding residential settings and lifestyle (e.g., urban versus rural).

Research Findings and Chapter Summary

Based on my initial observations at the Hogares when I served as a volunteer in the mid-1990s, I assumed that many if not most orphans would not be able to overcome the long-term consequences of la violencia in adulthood. During just the two years that I served as a volunteer, I witnessed some of the teenage orphans suffering frequent panic attacks and persistent anxiety. Others exhibited destructive behaviors that led to being permanently expelled from the Hogares. Teenage pregnancy occurred despite highly regulated schedules and constant adult supervision at the home. Many of the teenage orphans refused to speak their Mayan languages and had a bitter attitude about their indigenous heritage, calling anything having to do with indigenous identity or practices
“estúpido” (stupid). Having eye-witnessed their behavior in adolescence, I was certain that my research would demonstrate that indeed war orphans had succumbed to the overwhelming long-term consequences of genocide in adulthood and that for the rest of their adult lives, orphans would be in an emotionally, economically and socially disadvantaged position when compared with their peers from the town of Santa Apolonia. To my surprise, however, the research results conveyed the complete opposite.

When compared with their peers from Santa Apolonia, orphans who participated in my research project have had to face greater challenges because of the long-term consequences of *la violencia* and their subsequent orphan status, which continue to affect them even in adulthood. Specifically, orphans have experienced more trauma, economic loss and severed ties with families and natal communities than have their peers. However, instead of responding to the challenges caused by the long-term consequences of *la violencia* in negative or ill-adaptive ways, orphans have actively engaged in creative and constructive practices that have allowed them to develop resiliency, to establish themselves economically and to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging as adults in the Guatemalan nation-state today.

In this dissertation, I elucidate how war orphans in my research project have positively confronted and ultimately are overcoming the long-term consequences of genocide in creative, constructive ways. I also demonstrate that they have developed a strong sense of identity and belonging in a nation-state that explicitly, but unsuccessfully sought to assimilate them into a single non-indigenous national identity. To achieve these aims, I begin with **Chapter 2** in which I outline the historical background and theoretical framework that are necessary to make sense of the orphans’ own experiences as survivors.
of genocide and with identity in Guatemala in general. I begin by elucidating the political and economic policies and practices that have contributed unremittingly to a dichotomous social hierarchy and thus, a state-established dichotomous identity construct imposed on the heterogeneous peoples of Guatemala. I follow with an examination of the theoretical tenets that have factored into the analytical tendencies to mirror the state’s envisioned dichotomous social construct by employing corresponding dichotomous categories when classifying and examining identity among Guatemala’s heterogeneous populations. I conclude by highlighting how both contemporary anthropological scholarship and my own research have diverged in important and meaningful ways from the narrow confines of a dichotomous identity construct and toward a more complex analysis that reflects how identity is actually perceived and expressed at the local level in the post-war era.

In **Chapter 3**, I present profiles of the life experiences (from infancy to present adulthood) of five of the 20 orphan participants who were enrolled in the *Hogares* shortly after its founding in 1985. I use the profiles first to describe and publicly record orphans’ experiences during and following the genocide, which contributes to recent efforts to construct an accurate historical account of the genocide in Guatemala based on first-hand eye-witness accounts collected from survivors. I also utilize the profiles to underscore two main sets of themes that emerged from the orphans’ experiences and that guide the direction of this dissertation: 1) the negative long-term consequences that orphans have had to confront because of the genocide and 2) orphans’ own creative and constructive responses to those long-term consequences. By focusing on five detailed orphan profiles in this chapter, I establish the foundation necessary for understanding what orphans have
had to endure and how they have responded during childhood and adulthood to the challenges of being orphaned survivors of genocide.

In Chapter 4, I examine orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma and loss, and discuss their abilities to enact resilient, thriving behaviors as a constructive response to those traumatic experiences. I begin with an overview of the militarized state’s overt use of psychological warfare and state-sponsored terror during the genocide in order to elucidate how the military sought to psychologically devastate the masses in the long-term. I then address the limited knowledge that exists regarding child survivors’ particular experiences related to the psychological warfare and state-sponsored terror. I continue by presenting orphans’ personal experiences with psychological warfare and state-sponsored terror of the genocide in order to fill the current gap in knowledge regarding child survivor experiences. I then compare orphans’ experiences with those of their peers to further delineate the particular experiences of children orphaned during the genocide. I conclude by discussing orphans’ abilities to become emotionally resilient and well-adapted adults today.

In Chapter 5, I detail the long-term economic loss orphans experienced and continue to face as a consequence of their orphan status, and focus on their dedication to education as one constructive means of overcoming the challenges of such prolonged economic loss. I begin by summarizing the economic precursors that led up to la violencia and that had placed orphans and their families in already extreme poverty. I next discuss the general economic loss and devastation that resulted from la violencia, establishing how subsequent economic destitution persisted for the masses for years following the genocide. I then explore the specific long-term consequences that the economic loss has
had on the lives of orphans and compare their experiences with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia, underscoring how orphans, in particular, have confronted and ultimately are overcoming the sustained economic loss caused by *la violencia*. I conclude by presenting orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia* and by revealing their views of the economic future for themselves, their families and the Guatemalan nation-state.

In **Chapter 6**, I address how orphans perceive and express identity, and reveal that despite severed familial and natal community ties long viewed as central to indigenous identity in Guatemala, orphans have formed a strong sense of identity and belonging that prevails today. I begin by discussing the Guatemalan military’s explicit attempts to eradicate indigenous identity during the genocide and highlight how adult survivors responded to the state’s brutal assimilationist agenda in the immediate wake of *la violencia*. I continue by presenting the orphans’ experiences with identity formation in childhood and adolescence, and compare their perceptions of identity now in adulthood with those of their peers. I next highlight the orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of current indigenous and *ladino* relations and convey the ways in which they personally experience intergroup relations. I conclude by elucidating how despite severed familial and natal community ties, orphans have developed a strong sense of identity that is forged upon simultaneous notions of continuity and creativity that are transforming what it means for them to be mainly indigenous adult citizens in the Guatemalan nation-state today.

In **Chapter 7**, I conclude my dissertation by summarizing the overall primary conclusions drawn from my research project regarding the long-term consequences of *la violencia*. I argue that orphans’ enrollment at the *Hogares* and their own sense of agency
are two central sources of influence that have contributed to their abilities to respond to the long-term consequences of genocide in creative and constructive ways. I also argue that the experiences of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project clearly demonstrate that their sense of concurrent continuity and creativity regarding identity does not denote simply “passing” from indigenous to ladino identity or becoming the “ideal citizen” according to the state. Rather, I contend that orphans enact a more fluid sense of identity that allows them to perceive themselves as remaining strongly rooted in their indigenous heritage, while transforming what it means to be an indigenous Guatemalan citizen today in their own terms and not that of the state. I conclude this chapter by discussing the implications of my research and the ways in which the results of this project will guide future research.

**Significance of Research**

My research with Guatemalan war orphans who survived the period of la violencia offers a significant contribution to the current dearth of research focused on orphaned children’s particular experiences during and following the genocide. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 children were orphaned during Guatemala’s 36-year civil war and subsequent genocide (Benton 1985; CITGUA 1989; Gugelberger 1999; Hooks 1993; Simon 1987; Tierney 1997; WOLA 1989). The two primary truth reports regarding the 36-year civil war and genocide in Guatemala discuss some orphaned survivor accounts and testimonies ([Informe de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico [CEH] 1999; Informe Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica [REMHI] 1998). However, research focused specifically and solely on war orphan experiences is nearly non-existent, which is surprising given the large number of children
orphaned. My research explicitly helps fill the gap in data regarding war orphans’
experiences, which is essential not only to further understanding both the short- and long-
term consequences of la violencia for survivors but also to validating orphaned survivors’
particular experiences related to the genocide.

My research project also contributes to anthropological literature regarding identity,
especially among indigenous citizens within the Guatemalan nation-state today.
Contemporary anthropologists working specifically in Guatemala recognize the
complexity of identity and are cognizant of the importance of moving beyond analyses
confined by the state-imposed dichotomous identity construct that places indigenous
identity, generally-speaking, on one end of the spectrum and ladino identity on the other.
My research further validates the importance of moving beyond a dichotomous construct
imposed on individuals by the state and of examining how identity is actually perceived
and expressed by individuals at the local level instead.

My research with war orphans also expands contemporary scholarship on identity in
Guatemala by demonstrating the importance of examining the internalized sense of
continuity regarding identity when familial and community ties—ties commonly
identified even by contemporary scholars as primary centers of influence regarding
indigenous identity—are abruptly severed in childhood. Orphans’ deep sense of
continuity and concurrent engagement in creative practices regarding the ways in which
they perceive and express identity provides further insight into the complexity of identity
(especially indigenous identity) for Guatemalan citizens today. Expanding the
examination of identity outside of the traditional confines of family and community is
now becoming even more imperative as scores of indigenous citizens are either moving
to urban centers or are migrating to other countries such as the United States and Canada for job opportunities in increasing numbers. The physical relocation of such large numbers of indigenous citizens out of traditional communities that in the past were considered central to indigenous identity and into urban and foreign centers does not necessarily equate with a sense of “identity loss” or an “identity crisis,” but will most assuredly come to bear in various ways on what it means to be an indigenous Guatemalan today. Thus, the complexity of indigenous identity in an increasingly urbanized and globalized context necessitates a wider scope of analysis and understanding as I demonstrate in my own research with war orphans who are now adults and who have mostly lost their familial and natal community ties altogether.

Lastly, my research with war orphans illustrates that there are alternative ways in which to care for children orphaned during and following war and other state-sponsored violence such as genocide. For orphaned children whose surviving family members cannot assume responsibility in caring for them, international adoption is not the only option. The work of the tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers at the Hogares demonstrates that residential care for orphaned children in their own country of origin can have positive life-lasting effects, while allowing the children to maintain a sense of connection with their extended family, general natal regions and even national heritage by physically remaining in their own country of origin. Therefore, the findings of my research project contribute to both research and practice by providing pivotal data and information that can assist development programs and policy-makers concerned with determining how to best meet the needs of orphaned children around the globe during and in the aftermath of state-sponsored violence.
CHAPTER 2

Historical Background and Theoretical Framework

The present is filtered through an understanding of the past, and even novel actions implicitly reference shared notions of a common history (Fischer 2003:46).

To understand the lived experiences of orphans who participated in my research project, it is imperative to present an overview of the historical and analytical tenets underlying the Guatemalan state’s efforts to construct and impose a dichotomous social hierarchy on its populace. From the time of the Spanish Conquest onward, the ruling oligarchic elite have controlled and maintained a dichotomous social hierarchy that places ladino (non-indigenous) peoples at the top and the majority Maya indigenous populations at the bottom. A dichotomous construct was created by the ruling elite to categorize the otherwise heterogeneous population, who subsequently came to be identified as either “Indian” or ladino with little room for variation between these two anchor categories. Historically, the dichotomous social hierarchy has greatly benefitted the small group of ruling elite whose persistent fear of a general “Indian” uprising has fueled centuries-worth of exploitative, oppressive and often brutal measures to keep the “Indians” in their subjugated position. Elite fears ultimately erupted into full-scale genocide in the late 1970s when an oppressive Guatemalan military regime that was backed by the ruling oligarchy as a means of maintaining its self-serving social hierarchy.

Theoretically, scholars in the early 20th century recognized the dichotomous social construct created and maintained by the oligarchy, and likewise formulated their examinations of identity in Guatemala within the narrow confines of this construct. As a
result, early scholars conflated the dichotomous categories of the social hierarchy with identity more generally in the Guatemalan nation-state. These early scholars posited that identity mirrored the state-created social hierarchical division of “Indian” versus ladino. By the mid-20th century, however, anthropologists began to examine the importance of the municipio (local municipal centers) in indigenous identity formation and subsequently recognized greater variability in the way in which indigenous individuals, in particular, perceived and expressed their identities at the local level. Despite the resulting awareness of greater variability in indigenous identities, many scholars at the time continued to adhere to an identity construct espousing the indígena (indigenous) versus ladino dichotomy.

In the analyses that follow, I outline both the historical and theoretical backgrounds essential for understanding the experiences, both during and after the genocide, of orphans who participated in my research project. I begin with a focus on the historical background of Guatemala in order to illuminate the political and economic policies and practices that have contributed unremittingly to the dichotomous social hierarchy and identity construct, which ultimately fueled the brutal terror that erupted into la violencia. I then follow with an examination of the theoretical tenets that have factored into the analytical tendencies to mirror the state-imposed dichotomous social hierarchy when examining identity at the local level. I conclude by highlighting how both contemporary anthropological scholarship and my own research have diverged in important and meaningful ways from the narrow confines of a dichotomous identity construct when analyzing how identity is, indeed, perceived and expressed especially among indigenous peoples, in Guatemala today.
**Historical Background**

For hundreds of years, indigenous peoples in what is now the nation-state of Guatemala have been systematically murdered, tortured, enslaved, indentured, violated, exploited and discriminated against by a small group of non-indigenous oligarchic elite (Carey 2001; CEH 2006, 1999; Handy 1984; Jonas 2000; McKean Dow 1981; Smith 1990a, 1990b; Warren 1998, 1989). In the late 1970s, the extremely disproportionate subjugation and annihilation of the indigenous masses reached new levels of callousness when the ruling elite orchestrated full-scale genocide that resulted in the murder and disappearance of hundreds of thousands of innocent indigenous peoples who committed no crime whatsoever against the state. In order to understand contemporary Guatemala and the experiences of any segment of its populace that survived the genocide, therefore, it is imperative to first examine the political and economic processes developed over the past five centuries chiefly by a non-indigenous, elitist and often inhumane oligarchy (CEH 1999; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Handy 1984; REMHI 1998; Smith 1990c).

Anthropologists Fischer and Hendrickson point out, “The present is constructed—consciously or unconsciously—from historical experience, both the material conditions produced by the past actions and the remembrance of how things once were” (2003:45). Thus, understanding the lives of Guatemalans today including orphans who participated in my research project necessitates an examination of the historical forces that have shaped their political, economic and social experiences. I recognize that the overarching political and economic history presented here lacks indigenous peoples’ perspectives via
their own particular historical accounts and oral histories\(^1\). However, the historical summary that follows does offer at the very least a general chronological overview of the state-imposed policies and practices resulting from the oligarchic elite’s drive to maintain the indigenous masses at the bottom of a self-serving dichotomous social hierarchy.

**From Spanish Conquest to La Primavera (The Spring)**

The Spanish Conquest set in motion over five centuries of intense subjugation and annihilation of the indigenous populations living within the territory that would become the nation-state of Guatemala. Divisive colonial enterprises, such as the *encomienda*, *repartimiento* and *reducción* (or *congregación*) systems, allowed the conquerors to exact control over the subjugated indigenous populations by exploiting their labor via enslavement, tribute and forced labor, and by physically relocating them to concentrated settlements for the benefit of the conquerors and the Spanish Crown. The colonial enterprises became the genesis of a deepening, centuries-long rift between the diverse indigenous Maya majority, who the conquerors came to collectively refer to as “Indians,” and the elite minority of Spanish landowners and their descendants (Carlsen 1997; Castillo Méndez 2008; Handy 1984; Hill 1992, 1989; Keen 1992; Lovell 2005, 2000, 1988; Lujan Muñoz 1998; Lutz and Lovell 1990; McCreery 1994, 1983; Perera 1993; Sharer 1994; Thompson 2001).

Mounting tension between indigenous and *ladino* (inhabitants of generally mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) populations, and deepening economic depression and political shifts within the territory that would become Guatemala fed the movement for

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\(^1\) My recognition of the lack of and importance of indigenous peoples’ perspectives on Guatemala’s history is substantiated by historian David Carey who notes, “Most Ladino and Western scholars’ presentations of Guatemalan history fail to incorporate Mayan historical perspectives and values. These ideas are important to an understanding of Mayan past, present, and future” (2001:274).
independence from Spain, which occurred on September 15, 1821 (MENAMGUA 1999; Smith 1984). Following two years of post-independence then under Mexican Empire rule, the Central American provinces of the Mexican Empire formed the independent United Provinces of Central America; however, by 1839, a revolt against the Central American alliance under the leadership of José Rafael Carrera ultimately persuaded politicians to renounce Guatemala’s membership in the United Provinces of Central America and to declare Guatemala an independent nation. Although independent from the provinces since 1839, it was not until March 1847 that President Carrera declared the Republic of Guatemala as a formal, independent nation-state (Calvert 1985; Castillo Méndez 2008; Griffith 1960; Kenyon 1961; Lovell 1988; Spinden 1999; Stirton Weaver 1999). For the remainder of the 19th century, Guatemalan history was marked by long-term presidencies that fortified the powerful position of elite non-indigenous landowners over the Mayan indigenous populations, which seriously deepened the grand chasm between the wealthy elite and the majority indigenous populations (Carlsen 1997; Casaús Arzú 2008; Grandin 2004; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; McCreery 1994, 1983; Montejo 1999; Smith 1990c, 1984; Thompson 2007).

By the turn of the 20th century, expanded elite control over resources, labor and wealth continued to displace and disenfranchise the country’s majority indigenous populations. Foreign companies also became major players in controlling Guatemala’s political and economic systems by building powerful economic monopolies that further destabilized interethnic relations in the country. The most powerful foreign company was the United Fruit Company from the United States, which was dubbed El Pulpo (the octopus) for having many “tentacles” of influence wrapped around various business and political
ventures within Guatemala. Government concessions to the United Fruit Company alone forced scores of indigenous peoples off their lands in order to satisfy the company’s west coast expansion, while strict vagrancy laws enforced by President Ubico ensured a sufficient supply of indigenous laborers who were paid meager wages for overly strenuous work (Adams 1990; Arévalo Martínez 1984; Brintnall 1979; Calvert 1985; Handy 1984; Luján Muñoz 1998; McCreery 1994, 1983; McPherson 2006; Perera 1993; Saavedra 2001; Sabino 2007; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982).

While citizens recognized that Ubico did, indeed, provide order in the country, he also took away their liberty (Arévalo Martínez 1984). Guatemalans grew tired of their loss of freedom and of Ubico’s exclusive support of the United Fruit Company and other U.S. interests. Following massive student demonstrations, growing opposition to his rule and a general strike in 1944, Ubico was compelled to resign in July of that same year and fled the country, which ushered in a ten-year period of calm and positive reforms that came to be known as La Primavera (the Spring) (Adams 1990; Calvert 1985; Comité Pro Justicia y Paz de Guatemala 1990; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; McCreery 1994, 1983; Montejo 1999; Saavedra 2001; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982).

The peaceful period of La Primavera (1944-1954) was sustained by two prominent Guatemalan presidents. The first was President Juan José Arévalo, who brought a new philosophy to the presidency (Luján Muñoz 1998; Tischler Visquerra 1998). His sympathy for the working man, democratic ideals and socialism shaped his administration and were embodied in the new constitution of 1945 (Britnell 1951; Calvert 1985; CEH 1999; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). In the new constitution, all males (literate or illiterate) and females (literate only) over the age of 18 were given the right to
vote (Guillén 2007; Jonas 1991). The new constitution also prevented presidential re-election, required the military to play an apolitical role in the government, and gave autonomy to the University of San Carlos. In addition to these reforms, Arévalo moved to improve access to healthcare in the rural areas, to establish potable water projects and to install sewers in the cities (Carey 2001; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). Arévalo’s reforms were effective in raising the standard of living for all Guatemalans, which directly contributed to the fall in mortality rates by 2.5 per cent each year during his presidential term (Handy 1984).

Arévalo also made other important strides to improve conditions within Guatemala for all of its citizens, including indigenous and ladino peoples alike. He established the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (or IGSS) in 1946 to provide injury compensation, maternity benefits and healthcare for all. Educational spending was increased, schools expanded and literacy campaigns were initiated to help educate the masses. Arévalo also pushed for the implementation of the Labor code, which recognized the right to strike, collective bargaining, minimum wages, restricted child labor and legislated hours (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Calvert 1985; Carey 2001; Guillén 2007; Jonas 1991; Lovell 1988; Luján Muñoz 1998; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). To further improve workers’ conditions, Arévalo abolished the vagrancy laws established by Ubico (finally ending forced labor in Guatemala) and implemented a project for allocating land located in sparsely populated areas to poor farmers from the Highlands (Brintnall 1979; Montejo 1999). These reforms played a vital role in establishing a new framework for radical social, economic and political reforms in Guatemala. This framework also allowed Arévalo to endure a contentious and challenging presidency despite his drastic reforms,
which benefitted the masses and angered the landowning elite. Following his presidency, Arévalo’s vital reforms were advanced by his successor, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz, who became the next Guatemalan president in 1951 (Calvert 1985; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Luján Muñoz 1998; Saavedra 2001; Sabino 2007).

Arbenz, an intelligent and strong-willed leader, deliberately focused his presidency on primarily economic reforms. He was determined to achieve Guatemala’s economic autonomy by focusing on economic modernization and agricultural diversification (Carey 2001; CEH 1999; Grandin 2004; Jonas 1991; Poitevin 2001). To achieve this goal, Arbenz fostered vigorous efforts to increase the production of crops such as sugarcane and cotton. He moved to expand access to agricultural credit and promoted the Bank of Guatemala’s increased role in financing indigenous development. Arbenz increased the number of rural schools and had them focus more on agricultural education in order to further strengthen and advance the country’s agricultural base. Through increased production, lending and education, Arbenz pushed for greater national autonomy on the world stage via agricultural production. At the same time, he worked to develop a nation-state that allowed all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, to experience an unprecedented level of freedom and democracy that had been absent in the history of the Guatemalan nation-state since the time of the Spanish Conquest (Gleijeses 1989; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Saavedra 2001).

Of all of Arbenz’s presidential acts, the most notable was the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 (Bowen 1983; Calvert 1985; Perera 1993). According to the law, Arbenz worked to advance the agrarian system within Guatemala by promoting increased crop production. The Reform Law called for measures that would “foster the growth of a class of small,
capitalist farmers and be one more step in a progression that Arbenz and Arévalo had perceived as a journey from a feudal, dependent economy to an independent, fully capitalist one” (Handy 1984:127). To achieve this aim, Arbenz focused on finding more efficient means of using uncultivated land. He believed inefficient landlords should be deprived of their excess fallow land and consequently, this land should be given to landless indigenous farmers who would be able to cultivate it more efficiently and intensively. In response to the inefficiency of landlords, Arbenz passed Decree 900 calling for inactive land to be handed over to the government for resettlement purposes. Through Decree 900, the state agreed to pay for the land in the form of amortized bonds so large landowners would recoup some of the value of their retracted land. This bold move came to have a tremendous impact on economic and social relations within Guatemala (Carey 2001; CEH 1999; Gálvez Borrell 2008; Gleijeses 1989; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Jonas 1991; Montejo 1999).

By 1954, over 917,659 acres of uncultivated land were expropriated and distributed to 87,589 individuals who received an average of 10.5 acres each. In addition, 61 of 107 national fincas (large plantations) were divided among 7,822 small farmers and another 46 became cooperatives (Handy 1984). As a result, the Arbenz agrarian reform had permitted 100,000 landless people to receive valuable farmland within eighteen months of the enactment of Decree 900 (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Calvert 1985; Gleijeses 1989; Jonas 2000). The efforts of those who received land proved successful, contributing directly to increasing the production of corn by 11.8 per cent between the years of 1950 and 1953 alone (Handy 1984). Thus, Arbenz’s plan for agricultural growth was working, and the country was well on its way to obtaining unprecedented levels of
economic growth. However, the expropriation of land did not sit well with elite landowners or with U.S. interests, such as the United Fruit Company, which had lost major land holdings in the country as a direct result of the reform. Not surprisingly, Arbenz’s efforts to pry Guatemala from the confines of coffee and banana export, the United Fruit Company and excess elite landownership, as well as from dictators and the military, soon came under direct fire from the U.S. government (Amnesty International 1976; Bowen 1983; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Montejo 1999; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982; Tischler Visquerra 1998). Pressured by U.S. interests in Guatemala, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated a covert invasion of Guatemala on June 18, 1954 in order to direct a supposed “Guatemalan” military coup. Just ten days later, Arbenz was forced to resign and to hand the presidency over to Colonel Enrique Díaz, immediately ending the 10-year period of calm and positive reforms in the country (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Brintnall 1979; Calvert 1985; Gleijeses 1989; Handy 1954). La Primavera was over and the age-old recipe for an elitist military regime took hold of Guatemala, marking the transition to one of the most horrific periods in the country’s post-conquest history (Guillén 2007; Jonas 2000, 1991; McPherson 2006; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982).

**Post-Primavera Period of 1954 to 1977**

The post-primavera epoch of 1954 to 1977 marked an era of vast decline in economic and social conditions for most of Guatemala’s citizens, especially for the majority indigenous populations. With the liberating reforms of the Arévalo and Arbenz administrations, the poor (mostly indigenous) masses had finally gained access to land and more suitable living conditions. However, the 1954 presidential overthrow erased
any gains made during *La Primavera* by swiftly reversing land distributions achieved during that period and reestablishing a government focused primarily on protecting the interests of Guatemalan elites, as well as U.S. companies and government interests (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Handy 1984; Schirmer 1998).

With land and their means of subsistence stripped away from them, rural farmers were forced to return to plantations and *fincas* to work under miserable conditions and were resigned, once again, to forms of debt peonage and incessant poverty. Those small-scale farmers who were able to maintain their land owned parcels too small to provide adequate subsistence. With limited access to resources and living in deplorable economic conditions, poor rural inhabitants (the majority of whom were indigenous) experienced extensive malnutrition, unsanitary living conditions, lack of healthcare and physically demanding work, which was reflected in the exponentially increased mortality rates and the fact that 75 percent of Guatemala’s children were gravely undernourished by the early 1970s (Carey 2001; Davis 1988; Handy 1984).

The 1976 earthquake caused even further devastation for the rural and urban poor. In less than forty-five seconds, “more than one million people were made homeless” (Arias 1990:243). Poor rural farmers lost what little they had and grew more susceptible to illness and disease (Campaign for Peace and Life in Guatemala 1999). Even worse, over 22,000 people were killed in the earthquake and 250,000 homes were destroyed. The vast majority of the victims were disproportionately poor, rural indigenous farmers (Carey 2001; Fernandez de Laserna 1981; Fischer and Maxwell 1999; Woodward 2008).

Increased military tyranny and violence also weakened social conditions and created an unstable landscape infested with terror and angst. In 1960, the military launched its
counter-insurgency campaign against a small, but growing group of Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrillas who had established base camps in the western Highlands region. Soon thereafter, the military’s strategy to wipe out the insurgents quickly expanded to include terrorizing, annihilating and disappearing innocent rural Highlands inhabitants as well, most of whom had no affiliation whatsoever with the Leftist movement. Amnesty International reported that between 1966 and 1976 alone, over 20,000 Guatemalans became victims of covertly-sanctioned murders or disappearances (1976:1). Unfortunately, during this epoch the Guatemalan people had not yet seen the worst of it. Instead, they were about to enter one of the darkest periods in Guatemalan post-conquest history (CEH 1999; Davis 1988; Handy 1984; Smith 1984; REMHI 1998; Zur 2004).

la violencia (the violence) from 1978 to 1983

In 1978, “the social tensions always present in agrarian, multiethnic Guatemala exploded into a full-scale civil war that has had a permanent effect on the country’s large indigenous population” (Davis 1988:6). The resulting dark period of full-scale genocide, a period known as la violencia (the violence), began in May of 1978 when a group of 700 Maya Q’eqchi’ campesinos (or rural farmers) began demonstrating peacefully for land rights in the village of Panzós, located in the Department of Alta Verapaz (CEH 1999; Guillén 2007; Lovell 1988; Manz 2004; Smith 1984; REMHI 1998). Many of the campesinos, who had farmed the area land for generations, had been recently displaced due to increased mineral exploitation in the area and to cattle ranchers who took over additional land that belonged to campesinos by means of legal land transfers sanctioned by the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (INTA) (Davis 1988; Grandin 2004; May 2001; Sanford 2008, 2003). In a desperate attempt to maintain their familial lands,
the Q’eqchi’ campesinos began a public demonstration to call attention to their quest to obtain official legal titles from INTA. The protest was quickly squelched, however, when military soldiers were brought in by local elite landowners and a brutal clash ensued (Amnesty International 1998; Calvert 1985; Handy 1984; Jonas 2000; Lovell 1988; Saavedra 2001). It was reported that in the military attack, over 100 indigenous campesinos (including women, children and the elderly) were killed and more than 300 were wounded (Guillén 2007; Lovell 1988; Manz 2004; May 2001). Similar massacres in nearby rural villages, as well as local urban centers, soon followed.

The most notorious urban massacre occurred as a response to the 1980 raid of the Spanish Embassy by a group of 39 Mayan campesinos. Driven by desperation, the campesinos occupied the embassy in protest of the kidnapping and murder of a lawyer who had acted on their behalf to help locate the remains of their recently disappeared relatives (Arias 1990; Calvert 1985; Fernández de Laserna 1981; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984; Jonas 2000, 1991; Manz 2004; May 2001; Sanford 2003; Simon 1987). The government response to the campesino protest and occupation of the Spanish embassy was horrific. Guatemalan troops, under orders from President Romeo Lucas Garcia, simply lit the embassy on fire and burned the entire group of indigenous campesinos alive, along with Spanish diplomats, embassy staff, the Guatemalan foreign

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2 The concept of “disappeared” or desaparecido became both a verb and participle (e.g., “to be disappeared,” “he was disappeared,” etc.) in Guatemala nearly a decade before the notion was used in Chile and Argentina. It is a term specific to Latin America and denotes the state-sponsored kidnapping of an individual whose fate is unknown and whose bodily remains have never been found. The Guatemalan military “disappeared” thousands of individuals as way of eliminating potential subversive threats and to instill fear in survivors who could just as easily have been the next to be disappeared. Between the period of 1981 and 1983 alone, it was estimated that over 35,000 persons had been disappeared (Calvert 1985; Simon 1987), raising the total number of disappeared during the 36-year civil war to well over 200,000 individuals (Comite Pro Justicia y Paz de Guatemala 1992; ICCHRRA 1997; Perera 1993). La violencia, however, was undeniably the period constituting the largest number of desaparecidos. In this period alone, approximately 100 to 200 people were disappeared per month (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003).
minister and a former vice president. The only survivor of the firebombing was a *campesino* who was severely burned and taken to a hospital only to be kidnapped and killed some hours later by “unknown” men. The victim’s lifeless, burned and disfigured body turned up some hours later on the campus of the University of San Carlos where it was presented as a warning to anyone considering participation in public dissent.

President Lucas made his message clear: he would not tolerate dissent and would use whatever means necessary to decimate even the slightest threat of opposition or public organization against government land seizures during his administration (Arias 1990; Fernandez de Laserna 1981; Guillén 2007; Manz 2004; May 2001).

President Lucas (a former General), who won the 1978 presidential elections via fraudulent means, was a major landowner in Alta Verapaz in the area where the initial Panzós demonstration and subsequent massacre took place (Jonas 1991; Saavedra 2001; Simon 1987). Lucas became intent on stifling any indigenous movements that had begun to organize and to publicly protest against government land seizures. Because of his previous military rank, Lucas was powerfully placed within the military and was not afraid to use military might to violently force his agenda. Consequently, Lucas used his presidency to carry out a ruthless campaign of terror, murder and genocide, which ultimately led to the bloodiest period of Guatemalan post-conquest history (Carey 2001; Casaús Arzú 2008; CDHG 1991; Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Grandin 2004; Guillén 2007; Smith 1984; Tedlock 1982; Woodward 2008). Under Lucas, Guatemalans with any potential links to any type of reform activity or organizing such as trade unions, university students, teachers, lawyers, journalists and opposition politicians were swiftly annihilated (Calvert 1985; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). In fact,
individuals from these sectors were murdered at the rate of five or more a day during Lucas’ presidential term of 1978 to 1982 alone (Handy 1984). Students and academics, in particular, were targeted by the military because Lucas made a point to publicly portray and accuse them of being a center for subversive ideologies and activities (CEH 1999; Luján Muñoz 1998; May 2001; REMHI 1998; Simon 1987). In fact, in March of 1980, 27 university teachers and administrators, along with 50 university students, were murdered by military forces for their supposed participation in subversive practices (Handy 1984).

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres or EGP) responded to the increased state violence against innocent victims and community organizers by recruiting more campesinos into its ranks (Garrard-Burnett 2010; Smith 1984). In the early 1970s, remnants of previous guerrilla movements came together under the new leadership of the EGP (Calvert 1985; May 2001; Stolen 2007; Woodward 2008). The EGP began to rally after the 1976 earthquake in order to respond to the increasing military control of all forms of rural organization. The government’s “scorched earth”

3 campaign aimed at fully controlling rural villages provoked the guerrilla contingent to mobilize at full-force (Davis 1988; Jonas 2009). The guerrilla movement began to gain new momentum as relatives, friends and colleagues of murdered victims joined in their ranks in the struggle against overt military oppression (Fernandez de Laserna 1981; May 2001; Simon 1987; Stoll 1993; Warren 1998, 1993). Tracing the lineage of their movement back to the 1954 overthrow campaign of Operation Success, the guerrillas

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3 The “scorched earth” offensive was a military strategy designed to “drain” the Highlands of any potential guerrilla supporters (i.e., rural indigenous peoples considered “the water”) via burnings, massacres of entire villages and forced relocations on a massive scale in order to get at the guerrillas who were considered the “fish” (Jonas 1991; REMHI 1998).
continued not only to fight against the military’s counter-insurgency campaign but also against all-out indigenous oppression and land reform that had worsened in the late 1970s (Smith 1990d). According to a World Bank report of 1978, a mere 10 percent of elite landowners possessed over 80 percent of all land at the time (1978:9). The increasing loss of land and basic human rights abuses, along with intensified military monitoring and control, fed burgeoning public discontent and contention that ultimately erupted into extremely violent conflict.

The conflict between the military government and Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrillas rapidly escalated in the Highlands in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Aguilera Peralta 1980; Jonas 1991; Stolen 2007; Woodward 2008). Travel in the Highlands area became dangerous, which caused the tourist industry to significantly decline (Simon 1987). Long-time U.S. American residents also sold their homes and left the country, as did wealthy Guatemalans who desired to escape the unstable environment of their home country (Handy 1984). Foreign capital also rapidly diminished in Guatemala as foreign interests perceived Lucas’ administration as having limited control over the growing guerrilla movement. To retaliate against the loss of wealthier residents and foreign capital, Lucas sent additional troops into Highland villages where the military suspected that guerrillas had temporarily set up camp (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998; Saavedra 2001). When the military troops arrived, the guerrilla forces would be long gone. The military, however, would retaliate against the rural inhabitants of the village anyway, leaving behind a bloody trail of terror and violence. Yet, the retaliatory tactics actually worked against the military. Instead of stifling the guerrilla movement, Lucas’ brutal tactics inflicted on innocent village inhabitants drove increasing numbers of indigenous campesinos to
support and join in the guerrilla movement as it gained a hold on portions of the Highlands (Aguilera Peralta 1980; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Handy 1984).

Lucas attempted to squelch the escalating guerrilla movement by appointing his brother, General Benedicto Lucas García, as the new defense minister (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998; Schirmer 1998). Benedicto intensified the counter-insurgency campaign by executing brutal attacks on primarily rural, indigenous villages even remotely believed to sympathize with the guerrillas. Benedicto also feigned a civic-action program aimed to assist villages with local construction projects as a means of monitoring residents. Central to the scheme, however, was the hidden objective of “forcing Highland peasants to abandon their scattered communities and to relocate in concentrated villages the military could more easily control, again a policy followed in Vietnam and Algeria” (Handy 1984:257). Lucas launched and supported this grueling campaign of forced relocation to “model villages” near the end of his presidential term, yet he did not remain in office long enough to see it through (Davis 1988; Handy 1984; Montejo 1999; Simon 1987).

Growing discontent with Lucas’ government began to strain his presidency. The U.S. government, disappointed with his regime, determined Lucas could not control the guerrillas, which the U.S. government viewed as a direct threat against foreign investments (Dill 2009; Jonas 1991). With the increasing pressure of nearby Leftist insurgency in El Salvador and a revolutionary government in Nicaragua, the Reagan administration quickly intensified its strategic concern with Guatemala in the early 1980s (Jonas 1991; Luján Muñoz 1998). In addition, a myriad of international reports announcing the human rights violations and murders that had taken place during Lucas’
regime caused the U.S. State Department (normally a supporter of Guatemalan military governments) to issue a travel advisory, recommending that U.S. citizens avoid traveling to Guatemala except for “essential visits” (Simon 1987). The travel warning had dire consequences for Guatemala’s tourism industry, which was one of the leading industries in the country. Lucas countered the international reports of human rights violations and the ensuing travel warning by asserting that the repression was not caused by his administration. However, other independent organizations abroad investigated the situation and found that the Lucas administration was, indeed, responsible for over 25,000 questionable deaths at the time (Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Handy 1984; Simon 1987).

While the U.S. under the presidency of Jimmy Carter had already officially withdrawn military aid to Guatemala in 1977, it continued to demand greater military control of the guerrillas. At the same time, the U.S. sought further disassociation with human rights violations occurring in Guatemala and as a result, the U.S completely withdrew all forms of support of the Lucas regime in 1981 (Dill 2009; Jonas 1991).

As Lucas was completing his initial presidential term, it became apparent that he had maintained little support at home and abroad. In the 1982 fraudulent elections, Lucas lost to Aníbal Guervara, who was “selected” to serve the next presidential term. Despite his appointment, however, Guervara never actually took office. Many top military officers and elite feared Guervara (a member of Lucas’ party) would only continue to demonstrate the military incompetence they believed characterized Lucas’ administration and his inadequate tactics for crushing the guerrilla movement altogether (CEH 1999; Loucky and Moors 2000). Fearing that the guerrilla movement would continue to grow and to gain control over the country, a group of junior military garrison commanders
quickly organized to carry out a military coup to overthrow the presidency. One of the commanders was General Efraín Ríos Montt, who would become the designated president following the overthrow and would commit the worst atrocities of Guatemala’s entire 36-year civil war (Calvert 1985; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Guillén 2007; Simon 1987; Woodward 2008).

The Brutal Reign of General Efraín Ríos Montt

On March 23, 1982 junior military garrison commanders led a successful revolt to overthrow the presidency and place General Ríos Montt at the helm of the government (Calvert 1985; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Hale 1997; Handy 1984; Montejo 1999; Schirmer 1998; Simon 1987). By the time of the 1982 coup, guerrilla forces in the Highlands had grown substantially⁴ and were actually in control of several regions (Handy 1984; Schirmer 1998). In addition, three major guerrilla organizations (the EGP, Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes [FAR] and Organización del Pueblo Armado [ORPA]), along with the national communist party (Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo [PGT]), came together in early 1982 to form a broader and more united front called the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteco (or URNG) (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Davis 1988; Guillén 2007; Jonas 2009; May 2001; Stoll 1993; Woodward 2008).

To smother the expanding insurgency movement spurred by the unification of the guerrilla groups and the national communist party, Ríos Montt intensified General Benedicto Lucas’ counter-insurgency program. Ríos Montt was determined to “annihilate the subversives and their supporters” at all costs and without hesitation (Handy 1984:257). The result was operation Victory 82, which ensured that Highland villages

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⁴ Jonas notes that the number of members in the guerrilla may have reached as high as 6-8,000 individuals at the peak of the movement from 1980 to 1981 (1991:138).
were occupied by military or civil personnel at all times, and that all rural *campesinos* suspected of being subversive were either killed or forced to flee to refugee camps.

Consequently, the Victory 82 plan involved additional massacres and a stepped-up “scorch earth” offensive aimed at destroying thousands of supposed “subversive” indigenous people in the Highlands (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; CEH 1999; Falla 1994; Frank and Wheaton 1984; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2008, 2003; Saavedra 2001).

Ríos Montt’s military strategy called for army soldiers to view any civilian population, especially those in primarily indigenous communities, as indistinguishable from the guerrilla movement (Montejo 1999). Out of fear, many *campesinos* tried to flee as soon as the military entered their villages. However, the military captured, tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent inhabitants and justified their actions by stating that those who were truly not guilty of subversion would not have run from the military (Sanford 2003; Simon 1987; Stolen 2007). The military also instilled terror in villages by dumping disfigured corpses along roadsides or hanging them from trees, serving as a warning to other villagers (Falla 1994; Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Warren 1998, 1993). Fortunately, many villagers who survived by fleeing their communities found temporary relief in refugee settlements in Mexico and Belize (Handy 1984; Manz 2004). It is estimated that by the end of 1982 (only nine months following Ríos Montt’s takeover of the presidency), 200,000 indigenous people had fled to Mexico and approximately one million had fled or were internally displaced from their homes altogether (Calvert 1985; Handy 1984; Lovell 1988). In addition, the military also carried out 246 massacres, murdered over 10,000 people and orchestrated the disappearances of
833 people during Ríos Montt’s 17-month presidential term alone (CDHG 1991). Thus, Ríos Montt’s counterinsurgency campaign consisted of the ruthless annihilation of innumerable innocent people, the razing of countless communities, and the seemingly endless military control and monitoring of daily life carried out by both soldiers and by civilian populations who were involuntarily enlisted to support military maneuvers as part of Ríos Montt’s expansion of the Civil Patrol program.

Ríos Montt extended control over highland villages by not only expanding military presence but also by expanding the civil patrol program, called the Patrullas de Auto-Defensa Civil (PAC). The PAC soon became central to army strategy. The patrols consisted of all male residents of Highland villages and hamlets who were between the ages of fifteen and sixty. These men were forced into the civil patrol, which was under the authority of a local army commander (Amnesty International 1998; CEH 1999; Davis 1988; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Handy 1984; Montejo 1999; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2008, 2003; Schirmer 1998; Stoll 1993; Woodward 2008).

Civil patrol members were given weapons and told to defend the Highlands against the guerrillas and any potential subversive actions. As such, the men involuntarily conscripted into the patrols were required to provide unpaid service in their village areas for eight to twenty-four hours every four to fourteen days. By 1984, almost one million men were involuntarily incorporated into the civil patrol program. Using these men as another force against the guerrillas and a source of local surveillance and control, the military gained a stronghold over the Highlands region. Consequently, the civil patrols became a first line of defense against the guerrillas and also became an effective mechanism of terror (CEH 1999; Davis 1988; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Montejo 1999;

While the civil patrols threatened the lives of both campesinos and its members, the army saw them as an effective tactic for gaining militarized control of rural areas. The civil patrols, according to the military, were a primary factor in drying up guerrilla support among Highland inhabitants. Using the civil patrols to obtain extensive control of the poor, Ríos Montt’s military campaign cemented the state’s stranglehold on the Highlands, thereby achieving the primary objective of his counter-insurgency program (Garrard-Burnett 2010; Handy 1984; Montejo 1999; Sanford 2008, 2003).

Ríos Montt’s campaign to destroy the guerrilla movement and subdue campesinos more generally was brutal. Army attacks on villages included beating children to death on rocks and slicing open campesinos with the ends of bayonets. Soldiers also commonly burned crops, homes and entire villages. The rape of women, individual torture and massacres of entire populations also occurred in increasing numbers. In his account of a military attack on his natal Highland village, anthropologist Victor Montejo remarks, “With the rise to power of Efraín Ríos Montt, all remaining human rights were abolished, and the army became the sole arbiter over the lives of Guatemalans” (1987:113). No one in Guatemala was exempt from the terror. Using covert tactics, such as “death squads” that were comprised of former security force personnel operating in plain clothes and acting under orders from military or police officials, Ríos Montt was even able to order the murders of elite opposition and politicians who would have been untouchable under any other regime. While Ríos Montt gained considerable control over the country in a relatively short period of time, a bitter conflict between two powerful factions of the
military began to ignite and threaten his regime (Amnesty International 1998; CEH 1999; Falla 1994; Garrard-Burnett 2010; May 2001; Montejo 1999; Schirmer 1998).

The military divide that ensued eventually led to the overthrow of Ríos Montt’s administration. The divide had grown between junior garrison officers who had initially supported the 1982 coup and Ríos Montt. The *frijoles* and *fusiles* (beans and rifles) campaign of Ríos Montt—which consisted of eliminating individuals thought to be supportive of the guerrillas and destroying their fields, homes and possessions (*fusiles*) and placing them in resettlement camps where their needs would be provided for (*frijoles*)—had grown into inconceivable, brutal violence. Having witnessed the brutality, many junior officers began to oppose the vicious acts committed in the counter-insurgency campaign. Fifty junior officers, disgusted with the brutality, responded to the unjustifiable violence by formally presenting a petition calling for less brutality. However, the petition did little to convince Ríos Montt to diminish his gruesome military tactics. Attempting to navigate the sudden treacherous division between junior and senior military officers, Ríos Montt found he could not satisfy either side of the divide. Support for Ríos Montt by both sides of the military divide began to rapidly dissipate, which quickly threatened his regime (Benton 1985; Calvert 1985; CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Guillén 2007; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2003; Schirmer 1998).

In addition to the divisions in the military, Ríos Montt’s economic policies threatened many individuals who soon began to withdraw their support of him as well. Ríos Montt’s policies “quickly alienated large landowners, leaders of the business community and eventually much of the middle class” (Handy 1984:267). The economy during Ríos Montt’s rule was seriously depressed due to a worldwide recession, an archaic tax
structure that was insufficient to support governmental needs, poor external investments, lack of sufficient investment capital and the severe decline of the tourist industry that had resulted from the official U.S. travel warning in response to political unrest within the country. In addition, the international community began raising awareness of the violence and human rights violations of Ríos Montt’s administration. Major flight of capital from the country soon followed, which made it nearly impossible for Ríos Montt’s regime to purchase additional arms or to support the national economy (Calvert 1985; Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Handy 1984; Simon 1987).

Ríos Montt’s administration was viewed as doing little to resolve the impending economic crisis and flight of major capital. Efforts to impose new taxes, to ration foreign exchange and to renew agrarian reform proved unsuccessful in improving the national economy. Ríos Montt’s economic policies were further hindered by his religious fanaticism, which obligated him to stock his regime with fellow members of conservative evangelical Church of the Word, based out of Eureka, California. Ríos Montt’s fervor as a religious zealot rapidly grew to become indistinguishable from his politics (Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Simon 1987). Recognizing Ríos Montt’s inability to improve Guatemala’s economic conditions and having been passed over for positions that instead were given to Ríos Montt’s church cronies, government officials and military officers began to craft a plot to remove Ríos Montt from office (Calvert 1985; Frank 1984; Handy 1984; Saavedra 2001; Schirmer 1998).

On August 8, 1983, Ríos Montt’s presidency was terminated by a military coup. Generals Mejía Víctores and Héctor Mario Lopez Suentes, with the support of the majority of the military command, physically forced Ríos Montt from office. Although
the administration that followed the overthrow was hardly the democratic engine it was proposed to be, it did end the brutal genocidal legacy of Ríos Montt’s government, bringing the dark period of *la violencia* mostly to a close (Calvert 1985; Guillén 2007; Figueroa Ibarra 1991; Handy 1984; Saavedra 2001; Schirmer 1998; Tierney 1997; Woodward 2008).

*La violencia*, especially during Ríos Montt’s reign, was one of the most tragic periods in all of Guatemala’s history (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Guillén 2007; Handy 1984). Handy notes, “Accustomed to poverty, neglect and injustice, Guatemalan peasants endured in the early years of the 1980s a level of violence that far surpassed any experienced since the first days of the conquest” (1984:278). Although the military overthrow did not bring immediate peace to Guatemala, it did significantly diminish the violent military tyranny in which both Lucas and Ríos Montt orchestrated all-out genocide against innocent civilians. The brutal period of *la violencia* resulted in hundreds of thousands of mostly innocent indigenous peoples becoming victims to unjust military tyranny that has led some scholars to call the genocide the “Mayan Holocaust” (Davis 1988; Frank 1984; Garrard-Burnett 2010). While Ríos Montt’s reign of terror ultimately ended, it forever stained the nation’s history and has left behind countless innocent victims.

*Victims in the Aftermath*

The massive slaughter that came to denote *la violencia* took its toll on the entire Guatemalan populace (Adams 1988; Davis and Hodson 1983). Actual battles between the army and the guerrillas produced just 10% of the total number of casualties of the genocide (CEH 2006:xx). The remaining 90% of victims (the majority of whom were
indigenous) consisted of mostly tens of thousands of innocent citizens who were murdered and hundreds of thousands who were forced into exile. The military executed over 440 massacres and completely obliterated 626 primarily indigenous villages (Davis and Hodson 1983; CDHG 1991; Falla 1994; Green 1999). In addition, at least one million people were displaced internally with many forced to leave their home communities indefinitely (Brown, Fischer and Raxché 1998; Davis 1988; Smith and Boyer 1987). Between 200,000 and 500,000 Guatemalans fled as refugees to Mexico. Those victims who remained in Guatemala and survived the slaughter were seriously traumatized and forced into submission under the ongoing tyranny and oppression of the government (CEH 1999; Fischer and Brown 1996; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Gugelberger 1999; Jonas 2009; Lovell 1988; Perera 1993; REMHI 1998; Simon 1987).

The Guatemalan government’s campaign to stamp out Leftist subversives went far beyond its scope by killing and terrorizing hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Hardly a person living in Guatemala at the time went untouched by *la violencia*, yet the hardest hit unquestionably was the majority indigenous segment of the population. Lovell states, “The majority of victims so far have been defenseless, nonpartisan villagers, some of whom met their deaths in the most barbarous ways imaginable” (1988:46). According to the official CEH truth commission report, roughly 83% of the over 200,000 victims murdered and disappeared in the civil war and subsequent genocide were indigenous peoples who had nothing to do with either the military or the guerrilla struggle (2004:xviii). As Fischer and Maxwell posit, “Caught in the middle of an ideological struggle between competing Western philosophies, the rural Maya population bore the brunt of the bloody war” (1999:64). Unfortunately, the effects of the war and especially
the genocide have been long-lasting, especially for those who were left behind by loved ones who were murdered and disappeared.

The deaths and disappearances of over 200,000 individuals (most of whom were indigenous men) severely challenged the survival of thousands of campesino families in the Highlands. It is estimated that the armed conflict left between 40,000 to 45,000 women widowed (Campaign for Peace and Life in Guatemala 1999; Gugelberger 1999; Hooks 1993). Others estimate the number of widows to have reached as high as 80,000 (Green 1999). Many of these women suffered tremendous economic, emotional and psychological hardships (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Fearing for their lives and those of their surviving family members, many widows were forced to flee their villages and leave what little they had behind. When the widows returned home, they found their homes looted and destroyed. Not only had they lost their loved ones but they also had lost their possessions, animals, crops and domestic tools. With few possessions, the widows found it increasingly difficult to support their families. Many widows were illiterate and had few marketable skills to enter the labor market, making it nearly impossible to piece together a livelihood. Under growing duress, many widows suffered greatly not only from the psychological torment of having loved ones disappeared and killed, and living in continual fear of the ongoing violence but also from trying desperately to economically sustain their families. Recognizing the particular struggles of war widows, scholars began working with groups of widows following the 1996 Peace Accords in order to bring their particular experiences to light (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

While many groups of individuals suffered immensely from Guatemala’s genocide, one particular group has received little attention in academic literature in the post-war
era. Children also suffered immensely during and following *la violencia*. The REMHI truth report reveals that “[c]hildren, as a social group, have been deeply affected by violence and political repression whether as indirect victims of violence against family members, as witnesses to numerous traumatic events, or through their firsthand experiences of violence and death” (1999:29). Scores of children were killed, thousands were force to flee as refugees with their families, many were abducted and sold to “adoptee” families, and still others were forced by soldiers to witness brutal murders and torture in order to report what they saw to other surrounding villages as yet another terroristic tactic for instilling fear in rural communities (CEH 2004, 1999; Falla 1994; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998). Yet the largest number of child victims following the horrendous civil unrest and genocide is the estimated 100,000 or more children who were orphaned due to the death of one or both of their parents (Benton 1985; Hooks 1993; Simon 1987; WOLA 1989). Some scholars and activists even place the figure of war orphans much higher at over 200,000 children total (CITGUA 1989; Gugelberger 1999; Tierney 1997).

Despite the lack of consistent records to reveal the actual total count of war orphans, the estimated number of children who lost one or both parents is chilling. Simon notes, “No one suffers more than Guatemala’s children. In one school in Totonicapán, Quetzaltenango, 55 out of 250 children had lost both their parents. All had witnessed their deaths” (1987:92). The children who lost one or both parents have since had a difficult road in life (REMHI 1998). From the emotional distress of witnessing the deaths or disappearances of parents and other family members, war orphans have had to continue living through painful memories, while often navigating the complexities of life
on their own without support from parents or relatives. Given the large number of orphans and the torment they have had to endure, it becomes apparent that children were and continue to be a primary group of survivors who suffered immeasurably during and in the wake of Guatemala’s genocide (Comite Pro Justicia y Paz de Guatemala 1992). Caught in a world of violence, loss and emotional suffering, war orphans already in their young lives had to endure an unfathomable amount of distress, agony and despair that likely continue to affect them in some way even in adulthood today and their struggle deserves attention. Yet, research with Guatemala’s war orphan survivors remains sparse. It is for this reason that I chose to work with a small segment of this particular group of genocide survivors in order to conduct dissertation research with the aim of illuminating the particular experiences of war orphans both during and long after the genocide. Thus, in order to best understand Guatemalan war orphans’ particular experiences, I now turn to the theoretical background that formed the explicit framework for my dissertation research.
Theoretical Framework

Inequality, repression, exploitation and subordination of the majority indigenous populations by the ruling oligarchic elite have characterized ethnic relations in Guatemala since the time of the Spanish Conquest to present day. The ruling elite (a minute portion of the entire national population) have long benefitted from the entrenched political, economic and social disparities that have unrelentingly placed indigenous peoples in a repressive and inferior status within the country’s social hierarchy. The genocide that occurred during the period of *la violencia* was deeply rooted in these inequities and in the underlying, centuries-old attempt to either assimilate or annihilate the majority Maya indigenous masses under the guise of a nationalist project. As a result, the relationship between the state and the people it defines as “citizens” has been and continues to be a critical focus of anthropological inquiry in Guatemala even today.

In order to more fully understand how the Guatemalan nationalist ideology and the failure of general consensus to that ideology—and by extension the failure of overall hegemony—fueled the genocide and created such a large population of war orphans in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I now present an overview of theoretical scholarship that explicates the power relations inherent in the Guatemalan nation-state. My aim is to demonstrate that despite entrenched and often brutal state attempts at assimilation, Guatemala’s majority indigenous populations continue to exert their own creative, innovative, resilient and fluid notions of indigenous identity, which is further revealed in the experiences of orphans who participated in my dissertation research project. I achieve this aim by first presenting an overview of general theoretical tenets that explicate the relationship between the state and the nation. I next discuss the state as ideological power
and continue by summarizing key theoretical works that further illuminate how states wield power primarily via nationalist ideology. I then describe the state and its general relation to ethnic groups, which I follow with a particular focus on the nationalist identity-making project and the creation of the “Indian” in Latin America. I continue by discussing the creation of the “Indian” as a social category by emphasizing how the “Indian Question” has been posed and dealt in the particularly case of Guatemala. I expand my analysis of the “Indian Question” in Guatemala by focusing on how identity is perceived, expressed and re-worked by indigenous and ladino individuals at the local level, highlighting the research of several influential contemporary anthropologists who have examined identity in Guatemala over the past two decades. I then draw from the work of these contemporary scholars to establish five vital conclusions that I believe are necessary for analyzing and understanding identity in Guatemala today. I conclude this chapter by discussing how contemporary scholarship provides a relevant framework for analyzing and understanding identity among the war orphans who participated in my own research project, while I simultaneously contend that these orphans’ experiences also diverge from contemporary scholarship in interesting and distinct ways.

**The State and the Nation**

With nearly 200 nation-states in existence today, understanding the power that the state wields in creating, sustaining and enforcing a national framework for identity and belonging is a vital focus of anthropological inquiry and is essential for understanding relationships between states and their national populations (Dandeker 1998b; Gupta 1992; Heyman 1999; Nagengast 1994; Trouillot 2001; van den Berghe 1990a). Examining the state is particularly vital for identifying and analyzing the core issues...
surrounding state-sponsored violence in regions such as Africa and Latin America where states have long been and remain overtly coercive in their attempts to fulfill their own special interests. State-driven policies and practices designed to satisfy the demands of a small group of ruling elite have denied the human rights of many individuals in these regions and especially of indigenous peoples who have been the primary targets of brutal nationalist projects carried out in the Americas (Dandeker 1998b; Friedman 2003; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Nagengast 1994; Stavenhagen 1998).

In order to understand the mechanisms at play regarding state-sponsored violence, it is essential to first draw a careful distinction between the state and the nation. These two terms have frequently been used interchangeably in academic literature; however, they represent different constructs. The modern state, at its most fundamental level, is generally defined as a set of interlocking bureaucratic institutions staffed by a small group of specialists who govern a larger group of people identified as “citizens” and who enact policies within particular territorial bounds (Field 1999; Gow 1998; Heyman 1999; Nagengast 1994; Smith 1990a; Stavenhagen 1990). In other words, the state is the political apparatus typically controlled by a small group of bureaucrats that makes laws, enforces policies, polices its citizenry and defends its borders against outside threat.

The nation, in contrast, is a collective group of individuals defined as “citizens” that lives within a particular territory and that is conceptualized as ideally having one culture, one language, one religion, one shared history, one judicial system and one shared set of beliefs about the world (Cojtí Cuxil 1996; Field 1999; Nagengast 1997; Smith 1990a; Watanabe 1995). Collectively, the individuals that comprise a nation are what Anderson terms “an imagined political community” (1991:6). By “imagined” Anderson suggests
that as members of a particular nation, even among the smallest of nations, individuals will never know their fellow members, and yet they perceive themselves as members of a unitary nation with a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1991:7). Through a collective identity and “imagined” community, the people of a speciously unitary nation are believed to subscribe (or surrender, as in the case of many marginalized peoples located within the boundaries of particular states) to nationalist thinking and practices that result from the central totalizing and homogenizing nationalist ideology of the state which, in turn, is the locus of power for the modern nation-state (Alonso 1994; Anderson 1991; Cojití Cuxil 1996; Donham 1999; Duany 2000; van den Berghe 1990a, b; Stavenhagen 1998).

**The State as Ideological Power**

The definitions of the “state” and of the “nation” presented above provide an encapsulation of two major constructs that continue to be analyzed, debated and contested not only in anthropology but also in other fields of academic research (Abrams 1988; Nagengast 1994). These definitions, while somewhat oversimplified, provide a starting point from which to understand the power that the state holds over the nation and how violent acts such as genocide are legitimized by the state as a necessary coercive mechanism for imposing, reinforcing, protecting and ultimately forcing the state’s ideology on its populace. The ideology promulgated by the state becomes a central source of power that through various processes and practices the state works to internalize so that it becomes the lived daily reality of its citizens. By localizing its ideology on the individual level in daily life, the state can effectively legitimize, justify and maintain its power over the collective nation in such a way that a small elite class ultimately benefits
from the subordination of an entire nation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Gramsci 1957; Nagengast 1997, 1994). The notion of the state as ideological power wielded by a ruling elite class for its own benefit, therefore, is a crucial focus for understanding the modern state and the localization of its ideology, which is further demonstrated in the work of Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci argued that the state could be best understood by exploring the hegemonic force or political consciousness found within a particular society (1957:67). Gramsci contended that the state “corresponds to the function of ‘hegemony’ that the ruling class exercises over the whole of society and to that of ‘direct rule’ or of command which is expressed in the state and in ‘juridical’ government” (ibid:124). Gramsci described hegemony as the “spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population” to the social life that is directed by a fundamental ruling class (ibid:10). Gramsci believed that states strive to develop and maintain a certain type of civilization and a certain type of citizen, while propagating customs and attitudes that support the ideology and interests of the ruling class and thereby supplant any differing customs and attitudes among the masses. For Gramsci, states achieve this aim by attaining consensus from the masses that results in social and cultural conformity to the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class and thus, a homogenous nationalist identity (ibid 1957).

Scholars such as Philip Abrams and Carole Nagengast, who draw from the work of Gramsci, further contend that we must look beyond the confines of the state as a concrete thing or material object in order to fully understand the extraordinary power that it wields. Rather than a mere set of political and governmental institutions staffed by bureaucrats designated to serve public interest, the state is an ideological project that
exercises legitimation (legitimating the illegitimate), as well as moral regulation (Abrams 1988:76; Nagengast 1994:116). As an ideological project, the state exercises legitimation by creating and regulating a universal conception of who its inhabitants should be and should not be that, in turn, validates the state’s self-serving and often illicit actions. Through assimilation and conformity, the state seeks to gain and maintain the consent of its people to the hegemonic ideology that it imposes on them (Abrams 1988:75, 88; Nagengast 1997, 1994). Hegemony and consent, therefore, become essential sources of power that are “created, imposed, and enforced through social knowledge and cultural practices” at an individualized level (Nagengast 1991:22).

The state legitimizes its hegemonic ideology by creating a unitary image of its population as a single homogeneous nation that shares the same language, same set of beliefs and same version of history (Nagengast 1994). Any deviation from the hegemonic “norm” is “stigmatized or is punishable by assimilation or disenfranchisement” or much worse, by forms of unjust and violent coercion (Nagengast 1997:357). Thus, examining the state as an ideological project is essential for revealing power relations that undergird political practices, which engenders a deeper understanding of the state’s impositions of constructs such as identity and assimilationist national projects (Abrams 1988; Heyman 1999; Nagengast 1994).

**The State and its Nationalist Ideology**

The theoretical work of Gramsci and scholars who draw from his work clearly demonstrate how the state wields its ideological power by creating, imposing and regulating ideology that dictates who is and who is not considered a legitimate member or “citizen” of the nation. The particular ideology that the state creates and imposes for
dictating who is and who is not a legitimate member of the nation is considered nationalist ideology (Cojtí Cuxil 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Gramsci 1957; Nagengast 1997, 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Smith 1990a; Watanabe 1995). A founding principle underpinning most nationalist ideologies up until as recently as the late 1980s (such as in the case of Guatemala) is that inhabitants within the territorial bounds of the state ought to be members of a single unitary nation that shares a single homogeneous national culture (Donham 1999; Hobsbawm 1990; Nagengast 1997, 1994; Raxche’ 1996; Smith 1999; Stavenhagen 1998, 1990; van den Berghe 1990a). To achieve the nationalist goal of a single homogeneous national culture and to localize it at the level of the quotidian life of its often heterogeneous populations, the initial state model called for totalizing and homogenizing practices designed to create the imagined sense of political community necessary to constitute a “nation.” Members of the nation, in turn, were then expected to subscribe and conform to the state’s nationalist ideology embodied in its homogenizing nationalist project (Alonso 1994; Anderson 1991; Cojtí Cuxil 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Duany 2000; Gramsci 1957; Nagengast 1997, 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Smith 1990a; van den Berghe 1990b; Watanabe 1995). The state’s drive to produce and impose a nationalist ideology on the heterogeneous populations found within its sovereign territorial bounds is what created the nation. Therefore, the state created the nation rather than the nation having created the state (Hobsbawm 1990; Nagengast 1997, 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Smith 1999). The state’s power to produce a “nation” via nationalist hegemony clearly demonstrates that the state is not merely a set of interlocking institutions, but is more accurately defined, in Field’s terms, as “a historically determined processual formation” (2002:5).
Together, the modern state and its nationalist ideology was what gave rise then to the term “nation-state” that is modeled on the assertions that 1) humanity is divided into nations maintained, policed and defended by sovereign states and 2) that each nation ideally shares a fundamental homogeneous national culture and identity (Donham 1999; Raxche' 1996; Stavenhagen 1998; van den Berghe 1990a).

The concept of the modern nation-state is of relatively recent historical origin, having developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of the struggles between rising bourgeoisie, and absolute monarchies and feudal aristocracies in Europe. This model then spread to the rest of the world (Hobsbawm 1990; Stavenhagen 1990; Turner 2003). Hence, the construct of the modern nation-state in most regions is a relatively new imposition from the outside. While most states today have moved from an assimilationist agenda and toward a multiculturalist one, the modern nation-state is inherently modeled on a typically homogenizing nationalist ideological blueprint that seeks to assimilate and subordinate numerous heterogeneous populations under the guise of nationalism into a single nation-state structure (Donham 1999; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Friedman 1994; Hobsbawm 1990; Stavenhagen 1990; Turner 2003; van den Berghe 1990a; Williams 1989). The primary challenge that most nation-states have faced in imposing a homogenizing nationalist ideology on the populations found within its specific territories, however, is that the populations living within a state’s geographical bounds typically consist of multiple ethnic groups.

*The State and Ethnic Groups*

Most states exercise control over geographical territories that encompass multiple heterogeneous groups of people who, in the purview of the state, are designated as
belonging to ethnic groups (Adams 1991; Hobsbawm 1990; Stavenhagen 1990). Thus, the majority of nation-states that have developed since the Enlightenment period, especially those with large expanses of geographic territory, are what Stavenhagen deems “polyethnic nations” in that they consist of multiple ethnic groups instead of one national ethnicity (1990:vii). According to the state view of nationalist ideology, an ethnic group (or ethnie) is defined as a recognizably distinct grouping of people who share a myth of common ancestry and often a common connection with a particular historic territory, and who are perceived as being united through distinct linguistic, racial and cultural traits which distinguish them from other ethnic groups in such a way as to create a sense of shared identity with the members of that particular ethnic group (Friedman 1994; Jackson 1991; Smith 1999; Stavenhagen 1990).

Because most territorialized states encompass a multitude of heterogeneous ethnic groups, it is nearly impossible for any state to instantly form a single unitary homogenous national identity among the inhabitants it considers the “nation” (Hobsbawm 1990). Instead, the state must impose and sustain its nationalist ideology and projects in such a way as to “purify” the heterogeneity of peoples living within its borders and to require unconditional allegiance to the state (Butler and Chakravorty Spivak 2007; Stavenhagen 1990; Williams 1989). The focus of the nationalist project, therefore, is to eliminate ethnic differences among the people living within the state’s physical boundaries in order to establish the imagined unitary homogenous nation with one culture, one language, one

5 Culture is a highly contested and some would argue undefinable construct in the anthropological cannon. For the purposes of understanding the nation-state and its nationalist projects, however, I use the term “culture” here in the most general sense of shared and simultaneously contested symbols, signs, beliefs, meanings and practices that are historically and socially situated in such a way as to unite a group of individuals who distinguish themselves as having a “culture” different from others (Field 1999; Nagengast 1997; Stavenhagen 1990). Culture here is distinct from ethnic groups in that ethnic groups are the individuals who are united, while culture is one of the constructs that unites the people who are categorized as belonging to a particular ethnic group.
religion, one shared history, one judicial system and one shared set of beliefs about the world (Abrams 1988; Cojtí Cuxil 1996; Field 1999; Nagengast 1997; Smith 1999; Smith 1990a; Watanabe 1995).

The state’s actions to “purify” or homogenize its heterogeneous populace into a unitary nation with a single national identity are essentially manifested in the form of a state-derived identity-making project (Alonso 1994; Field 2002; Nagengast 1997, 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Smith 1999; Stavenhagen 1990; Williams 1989). In order to inculcate, sustain and police the homogenizing national identity, the state produces hierarchical categories of identity for its nation that Alonso argues “are assigned varying degrees of social esteem and differential privileges and prerogatives within political community” (1994:391). Ethnic groups living within the confines of the territorialized state are subsequently subordinated to the identity-making hierarchy, which typically privileges a small group of elite on top who hold the power of the state and who are commonly supported by other more powerful states such as the United States or Great Britain, for example. The ruling elite via the state relegate to the lower strata of the hierarchy the various subordinated ethnic groups who wield little if any political power and who are forced to abandon ethnic loyalty in the name of nationalism (Adams 1991; Field 2002; Jackson 1991; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Stavenhagen 1990). Adams furthers,

Most states are “ethnocratic,” that is, they are controlled by a particular ethnicity. In ethnocracies, the interests of all other ethnicities tend to be subordinated, thus creating conflicts that cannot always be readily distinguished from the structural conflicts inherent in the operation of the state [1991:181].

The identity-making project of the state is designed to create what Williams refers to as a “putative homogeneity out of heterogeneity through the appropriative processes of a
transformist hegemony” (1989:439). Rather than accepting the heterogeneity of the ethnic groups found within its territorialized boundaries and working to negotiate the conflicting interests of the various groups so that all may benefit, the state typically utilizes transformist hegemony to not only assimilate, subordinate and even annihilate members of the nation in the name of nationalism but also to construct categories of identity designed to facilitate the state’s homogenizing nationalist project (Adams 1991; Kearney 1996; Nagengast 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Stavenhagen 1998). An example of one such constructed category of identity used to subordinate and assimilate diverse ethnic groups under the auspices of the homogenizing nationalist project of the state is the category of “Indian” utilized in Latin America.

**The Nationalist Identity-Making Project and the “Indian” in Latin America**

Invented by the Spaniards at the moment of their arrival in the Americas, the epistemological identity category of “Indian” was superimposed over the massive heterogeneous populations that occupied the Americas in the late fifteenth century. The category of “Indian” was ascribed to the original inhabitants of the Western hemisphere in order to subdue them and ultimately subjugate them to the Spanish Crown. The generalized and oversimplified category of “Indian” allowed the colonial powers to occlude the complexity and heterogeneity of the populations found within its new colonial borders, and to establish a category of “other” that placed “Indians” in a subaltern position within colonial institutions (Field 2002; Tilley 2005; Urban and Sherzer 1991; Varese 1996).

Unlike the populations categorized as “Indian” in the United States, “Indians” in Latin America did not sign treaties with the Spanish Crown and consequently, were never
granted supposed inalienable rights in exchange for ceding land in the way that a portion of “Indians” in the United States were granted. Indigenous populations in Latin America also were not considered separate nations in the way that indigenous peoples in the U.S. were defined according to early treaties between the United States government and indigenous populations (Field 2002). Thus, the more ambiguous category of “Indian” in Latin America resulted in a “diminished, uncertain social identity” (Varese 1996:58).

Tilley observes that “[w]ithin a century, Indian became a pan-American label embracing thousands of (vastly diverse) cultures throughout the hemisphere—although understood quite differently under the imperialist doctrines of Spanish, French, and English governments” (2005:12). While meanings assigned to the category of “Indian” varied in each region depending on the colonizers and particular colonial histories, indigenous peoples overall were overwhelmingly relegated to inferior social, political and economic positions in the identity hierarchies developed throughout the Americas during the colonial period.

Subjugated, beleaguered, oppressed and exploited, indigenous populations of the Americas continued to be forced into the inferior position of “Indian,” which is a position that persisted well into the post-colonial era and beyond. Yet while the primary aim of the ruling elite in the colonial era in Latin America was to immediately subjugate and exploit native peoples for their labor—especially for extracting natural resources—the impetus behind subjugating “Indians” shifted in the post-colonial period. The post-colonial era marked a period in which homogenizing indigenous populations in order to transform them into “legitimate citizens” while simultaneously appropriating their lands became the primary focus of the newly developing independent Latin American states (Field 2002;
Tilley 2005; Urban and Sherzer 1991; Varese 1996). In the drive towards nationalism, these young and newly independent states began developing policies and practices deliberately aimed at not only achieving national assimilation and conformity in order to create the single unitary national identity and culture inculcated in the nation-state model but also at gaining unprecedented access to previously held indigenous lands. The resulting nationalist identity-making projects ushered in a new phase of defining who would be considered a “legitimate citizen” by posing and attempting to answer what ruling elite considered the central “Indian Question.”

*The “Indian Question” in Latin America*

The “Indian Question” was devised to discern what ought to be done with the indigenous peoples (or “Indians” as categorized by the ruling elite) who were living within the territorialized bounds of the state. Under the guise of nationalist ideology and the subsequent nationalist project of creating a single common national identity and culture, the ruling oligarchies in Latin America overwhelmingly considered indigenous peoples—who they perceived as having a stunted intellect—not only as a hindrance but also as the antithesis to the development of the modern state (Fischer 2004b, 2004a; Fischer and Benson 2006; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Montejo 1999; Reeves 2006; Rosada Granados 1987; Smith 1990a, b; Stavenhagen 1998). Drawing directly from the post-Enlightenment construct of the nation-state, the elites developed a hegemonic ideology to legitimize their efforts to assimilate and eradicate the “Indians” residing in their territories in order to resolve the “Indian Question.” Yet, each state differed, often significantly, in the methods they developed to make the “Indian”—in the politically and culturally constructed sense—“disappear” (Field 1999; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004).
In some nation-states in Latin America such as Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico, the nationalist identity-making projects were aimed at developing a common national identity through the process termed *mestizaje* (Field 2002, 1999; Gould 1998; Tilly 2005; Zur 1998). *Mestizaje* is a notion particular to Latin America (Field 2002; Hale 1996: Warren 2001). Depending on the region, its meaning is varied and multiple; notions of *mestizaje* in Nicaragua, for example, differ from that which is utilized in Mexico. However, *mestizaje* generally evokes “an encounter of two or more distinct cultural/racial groups” (Hale 1996:39). In the post-conquest era, this encounter or “mixing” of two or more cultural or racial groups often eluded to the process of biological miscegenation resulting from Spanish with Indian liaisons that produced *mestizo* (or mixed-race) offspring (Field 2002, 1999; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Hale 2006, 1999, 1996). Today, *mestizaje* in Latin America more commonly refers to the mixing or blending of indigenous and non-indigenous identity positions through assimilationist ideologies of cultural homogenization that result in “de-Indianization” (Field 2002, 1999; Hale 1996; Tilley 2005; Wilson 1995). In other words, *mestizaje* has come to include not the actual mixing of European and indigenous “blood” but rather a blending of social and cultural characteristics. In countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico, the identity-making project of *mestizaje* as a form of national homogenization has been and continues to be touted by the state as having created a citizenry in which individual inhabitants have “blended” into a generic *mestizo* (mixed) identity and culture that ultimately has led to the perceived absence or invisibility of indigenous populations (Field 2002, 1999; Gould 1998, Tilley 2005). As a result of this mixing, indigenous peoples in Nicaragua and El Salvador, in particular, are often considered either invisible or completely absent by the
general populace, as well as by foreigners (Field 2002, 1999; Gould 1998, Tilley 2005). While *mestizaje* dominated identity discourses and has played a major role in the nationalist identity-making projects of newly emerging Latin American nation-states such as Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico, the concept did not take hold in Guatemala as it had elsewhere (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Smith 1990a; Warren 2001; Zur 1998).

*The “Indian Question” in Guatemala*

Like other Latin American nation-states, the oligarchy of the newly emerging nation-state of Guatemala posed and dealt with the “Indian Question” by implementing state-sponsored policies and practices focused on the assimilation and conformity of its indigenous citizens into a single national culture and identity. However, the manner in which the emerging Guatemalan state categorized its populations and sought to homogenize them into a single unitary national culture and identity differed (CEH 1999a; Hale 2006; Hendrickson 1991; Menchú and Cuc 1992; Simon 1987; Smith 1990c; Warren 1989; Zur 1998). The individuals living within the territorialized boundaries of the Guatemalan state in the nineteenth century encompassed a wide-range of heterogeneous populations (Davis 1988; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003). With twenty-one Mayan linguistic groups alone within its borders, Guatemala had and continues to have one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the Western hemisphere (Calvert 1985; Carey 2001; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Jonas 1991; MENAGUA 1999). In addition to various Maya indigenous populations, Guatemala also has been home to individuals who identify as Garífuna (African-Caribbean) on the Atlantic coast and Xinca (non-Maya indigenous) of the southeastern region (Carey 2001; Cojtí Cuxil 1997a; Fischer 1999; Fischer and Brown 1996; Nelson 1999). Yet, despite the long history of
ethnic heterogeneity existent within its territory, the Guatemalan state was steadfast in formulating and imposing its own nationalist ideology and subsequent identity-making project on the masses by devising a distinct hierarchical identity category schema.

In the post-independence era of the early to mid-1800s, the newly emerging Guatemalan nation-state developed a dichotomous, mutually exclusive and hierarchical ethno-class identity framework that divided its inhabitants into rigid structural boundaries with just two distinct categories: Indians and ladinos (Fischer and Brown 1996; Grandin 2000; Herbert 1970; Reeves 2006; Smith 1990a; Warren 1998).

Individuals identified as “Indian” were considered by the state as underdeveloped, backward and traditionalist natives of the region who would only hinder the state’s progress toward the development of a unitary modern nation-state (Fischer 2004b; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Smith 1990b; Stavenhagen 1998). Persons categorized as ladinos, on the other hand, were initially considered to be baptized and Hispanicized (or acculturated) indigenous people who spoke Spanish. By the eighteenth century, however, the category of ladino soon came to encompass all individuals of “mixed race” and by the turn of the nineteenth century, it was expanded to demarcate any individual considered “non-Indian,” including individuals who were mestizos (offspring of mixed Spanish and indigenous parents), Creoles (American-born offspring of Spanish parents) and Spaniards. Thus, the dichotomous identity framework established by the Guatemalan state came to define ladinos by the early 1800s as “non-Indian” Spanish-speaking people in opposition to ignorant, backward “Indians” who were deemed intellectually and morally inferior to their ladino counterparts (Brown, Fischer and Raxché 1998; Grandin

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6 I use the term “ethno-class” here to indicate the overlap of ethnicity with class as the category of “Indian” not only assumes a subordinated ethnic status but also reflects the fact that “Indians” as a group are also simultaneously relegated to a lower politico-economic class position by the state as well.
By developing a dichotomous *ladino* versus “Indian” hierarchical identity-making framework, the Guatemalan state created and maintained an arbitrary division of “us” (*ladinos*) versus “them” (Indians) based on a system of social classification that was built on ideologies of culture, class, and language. The resulting dichotomous identity construct—a construct specific to Guatemala—came to be one of the fundamental classifiers of personhood in the Guatemalan nation-state (Grandin 2000; Fischer and Brown 1996; Hendrickson 1991; McKean Dow 1981; Moser and McIlwaine 2001; Nelson 1999; Reeves 2006; Smith 1990a).

The dichotomous identity construct developed by the emerging Guatemalan state was established to help the state in the efforts to homogenize its heterogeneous indigenous populations. The Guatemalan state viewed homogenization qua nationalism as necessary for achieving political stability, economic prosperity and political legitimacy in the international arena (Fischer 2001; Grandin 2000; Reeves 2006; Smith 1990a). For the ruling elite, the drive toward nationalist goals necessitated the eradication via homogenization (or assimilation) of the “Indian” population who the state perceived as still deeply rooted in traditions of a pre-colonial past and hence, as the “very symbol of backwardness” (Smith 1990b:5). State-sponsored policies and practices to eliminate any cultural divisions found within its territory were soon established and in the process, the state utilized its dichotomous identity construct as a means for justifying its often ruthless assimilation efforts (Smith 1990a). The “*ladino* versus Indian” identity construct dictated that if an indigenous person did not become one of “us” (*ladino*) then they were necessarily in opposition to the development of the state and therefore, had to be
eliminated through legitimized assimilation and ultimately eradication (Reeves 2006; Smith 1990a). Consequently, programs of assimilation (or the homogenizing process of becoming *ladino* in the form of *ladinization*) were designed and implemented to ultimately coerce Maya peoples to abandon their indigenous cultures and languages, and instead, take on *ladino* norms of language, dress and sexual conduct (Cojtí Cuxil 1997a; Nelson 1999; Otzoy and Sam Colop 1990; Reeves 2006; Smith 1995; Wilson 1995). The resulting *ladinization* policies and practices of the Guatemalan state were carried out via miscegenist policies, military training, schools, urbanization, missionization, literacy projects and social programs (Bachrach Ehlers 2000; Cabarrús Pellecer 1998; Carey 2001; Casaús Arzú 1998; Fischer and Brown 1996; González-Ponciano 1998; Wilson 1995; Zur 1998). The push to eradicate indigenous peoples through the process of *ladinization*, therefore, became the Guatemalan state’s particular and primary response to the overarching “Indian question” (Fischer 2004b; Grey Postero and Zamosc 2004; Reeves 2006; Smith 1990b; Stavenhagen 1998).

While the Guatemalan state has made every attempt since its inception to create a unitary nation-state, its efforts have largely failed to assimilate its heterogeneous Maya indigenous populations into its unified nationalist hegemonic *ladino* identity-making project. Instead, indigenous inhabitants have mostly resisted assimilative incorporation into ruling-class hegemonic society since the Spanish Conquest (Brown, Fischer and Raxche’ 1998; Green 1999; Smith 1990b). Smith (1990b) notes that the weakness of the Guatemalan state lies in the fact that all efforts to assimilate or incorporate Maya indigenous peoples into a homogenous nation in the postcolonial period have consisted of forced coercive actions rather than a successful transformist hegemony. Despite the
state’s efforts to incessantly define and manipulate divisions and homogenization among its populations, indigenous peoples have dynamically formed, maintained and re-worked their own sense of identity and belonging within the state (Grandin 2000; Hale 2006; Smith 1990b). Frustrated by its inability to establish the assimilation and conformity of its indigenous citizens through its self-serving ruling-class hegemony, the Guatemalan state began increasing its coercive tactics for nation-building in the mid-1900s (Smith 1990b). Following ten years of relatively peaceful relations and agrarian reforms in the period of La Primavera (as discussed in the prior historical section of this chapter), Guatemala entered an era characterized by despotic military rule (Montejo 1999). In an effort to vigorously impose its nationalist ideology and subsequent identity-making project on the masses and to force conformity once and for all, the Guatemalan state began to utilize military tyranny and violence to achieve its nationalist agenda, which weakened social conditions and created an unstable landscape throughout the country. By the late 1970s, the state’s coercive practices produced one of the darkest periods in post-conquest history by transforming state coercive practices into all-out genocide (CEH 2000, 1998; May 2001; Smith 1984; Zur 1994).

During the genocide, state-categorized “Indians” became the primary targets of military and political strategies developed to subjugate and eliminate the “Indian” altogether (Cojtí Cuxil 1997a; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; González-Ponciano 1998; Grandin 2000). The Guatemalan state launched its “scorched earth offensive” counterinsurgency campaign to not only attack the Leftist guerrilla insurgency but also to stamp out any possible threat of communist supporters (or subversives) by destroying indigenous populations. As a result, the “scorched earth offensive” gave the state “the
moral justification to attack Maya culture at its roots (if necessary, razing the towns and villages where it found expression), thus forcing the Indians’ integration once and for all into a ladino-envisioned nation-state” (Fischer 2001:77). The result was the large-scale military escalation from 1978 to 1983 known as *la violencia* (Adams 1988; Jonas 1991; Wilson 1995). The brutality of the Guatemalan state’s large-scale attempt to eradicate the “Indian” through assimilation and ultimately violent physical annihilation, which was poised as a campaign to stamp out “communist subversion,” resulted in the murder, disappearance, injury and maltreatment of hundreds of thousands of innocent people (mostly indigenous peoples), revealing Guatemala as a nation-state with one of the most abysmal human rights records in recorded human history (Fischer 2004b; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Lovell 1988; Montejo 1999). Hardly a person living in Guatemala at the time went untouched by *la violencia*. Yet, the hardest hit were undoubtedly the indigenous populations who were caught in the middle between a relatively small group of Leftist guerrillas who sought to challenge the ruling elite and the Guatemalan state that used the guerrilla movement to justify executing all-out genocide as one last violent attempt to assimilate or destroy its majority heterogeneous Maya indigenous populations (Fischer and Maxwell 1999; Grandin 2000; Lovell 1988).

The identity-making project of the Guatemalan state has had serious and fatal consequences for Maya indigenous peoples living within its territorialized borders. The state’s persistent imposition of the “Indian” identity category on the majority indigenous population in order to subjugate, exploit and homogenize them has shaped how indigenous Guatemalans, in particular, have related to the state since its inception. This externally imposed hierarchical identity categorization of citizens has also factored into
how individuals at the local level perceive and form their own sense of identity as individuals living within a modern nation-state. However, the manner in which identity is dynamically formed, understood and expressed from the perspective of people considered part of the Guatemalan “nation” is not merely a reflection of the state-sanctioned “ladino versus Indian” identity framework. Instead, indigenous and ladino citizens alike continually rework their identities in creative and resistant ways that extend far beyond a dichotomous “ladino versus Indian” identity construct. To further explore how individuals at the local level currently perceive, express and re-work identity (especially indigenous identities), I now turn to recent scholarship focused specifically on examining identity within the Guatemalan nation-state today.

**Identity Among Guatemalan Citizens at the Local Level**

Early anthropological scholarship on identity in Guatemala acknowledged the dichotomous identity construct that the state worked to impose on its heterogeneous population. Yet at the same time, early anthropologists endeavored to determine how identity was actually perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level instead of assuming that indigenous peoples simply subscribed to the state-imposed identity framework. Sol Tax (1937, 1941, 1942) was the first anthropologist to direct attention specifically towards the importance of the municipio (municipality) as a locus of identity analysis, which he deemed the single most important ethnic unit defining indigenous peoples in the country (1941). Tax argued that indigenous identity as perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level was actually marked according to affiliation with a municipio. Through interaction with others outside of one’s municipio, difference was maintained in such a way as to foster cultural unity at the local municipio level rather
than at a larger regional level of language community or ethnicity (e.g., Kaqchikel, K’iche’, Tzutujil, etc.). Tax’s work was monumental in moving beyond the constraints of the state’s lens on identity in order to engage more fully in a local level of analysis.

Eric Wolf (1957) also focused on local indigenous communities as a locus of analysis for identity, designating them as “closed corporate peasant communities” (1957:4). For Wolf, the communities were insulated and inward facing, allowing indigenous peoples to resist external influences that would threaten the integrity of their community and to maintain their traditional cultural content. The early work of Richard Adams (1956) similarly recognized the importance of indigenous communities, but focused more on the process of “ladinization.” Based on his “ladinization” model, Adams argued that indigenous peoples inevitably moved along a unilinear progressive continuum in which they would eventually “pass” into the ladino ethnic class by dropping their indigenous traits. While some scholars argue that Wolf’s initial theoretical work was misread (Watanabe 1992; Little 2004; Fox 2004) and Adams, himself, disavowed his earlier overly-simplistic linear continuum model for identity (1994), these early scholars provided important groundwork for encouraging more rigorous, ground-level scholarship that sought to determine how identity is actually perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level instead of through the purview of the state’s nationalist identity-making project.

Following earlier anthropological work, contemporary scholars over the past twenty-some years similarly recognize the importance of local communities as a primary factor in identity formation, especially for indigenous peoples. At the same time, contemporary scholars understand the need for ongoing analysis of the state’s often violent efforts to
impose its external dichotomous identity construct on its indigenous populations in order to glean a more accurate picture of the context in which identity is perceived, formed, expressed and re-worked at the local level today. Yet, contemporary scholars have simultaneously broadened the scope of anthropological inquiry regarding identity by including a focus on individuals’ complex, dynamic and often strategic perceptions and expressions of identity as situated within an increasingly complex web of local, national and global relations.

Carol Smith’s (1990) edited volume on the relationship between Guatemalan indigenous peoples and the state provides one of the most expansive frameworks for understanding not only indigenous peoples’ positioning within the state’s identity-making project but also their active participation in a dialectic with the state, clearly demonstrating that indigenous people are not mere passive recipients of state ideology, policies and practices. Consistent with her anthropological predecessors, Smith contends that indigenous identity is “rooted in the community (rather than in a general sense of ‘Indian-ness’)” (1990a:18). She furthers, “Indians recognize themselves as members of specific communities, which usually, but do not always, correspond to the smallest administrative unit, the municipio” (1990a:3). As members of a specific community, indigenous peoples since the time of the Spanish Conquest have retained core beliefs and traditions, which Smith believes continue to anchor indigenous identity in the present (1990a:5). However, the nature of the indigenous communities is dynamic in that they are a “constantly formed and reformed political response to real existing conditions, mostly political but also cultural and ideological” (Smith 1990d:281-282). Thus, while indigenous peoples perceive and express their identity as members of a particular
community rather than as the state-imposed general category of “Indian,” they also have a long history of awareness of and active resistance against the state and its nationalist identity-making project, which is made manifest in notions of class.

Smith argues that the Guatemalan state’s dichotomous identity construct of “ladino versus Indian” has long conflated ethnicity with class by placing “Indians” as a single group into a socially, economically and politically subjugated class position within the state system. Indigenous peoples have long been aware of the “Indian” class position even though they do not perceive or express their own indigenous identity as simply “Indian” and do not necessarily perceive indigenous peoples as a united class. Smith asserts, “While the Guatemalan state has almost always acted against all Indians as a class, Indians have rarely acted as a self-conscious class (i.e., a united political group), more often reacting to their oppression as separate communities” (1990a18-19).

Despite their lack of unity as a single class, indigenous Guatemalans have been relatively effective in resisting the full scope of the state’s nationalist project overall. Smith purports, “Despite their incredibly meager political economic resources, Guatemalan Indians have provided a powerful block of opposition to all attempts to draw them into national life on any terms other than their own, their terms being those of continued political and economic autonomy” (1990a:17). Smith points out that indigenous peoples have been and continue to be active players in the state system, using openings given to them to resist state impositions to eradicate indigenous cultural identities and maintaining local political and economic autonomy (1990d:279). Therefore, it is the state that has long been the main adversary of indigenous communities and not the ladino population as a whole, substantiating the importance of analyzing the
dialectical relationship between indigenous communities and the state, and the historic interface between local, national and global power relations (Smith 1990d: 226, 281). Smith’s work also underscores the importance of analyzing how indigenous peoples continue to actively resist the oligarchy-controlled state system and subsequently to affect larger historical processes as well (1990b:26; 1990d:281). Thus, Smith’s work clearly indicates that indigenous identity—which is concurrently shaped by local communities and is situated within a state system working to impose its own self-serving categorization of identity—is complex and dynamic, and is continuously reworked in a web of social, economic and political relations at local and national levels, and now at increasingly global levels as well.

Kay Warren (1998) similarly recognizes the complexity and dynamic nature of identity for indigenous peoples in Guatemala today. Based on her analysis of the Pan-Mayan movement and its projects for “self-determination” and the promotion of “Maya Culture,” Warren argues that identity formation is an ongoing process in which individuals and communities continually rework identities (1998:71). The dichotomous identity construct imposed by the state as a mutually exclusive set of identity choices for its citizens, therefore, ignores the dynamic, fluid processual nature of identity formation. For Warren, identities are “constructed, contested, negotiated, imposed, imputed, resisted and redefined in action” and as a result, identity formation is a process that “is never-ending because identity never quite coalesces” (1998:73). She further underscores that the dichotomous “ladino versus Indian” identity construct also is challenged by “the diversification of contemporary Maya identities arising from pan-Maya ethnic
nationalism, the diaspora of political and economic refugees, and the waves of successful evangelizers across ethnic divides” (1998:73).

With indigenous identity in Guatemala construed as a fluid, diverse and never-ending process, Warren examines the Pan-Maya movement’s efforts to cultivate a unified “Maya culture” across the heterogeneous indigenous populations. In Warren’s view, “Maya culture” as proposed by leaders of the movement is defined as “the meaningful selective mix of practices and knowledge, drawn on and resynthesized at this historical juncture by groups who see indigenous identity as highly salient to self-representation and as a vehicle for political change” (1998:12). Warren suggests that “Mayanists hope that the ideology of ‘unity within diversity’ will bring Mayas powerfully into the mainstream to readdress Guatemala’s serious development dilemmas” (1998:13). Utilizing a nationalist essentialism, activists have created the Pan-Maya social movement in order to realize the resurgence of “Maya culture” via primarily language revitalization and education, as well as through concerted efforts toward the assertion of self-determination and human rights. Warren demonstrates through her analysis of the Pan-Maya movement that indigenous peoples continue to take an active role—albeit now as a much more formalized social movement—in not only transforming their own lives, identities and cultures even in the face of historical and contemporary domination but also in affecting the state through the creation of new positioning such as “novel class-ethnic blends” (1998:6, 201). Warren’s work, therefore, emphasizes that identity is a creative, dynamic process in which individuals continually reassert, reimagine and redefine their positions and sense of belonging in Guatemala today.
Maya Guatemalan anthropologist Victor Montejo (2005, 2004, 1999) provides further insight into the complexity of identity among contemporary indigenous Guatemalans. Montejo draws from personal experience and his ethnographic research with Maya refugees from the Kuchumatán highlands (his homeland area) who were forced to flee to Chiapas, Mexico during la violencia. Through both his first-hand experiences and his anthropological research, Montejo demonstrates that instead of losing their sense of indigenous identity while in exile, refugees have worked in interesting ways to both reaffirm and transform their sense of identity. Through creative practices such as renaming themselves with historically established Maya Jakaltek names, reviving or creating new ceremonial practices, and asserting new positions within and beyond the refugee community, the refugees report feeling strongly connected with their past while simultaneously interacting in creative ways with the changing realities of their current situations (2004:252, 253; 1999:188-189). Montejo explains,

Maya ethnic identity is still vital despite separation, destruction, and reintegration as a result of exile, the culture survives in many forms. The mechanisms of survival they developed and the sociocultural institutions they adapted give evidence that the heart of Maya culture continues and transforms to meet the problems of the present. Through their Maya languages, their weaving and traditional dress, their religious rituals and changes, their gender roles and family relations, their economic strategies and education, the refugees were able not only to withstand the hardships of exile but also to revitalize their Mayanness as a tool of survival [1999:144].

Montejo contends that the simultaneous process of continuity and discontinuity of indigenous identity, as evidenced among the Maya refugees in Chiapas, has long formed part of indigenous experiences overall in Guatemala. Therefore, to understand indigenous identity, Montejo first emphasizes that Maya peoples find it “preferable to call themselves by the names of their linguistic communities” (1999:187). As a result, Maya
peoples identify principally with their linguistic communities (e.g., Kaqchikel, K’iche’, Tzutujil, etc.) and then with the aggregate of being a Guatemalan Maya. Montejo confirms that it is not common to hear an indigenous person identify as an “Indio” (Indian) as the term is considered pejorative by most and highly politicized by some. To be Maya is not limited to any single place or time or to the state-imposed category of “Indian” and it is not forever rooted in the past (2004:243, 1999:243). Instead, Maya identity is and has long been a dynamic process of resistance, adaptability and creativity that is not inextricably bound to the state-imposed identity-making project (2004:243).

Montejo also argues that despite their subjugated position, Maya peoples have made important long-standing contributions to the Guatemalan nation-state as well. For example, Maya peoples have contributed both ideologically and economically by playing a major role in the construction of the country’s infrastructure (1999:18). Yet, the oligarchy has persistently denigrated indigenous citizens to the state-imposed ethno-class category of “Indian” and as such, has overtly rejected indigenous peoples as active participants in the social, economic and political life of the country. The irony is that at the same time, the oligarchy has co-opted elements of indigenous traje (clothing), historical figures (e.g., ancient K’iche’ warrior Tecún Umán, etc.) and other imagery to promote tourism both nationally and internationally. Montejo argues that despite the state’s appropriation of indigenous imagery, particularly in the tourism industry, and the denial of participation in national social, economic and political life, indigenous peoples’ actual involvement in affecting the state is undeniable. Maya peoples’ contributions have

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7 Montejo refers to the term “Indian” as being used as a political whip by some Maya intellectuals as a form of politically reaffirming “Indian” identity (1999:187).
8 Carol Hendrickson (1995) offers an expanded discussion of the appropriation of indigenous imagery and especially the depiction of traje used to promote tourism in Guatemala.
been overshadowed, however, by the subjugated category of “Indian” that has been used by the state to discriminate against and brutalize its indigenous citizens. Montejo suggests, “It is not for being “Mayas” that the dominant classes have persecuted and killed us since Columbus but for being placed in the denigrating category of ‘indios’” (1999:189).

Based on his work with Maya refuges, Montejo asserts that the sense of solidarity found among various heterogeneous groups of Maya peoples is imperative for eliminating the denigrating, state-imposed category of “Indian.” In place of the state-imposed identity framework, Montejo proposes establishing a multicultural, pluriethnic Guatemala in which the Maya—who he defines as the native people of the Mayab’ (Maya region of the world)—are recognized for their long-standing contributions to Guatemala despite the duress, subjugation and exploitation they have been forced to live under since the time of the Spanish Conquest (2005:6, 1999:18, 187). Montejo furthers that both Mayas and non-Mayas must work together to build a multicultural, pluriethnic Guatemala in order to prevent the reconfigured structure from simply promoting new ways of marginalizing and essentializing indigenous citizens in today’s world. Montejo argues that what has been lacking in Guatemala is “the genuine interest in walking shoulder to shoulder, Mayas and ladinos, toward true progress for this country, with the efforts and contributions of all of us applied to generating a new nationalist vision of unity and solidarity among the Guatemala people” (2005:15).

Edward Fischer (2001) is another anthropologist working in Guatemala who recognizes the dynamic processes involved in identity formation at both local and national levels. Fischer utilizes the concept of “cultural logics” to demonstrate that
continuity and creativity simultaneously characterize contemporary Maya indigenous identities today. For Fischer, cultural logics are “dynamic, shared predispositions that inform behavior and thought” (2001:15). These predispositions are cognitive schemas localized in the individual that derive from shared cultural patterns that are received by the individual through processes of socialization and ongoing social interaction, and are also redefined through these very processes as well. Thus, individuals create their own unique cognitive worlds, but they are constructed out of already cultured and dynamic ideas. Fischer’s notion of cultural logics, therefore, recognizes individual agency in identity formation, but within certain cultural constraints. Fischer explains,

Cultural elements can be and are self-consciously deployed and manipulated by individual actors in the course of events both grand and small; but culture itself (conceived of more as gestalt than trait list) acts on these individuals and delimits their options in very subtle—often subconscious—ways. This leads us to the irony that culture is dynamic while remaining continuous. Cultural symbols are continually construed and reconstrued through practice, and social fields of common identity are redefined through changing categorizations of ethnicity. Yet, the wonder of culture is that, through symbolic transposition and internally logical transformation, continuity is maintained by giving old forms new meaning and giving new forms old meaning [2001:13].

Fischer furthers that Individuals’ shared cultural logics are what unite people in a cultural community and allow them to maintain a sense of cultural continuity even amidst their dynamic relations with larger processes of national political structure, the world system and globalization. Fischer asserts, “The nature of cultural creativity itself thus binds individuals together through points of common reference, reinforcing and creating cultural communities that may or may not correspond to a particular geographic territory” (2001:7).

United through cultural logics, Fischer illustrates how indigenous peoples in Guatemala are also becoming increasingly involved in the global political economy via
the production of nontraditional export crops. Interestingly, Fischer does not discuss the ramifications of increased involvement in the global political economy such as low wages, increased dependence on wage-labor or higher prices for traditional crops that are no longer grown locally to the same degree under the mono-crop agricultural model as large portions of land are now solely allocated to the production of non-traditional crops for export. Instead, he argues that indigenous peoples’ participation in global processes has opened a new venue of ethnic expression in which indigenous peoples re-assert and defend their cultural identity and distinctiveness within Guatemala’s oligarchic state system whether as national Pan-Maya movement leaders or as local individuals among the rural masses. According to Fischer, indigenous peoples maintain continuity and re-assert ethnic expression locally—and some nationally as members of the national Maya movement—while simultaneously engaging in proactive, improvisational identity formation and expression within rapidly changing national and global contexts, exemplifying the need for a broadened, complex analysis and understanding of indigenous identities in today’s globalized world.

Walter Little (2004) similarly argues that indigenous identity in Guatemala is a process that is much more dynamic and improvisational than a simple identity dialectic of self-identification and attribution by others (namely the state). Working with Kaqchikel Maya vendors who sell handicraft goods in Antigua, Guatemala, Little purports that Maya identity is constructed and maintained through a process that is structured around “the overlapping constellations of social relationships embedded in local, regional, national, and global systems” (2004:16). For the vendors, overlapping fields of social interaction include family, community, the tourist marketplace and the Guatemalan state.
In each of these overlapping fields, the vendors evoke “concepts of identity in self-conscious ways, depending on the social context and the social relation in which they were embedded” (2004:15-16). In other words, vendors deliberately choose to express certain aspects of indigenous identity or traditions depending on the social context and relationship of the interaction, which essentially reflects a commodification of indigeneity. For example, a vendor may express a particular form of identity that they know will appeal to a foreign tourist who desires to purchase “traditional” handicrafts from an “authentic” Maya. Thus, Kaqchikel vendors “construct and use dynamic and flexible cultural identities to provide livelihoods for themselves” (2004:8-9). Little observes that the use of various identities demonstrates that “Mayas today are more conscious of their identities, as well as the political and economic ramifications of using them” (2004:14).

Little also affirms that Maya Kaqchikel vendors’ self-conscious use of various identities in differing social contexts and relations does not necessitate an “identity crisis” in any form. Rather, Maya vendors are quite aware of who they are and this strong sense of identity is primarily rooted in their sound community connections. Little states that “place and identity, localized specifically as community, continues to be one of the more prominent ways that Mayas conceive of their identities” (2004:180). The vendors’ sense of belonging to a community, their relations with the people who reside in it and the physical interactions with the actual place or geographical site of the community constitute the vendors as people and as part of a community. More than mere residents of a geographic locale, Maya vendors are “members of a community based on a dialectical relationship with a particular place” (2004:201).
What makes the sense of community particularly interesting among Maya Kaqchikel vendors is that most who participated in Little’s research project now live mainly in Antigua in order to sell handicrafts. Yet, while the vendors do not live in their home communities on a regular basis, they do maintain their ties through regular public participation in community events and through ongoing social relations with community members. Those who leave the community and fail to maintain participation and ongoing relations are no longer considered part of the home community. Little suggests, “This special position and function of community, linked to a particular place even though its membership may be widely dispersed, helps root Kaqchikel Maya vendors as they engage other places and people” (2004:202).

Little is careful to point out that even though Kaqchikel Maya vendors maintain strong ties to their home communities while working in the Antigua tourist marketplace, they are not impervious to external and global forces. Vendors are directly involved in the often dramatic changes occurring in the economic and political contexts of contemporary Guatemala. Their simultaneous social, economic and political relations with their respective home communities and with foreign tourists, business people and the global market have changed some of the ways in which they live and conceive of themselves, but it has not eroded or destroyed their strong sense of indigenous identity or belonging. Little observes,

Those Kaqchikel Mayas (including nonvendors) that I know do not think using such things as cellular telephones, computers, gas stoves, refrigerators, televisions, and cars makes them less Maya. In fact, these things allow them to be even more Maya because they make it easier to maintain basic and special cultural practices. Furthermore, as Kaqchikel Mayas see it, they do not move between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global. According to them, it is all the same thing, all mixed up, just the way life is [2004:264].
Kaqchikel Maya vendors’ conscious use of various identities in differing social contexts and relations demonstrates their awareness of their own identities and how they are embedded in local, national and global contexts. They are also keenly aware of their positioning within the Guatemalan state; yet, Little emphasizes that vendors are not interested in either remaking the state or re-conceptualizing the nation. Instead, Kaqchikel Maya vendors prefer to do away with the concept of the nation altogether as they view the state and its conceptualization of the nation as getting in their way, obfuscating their economic and social autonomy. Little argues that the vendors prefer “using community- and transnational-based identities, among others, rather than national identity” (2004:32). As a result, the vendors are not interested in the Maya movement or in revamping the state. For Maya Kaqchikel vendors, their use of their own various strategies to maintain ongoing social relations among themselves and with others is what is critical to their perceptions of indigenous identity and to their success in the marketplace. Therefore, Little concludes that “‘Real’ Maya identities are composed within a complex matrix of social, economic, and political arenas, where difference from and identification with other individuals are manifested in continually shifting ways” and in which vendors “will continue to conceive of creative ways to market their products, make their livelihoods and construct their identities within the transnational tourism borderzone” (2004:270-271).

The work of Charles Hale (2006) offers a final perspective that advances anthropological understandings of the complex, dynamic and often strategic perceptions and expressions of identity present in contemporary Guatemala. Unlike most anthropologists who have been studying identity in Guatemala through the focal lens of
indigenous peoples’ experiences, Hale conducted research with ladino inhabitants of the city of Chimaltenango in the central Highlands. Engaging in the ethnography of social interaction and political practice, Hale examined how ladinos negotiate, contest and maneuver within the spaces of structured inequality. He found that with new indigenous political assertion and gains in indigenous empowerment, ladinos generally “fear their longstanding dominance may be slipping away” and yet, they simultaneously desire greater equality for all of Guatemala’s citizens (2006:14).

Hale observes that Guatemalans who self-identify as ladinos today are a heterogeneous group of individuals who “occupy a wide range of social and economic positions, from manual laborers to elite politicians and landowners” (2006:3). Despite the heterogeneity present among those who self-identify as ladino, however, ladinos in general have absorbed the ideology that they are racially superior in relation to “Indians.” As ladinos, they perceive themselves as closer to the ideal of progress, decency and all things modern, while they continue to consider “Indians” as regrettably backward. Ladino perceptions of racial superiority are reflected in the notion that they consider themselves más que un indio (more than an Indian) or simply stated, they feel they are certainly and necessarily better than an a lowly “Indian.” Hale notes that the use of the term “race” in this context is not meant to necessarily equate with race-as-biology—although at times the biological perception of race can seep back into ladinos’ cultural discourse—but rather “race” is a “social construction in reference to how social hierarchies and identities are constituted and to the meanings ladinos assigned to the world around them” (2006:30).
Even though the racial hierarchy persists in Guatemala—with indigenous peoples meant to be kept at the bottom and ladinos always above them—Hale asserts that ladino political sensibilities have, in fact, changed. Most ladinos in Chimaltenango now agree that indigenous Guatemalans deserve better treatment than they received in the past. Subsequently, ladinos now take a self-critical stance toward the overt racism of the past, purporting that racism should be eliminated and the principle of equality should reign. Curiously, ladinos’ cautious advocacy for multicultural equality stands in direct tension with their privileged hierarchical positioning. Hale argues that while ladinos generally advocate multicultural equality, they simultaneously fear that indigenous ascendancy will necessarily result in losing their racial dominance and privilege in relation to “Indians.”

The desire for a multicultural and equal society on one hand, and continued racial privilege on the other fosters what Hale terms “racial ambivalence” among ladinos today (2006:11). With respect to his use of the term “racial ambivalence,” Hale elaborates,

The phrase refers, most simply, to an incongruity between the way people think about race and the position they occupy in a racialized social hierarchy. Ladinos manifest racial ambivalence when they repudiate racism, express support for the ideals of cultural equality, and view themselves as practicing these ideals, yet, maintain a strong psychic investment in their dominance and privilege in relation to Indians [2006:19].

Hale purports that racial ambivalence has contributed to the remaking of the racial hierarchy in Guatemala albeit in a gentler, less offensive and more sustainable guise that forms part of a broader process of political restructuring exemplified in neoliberal multiculturalism (2006:31). Neoliberal economic reforms—characterized by aggressive open markets, free capital flows and structural adjustment of local economies according to global economic principles—swept across Latin America starting in the mid-1980s. Neoliberal reforms also ushered in a new era of neoliberal politics that vigorously sought
to promote not only aggressive market-oriented economics but also state-sanctioned multiculturalism (2006:34). Hale contends that the concurrent rise in neoliberal economic policies and in neoliberal political practices as the predominant mode of governance coincided with a shift away from nationalist ideologies focused on assimilation and toward a new multicultural ethic that has become woven into Guatemala’s social fabric (2006:36).

While the idea of multiculturalism through the endorsement of cultural rights and intercultural equality has taken hold in Guatemala, Hale asserts that it has done so in such a way as to selectively recognize indigenous rights without placing ladino racial dominance in jeopardy (2006:35). Hale affirms, “Neoliberal multiculturalism holds out the promise of both equality and cultural recognition, but grants only the latter, and then promotes intercultural exchange anyway” (2006:38). Therefore, it is in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism that ladinos embrace the new ethic of cultural equality—mainly because quotidian relations with upwardly mobile indigenous neighbors and co-workers increasingly require it—while they also continue to limit indigenous ascendancy because of the direct threat it imposes.

Hale’s work reveals that ladino racial ambivalence, neoliberal multiculturalism and the resulting change in class structure—which has opened middle-class spaces now shared with increasing numbers of upwardly mobile indigenous peoples—constitute a complex set of contexts that demand an expanded framework for examining and understanding identity (both indigenous and ladino) in Guatemala today. Hale also illustrates that it is equally vital to continue to analyze intercultural relations as well because although those relations traditionally mapped across ladino-dominated social,
economic and political terrains, they are now clearly changing. Lastly, Hale’s research illustrates that the ways in which ladinos perceive and express their identity are also creative and dynamic as they are for indigenous peoples. In this era of increasingly complex webs of local, national and global relations, understanding ladino identity will also be an increasingly important focus for anthropological research as Guatemala’s citizens continue to move forward in an ever-changing, globally connected world that grants individuals access to unprecedented social, economic and political resources with the potential for up-ending previous racial hierarchies and ethno-class systems.

**Identity through the Lens of Contemporary Anthropological Scholarship**

The works of contemporary anthropologists presented above provide important insights into the complexity of identity as perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level in Guatemala. Based on their research, I draw five vital conclusions that I believe are necessary for analyzing and understanding identity, especially among Guatemala’s heterogeneous indigenous populations and particularly among war orphans who participated in my dissertation research project.

First, the manner in which identity is perceived and expressed at the local level clearly is not merely a reflection of the state-imposed identity framework that categorizes all indigenous peoples as “Indians” who are positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy and all non-indigenous people as ladinos necessarily occupying a higher social stratum. None of the work of the contemporary scholars discussed above—or that of most of their earlier predecessors—conceives indigenous peoples as passive recipients of the state-categorization of identity. Thus, scholars do not assert that indigenous peoples, for example, simply identify themselves as “Indians” in accordance with the state-imposed
identity framework. Instead, anthropologists argue that indigenous peoples identify themselves at the local level primarily by their communities, which are heterogeneously defined throughout the Highlands. This is consistent with my own experience in that I have never heard an indigenous person in Guatemala identify herself or himself as “indio” (or “Indian”). For indigenous Guatemalans, such a label is pejorative as the identity category of “Indian” comes from outside and is not a local category used by indigenous peoples themselves. While the state has worked hard to impose its own self-serving identity-making project on the indigenous masses, the project has largely failed and indigenous peoples have continued to perceive and express their identities locally in their own diverse manners.

Second, indigenous identity is not simply a result of a one-way dichotomous relationship between indigenous peoples and the state in which indigenous peoples are helpless victims unaware of the state’s intentions and unable to affect change. Indigenous peoples are fully aware of the state-imposed identity-making project and the efforts to homogenize them into a single identity category. At the same time, indigenous peoples in Guatemala have always engaged in affecting the state system in creative ways despite their subjugated and exploited positioning within the social hierarchy. There is no doubt that the dichotomous relationship between indigenous people and the state exists, but it is not the single determining factor of indigenous or ladino identities. The manner in which identity is perceived and expressed is and I argue likely always has been embedded in a complex web of relationships between individuals, communities, ethnic groups, regions, the state and external entities such as foreign governments and businesses. Indigenous communities historically have long interacted with each other and with outside groups of
people and institutions for various social, economic and political purposes. As a result, the dichotomous relationship between citizens and the state is but one of the multiple relationships brought to bear on how identity is perceived and expressed at the local level. Furthermore, more recently the web of interaction has expanded to include increasing global relations that have resulted from the surge in export agriculture in which Highland indigenous farmers are now growing nontraditional crops for the international market. Farmers’ participation in the global commodities chain is an example of how indigenous peoples are developing new relations on an international scale that has opened novel venues in which individuals can reassert their indigenous identities and transform what it means to be indigenous Guatemalan citizens in unprecedented ways that are not constrained by the state. The contemporary complex web of relations certainly factor into how individuals perceive and express their sense of identity today, but do not necessarily translate into a feeling of “identity loss” or identity crisis. Rather, these relations are but some of the many factors that now play a part in how individuals continuously form, rework, reassert and transform their identities and sense of belonging in today’s world.

Third, identity is an ongoing process that is never finished. Unlike the state’s view of “Indian” identity as static, backward and firmly entrenched in a pre-colonial past, identity for indigenous and ladino peoples is a dynamic process that is continually reworked throughout an individual’s lifetime in a variety of contexts that are embedded within a multitude of overlapping local, regional, national and global systems. Therefore, identity cannot be viewed simply as a list of static autochthonous traits (e.g., clothing, language, traditions, etc.) that once changed or removed amount to the total elimination of a
particular identity, as the essentialist perspective of identity suggests. Rather, identity is formed, reworked, negotiated, reasserted, redefined and reconstituted in an ongoing process that is ultimately never complete in an individual’s lifetime.

Fourth, while identity is an ongoing process, indigenous peoples in Guatemala do simultaneously perceive and express a sense of continuity that factors prominently into how they identify themselves today. The scholars discussed above argue that a sense of continuity regarding identity (particularly indigenous identities) largely derives from long-standing family and community relations, as well as through core beliefs, ceremonial practices and traditions that have been passed on from one generation to the next, which fosters a strong connection with the past. As the scholars above so aptly demonstrate, a sense of continuity is ever-present for most indigenous people and yet, they simultaneously engage in ongoing creative and transformative practices that allow them to adapt to their changing circumstances and their dynamic relationships with larger processes. Montejo’s work with refugees is particularly illustrative, showing that refugees feel strongly connected to their pasts even in the midst of creatively adapting to their challenging situations as refugees in a foreign country. Therefore, concurrent continuity and creativity are important aspects of indigenous identity that allow individuals to maintain a sense of rootedness while they creatively engage with larger, dynamic relations and systems.

A fifth and final conclusion drawn from scholars’ worked discussed above is that changing relations with national and global systems are opening new spaces for indigenous peoples to reassert identity and transform belonging within Guatemala’s own social hierarchy. Indigenous peoples, in particular, are increasing their participation in
national movements such as the Pan-Maya Movement led by Maya indigenous scholars, leaders and grassroots intellectuals. Through national movements such as the Pan-Maya Movement, indigenous activists and leaders are explicitly demanding greater involvement and recognition of the country’s indigenous populations in the traditionally ladino-dominated social, economic and political systems. As a result, these movements have helped facilitate increased access to education and economic opportunities that are fostering upward class mobility for indigenous peoples. Participation in tourist and global markets is also allowing indigenous peoples to gain considerable access to social and economic resources that likewise have contributed to their upward social and economic mobility. While participation in these markets certainly has presented indigenous peoples with challenges and negative repercussions as well (e.g., greater dependence on wage-labor, new forms of exploitation and increased exposure to the volatility of the international commodities market, etc.), their abilities to gain increased access to social, economic and political resources, along with the slight shift in ladino attitudes toward eliminating classic racism, at the very least have begun to open new spaces in the social hierarchy. The social hierarchy has long been dictated by the oligarchy and dominated by ladinos; however, indigenous peoples are now challenging the ethno-class conflation that in the past placed all indigenous peoples into a lower class position simply based on ethnicity. Today, indigenous peoples in Guatemala are occupying unprecedented class levels, while ladinos are also finding themselves in new class positions as well (even resulting in a downward shift for some). For example, research of the scholars presented above reveal that it is not uncommon for Guatemalans to comment on how there are now wealthy indigenous people and poor ladinos. While equality among the country’s
populations is far from being achieved, the fissure that is beginning to detach the conflation of ethnicity and class presents potential for new positioning and more creative forms of belonging for indigenous and ladino citizens alike in contemporary Guatemala, which is also coming to bare on identity for participants in my research project.

**Analyzing and Understanding Identity among Guatemala’s War Orphans**

The contemporary scholarship highlighted above offers a relevant framework for analyzing and understanding the ways in which identity, particularly indigenous identity, is perceived and expressed by the war orphans who participated in my research project. As I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, similar to indigenous peoples who participated in researched carried out by Smith, Warren, Montejo, Fischer and Little, orphans I interviewed are well aware of the state’s efforts to brutally force its identity-making project on them and their families during the genocide. After all, it was under the auspices of the state and its assimilationist efforts that the orphans’ innocent parents and relatives were murdered during the genocide, which forever changed the course of orphans’ lives not only in childhood but in adulthood as well.

Orphans recognize what the state did to them and their families, and yet, orphans do not talk about their own identities in terms of the state or its forced identity-making project. Rather, orphans discuss how creativity and transformity have been key aspects in the ways in which they perceive and express identity, and view their belonging in the nation-state now in adulthood. Additionally, orphans discuss and demonstrate that they are also utilizing new openings in the social hierarchy as a means of establishing their sense of belonging in Guatemala today. Having accessed higher education and establishing themselves as entrepreneurs and professionals, orphans are experiencing
upward mobility in Guatemala’s social hierarchy despite their disadvantaged position as orphans with no family or natal community economic support. Orphans’ upward mobility and subsequent shift in class position is similar to the social openings and novel ethno-class blends discussed by the contemporary scholars presented above. While the experiences of orphans who participated in my research reflect much similarity in identity perception and expression common among other indigenous and ladino populations presented in anthropological research specifically focused on Guatemala, their experiences diverge in interesting and distinct ways as well.

Unlike other research with indigenous populations, in particular, orphans who participated in my research project had ties to their families and natal communities dramatically severed as a result of la violencia. This is not to say that the Guatemalan indigenous refugees who participated in Victor Montejo’s research, for example, did not have their ties with communities severed. Ties were certainly cut, although many of the refugees fled the country together with family and community members, allowing them to maintain many of these important ties albeit in a new geographic location. For most orphans, however, family and natal community ties were permanently severed with no hope for future restoration. In place of living with family and in their natal communities, orphans were enrolled in a permanent residential home for children in a Highland community that was foreign to most of them. Much of contemporary and even the earliest anthropological research on identity in Guatemala emphasize the importance of the community (or municipio) in indigenous identity formation, but what happens when the community ties, as well as familial ties, suddenly cease to exist for indigenous peoples, especially for indigenous children who are in their most formative years of childhood?
For orphans in my research project, familial and community ties have been mostly lost and yet, they have maintained a strong sense of continuity in their indigenous identities. Without the essential community ties so centrally discussed in previous research on indigenous identity in Guatemala, the orphans’ profound sense of continuity and adamant assertion of that continuity is particularly intriguing. The orphans’ interview responses and conversations are permeated with their contentions that being indigenous is something internal in that it is located within the individual, often in one’s blood. According to orphans, the internalized aspect of indigenous identity has been passed on from their ancestors via their familial blood ties even though the relationship ties with their families are now mostly gone. Because aspects of their indigenous identities are permanently located inside of them, orphans do not believe that their “indigenous-ness” can be undone, erased or lost, which constitutes continuity in their identity formation processes. The sense of internalized continuity regarding identity is reflected in one orphan’s response, “You are born indigenous and you die indigenous.”

Orphans’ strong sense of identity mirrors Walter Little’s work with Kaqchikel Maya vendors who he likewise contends are not experiencing an “identity crisis” whatsoever today in adulthood despite their relocation to an urban center and their expanding relations with tourists and the global market. Similarly, orphans have had to adapt to their circumstances of not having familial and community support by moving to urban centers, advancing their formal education and establishing professional careers. Rather than succumbing to the long-term consequences of the genocide and the harsh challenges those consequences have presented throughout their lifetimes, orphans instead have used creative ways to adapt to their situations with amazing perseverance and resiliency. As a
result, orphans have not only maintained a profound sense of continuity in the ways in which they perceive and express identity but they also have engaged in creative practices—such as participating in new social, economic and educational arenas—through which they have expanded and transformed what it means for them to be indigenous Guatemalan citizens today, which I now demonstrate in the remainder of this dissertation.

**Conclusion**

The majority indigenous populations living within Guatemala have faced immense challenges and often arduous adversity throughout over five hundred years of domination by a relatively small group of non-indigenous elite who have wielded overwhelmingly disproportionate power, and who have created and maintained a social hierarchy that has placed the indigenous majority in a persistent subordinated and exploited position (CEH 2006, 1999; Handy 1984; REMHI 1998; Smith 1990c; Warren 1998, 1989). For centuries, indigenous peoples have had to endure brutal conquest, health epidemics, extortion, involuntary subjugation, grueling labor tribute, slavery, land seizure, forced relocation, debt peonage, religious conversion, loss of sovereignty, disenfranchisement, military scrutiny, poverty, discrimination and genocide (Adams 1990; Brintnall 1979; Calvert 1985; Carey 2001; Handy 1984; McCreery 1994, 1983; Perera 1993; Smith 1990c). Constantly forced into an oppressed status, indigenous populations have been kept at the bottom of a vast social, economic and political chasm initially forged between them and the ruling elite at the time of conquest. This extensive divide continued to expand and deepen over the subsequent five centuries and ultimately erupted into full-scale genocide during the period of *la violencia* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The
brutal culmination of violence resulting in all-out genocide derived from deeply-tooted and mounting tensions in the country, as well as the ruling elites’ ongoing fear that the “Indians” would rise up, revolt and take over the state. Thus, in its efforts to ultimately squelch any hint of an “Indian” revolutionary threat, “…the army committed acts of genocide against the indigenous population further supporting fundamental racism [and] prolonging the history of 500 years of killing indigenous peoples without consequences” (CEH 2004:xxi). While the military, its leaders and the general ruling oligarchy have faced few consequences for these heinous acts, the Guatemalan state rose to infamy on the international stage “as the hemisphere’s worse violator of human rights” (Manz 1988:30).

Despite centuries-worth of oppression and ultimately genocide, indigenous peoples of Guatemala have managed to survive and to even thrive under conditions most people would find far too daunting to face. Jakaltek Maya anthropologist Victor Montejo reflects, “Working to survive extreme hardships, terror and violence, indigenous populations have effectively employed strategies of cultural survival carried out since pre-Hispanic times” (1999:242). Guatemala’s indigenous peoples have successfully found a way to withstand overt racism and discrimination—constructs that need ideological argument to work—while still contributing in vital ways to the nation’s social, economic and political fabric (Smith 1990a, 1990b). Furthermore, indigenous populations and communities have continued to forge and rework their own sense of identity not simply in reaction to the state-constructed dichotomous social hierarchy that consistently maintains them in a subjugated social position but as a result of their own ongoing, inherently incomplete processes common to identity in general. Regardless of
the myriad of external political and economic forces working to confine, control and eliminate indigenous individuals and indigenous identity overall—along with the drive to destroy indigenous communities and indigenous peoples’ active participation in the nation-state—indigenous peoples have developed unmatched resilience that is born of the simultaneous continuity and creativity that characterizes their sense of identity and belonging. This concurrent sense of continuity and creativity is also reflected in the experiences of the war orphans who are the focus of my dissertation research. In chapter 3, I now turn to the specific life experiences of five orphans who participated in my dissertation research project in order to more fully elucidate their participation in creative and constructive practices that have facilitated their simultaneous sense of continuity and creativity regarding identity and of transformity regarding how they view belonging in the post-war Guatemala nation-state today.
CHAPTER 3

Orphan Profiles

“The history of my life...is not just a personal story; rather, it is part of the history of Guatemala, a history of tragedy and, at the same time, a story of promise.” (Menchú 1993:ix)

Guatemala’s genocide resulted in the victimization of hundreds of thousands of innocent individuals (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Vital efforts to collect and publish personal accounts of victims’ experiences during la violencia are now underway; however, this work has focused primarily on the lives of adult survivors (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 2001). Many of the victims during la violencia included children, yet few personal accounts presented in contemporary research include children’s particular experiences, especially those of children orphaned because of the genocide. With estimates of the number of children orphaned during la violencia ranging from 150,000 to 200,000, the lack of research with this group of survivors is glaring and has not gone unnoticed by orphans themselves. This fact is exemplified in a response from one orphan participant in my research project who reacted to my research description by asking, “Seriously? Someone is finally going to write about what happened to us?”

In this chapter, I present profiles of the life experiences (from infancy to present adulthood) of five of the 20 orphan participants in my project who were enrolled in the Hogares shortly after its founding in 1985. My aim in highlighting five orphans’ life experiences in this chapter is twofold. First, the profiles describe and publicly record orphans’ experiences during and following the genocide, which contributes to recent
efforts to construct an accurate historical account of the genocide in Guatemala based on eye-witness accounts collected from survivors. Presently, only one other work, written by clinical social worker Laurie Levinger (2009), has been published that solely describes first-hand accounts of war orphans’ life experiences during and following the genocide. Hence, the profiles included in this chapter add an essential element only minimally presented in current historical memory work and more generally in anthropological literature. Second, the profiles in this chapter elucidate topics and themes commonly found among orphans’ lived experiences. By examining the various topics and themes within the context of five orphans’ specific lived experiences, I aim to demonstrate what orphans have had to endure because of the short- and long-term consequences of *la violencia*. I also show how they have responded to the challenges those consequences have presented even in adulthood, while highlighting the complexities of their sense of identity and belonging in Guatemala today.

**Defining and Establishing Orphan “Profiles”**

The orphan profiles presented in this chapter are based on additional extended interviews that I conducted with five orphans who were randomly selected from the list of 20 orphans who participated in my doctoral dissertation research interviews. The extended interviews occurred after all of the primary dissertation interviews were completed and involved open-ended questions that sought specific details regarding the five orphans’ particular lives prior to enrolling at the *Hogares*, the reasons they were sent to the home, their educational histories, professional careers, current family life and future aspirations. I also posed various follow-up questions via electronic mail and instant messaging when writing up each of the five orphan’s profiles in order to clarify and
confirm various events and details captured in the extended interviews. To complete the profiles, I compiled the information contained in the five orphans’ primary dissertation interviews, extended interviews, follow-up responses and in some cases, preliminary dissertation interviews from 2005 to develop the individual profiles that describe the five orphans’ life experiences.

I use the term “profiles” in this chapter to describe the detailed accounts of the life experiences as presently perceived and told by orphans in the interviews and follow-up responses. The profiles are a culmination of first-hand experiences, memories and general testimony revealed by orphans themselves, but which I have opted to present in a linear, chronological order and have infused with my own personal observations made not only during dissertation research but also when I initially lived and worked with this group of orphans as a volunteer in the mid-1990s. I chose to order these five orphans’ life experiences in a sequential format in order to explicitly map their experiences onto their lives before, during and following their enrollment at the Hogares. The resulting profiles illuminate orphans’ own active responses to their life situations and determine the role the Hogares likely played in influencing their life trajectories. This sequential format also allows for comparison of the life experiences among the five orphans in order to reveal common themes found among their lived experiences.

It is important to note that the profiles presented in this chapter are not meant as a form of life histories literature, which typically crafts an individual’s life into a simple, static sequence of historical and cultural events captured in one sitting with the individual at one particular point in time (Bourdieu 1987; Crapanzano 1984; Peacock and Holland 1993). Certainly what orphans presented as their life experiences ten years ago and what
they present ten years from now may vary significantly, which demonstrates that life experiences are commonly both dynamic and emergent. The orphan profiles also consist of experiences, testimony and observations made by orphans and myself at the time that I was a volunteer over 17 years ago, during preliminary research in 2005, at the time of dissertation research and during the subsequent follow-up period of two years. Thus, the profiles do not subscribe directly to a life histories literature format because they are based on various forms of data collected in various settings at different points in time over a 17-year period.

The orphan profiles also are not poised as life stories, which is a form of literature that portrays an individual’s life as a story with events and details that may not necessarily have happened (Peacock and Holland 1993). The orphan profiles do consist of factual events that can be verified through various records, such as the truth commission reports presented by CEH (1999) and REMHI (1998). I also witnessed some of the events first-hand and can personally corroborate the five orphans’ recollection of particular activities. Therefore, I do not question the veracity of the information orphans present and similarly, do not position their profiles as simple stories, which is a clear departure from the life stories literary genre.

Lastly, the orphan profiles are not meant to represent Latin American testimonio (testimony) discourse, which is described as testimonial narratives of lived experiences told in the first person by narrators who are testifying in a legal or religious sense. Testimonios typically involve a strong sentiment of urgency to communicate an issue (e.g., war, imprisonment, genocide, human rights abuses, etc.) and to call for immediate action (Beverly 2004, 1996; Duchesne Winter 1992; Gugelberger 1996; Sanford 2003).
While the orphan profiles presented in this chapter do include brief first-person narratives and elements of testimony regarding particular events related to the genocide, they also include descriptions, observations and recollection of events that have been part of orphans’ general life experiences and that do not necessitate an urgent call to action. Hence, the orphan profiles presented in this chapter include some aspects of testimonio but cannot be classified as such.

The orphan profiles include aspects common in all three aforementioned literary genres; however, they stand independently both in content and form. The orphan profiles are simply descriptions of orphans’ life experiences as they were told to me by orphans themselves and are peppered with their own first-hand accounts of various events that have occurred throughout their lifetimes, along with my own personal observations of some of their life events as well. Because I ultimately compiled these profiles and rendered them into text, it is important to acknowledge the potential for subaltern subjectivity\(^1\) in these profiles as well. By subaltern subjectivity I mean that marginalized or disadvantaged peoples are presented as mere subjects of Western inquiry without a voice of their own and are talked “about” in Western terms and ways of knowing rather than speaking directly for themselves. As a Western-trained anthropologist, I recognize that the information that the five orphans shared with me has been filtered through my own perceptions, ways of knowing and experiences as I wrote them. Therefore, I can never fully know or comprehend what orphans’ experiences have been like in their own lived experiences and perspectives. As a result, my aim is not “to speak” for orphans or to assume that what I write is an absolute reflection of their lived experiences. Rather, I

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\(^1\) For an expanded discussion of subaltern subjectivity, see works such as Spivak (1988), hooks (1990), Sharp (2009), Coronil (1994) and Lal (1996).
believe that by blending description, narrative and observation, the following five profiles at the very least offer a general sense of how orphans describe what being orphaned during *la violencia* has meant for them as they grew up, entered adulthood and started families of their own.

**Mario**

*“I know that if it was not for the Hogares, I would not be the person I am today.”*

When asked about his earliest memories of life before living at the *Hogares*, 29-year-old Mario describes them as “static snapshots or scenes.” Prior to the first of a series of fateful days that would change his life forever, Mario only recalls fragmented scenes of his early childhood in which his parents and siblings were present. His most vivid memory, however, came at around the age of two.² Mario reflects, “Well one of the scenes that I remember from my childhood as if it occurred yesterday was when I lost my mom. I remember that it was one evening that we were gathered together—all of the family—in the kitchen of the house when four armed men arrived and from the doorway, they asked my mom to leave and to go with them.” Mario believes that his mother most likely knew at that moment that leaving the house to go “speak” with the soldiers would ultimately mean her demise. Mario shared that his mother stood her ground. He recalls,

² Readers may question whether Mario, at age 2, could truly remember this event. Recent work in developmental psychology demonstrates that adults can remember events that happened when they were as young as 2 years of age (Hayne 2004; Jack, MacDonald, Reese and Hayne 2009). In Mario’s case, whether his early childhood memories are solely his own recall or whether they are a combination of his own recollection and his siblings’ retelling of the event is irrelevant. This is Mario’s story as he told it and as he remembers it today. Therefore, I do not feel the need to call into question the veracity or “true” source of Mario’s earliest childhood memories.
“They were donning ski masks, were armed and everything and they told her to leave and she said ‘No!’ She didn’t want to leave and so she refused to leave the house.” Fed up with her resistance, four armed soldiers forced their way into the house. Mario continues, …just being two years old, it is hard to remember something so clearly. I [remember] it because it was a pivotal moment that I really do not know if I actually spoke [it] or if I just thought it, but what is certain is that I begged the armed men to not take away my mom and I remember very well that they responded by saying that I shouldn’t worry because she was going to return in just a few minutes.

The men, who wore ski masks to hide their identities, became fed up with Mario’s mother’s resistance. Mario states, “One of the armed men snatched me from my mom’s arms and [thrust] me into my oldest sister’s arms.” Mario furthers that the soldiers then viciously seized his mother by the arms and dragged her barefoot and unarmed out of the house. Mario and his siblings were terrified because they knew at that very moment, from the various recent accounts of similar events happening to neighbors and villagers from other areas, that they likely would never see their mother alive again. Mario can still sense the terrified shock he and his siblings felt as they screamed after the soldiers to please leave their mother alone, which was of no use.

Meanwhile, Mario’s father, who hid himself in a back corner of the house while the soldiers confronted his wife, made what Mario imagines was an incredibly difficult decision. Mario’s father was a religious leader in their tiny hamlet and also served as a representative of the hamlet at municipal-level meetings in the primary town center in the region, which was a 4-hour walk from their home. Any type of leadership position in rural Highland communities during the brutal period of la violencia commonly led to a death sentence carried out by the military because leaders were often equated with “subversives” capable of carrying out a community rebellion against the military (CEH
1999; REMHI 1998). Mario relates, “My dad left [the house] clandestinely because if the men saw him there, they would take him away too because they were killing all of the leaders of the community and he was a leader. He could get out at that moment because there was no electricity there [in the village]. Everything was dark. Inside, there was only a single candle and outside it was completely dark.” Mario believes that his father knew that if he had tried to stop the soldiers from kidnapping his wife, it would have only caused them to kidnap him as well. Under the cloak of darkness, Mario’s father—who Mario imagines must have been deeply conflicted by the situation—made the difficult decision of quietly slipping out a back window and fleeing from the house while the soldiers kidnapped his wife. Mario’s father ran for the mountains that evening where he hid from the soldiers in order to stay alive and to keep his children from being left with no parents at all.

Having just witnessed their mother’s kidnapping, Mario remembers huddling together with his siblings in their house and sobbing uncontrollably from the torment they had just experienced. Mario’s oldest sibling at the time was his 18-year-old brother, who tried in vain to keep his younger siblings calm. However, Mario remembers how the hours ticked away slowly that evening as he stayed closed to his siblings, who were overwhelmed and panic-stricken. He shares, “We were crying and waiting for [our mom] to return home and first my father arrived and since that time, we never knew anything more about [our mom].” Mario continues, “Yes, [dad] escaped that evening and didn’t return until midnight because he was afraid that [the armed men] were watching the house and would see him enter.” Mario’s father had to carefully return in the dark, not making any sounds
or using the front door. Mario and his siblings were relieved and overjoyed to see their father return, yet they felt the weight of mourning for their mother’s likely demise.

For the next two weeks, Mario’s oldest brother went about the hamlet and neighboring villages desperately searching for their mother or at least for answers to what had happened to her. Mario’s brother did everything that he could to try to locate her, asking everyone he came upon if they had seen his mother. Unfortunately, no one remembered seeing his mother or had heard of her whereabouts. There were no reports, no eye witnesses and no evidence of what had happened to her. Mario states, “…my oldest brother did everything possible to find her and she was never found. It was as if the earth had swallowed her up.” Overwhelmed by the sadness of their mother’s disappearance, Mario relates that the family tried to do what they could to continue living as a family even though it would be so painfully hard to do so without their mother.

Exactly fifteen days after his mother’s disappearance, Mario’s father, who had been so careful to stay home and out of view from any soldiers in the area, made his weekly trip to the market in a town some distance away from their tiny hamlet. Mario recounts, “…every Sunday [dad] went to the local town to sell fruits because it was market day and it was a source of economic income for our family.” Mario’s father sold fruits and vegetables grown on their own land to supplement the family’s meager subsistence. That particular Sunday, Mario’s father set out to sell the fruits he had just harvested from their land such as oranges, limes, avocados and jocotes (a small, sweet, plum-like fruit common in the area). According to Mario, his father loaded the sacks of fruit onto his horse in the early hours of the morning just before dawn and headed out on foot on the mountain path that would take him to the market several hours away. Mario and his
siblings stayed behind as they typically did in order to care for their animals and their home. In the evening, however, Mario’s siblings instantly knew that something was wrong. Mario recounts, “[My dad] always took the horse along to carry all of the fruit that he brought [to the market] and in the end, only the horse returned because he knew the path and the house. That day, they had grabbed not only [my dad] but others who were also traveling on the same path.”

Seeing the lone horse, Mario’s older siblings immediately set out to find out what had happened and to frantically look for their father. Shortly after they had begun their search, word came from other hamlets that soldiers donning ski masks were seen on the path that day and that others had gone missing as well. Soon word came that people had specifically witnessed the soldiers abducting people on the path. Mario remembers that he and his siblings were sickened with fear because they just knew at that moment that their father likely had been kidnapped and disappeared as well because of his leadership position in their tiny hamlet. Mario and his siblings realized that day that they would probably never see their father again either and were now all alone without parents. Mario’s oldest brother, just 18 years of age at the time, was now in charge and had no choice but to try to make it as the head of household for a family of orphans.

Tending the crops, caring for the animals and seeing after their youngest siblings, Mario’s oldest brother and two older sisters became the primary caretakers for their two younger brothers. Mario’s sisters were just 12 and 10 years old at the time, but together, they took care of all of the household duties and of their two youngest siblings, Mario (age 2) and his second brother (age 3). Mario posits that the task of carrying on as a family was difficult, especially during the period of the brutal genocide. It was 1981 and
the “scorched earth offensive,” the military’s genocidal sweep through the countryside, was at full force (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Just barely one month after their father’s disappearance and hoping that the worst of the violence was over, Mario and his siblings would undergo yet another even more horrifying event that would forever change their lives.

The hamlet where Mario’s family resided became one of the hardest hit in the Highlands during the genocide (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). It was located in a primarily Maya Kaqchikel region that consisted of rich agricultural land. The families that lived in the hamlet had been farming the area for numerous generations and were able to make a somewhat successful living due to good quality soil and weather conditions. During *la violencia*, however, the hamlet was often a contentious physical battleground between military and guerilla forces because it was situated near the frontlines in the Highlands between the warring factions (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). As a result, the military suspected and treated everyone in the area as a potential “subversive” or guerrilla supporter. This false assumption was consistently used to justify military-led disappearances and murders of inhabitants who wanted nothing to do with either side of the armed conflict. For Mario, the situation came to a devastating head when just one month after his father had disappeared, the military descended upon their hamlet and began to massacre its denizens (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998).

Amidst the panic of the ensuing chaos, Mario’s siblings fled from their house and headed to the surrounding mountains to hide along with other villagers. Mario’s oldest sister, just 12 years old at the time, grabbed Mario in the scuffle and hurriedly tied him on her back with a shawl type of sling called a *revoso*, which is the most common way that
indigenous women carry infants and toddlers in Guatemala. With Mario secured to her back, his sister made a run for the nearby mountains while her siblings took off in other directions. Mario described the atmosphere as chaotic because the military had opened fire on the fleeing peasants, killing the majority of them (REMHI 1998). Mario’s oldest brother related to him much later that in the chaotic mad rush for the mountains, some people were toppled by gunfire, while others scrambled over the fallen bodies. Mario recalls, “Yes, all of the people [of the village] were trying to save themselves by fleeing to the mountains. Some were successful, but the majority of them died.” Meanwhile, Mario’s oldest sister ran as hard as she could in the pandemonium. Mario claims that he can remember feeling his sister’s body suddenly jolt forward several times in rapid succession. She was just 12 years old and was shot multiple times in the back by soldiers, and instantly fell to the ground. Mario cannot recall the next sequence of events, but miraculously he had not been hit by the gunfire even though his sister was carrying him on her back. Mario was not even grazed by any of the bullets that fatally wounded his sister. Mario reflects, “…they murdered her with so many bullets and from that moment on I believe that God showed me his love by allowing me to live. In reality, it was a miracle because it just was not possible that she was killed by so many bullets in the back…she was running away [from the gunfire] and she was carrying me on her back…it is so unexplainable.”

The following few days proved to be an extraordinary series of events for Mario as well. Mario had managed to wiggle out of the revoso his sister was carrying him in when she had fallen, and he toddled off into the mountains. Mario was just barely two years old at the time and somehow managed to climb up into the hillside without getting shot,
toppled or injured in the massacre. Mario continued to wander up and off into the mountains for three days all alone and with nothing to eat or drink. Unbeknownst to him, Mario faced potential dehydration, starvation, attacks from area mountain lions and further persecution by military soldiers. Mario’s life certainly hung in the balance at that point in his early childhood.

Meanwhile, Mario’s brothers and youngest sister made it back to the family home (the military had departed the area a day after the massacre, which allowed most families to return to their homes several days following the attack). Mario and his oldest sister, however, were nowhere to be found. That same day, Mario’s oldest brother quickly learned of his sister’s murder and discovered that Mario’s body was not found near that of his sister’s. Mario shares, “…my brother…was searching for me and asking families near the hamlet and around the mountains where my sister was fleeing to [when she was killed].” Mario continues, “…according to what they say, I was alone in the mountains for three days, hungry, cold and exposed to animals and who knows what else….I was lost for 3 days in the mountains and some men found me when they were going to work [in the fields] and they heard the cry of a baby and that was me.” According to Mario’s brother, the men who found Mario immediately brought him to their home where one man’s wife cleaned Mario up and fed him. The man and his wife decided that they would care for Mario until they could figure out where he belonged. In the meantime, they sent word around to neighbors and relatives that they had found an abandoned child in the mountains. Fortunately, Mario’s brother came upon a villager who told of the farmer who had found a lost toddler. Mario’s brother rushed to the farmer’s home hoping it was Mario and to his relief, it was. Mario says that his oldest brother remembers thinking it
would be impossible to find him, similar to his attempts at finding his mother, but his perseverance made all the difference. After their happy reunion, Mario and his oldest brother returned to their family home that very evening where they joined Mario’s second sister and 3-year-old brother in order to salvage what remained of their family.

Mario remembers that for the next three years, his older siblings tried their best to maintain their home and to sustain their family. It was a lot of work for all of them. As Mario recalls, “…we always went to work with our oldest brother, helping in what little way we could. We did not have much time to enjoy our early childhoods because we were always working.” It also remained very dangerous in the area. Mario and his siblings had no other place to live, so they had to stay in their family home, but they would often spend the nights in the mountains. Mario reveals, “[We lived] in the house because there was no other place to live during the day and in the evenings, many people fled to the mountains because it was then that [soldiers] would arrive at the house and kidnap or simply kill the people.” Indeed, most of the inhabitants of the hamlet spent the daytime in their homes and the evenings camped out in the mountains in order to stay alive. Other residents left the area altogether and went to live in far-reaching villages and towns where la violencia was not as intense such as the Pacific coast (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Mario notes, “…many people, yes, they left to go live in other places or municipalities because [in the hamlet] it was very difficult.” But Mario’s family did not have relatives in other villages with whom they could stay nor did they have the money to completely relocate to a new place. With no other options, Mario’s siblings stayed together and tried their best to maintain the family home and land for the next three years.
Mario’s oldest brother, in particular, did the best he could to keep his siblings together, but it was becoming increasingly difficult, despite the help of his younger sister who was just 8 years his junior, to find work, tend the crops, maintain the household and care for his younger siblings. Mario and his second brother were also becoming school age and Mario’s oldest brother had no idea how he could pay for their education. Mario reflects, “For [my brother] it was very difficult to support all of us and he had heard about the Hogares and wanted to enroll both of us, but afterwards he didn’t want to leave Julio there because to be left without both of us, well Julio was older than me and he could help out more than I could.” Concerned about his youngest siblings’ future, Mario’s oldest brother decided that he would enroll Mario in a home for orphans, which he had heard about through word-of-mouth. Once he made the final decision, Mario’s oldest brother told him one morning that the two of them were going to go on a small fieldtrip that very day.

Mario was beside himself with excitement. Except for his three-day wandering in the mountains (which he did not recall), he had never been further away from home than a nearby village. He imagined that getting out of the hamlet to see other areas would be so wonderful and he had a hard time containing his excitement for the trip. He remembers eagerly waiting for his older brother to gather up a few things so that they could head out together. Hand in hand, Mario and his brother walked for some time to the main dirt road that linked the smaller hamlets to the municipal town center. Once on the road, they waited for a passing truck to catch a ride into town. From town, Mario got to ride a local bus for the first time. The bus, with its brightly painted colors on the outside and the loud ranchera music blaring within, was an incredible first-time experience for Mario. He
recounts, “I was so content to be on a trip with my brother and to see the world around me that I hadn’t known before.” Mario was overjoyed as the bus packed with people and animals chugged along the winding mountain road, working its way toward the town of Santa Apolonia, the next stop on the bus route.

Mario remembers getting off of the bus with his oldest brother in Santa Apolonia, a town that he had never seen before. The people of the town spoke Kaqchikel, but it had a different sound than the Kaqchikel that Mario had learned in his natal hamlet. The women in this new and strange town tended to sing their Kaqchikel phrases with fluctuating tones that reached high and low pitches throughout, which was something that Mario had never heard before. Mario remembers soaking in all that he saw as he headed off with his brother to some unknown destination. Mario was thrilled as he walked along with his brother in this strange place. While Mario was unsure of why they were there, he was certain the purpose of their visit would be something marvelous, intriguing and fun as the day had proven to be so far. Mario was a bit stumped, however, when his brother led him into a small compound in the town where a large group of children was playing. It was a strange environment; one that Mario had never seen before. Mario’s brother asked him to wait in the courtyard because he had to speak with someone. Mario waited off to the side, nervously watching the other children as they laughed and played. Mario was just too shy to join in with the children. Mario remembers that his brother returned and explained to him that he would now be living in this new place where he could go to school and be taken care of in a way that Mario’s oldest brother was economically unable to do so at the time. Mario recalls becoming instantly confused. This was supposedly a
fun field trip with his brother. Why was his brother leaving him? What had he done wrong?! Mario immediately became sad and morose. He reflects,

We left one day…I had come along [with my brother] so contently because we were leaving the hamlet. I had never gone any further than the nearby village…So, I very happily went along because we were going on a fieldtrip, according to me, right?...But I did not know…I did not know that [my brother] was going to leave me there [at the Hogares]. So, we arrived and entered the home and he presented me to everyone and then afterwards, he was going to leave and I was to stay. It was very sad for me because I was hanging onto the fence [that encircled the home] because I wanted to go with him. I wanted to return [with him] and to not stay…and when he left, he walked away, disappearing into the distance. I didn’t know anyone. I couldn’t even speak Spanish…and to see my brother, who I was closest to [in my family] and who was like a father to me leaving me behind in some unknown place was so difficult.

The first few days at the Hogares proved challenging for Mario as well. He was just five years old and already felt the distance from his family. Mario recounts,

It was difficult. It was difficult because I felt so distant from what little family I had left at the time and precisely because of that, they called me pollo triste [sad chicken]. That was my nickname, pollo triste, because they told me that I cried so much and the sadness…well, if you ask Binky [of the home’s staff], he’s the one who gave me the name pollo triste because I was, they say, shy. I am so shy and I walked about sad and practically didn’t speak with anyone for the same reason. I hardly [learned] Spanish because I was sad and I didn’t know anyone and I cried so much of the time, that’s what they tell me.

Mario relates that it took months for him to adjust to his new home. It also took him longer than most kids to acquire Spanish language skills because he was just too sad and lonely to make the effort to make friends and practice speaking Spanish with the others.

Within the first year, however, Mario recalls eventually making friends with the other orphans. He describes,

So, thank God, I had many friends. Many of them, who were already [at the home when I got there], got along well with me and they defended me a lot. Yes, I remember that there were others who wanted to harm me, but they all knew that I knew someone, someone bigger than me, who would get involved to defend me and I remember very well one guy, Leonardo…he was in the same situation, but was older. Perhaps he had been at the Hogares a little longer than I had been, but he always, he always…he was my friend and…for whatever anyone did to me,
because there were some who treated me poorly, he was always there. He was there to defend me and in the same way, there were others, many others.

Slowly establishing friendships with mostly fellow orphans, Mario began to come out of his shell and became more involved in the daily life and sense of community at the Hogares.

Within days of arriving at the Hogares, Mario was also enrolled in the local public elementary school in the town of Santa Apolonia. Mario came to love school and did very well throughout his elementary and junior high school years. Mario never failed a single year in school despite the fact that he had to learn Spanish simultaneously while learning the initial subject materials in his second language. Mario made many friends and got along well with his teachers, who often asked him to fill leadership roles within the classroom. Mario states, “I remember one elementary teacher, in particular, who related very well to me and she would ask me to sing or play something for the class when we learned how to play the recorder. So, she helped me and motivated me to do the things I could do. In whatever way, she would make me an example for the rest.” Surrounded by supportive teachers, Mario blossomed in the atmosphere of learning. Mario shares, “Thank God I always got good grades and I was honored with being the valedictorian in every single year of elementary, junior high and even high school.”

When Mario turned 10 years old, he was also enrolled in the vocational skills training program offered at the Hogares. He chose to learn carpentry and picked up the skills rather quickly. As a teenager, he became one of the primary carpenters at the home, making beds, dressers, chairs, benches and desks for use at the Hogares itself as part of the home’s self-sufficiency plan. Mario remembers, “It was great studying for half of the day [in school], working in the carpentry shop for part of the afternoon and then doing
homework for the other part of the afternoon and in the evenings.” Mario enjoyed his
schedule and also appreciated working with the carpentry instructor, Edgar, who became
a true mentor for him. In fact, Edgar, who was a young adult at the time, became like an
older brother to Mario and even took Mario home to his family holiday celebrations with
the permission of the Catholic sisters who ran the Hogares. Mario affirms, “God has
always put important people [like Edgar] in my life. [God] has never abandoned me.”

In addition to carpentry skills, Mario also learned key agricultural skills by helping
tend the Hogares animals (e.g., pigs, chickens and rabbits, etc.) and crops. The Hogares
grew several acres worth of corn, black beans, squash, lettuce, chili peppers, broccoli,
cauliflower and other vegetables that were consumed at the Hogares. Mario was equally
skilled in agriculture and enjoyed being outside. Working in the fields reminded Mario of
the days he spent helping his older brother in the fields before he came to live at the
Hogares. Mario missed those times with his brother, but he simultaneously appreciated
the opportunity to expand his vocational skills at the home.

Mario did not receive any visits from family at all while enrolled at the Hogares. His
oldest brother and sister did not have the money it would have taken to travel from their
tiny hamlet to the town of Santa Apolonia, a day-long trip. Mario’s oldest brother also
married soon after Mario was enrolled in the Hogares and had his own children to care
for in his natal hamlet, making a day’s worth of travel to the Hogares seem financially
and logistically impossible. Mario explains,

Me, at the home, I didn’t receive any visits and this is another thing. I watched as
others arrived to visit the other [orphans]. They arrived to visit and they brought
[the other orphans] things and they bought them things. [My family] never came
to visit me, they didn’t talk with me, they didn’t bring me things, nothing…but I
also knew that it was because of the situation my family was in…My brother, the
one that was in charge as the oldest, well he had to take care of the others...there
were the economic conditions also and to leave, there was the situation of transportation to leave the hamlet…at that time, it was difficult to leave the hamlet to head to the town. He would have had to miss a day of work…let’s say an entire day and he worked for someone and to lose a day’s worth of wages was a lot. It was a lot of work just to visit me. And so, I never had [visits]. Even now I don’t complain at all about that because I was aware of the reasons why [visits] were just not possible and those reasons are valid enough for me.

Mario was not bitter that his siblings or extended relatives did not visit him while he was at the Hogares. He was grateful for the opportunities the home afforded him and he knew that his family was doing the best they could by supporting him via his enrollment at the home. In a way, Mario viewed the other orphans and staff as a new form of family that supported him during his years at the Hogares. Mario describes,

…Yes, I still had a family because [the orphans and staff], they always told me I was part of the family. I grew up there. They are my family, all of them. Even though I had my own [biological] family, in the end I lost them or perhaps I didn’t lose my family, I just changed families for a while due to lack of communication, but in one form or another, that loss was made up for by this other [Hogares] family. So, with this [new family], I believe that in the end I didn’t lose anything.

While Mario began to establish himself within his “new” Hogares family, his remaining siblings also experienced change. One year after Mario had left the hamlet to enroll in the Hogares, his second brother was then enrolled in a separate boarding school program located in a city 35 miles southeast of the town of Santa Apolonia. Originally, Mario’s oldest brother chose to enroll his second youngest brother in a weekly boarding school program that allowed him to receive a full elementary and junior high school education, while permitting him to return to his family home on the weekends and holidays in order to be with his older siblings, to help tend the crops and to maintain the family home. Because his second brother often stopped by the Hogares on the weekends on his way back home, Mario eventually became particularly close with his second brother, who is closest in age. Mario and his second brother now spend much of their
time together when they are not working or studying, and have become a consistent source of support for each other. Mario’s remaining sister left the family home just a few years after Mario was enrolled at the Hogares in order to work in the capital for a time where employment (especially domestic jobs for women with little education) were more commonplace and available. After working for a few years, Mario’s only surviving sister married and settled down in a town just 20 miles southeast of the town of Santa Apolonia where she still lives with her husband and four children today. While each sibling ended up living in different locales some distance from each other for several years, they did continue to maintain a strong family bond despite their limited communications and contact.

I came to know Mario toward the end of his first year of junior high school. Within weeks of meeting him, I was amazed by his consistently positive attitude. Mario went about the Hogares with a huge smile on his face and with a happy demeanor nearly every day. He was a genuinely happy teenager who was always willing to take on any challenge presented to him. Mario worked hard at his studies, never missing study hours that I helped conduct at the Hogares. He was the first of the teenagers to head off to the fields when we needed to harvest crops. He consistently volunteered for extra tasks that needed to be done and never complained. Mario was one of the most dependable teenagers I have ever come to know. I could always count on his help in the two years I volunteered at the Hogares and developed a profound respect for Mario as a result.

Mario was also extremely respectful to all around him. Any time I would walk cross the Hogares grounds with something heavy in my arms, Mario would immediately run to my aid and would ask if he could carry my cargo for me. He also treated the tías with
great respect, never talking back to them and always assisting them in any way he could (including helping to feed, clothe and care for the smaller orphans under the tías care).

The Catholic sisters also found Mario to be an exceptionally helpful and respectful teenager. He would often help the Catholic sisters with chores such as carrying their heavy propane gas tank back and forth to a local store for a refill when needed. He also helped make furniture for the Catholic sisters’ residence such as beds, tables and chairs. In fact, Mario seemed happy to help with anything that was asked of him, making him a remarkable teenager. All of us who knew Mario at the time only hoped that his next steps in life would be as fruitful and meaningful as he deserved.

Once Mario turned 18, he was no longer a legal ward of the Hogares. Having completed his junior high school program, the time had come to focus on furthering his education by selecting a career-specific high school program. During his teenage years at the home, Mario became very involved in music and sang in the Hogares choir, which gave him the opportunity to develop a close mentorship with the choir director. The choir director was a young man from a neighboring town who showed a lot of enthusiasm for music and teaching. Mario was mesmerized by the choir director’s efforts and asked if he would give him acoustic guitar and piano lessons. Through hard work and dedication, Mario learned both instruments quickly and soon played both instruments for the Hogares choir during weekly Sunday mass at the Catholic Church in the town of Santa Apolonia. Having developed a profound love for music, Mario’s selection of a high school career path was obvious.

Mario wanted to further study music and began investigating music programs and found that only two national programs for music existed: one in Guatemala City and the
other in the city of Quetzaltenango, which is located on the western edge of the Highlands, a two-hour bus ride from Santa Apolonia. When it came to choosing the program, however, Mario was more restricted by financial concerns than the actual program curriculum. The Hogares no longer supported Mario financially because he was an adult and the Catholic sisters simply could not afford to support orphans once they became adults and no longer were legal wards of the home. Fortunately, an Irish volunteer at the Hogares at the time agreed to raise money to support Mario’s high school education. With a “scholarship” secured, the next concern was figuring out where Mario could live while attending school.

After some thought, the Irish volunteer asked Mario’s mentor (the carpentry teacher at the Hogares) if there would be any way that Mario could live with the teacher’s older sister who had a house in Guatemala City. The volunteer assured the mentor that Mario’s scholarship would pay for room and board at the house. The carpentry teacher, who was very close to Mario, spoke with his sister (who also had known Mario for some time because her brother always brought Mario home for holidays and special family gatherings). She instantly agreed to have Mario live with her. Mario shares, “At the time, there were only two places to study music, in the capital and in Quetzaltenango and I chose where I had a place to live.”

With a scholarship in hand and a safe place to live, Mario made the big move to the capital to embark on his musical career. He wanted to make something of his life and was content with his decision to begin the music program in Guatemala City. The program specifically trained students in musical instruction so that they could teach music at elementary and junior high school levels anywhere in the country. Mario knew that he
wanted to become a music teacher just like the choir director at the Hogares who had positively influenced him and had taught him so much. Moving to the capital, however, was a scary prospect, especially having grown up in small, rural Santa Apolonia where there had been one single telephone and very few vehicles during his childhood. Mario recalls, “I tell you that it was very difficult because I was not used to it—it was a way of life totally different. I had to travel every day by bus to study, but afterwards, I got used to it. Thank God I have always been very independent and I think that helped me a lot.” Mario was also fortunate to have been able to move into a caring family home that provided him with a safe and supportive environment. Even though he knew the carpentry teacher’s sister fairly well before he moved into her home, living with her and her family strengthened their relationship and they became another true family for him. He still lives with the family today and plans to stay with them, at their request, until he has the funds to one day build a home of his own.

Mario completed the challenging musical education program in four years. The program is one of the best and most demanding career-specific high school programs offered in the country and requires four rigorous years of academic and musical instruction (most other programs require 3 years or less). Mario did well academically, while also advancing his core musical skills in piano and guitar. He completed his teaching practicum and graduated, once again, at the top of his class.

With a stroke of luck, I happened to be in Guatemala during Mario’s high school graduation. I was overwhelmed with pride watching Mario on stage with his cohort as the instructors spoke of their achievements and successes. When the time came to receive their diplomas, each student came up to the podium and waited as their parents joined
them on stage and presented their graduating child with a class ring and together accepted their child’s diploma. This is a common tradition in Guatemala, but for Mario it posed a particular challenge as he did not have parents and his siblings could not attend the event. Mario was thrilled, however, when two other international volunteers and I arrived as a surprise before the commencement ceremony. Without hesitation, Mario excitedly asked if two of us would step in as his “parents” to join him in receiving his diploma. I deferred to the other volunteers because I did not want to take the great opportunity away from them and I promised to take many pictures instead.

As Mario’s name was called, the two foreign volunteers came to the stage and proudly accepted the diploma with Mario while giving him hugs (not a tradition in Guatemala). There was no class ring to present to Mario as we had no idea that we would be asked to step in for his disappeared parents, but it did not matter for Mario. He was so proud of his accomplishment and was happy to have people there to celebrate with him. I felt a pang of sadness, however, thinking about how proud his parents would have been and how odd it must have been to have foreigners as proxies for parents. Yet, Mario was thrilled and was not at all embarrassed by us or the fact that he was supported by an international contingent, as strange as we were for everyone else in attendance (there were many whispers when the two volunteers went up on stage with Mario). Mario was overjoyed with his accomplishment, but it was just the beginning of his success. Mario wasted no time moving on to the next step of his career path.

Within a few months of completing his high school program in musical instruction, Mario was offered employment as a music teacher at two prominent private high schools in Guatemala City. Mario began offering instruction at one school in the mornings and at
the second institution in the afternoons with a very small break in between. Mario worked hard, offering both choral and instrumental music instruction. After one year of working both jobs, Mario decided it was time to also add university studies to his plate. Mario took the national college entrance exams and scored high enough to gain admission to the prestigious public University of San Carlos in Guatemala City, which is the top university in the country. Mario began taking courses in the evenings and on the weekends to accommodate his working schedule. He often took five to six courses each semester, while maintaining and flourishing at both of his full-time jobs. After the first couple of years of general coursework, Mario decided that he would major in communications. He explains, “I decided that it would be a good idea to combine my present career in music [instruction] with communications and journalism. I thought it would be a good idea and so, that’s what I did.” Mario continued to work and study and yet, his desire to succeed propelled him even further, resulting in his taking a shot at entrepreneurship as well.

In 2006, Mario opened an internet café in the city where his second brother had been enrolled in a boarding school during childhood. Mario rented the business locale, purchased the most up-to-date computer equipment with his own savings, hired qualified staff and opened the doors to his new business. Mario reflects,

I never just wanted to work for someone else or for an institution. I always wanted something of my own and what better than something that also relates to communication. Besides, [internet services] are a tool that was beginning to take hold in the interior of the country, but with the advances that exist today, I don’t think it’s as profitable because there is a lot of competition, but thanks to God, we are still able to compete with the rest.

Working two professional jobs and running his own business while continuing with university courses, Mario completed his college degree in the fall of 2007. Again, I was most fortunate to have been in Guatemala at the time of Mario’s graduation—this time
his college graduation. I was conducting research for my doctoral dissertation and could not have been more honored when Mario came to the Hogares one Sunday and with a big smile on his face, handed me the invitation to his commencement ceremony. We both laughed as I recalled the great fortune of having been in Guatemala for his high school graduation some years earlier. With a smile as big as Mario’s, I told him that I plan on also being at his masters and then doctoral graduations as well. “Okay!” Mario excitedly exclaimed, “Sounds great to me!” And with that, we made a deal.

Mario’s college graduation was one of the most stately that I have ever witnessed. Mario’s smile could not have been larger as I approached him from across the room and saw him in his full regalia prior to the ceremony. He was so appreciative that I was there, but I felt deeply that I was the one who was so incredibly honored to be present. After giving Mario a huge congratulatory hug, I went up into the balcony of the majestic theatre in which the commencement ceremony was being held. I watched as the group of about 25 graduates filed in and ascended the stage. After hearing from several speakers, the graduates were called up, one by one, to receive their diplomas (apparently, parents no longer accompany students to receive their diplomas at this stage of education). I could not help but think of how much work it had taken for Mario to get to this point and how proud his parents would have been had they been alive to attend the event. I wondered if anyone sitting next to Mario on that stage knew of his early childhood struggles and his incredible perseverance. It was possible that some of the other graduates were also victims of the genocide just like Mario, but it was more likely that most of the graduates came from privileged families from the capital who came out of the genocide relatively unscathed. It was hard to contain my absolute happiness for Mario as his name
was finally called. I stood up and snapped as many pictures as I could. After the ceremony, we hugged each other with tears in our eyes because we both knew very well how massively huge this accomplishment really was for him. That little boy, who was nearly shot to death while on his sister’s back and managed to survive three days in the mountains unaccompanied and at the mercy of the wilderness around him, had achieved a goal that he could never have imagined when he was a child. I can only describe Mario’s achievements as absolutely amazing and yet, he is always so grateful and gracious to everyone else for his success. Mario elaborates,

I believe that not all of us [orphans] have had the same luck because of out of everyone, I believe that I have been so fortunate with the opportunities that I have had in life, which is different from others because I was able to take advantage [of those opportunities] and I am so grateful to every single person who has contributed to my education, including you.

Today, Mario is working on his thesis for his Masters degree. He plans to write about the conflux of music and emotion. Mario also continues to oversee his internet café business, which is doing very well despite the growing competition of internet cafes in the city where his business is located. He also continues to work at both private schools (culminating in over ten years of employment at both institutions already) and has developed a formal concert choir for one of schools. While recently chatting with me online about follow-up questions for this profile, Mario elatedly revealed,

I tell you that we are in exam week this week here in the school and two weeks ago, the new choir that I am directing had its debut and thank God, it was a total success!….Everyone congratulated us: the parents, the teachers, the school director and even the other students. Thank God! I was so nervous that day and the days leading up to it, but it went well!

Mario’s life story is one of success and perseverance in the face of extreme adversity. Despite having lost both of his parents and growing up in a permanent residential home
for orphaned children located some distance from his natal hamlet, Mario developed into a resilient adult with strong self-confidence built on years’ of academic and other achievements. He is also confident in how he identifies himself. When asked to describe his identity, Mario responds without hesitation, “Indigenous.” He explains that although he grew up at the Hogares, he still feels connected to his natal community and indigenous heritage. Mario elaborates, “Identity for indigenous people comes from their [natal] community because even if someone tries to act or speak differently, they are still indigenous. An indigenous person knows where they came from, knows their parents are indigenous and so cannot appear to be from some other culture. Being indigenous comes from within you and you can’t change that.”

At the same time, Mario laments the fact that he has lost most of his Mayan Kaqchikel language skills over the majority of his childhood. He shares,

I understand [Kaqchikel] perfectly, I understand it well. I can respond with a few words, but it is not the same as before. I forget words...some verbs, how to conjugate...all of this is tough for me....I lost the ability to speak Kaqchikel. I lost that even though I can now understand it well, [but] I can’t maintain a fluent conversation. Language is part of an identity. I lost that. It was precisely because I left my family in order to better my life that I lost [those skills], but in exchange for bettering my life, I wasn’t able to maintain that part of my identity.

Mario’s strong sense of identity developed despite growing up in a residential home and losing his Kaqchikel language skills, which he identifies as central to identity. Mario never did return to live in his natal community because it is simply too far away from the capital where he has found steady employment. However, he states that he still feels connected to his natal community even though he has not lived there since he was five years old. Mario’s assertion that he still feels connected anyway and that being indigenous comes from within a person and therefore, is unchangeable reveals an
interesting conceptualization of identity that deserves further attention, which I specifically address in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

In addition to Mario’s strong sense of identity and continuity regarding that identity, he also has developed strong survival skills that continue to serve him well. On January 1, 2009, Mario was in a serious car accident on the dangerous winding Pan-American Highway just on the outskirts of the capital, which totaled his car that he had worked so hard to save up for. Mario cannot recall all of the details of the event, but he was profoundly moved by the experience. He says, “…but I understand it as more than an accident. It was a miracle and God showed me that he loves me…” It took a few weeks for Mario to recover from the accident. In the various conversations that we have had since then, he always foregrounds in our conversations his sincere gratitude for his life and consistently expresses that he does not take life for granted. When I asked Mario to summarize what he would like people to know about his life experiences as a person who grew up a war orphan in Guatemala’s Highlands, he concludes,

That one always has to be grateful and take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves, but especially not to give up and to fight for what one wants to be and do it with a lot of effort and goodwill. In conclusion, all of my achievements, besides any limitations that I have had, have been positive and you can never lose faith or hope. Do well onto others as you would do to yourself. Something important regarding the war is to not carry a grudge and to not think of vengeance because that would not allow you to move forward…Thank God for those people [who have supported me] who I will never forget. My success is not mine alone.
Debora

“...there is always a great emptiness because even as an adult, you need a mother's guidance.”

For Debora, the feelings of loss and emptiness from not having a mother with whom to confide and seek guidance consistently interweave throughout her life experiences. Debora was one of the nine orphans that I interviewed in preliminary research in the summer of 2005. In that initial interview, I asked Debora if she thought that la violencia had had a long term impact on the life of war orphans. She responded, “Yes, a lot...because one misses out on having the love of a parent, of a mother…”

Unfortunately, Debora never knew her biological mother. She was just 10 months old when her mother became one of the many disappeared victims of the genocide. Debora relates, “My mom, during the time of la violencia, was killed and disappeared…Of my mother, I have no memories because I didn’t even get to know her…” According to what Debora’s father told her when she was older, her mother was disappeared one evening in May of 1981. Debora explains, “My dad told us that we were eating dinner when some armed men came into the house and grabbed my mom and they started hitting everyone and my dad managed to get me and my siblings out of there…” Debora’s father told her that the soldiers were attacking villagers all around their small Highland hamlet that May evening. In the chaos of the moment, Debora’s father (just in his early 20s at the time) was able to make a run for the mountains with his three children. Frantically fleeing alongside other villagers, Debora’s father headed for the mountains with the hopes that they could hide away from the soldiers with the help of the surrounding darkness. Debora’s father ran with her in his arms and dragged her 3-year-old sister by the hand. Debora’s 7-year-old brother ran alongside them, but in an instant, he turned around.
Debora explains, “…when [my brother] was fleeing with us, he ran back for my mom and never returned.” According to Debora’s father, her brother most likely realized that their mother was not with them and ran back to the house to get his mother despite his father’s desperate cries for him to come back.

Debora’s father continued making his way to the mountainside with his little girls. Debora laments, “We never knew anything more of my mom and little brother.” No remains were ever found. Both Debora’s mother and brother became two more of the over 200,000 disappeared who were among the hundreds of thousands of unwarranted casualties of Guatemala’s genocide (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Asked why she thought that the armed men had entered her family home, Debora states, “The truth is that even now I still don’t know why they entered the house.” Responding to a question regarding what she believes was underlying la violencia at that time, Debora exclaims, “The truth is that I don’t even know why the war started or why they did it. What I do know is that it affected the indigenous people too much. We were the ones most affected.” What made matters worse was that the area that was once home to Debora and her family was especially targeted during la violencia. She contends, “Many more people from the hamlet [were disappeared] because it was there that la violencia was the harshest.”

For Debora’s family, their tiny natal hamlet was nearly destroyed that May evening by a military raid to stamp out communist “subversives” and their supposed supporters in the Highlands (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). After that harrowing evening, Debora’s father told her that he hid with his two daughters in the mountains for a few weeks. Debora remembers her father telling her about how at the time, many people lived in the mountains in makeshift shelters and sought whatever food they could find from other
villagers or from adjacent farmland in order to stay alive and avoid random military raids. Her father told her that he did what he could to care for his daughters in the mountains, but he grew increasingly concerned that Debora, an infant at the time, would not make it without milk or a consistent source of food. In an attempt to save his youngest child from what he called a “death sentence,” he brought Debora to his mother’s home in another hamlet some distance away. A few weeks had passed since his wife and son were disappeared, and Debora’s father said that he felt that the military situation would have settled enough to allow him to safely bring Debora to his mother’s home. Debora’s grandmother somewhat reluctantly took her in because of the situation even though it meant another mouth to feed in a time when resources were scarce because of the heightened counter-insurgency campaign. Debora’s father then returned to the mountains with his 3-year-old daughter and survived the next three years hiding in the mountains never returning to his home for fear that the soldiers would be there waiting for him. This was a common experience for many fellow villagers. As Debora shares, “When it was la violencia, everyone left fleeing because they killed anyone, nothing was secure and because of this many people lived hidden in the mountain. That’s how it happened that so many people lived hidden in the mountains”

For the next three years, Debora lived with her grandmother and other extended family members. Debora’s father never came to visit her for fear that he would be captured by military soldiers. Debora notes, “…after all that happened, my dad took care of my sister and sent me to live with my grandmother. He kept us separated, [but] then later he reunited us.” She continues, “Yes, we came back together when I was already 4 years old because my father learned that they were beating me a lot.”
Debora does not know how her father found out about the physical abuse of his youngest child (which was mostly perpetrated by an uncle of Debora) and fortunately, her memory of that abuse is foggy. However, the notification that she was being physically abused must have been unbearable for her father because he furiously returned to his mother’s home despite the constant military presence in the area in order to bring Debora to live with him in the mountains even though it meant living precariously in rough conditions. When asked why she thought her uncle was abusing her, Debora responded with what she heard from her relatives later on in her life, “[T]hey said he didn’t care about me.” Debora imagines that her father was uncertain how he would raise his two daughters (4 and 6 years old at the time) while hiding in the mountains, but that he was steadfast in not allowing anyone to abuse his own children, who were all that he had left of his family.

For the next year, Debora and her sister lived day-to-day in the mountains with their father, uncertain from where the next meal or form of shelter would come. Some of Debora’s earliest childhood memories consist of times they spent together in the mountains. She fondly reflects, “Sometimes I remember all of us eating in the mountains because that’s where we lived after I was with my grandma.” While Debora has warm memories of mealtimes with her father, she recalls that their time in the mountains also marked a turning point for her father. Debora shares, “It was after all of the sadness that my dad started drinking a lot!” She later elaborates, “We lived in the mountain because [the soldiers] were still looking for my father. We fled from one place to the other….Yes, my father drank because he felt so alone and he missed my mother so much.” In a follow-
up interview, Debora explains, “At the time, my dad drank so much that we never knew where we were going to sleep at night or if we were going to have something to eat.”

Debora’s father eventually moved with his two daughters to the outskirts of a larger village in order to have what Debora presumes was increased access to alcohol. The larger village was also a main military target area during la violencia, but Debora’s father moved them to the village nonetheless. After settling in this new location, Debora and her older sister tried to keep themselves occupied while their father drank heavily day and night. Debora reflects, “Yes, we wandered in the streets and that’s how it came to be that people saw us and managed to enroll us in a daycare only during the daytime.”

Debora believes that it must have been Catholic nuns who enrolled them in the daycare because she recalls what they were wearing. She speculates, “Who knows what religious order [they belonged to]…or what convent they were from, but they were nuns because of their habits they wore.” Fortunately, Debora and her sister spent the next couple of months attending the daycare during the weekdays, receiving daily meals, some clothing and occasional preschool-type education. In the evenings, however, the girls would try to find their father, but most often ended up alone. Debora reflects, “We slept in the street and people saw us and gathered us up. We slept in some [random] house and in the day, they would bring us to the daycare. In the evening, we would return to the street again, but the [villagers] would not leave us to sleep in the street.”

Debora’s father continued to drink more and more. Concerned about the girls’ wellbeing, the Catholic nuns running the daycare decided to ask Debora’s father for permission to send the girls to live in the Hogares, which the nuns had heard about through various Catholic networks in Guatemala. According to what Debora had been
told when she was older, her father was somewhat reluctant to let go of what remained of his family; however, he knew that sending his daughters to the Hogares would be in their best interest. Therefore, Debora’s father agreed to sign documentation to transfer the custodial rights of the girls to the Catholic sisters at the Hogares. Debora explains, “My dad [agreed] because all he was doing was drinking.” So the next day, the girls and their father got into a large truck that happened to be going in the direction that they needed to get to the Hogares. Debora recalls, “I remember that day when we left in the truck, but I didn’t have even one idea of what was going to happen.”

Arriving at the Hogares, Debora remembers seeing the other children for the first time. She relates, “My dad left us to play with the other children while he went to speak to the sisters, but we were too shy, so we only stayed watching the others while we waited for our dad [to return].” Debora recollects not fearing the Catholic sisters she saw when arriving at the Hogares—she had been with religious sisters at the daycare—but she was very shy around the new children. Within what seemed a long time for Debora, her father returned to his daughters and explained that they would now be living in this “home” for children. Debora vividly remembers watching her father leave the Hogares grounds and the Catholic sisters closing the gates to the property, enclosing Debora and her sister inside. “Oh! It was so sad! They locked us in so that we wouldn’t run after our father….He came to see us to say goodbye and we wanted to go with him. And they locked us in so that we wouldn’t follow him.” When asked to describe her first memories of the Hogares from that day forward, Debora shares, “Yes, [it was] difficult from the beginning because when one arrives there, you are timid and there is nothing to do but cry and there the others are consoling you…..I was sad because to not be with your
father…who you are close to and then to be with [strangers], locked in and so young...I wanted to be with my father even though he was like that [drinking].” In a follow-up interview, Debora states, “It was so difficult for me because despite his drinking, I loved him very much.” Debora imagines that the transition was even harder for her older sister who had lived for a much longer period of time in the mountains with their father following the disappearances of their mother and brother.

A few days after Debora and her sister arrived at the Hogares, the Catholic sisters enrolled the girls in the local public elementary school. Besides their experience at the daycare, neither girl had been previously enrolled in a formal educational institution. Consequently, Debora was enrolled in the first grade and her sister in the third grade at the Escuela Primaria de Mario Mendez Montenegro, the local public elementary school. In addition, the Hogares had one Catholic sister on staff who was a teacher and who spent many hours working with the orphaned children to tutor them in their studies so that they could catch up with their other classmates. Debora and her sister began receiving tutoring from the Catholic sister immediately after their arrival at the home, which enhanced their rapid progress in school.

Debora recalls liking school from the very beginning. She responds, “Yes, I liked to go to school because that’s how I learned to read and to write.” Going to school was something Debora never had imagined being able to do before she came to the Hogares. Debora did well in school and never fell behind in her homework or progress despite her somewhat delayed start. Debora shares, “With my grades, I did well, more or less, because I never failed a class.” It was not uncommon for her fellow orphans and peers from town to fail a class or two each year because of difficulties they had with the course
materials, the challenge of simultaneously learning Spanish as a second language and the vast resource limitations within the school itself. Yet, Debora was a successful student despite the limitations in the school system and she showed a deep penchant for learning.

Socially, Debora made good friends with the other female orphans, but she did not really have many friends from Santa Apolonia. She relates, “I believe that my friends were mostly the other orphans because, in reality, there were so many girls to be friends with right at the Hogares and also because they were orphans too…they understood my struggles and loneliness better than the rest.” Yet, despite her many friendships with the other orphans, Debora still continued to feel the tremendous loss of her mother and yearned for being in a family, which was a sense of belonging that she feared she would never come to know again in her lifetime. Debora shares, “For me, the entire time [at the home] was difficult because I felt so alone.” To make matters more difficult, Debora’s father only came to visit her and her sister four times during the 12+ years that she was enrolled at the Hogares. She explains, “After he enrolled us at the Hogares, he went to work on the coast to harvest coffee for one month and then return to the village for one month and so on….so, in all the time we were at the home he only came to visit like almost four times….[that was] in the beginning and afterwards, he didn’t visit at all.” In addition to her father, Debora recalls only one visit from a relative, an aunt she did not know well. With few family visits during the majority of her time at the Hogares, Debora tried instead to focus on maintaining her relationship with her sister and to seek solace in friendships with other orphans and a few mentorships with Hogares staff and volunteers.

Once Debora completed elementary school, she was enrolled in the local public junior high school, as well as in the sewing/tailoring vocational shop at the Hogares. She
continued to experience success in junior high school and even placed second in her class in the second of the three years she was enrolled. At the home, Debora learned to sew from don Faustino, the sewing/tailoring instructor who began working at the home shortly after it opened in 1985 and who continues to work there even today. From don Faustino, Debora learned how to sew clothing, bed sheets, pillowcases and even beautiful gowns for the orphan girls’ quinceañeras (15th birthday coming of age ceremonies). Debora especially enjoyed sewing pairs of pants, a job which was in high demand since all of the pants worn by the orphan boys (both for school uniforms and casual wear) were made in the sewing shop when Debora was a student. Debora still enjoys sewing today, although she does not sew as often as she likes. She shares, “I [still] like to sew and what I like to sew more than anything are my curtains, pillowcases and beautiful things.” The skills Debora developed in the sewing/tailoring shop have been helpful in advancing her avocation of sewing. Together, Debora’s formal education at the public school and vocational skill development at the Hogares created a solid foundation that permitted her to further advance her studies and to develop practical life skills as well.

When I arrived at the Hogares in 1994, Debora was in her first year of junior high school. Her deep hearty laugh is one of the things that helped me to get to know her rather quickly. Debora had a penchant for teasing others in a fun-loving way. She loved to tease me about my initial inability to pronounce “chocolate” correctly in Spanish. Instead of saying “cho-coe-LAW-tay,” I would say “chalk-a-lot-tay.” Holding back her laughter every time, Debora would ask me what the ingredient was in something chocolaty so that I would mispronounce the word yet again and then she would laugh her gruff, hearty laugh as if she just heard the funniest joke for the first time. By the end of
the two years I spent at the Hogares, it became a fun form of teasing between the two of us. Despite my progress in speaking Spanish, I would always purposely mispronounce “chocolate” in a myriad of ways to her amusement, which always resulted in her husky laugh. Day or night, Debora’s throaty laugh could be heard somewhere on the Hogares grounds. I found it amazing that someone who had the odds stacked against her so early on in life could develop such a fun-loving attitude towards others. Debora (who is barely five feet tall) always struck me as a remarkably strong person with a huge spirit. With so much potential and fight in her, I could only wonder where her life would go as she entered the next phase of her education.

Debora’s next step after completing junior high school in the town of Santa Apolonia, was to enroll in a two-year high school program in the colonial city of Antigua that offered a career emphasis in tourism and hospitality. Because of its small size and little government funding, the town of Santa Apolonia does not have a public high school, which is common for many towns throughout the Highlands (Menéndez 2002). As a result, most students must move to larger cities if they wish to continue their formal education beyond junior high. For Debora, the next step in her formal education required her to move to Antigua where the Catholic sisters had procured a small rental home for several of the high school-age orphans who were studying in and around Antigua. For the first year, Debora proved herself as a student and did well in school. She also helped prepare meals and carry out daily chores in the rented home she shared with the other orphans. In her second year of high school, however, Debora moved to Guatemala City. Most orphans she had lived with in Antigua graduated after her first year in the program. Subsequently, in an effort to save money, the Catholic sisters consolidated and moved all
orphans who were pursuing their high school education to the capital. Debora now had to commute to Antigua daily by bus (a one-hour ride each way) in her second year in order to complete the program. Fortunately, Debora studied hard and in November of 1999, she graduated from high school, which was a huge achievement for her (her older sister never continued her education and barely completely junior high school). Debora would have liked to continue on to college, but the Catholic sisters who run the Hogares can barely afford to financially support orphans through the high school phase of education. Without financial support from the Hogares, Debora felt she had no choice but to look for employment after her high school graduation instead.

For the first six months after graduation, Debora went to work for the Catholic sisters in their “mother house” (or headquarters) in Guatemala City. Fortunately, Debora developed the technical skills the Catholic sisters required for an open position within their administrative offices. With a new job secured, Debora had to find a place to live. She did not have any family members with whom she could live in the capital, unlike a few of her fellow Hogares alumni who have extended family members with whom they could potentially now live and pay rent. For Debora, her sister was already married and living with her in-laws not far from the town of Santa Apolonia, so living with her own sister was not an option. Fortunately, one of the other Hogares alumni (Adriana) had been living in the capital with her paternal grandparents. Adriana, realizing Debora’s situation, asked her grandparents if Debora could also live with them. Adriana’s grandparents agreed and Debora (with the few meager belongings she had) moved in with Adriana and her grandparents. Debora shares, “…it was when I was already an adult when I was living with [Adriana] that I finally felt that someone loved me.”
After six months of living and working in the capital, Debora decided to move back to Santa Apolonia and live with her boyfriend in his parents’ modest home. She explains, “We got to know each other when I was studying [in junior high] and he was two years younger than me.” Having met her boyfriend Alex in the town of Santa Apolonia while in junior high school, Debora decided that they would try to maintain their relationship even when she left to study in Antigua. After two years, Alex decided to study at a high school program in the western region of Guatemala in order to focus specifically on auto mechanics, while Debora worked with the Catholic sisters in the capital. However, Debora soon found out that she was pregnant. Having worked for only six months with the Catholic sisters, she decided it was best to move back to Santa Apolonia and live with Alex’s parents in order to raise their baby together. Debora and Alex never legally married, which is not uncommon in Guatemala (expense and bureaucratic complications often make legal marriage a challenge). Yet, they committed themselves to each other in a common law union and soon welcomed their first child, a son.

With few job prospects and worsening economic conditions in Guatemala, Alex was desperate to secure gainful employment in order to support his new family. He never finished his high school degree because of the baby, which made securing a job even more difficult as high school diplomas had become more commonplace among Guatemala’s young adult population and therefore, became a common minimum requirement of most employment positions. Debora shares, “We had been living together for four years when he decided to leave for el norte.”

Alex made the difficult decision to try to get to el norte (the United States) to find work. Debora recounts that although from the very beginning she hated the idea that Alex
would be leaving her and their son behind, she also understood their desperate financial situation. She states, “I had no option but to be in agreement with his decision.” After three grueling attempts to get across the Mexico/U.S. border via Arizona, Alex finally made it and settled in Houston, Texas where he began working as a construction laborer. Fortunately, with the increasing accessibility of cell phones in Guatemala, Alex was able to call home every day in order to work at maintaining his relationship with Debora and especially with their 4-year-old son. Debora recalls, “[Alex] was so lonely in the States in the beginning! He called us a lot.” Debora shared his feelings of loneliness as she greatly missed Alex as well. In order to make it through those early days of separation, Debora and Alex would speak with each other daily and even multiple times during the day by phone and together they would reconfirm their future plan, which would require Alex to stay in the United States no longer than seven years. Debora conveys,

We believed that it would take approximately seven years to make enough money [in the U.S.] so that we could live simply but comfortably here so that [Alex] could return [to Guatemala] and continue his studies and find a job….I thought seven years was like an eternity, but at least we had a plan with a return date.

While Alex established himself in the U.S., Debora and her son continued to live in the home of Alex’s parents. Debora and her son share one simple room with a double bed, a small desk, a rustic armoire, an old sewing machine that still functions despite its age and a small television that Alex sent money for Debora to purchase for their son. Debora spends her days caring for her son, helping her in-laws with various chores around the house and now volunteering in her son’s various elementary school activities. Alex does not want Debora to find employment because he prefers that she stay with and take care of their son. Debora would have liked to start studying at the college level while Alex was away, but he forbid it, saying she needed to stay home with their son.
shares that Alex also believes women are not meant to study. According to Debora, “He says that those women who study do it to be with other [men]….I would like to study, but he won’t let me, so I just want to be happy and live like the family that I never had.” With no other alternatives, Debora dedicates herself to her son and his education, as well as to overseeing the construction of a second story to her in-laws’ home. The second story will serve as Debora and Alex’s own home since land parcels are becoming expensive and scarce in the town of Santa Apolonia. Alex’s parents will keep their first-level as their home. To bring the project to fruition, Debora supervises the second story project and is concentrating on the next phase of construction, which involves laying the cement flooring, constructing the brick walls and installing the plumbing.

At the time of an ethnographic follow-up interview in April of 2009, Debora reported that Alex had relocated to Atlanta, Georgia, in search of more job opportunities. He was simply not getting the work he once had when he first arrived in Houston in 2004, which was before the global economic crisis hit the U.S. and other national economies in 2008. However, Alex was disappointed with the lack of job opportunities in Atlanta as well. Debora shared, “He hardly sends us money because he says there isn’t much work [in Atlanta].” Debora also commented that her relationship with Alex also had become considerably strained. He confessed to her that he had had a sexual affair while in Houston with a Mexican immigrant woman. Affairs with other immigrant women in the U.S. were becoming a common theme not only for Debora but also for many of the women in Santa Apolonia whose husbands were working in el norte. Debora shared that

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3 While conducting my dissertation research, I volunteered as a translator for a group of physicians from the U.S. who set up a week-long clinic at the Hogares in order to provide free medical services to the townspeople. During the five days of the clinic, there were at least six women that I translated for who presented with symptoms common for depression. Each woman shared how her husband had an affair with
she is fortunate because her husband decided to end the affair and to leave Texas. Thus, Alex not only moved to Atlanta to find a better job but also to distance himself from his mistress. Yet, despite Alex’s renewed commitment to Debora, she notes, “[His infidelity] has been very tough and has put a lot of stress on our relationship.” Debora’s hope at the time of the follow-up interview was that Alex would return to Guatemala as soon as possible, especially since he was no longer making enough money to send home for their future and her son could only vaguely remember him (often asking what his dad looks like or what kind of person he is). Debora confesses, “…I hope in God that this year [Alex] will come home because so much has happened already.”

For Debora, the loss of her mother and the intense desire to be part of a family have been the primary themes she emphasizes when talking about her life experiences. When asked in a preliminary research interview in 2005 what type of long-term impact the genocide may have had on her own life, she responds, “A lot because one lacks the love of a father, of a mother and although you are grown and come to have your own children…you miss having the advice of a parent to say, ‘Don’t do this.’ Or the advice of a mother who tells you, ‘Do this, my daughter, because it is good for you.’ It is so difficult when one does not have parents.” Speaking about her early childhood and the genocide in my doctoral dissertation research interview with her two years later, Debora similarly shares, “It affects me a lot because it was my mother that they murdered. Even today I still feel the pain because I wish I had someone to go to for advice, but I don’t have anyone.” Lastly, in the most recent follow-up interview just one year ago, Debora

an immigrant woman in the U.S. and then decided to abandon his Guatemalan wife and family. Each woman explained that her husband decided not to return to Guatemala and also stopped sending money to his Guatemalan family, leaving his Guatemalan wife and children in a desperate financial situation.
replies to a question about how she is feeling by stating, “There is always a great emptiness because even as an adult you need a mother’s guidance.” For Debora, the loss of her mother and the void it has left in her life are permanent reminders of her difficult early childhood, which continues to challenge her every day.

While Debora relates that she cannot escape the emptiness she feels because of the loss of her mother, she is doing her best to raise her son and to create the family she never had. Her hope is that her son will be a good person and that he continues his studies. Debora reflects, “The strength in my life is my son because God gave me a person so loving, which is my son.” She furthers that she just wants to “live in harmony and with lots of love.” Debora states, “Sometimes you feel so alone in this life, but then people appear who give you the strength to go on….My great family now is my son.” Debora feels strongly about providing her son with the love she rarely felt especially as a teenager. Considering her time at the Hogares, Debora confides,

Love-I can’t say that they [the Catholic sisters] gave us love because they didn’t. Each [orphan] found refuge with a friend, but with a nun, no. We felt it most when we left for school and we came back and they said, “Good afternoon.” They only said to us, “Good Afternoon.” They didn’t ask, “How did it go? What did you do today?” or something like that. And I notice it more now living with my parents-in-law [because] I come back from somewhere and they say, “Daughter, how did it go?” To us [the nuns] didn’t do that and that’s bad. I didn’t feel love in the Hogares. I am appreciative of my education [they provided], but love, I didn’t feel any.

Debora shares that despite the lack of love, she is grateful for the educational opportunities life at the Hogares afforded her. She states, “A great advantage was that they gave us an education. If we wouldn’t have been there at the Hogares, we would not have been able to study.” Debora’s appreciation for the educational opportunities provided via the Hogares stands in interesting contrast to her bitter feelings about never
having felt loved while enrolled there, demonstrating the complexity and variability of each orphan’s experience at the home.

It is also intriguing that Debora asserts a strong sense of pride in her indigenous heritage and identity despite her recognition that she has lost various aspects that she herself associates with indigenous identity. For example, Debora reports that she has not maintained any ties with her father, sister or extended relatives, and has not been back to her natal community since her family fled years ago. Debora also acknowledges that she has lost most of her Kaqchikel language skills and now wears non-traditional clothing as often as her traje. Yet, she asserts her indigenous identity. Debora shares, “I feel very happy to be indigenous.” She emphasizes that being indigenous “is a tradition that one has…that is passed down” and confidently states, “I am indigenous!” Debora has overcome great hardships and has succeeded in overcoming the loss of her family, obtaining a high school diploma, maintaining a sense of pride in her indigenous identity, creating a family of her own and moving forward in her life. Debora declares, “Sometimes you just have to endure because you do not have family.”

Debora’s life experiences reflect a common theme among war orphans. By having lost family members and having no familial “safety net” to support them, orphans commonly express that they have no other choice but to move forward in life. Debora relates, “[la violencia] affected [orphans] greatly because they were left without a dad or without a mom and many parents, for the sadness of [losing] their spouse began to drink and they didn’t think of their children. And there were so many children that came here to the home because almost all of us were left in the street.” In her own experience, Debora furthers, “…it is now when I am an adult that I need my mom and my dad. Right now
today, I have nothing.” Fortunately for Debora, she has been successful not just in moving forward but also in becoming a strong individual who is confident in who she is and in creating the family she always hoped to have in her life. She is also generous and empathic beyond belief with others. In concluding our follow-up interview, Debora sweetly declares, “Thank you for your attention and never feel bad about asking me more questions for your study. I am here to help you with all of my heart. I love you so much and may you have peace in your heart. God loves you and so do we!” Debora is a truly remarkable individual who, despite a myriad of barriers and life challenges, has made success happen and continues to strive for what she desires in life—mainly a loving, supportive family.

Esteban

“I try to remember the good and not the bad.”

Esteban, now 29 years old, still has a difficult time retelling the events of his early childhood when he lived with his family in a distant region in the department of Quiché, another one of the hardest hit regions in Guatemala during la violencia (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). He shares, “[My childhood] was a very difficult stage for me and I think, I don’t know, that it was something that I lived through…it was something very terrible for me. It was very terrible…when I recall it, I feel as if…as if I am in shock.” Esteban’s earliest memories are mostly filled with emotional pain and sadness, yet he recognizes the importance of not forgetting where he came from and volunteered to share his story with me for the purpose of this research project as a way of raising awareness regarding Guatemala’s war orphans, a topic that Esteban, himself, has made presentations on in
various college courses he has taken over the past few years. Yet, while underlying tones of suffering and disappointment infuse Esteban’s account of his earliest memories, he simultaneously reflects:

The only thing [at the Hogares] that could not be replaced was the love of my parents, which for me did not make a lot of difference, especially when they were drinking…I try to remember the moments in which they played or were doing something with me. I remember my dad playing and my mom washing clothes on the days they were sober. I remember the patio of my house with the animals my mom took care of on Sundays [taking them out to pasture for other people]. I try to remember the good and not the bad.

While Esteban consciously works to remember his parents in a positive light, he tells of his early life as one riddled with emotional trauma and challenge. Esteban relates that his mother, at the age of 20 and before he was born, moved to a sizeable village within the department of Quiché, which is located in Guatemala’s western Highland region. Her family had been living in a small hamlet as rural farmers. His mother was the oldest of five children. Through hard work as farmers and as creative entrepreneurs, Esteban’s grandparents eventually grew enough crops and fruits, and baked sufficient bread to accumulate surpluses that they could sell for a sizeable profit. Esteban explains, “My grandparents worked very hard…very hard. And in little time, they saved [enough] money to buy a parcel of land in the [larger] municipality and build a house there.” Esteban’s grandparents moved their family to the new home in the municipal village so that they could find employment while their children could gain much better access to education. Once Esteban’s mother and siblings moved to the new house, his mother began employment as a domestic worker in a local wealthy family’s home while also attending school. At the same time, Esteban’s mother soon fell in love with a young man who lived across the street from her family’s new home.
The young man, who would become Esteban’s father, was from a modest wage-labor family who lived in the village and attended crops located just outside of the village proper to supplement the foodstuffs they purchased at the local market. Esteban’s father had just completed his military service as a combat soldier during the late 1970s, which marked the start of the period of la violencia (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Esteban believes that his father’s military service had severe negative consequences. He explains, “…my father, as a consequence of [serving as a military soldier] developed a certain hatred [that] made him a totally impulsive person…” Following his military stint, Esteban’s father fell in love with the young woman who lived just across the street, but their union disturbed the young man’s parents. Esteban’s paternal grandparents did not approve of the budding relationship because the young woman came from what they considered a “peasant” family originating from a small hamlet. Esteban’s paternal grandparents wanted his father to marry a woman from a financially well-off family with a strong reputation in the village instead of a farmer’s daughter originally from a small “peasant” hamlet. Yet, Esteban’s father was committed to his true love even though his parents threatened to strip him of his hereditary rights to familial home and land should he continue his relationship with the neighbor girl. According to what Esteban later learned about his parents’ early relationship, his father took his parents’ threat to heart and abruptly left the family home in a rage and moved in with his young love’s family. “And a little later,” Esteban explains, “my parents started a family of their own, beginning with the birth of my sister.”

In the first several years of their marriage, feuds between the young couple’s families continued to grow and intensify. While uncertain of the true basis of the discord, Esteban
did learn that his father’s parents not only refused to accept the union of their son and his wife but they also rejected their new baby granddaughter as well. “My grandparents were not in agreement at all and they were not going to accept my mom in any way or my sister,” Esteban notes. At the same time, tension grew between his parents due to the increasing pressure from outside family members. Once Esteban’s father moved in with his wife’s family, his wife quit her domestic job so that she could raise a family and care for her family home, which she now shared along with her husband and baby girl. In order to earn supplemental income, however, Esteban’s mother often cooked for soldiers at the local military base and clandestinely sold *cuxa* (a local corn alcohol) that she brewed and sold out of the back room of their house to people from the village. Esteban observes, “My father’s family was repulsed by my mom selling *cuxa* because they considered it not only illegal but drinking [alcohol] was also becoming a big problem in the village.” In addition, his mother’s *cuxa* sales to the village men caused Esteban’s father to grow increasingly jealous of his wife. Soon the young couple began to fight incessantly, often ending with Esteban’s father physically assaulting his wife, which their relatives frequently witnessed. Both Esteban’s mother and father began to drink more and more *cuxa* themselves as the ongoing conflicts and tensions intensified. Esteban explains, “The stress of the family fighting caused my parents to drink more and more alcohol and [the drinking] just got worse.”

Esteban believes that his parents became alcoholics early on in their relationship and their battle with alcoholism only intensified and grew more challenging for themselves and everyone around them. After the first several years of their union, the parents of Esteban’s mother died within months of each other—her father from alcohol poisoning
and her mother of an unidentified illness. Esteban’s mother had an emotionally difficult
time handling the loss of both of her parents in such a short period of time. In an effort to
ease her pain, Esteban asserts that his mother began drinking more and more cuxa every
day just to cope with such sudden, unexpected and great loss.

Esteban was born just a few short years after the deaths of his maternal grandparents.
He contends, “My parents gave me life, but at the cost of bringing me into an unstable
and uncertain situation because they continued to drink uncontrollably and continued
fighting over money problems that [they faced] as the result of their alcoholism.” What
made matters worse for Esteban’s family was that this period coincided with the most
intense years of the Guatemalan genocide. Esteban explains,

The environment became more chaotic politically and economically and that
made things even harder for my parents….My parents worked in whatever way
they could. My dad tended the corn and vegetable crops, and my mom continued
to sell cuxa from the back room of the house, while she also did other jobs
whenever she had the opportunity such as continuing to cook for the soldiers on
the local military base on an occasional basis.

Despite their best efforts and likely a consequence of their costly vice, Esteban’s parents
barely managed to earn enough income to make a living for themselves and their
children, which eventually came to include a younger sister, born two years after Esteban.

One day, filled with growing angst amidst the chaos of the genocide and with
overwhelming jealousy over his wife’s interactions with her male customers, Esteban’s
father entered the backroom of the house where the cuxa was kept. Esteban recounts,

My father, well, he…came into the back room where my mom sold the cuxa and
he looked at my mom in a strange way and told her that he was going out to plant
corn in one of the parcels of land. He left the room and my mom looked at me
confusingly because it was not yet the time of year to plant corn…not for another
two months. So, my mom looked at me with a strange face and told me to go…to
follow my dad to see what he was really going to do. He was acting strange and
she knew something was not right. So, I left [the room] to go see where he went.
Esteban recalls following his father’s path through the house and found his father standing on top of the large, rectangular brick wood stove in the kitchen of their home where meals were prepared. Esteban watched with confusion and curiosity as his father leaned out over the stove and began tying a rope around one of the wooden beams (a *viga*) that supported the kitchen roof. Uncertain of what his father was about to do, but certain that it was not his normal behavior, Esteban quickly ran back to tell his mother of his father’s strange actions. Esteban’s mother rushed back to the kitchen with Esteban in tow and found her husband hanging from the *viga*. They were too late. His father was already dead.

Esteban ran to call for help and the entire extended family came, but it was simply too late. Esteban was just 6 years old at the time and had witnessed, first-hand, his father’s suicide. He shares, “For me it was so…so difficult…to see the death of my dad. That was so traumatic for me and I can remember it as if it happened yesterday. I cannot erase the scene from my mind. Sometimes when I recall the memory, I feel like I am in shock once again.” After his father killed himself, Esteban remembers his mother living like what he termed “the walking dead.” Distraught and traumatized, his mother drank more intensely and became overwhelmingly oblivious to her children’s needs. Esteban explains, “[My sisters and I] spent so many days and nights hungry because my mom simply forgot to feed us…every once in a while our grandma would give us something or maybe some aunts or uncles, but most of the time we were alone and just went hungry for many days.”

Within a year of his father’s death, Esteban’s mother was diagnosed with a blood condition that was causing paralysis in one of her legs. The paralysis spread quickly to her other leg and soon she was unable to walk. Esteban’s mother began taking medication
to treat the condition, which was never identified even after his oldest sister recently reviewed their mother’s medical charts that had been maintained at the village health center since her death. Esteban recalls, “I remember my mom in agony from the pain. She was in so much pain and I can remember it very well. She knew she was going to die.”

To make matters worse, Esteban’s mother could no longer work as she could not move about the house because of the paralysis, and despite her medical treatment, her condition did not improve. Esteban’s relatives contend that his mother’s intense alcoholism interfered with her medical treatment and essentially voided any benefits the treatment would have had for her. Against medical advice, Esteban’s mother continued to drink heavily to help deal with the pain she was experiencing and to cope with mourning her husband. Esteban confides,

She knew she was going to die…I would not have wanted to be in her place because for her, it must have been so tough to leave her children behind knowing that she was going to die and wouldn’t know what happened to her children…She died naturally, well, it was a natural death, but was caused by alcohol because she was already being treated because she already had paralysis in the legs and couldn’t walk anymore and by drinking alcohol again she poisoned herself even more.

Esteban and his older sister believe that the combination of their mother’s drinking and the potent medication that she was taking led to the lethal blood poisoning that eventually took her life. Just over a year after his father hanged himself, relatives called Esteban to his mother’s bedroom and told him to ask his mother for forgiveness for any wrongs he may have committed as it was likely that his mother would not live through the night. Esteban clearly remembers his mother’s deep cries of agony from the painful condition she was in during the weeks leading up to her death. He shares that her legs hurt so badly that all she could do was cry out in pain. However, she refused to stop
drinking because she believed, in Esteban’s estimation, that alcohol was the only way to
dull the pain both physically and emotionally.

Brought to his mother’s side that night, Esteban furthers, “I asked my mom to pardon
me for anything I ever did wrong in life or any sins, then I hugged and kissed my mom
and went off to bed as my relatives told me to do. However, at three o’clock in the
morning, I was awakened by my family members who were crying hard because my
mom had just died. It was so hard!” Esteban was terrified to hear the screams, crying and
shouts in his house because he knew that it meant that his mother had died. Sitting alone
in the dark, Esteban remembers coming to the cruel realization that it was now only just
his two sisters and him. Esteban describes how he searched for answers to the sudden
barrage of questions that swarmed his mind, “I kept asking myself: How could my mom
leave us alone? What were we going to do? Who would care for us? Where would we
live? What did mom’s death mean for our futures? It was so hard! What were we going to
do?”

Esteban’s mother had little money at the time of her death. With the small amount of
money that his sister had recently taken in from the sale of cuxa that week (she had taken
over her mother’s cuxa business when she turned 12 since her mother could no longer
move about the house), she purchased vegetables and meat in order to prepare the
funerary meal for their relatives. It was all they had and there was not even enough
money left over to purchase a simple pine box in which to bury their mother. With no
other financial means, Esteban recalls, “My sister, who was just 14 years old at the time
and suddenly in charge of us, took out several wooden boards from my mom’s bedroom
walls and from some of the wooden furniture in order to construct a box in which we
could bury our mom. All the money we had went to buying the food…so we didn’t have the money to buy a casket.” In fact, Esteban’s mother had left her children with nothing but the house in which they were living and their extended relatives were mostly indifferent to her children’s situation. Esteban’s paternal grandmother, still very much bitter about her son uniting with a simple “peasant” girl, agreed to take in only Esteban because, as a male, he would eventually be old enough to work and earn wages to help her out financially.

Esteban’s sisters had nowhere to go and his oldest sister was still not old enough to obtain gainful employment that would allow her to care for her younger siblings. In desperation, Esteban’s older sister sent word to her godmother (an aunt living in Guatemala City) that their mother had died and that they had nowhere to go. Their distant aunt graciously made her way to the village (which required a day’s worth of traveling from the capital and lost wages). Their aunt promptly gathered up the girls’ few belongings and took them to the Hogares, a home she had heard about from coworkers. At the home, Esteban’s aunt knew that his sisters had the best chance of being well taken care of and of getting a good education, which was something that the aunt was not in a financial position to provide at the time. For Esteban, however, it would be two years before he would be reunited with his sisters and would see his fate drastically improve.

After his mother’s death, Esteban lived like what he terms a “street dog” in his natal community. His paternal grandmother agreed to take him in, but she was indifferent to his wellbeing. Esteban describes,

I lived like a street dog…pure street dog, roaming about barefoot and going from house to house looking for whatever food anyone would give me. My grandma didn’t much care for me and so she hardly looked after me at all. Sometimes, I slept in her house in some corner and other times I would stay with another
relative for the night or find some warm spot the village where I could sleep for the night. I really was a street dog with no shoes.

Esteban had no permanent place in which to live and call his home, and none of his relatives seemed to care much about him. The few articles of heavily-used and soiled clothing Esteban did have were hand-me-downs from cousins who no longer wanted to wear such rags. Esteban did not mind because he had nothing. In his opinion, a ripped, dirty pair of pants was better than nothing. He excitedly details, “I once got a pair of rubber boots from a cousin who had outgrown them. I was so excited to have a pair of boots. I hadn’t had any shoes for a long time. I couldn’t believe I actually had a pair of shoes to wear and in particular, rubber boots!” Receiving his very own pair of rubber boots was exciting and he remembers wearing those boots until there was absolutely nothing left of them. Meanwhile, Esteban continued to live in the streets until his older sister received word of his situation. Looking back, Esteban believes that his relatives agreed to keep him so that they could have him work as a sort of “slave laborer” once he was old enough. Concerned about her seven-year-old brother who had no safe place in which to live, lacked a consistent source of food and had not been enrolled in school by relatives, Esteban’s older sister spoke with the Catholic sisters at the Hogares and pleaded with them to take her to her natal community in order to find her brother and bring him back to live with them at the home as well. The Catholic sisters agreed and Esteban’s sister, accompanied by Hogares staff members, made her way home in order to do what she could to help her brother have a better life.

Esteban remembers that his sister’s efforts were met with great opposition by their father’s family. Esteban believes that his paternal grandmother and uncles feared that if he left the village, then the maternal family members would seize the house of Esteban’s
parents, which Esteban was legally and traditionally designated to inherit as the only son. By holding onto Esteban, the paternal grandmother and her children would have certain “rights” to the house that others would not have. If Esteban left the village, there would be no telling who would take over the house and further family divisiveness would surely ensue. Yet, Esteban’s older sister was determined to put things into place so that her brother could go to school and have the chance to move his life in a more healthy and constructive direction. Esteban explains, “[My sister] made the decision that we would stick together and would try to determine what to do about the house later on once we became adults.” In the meantime, Esteban was uncertain and unconvincing about leaving the village. He observes, “I received a lot of pressure from my relatives and they promised me many things if I would stay. I wasn’t sure what to do.” Esteban’s sister eventually convinced him that the family was only concerned about getting the house by keeping him nearby and that it was much better for him if he left. After some hesitation, 7-year-old Esteban took his sister’s advice and with few possessions in hand, left behind his natal community in the hopes of finding that better life of which his sister spoke.

Esteban vividly recalls the first day he arrived at the Hogares as if it had just happened yesterday. Upon arriving, Esteban was given a pair of shoes and new clothing. He was absolutely thrilled. “They gave me a pair of shoes, they gave me a roof over my head, food…I was the happiest child in the world!” Newly arrived at the Hogares, Esteban recounts, “That night I went to sleep with my shoes on and I said that I didn’t want to take them off. I was so happy. Yes, that was my first day at the Hogares and I said to myself, ‘Well, it’s going to be okay.’” Esteban later affirms, “For me, it was a very happy time.” From that day forward, Esteban received all that he needed to live:
food, clothing, education, companionship, care, a stable home, etc. The only thing missing was the love of his parents, which he rarely received from his parents when they were alive anyway. He shares, “For me, I lost not having the love of a mom, the love of a dad, but really for me, well, my parents went about drunk most of the time and sometimes they hardly knew I existed.” Esteban was also thrilled to have so many new playmates. He arrived at the Hogares in 1987, just two years after it was established. The number of orphans enrolled at the time was roughly 75, so there were plenty of other children with whom to play, including the kids from the small town of Santa Apolonia where the Hogares was located. Esteban relates, “For me [adjusting to life at the home] was not difficult…no, for me it was all the contrary because they gave me all that I didn’t have, practically speaking…besides, I related well with the others right away, I joined in playing with them…so, I felt good at the Hogares.”

Because he had never attended school, Esteban was enrolled in the first grade at the local public elementary school as soon as he arrived at the Hogares. He skipped over kindergarten altogether because of his age and the tutoring he received at the home, which allowed him to catch up academically with classmates in his age group. Overall, Esteban was successful in school despite his delayed start. He only had to repeat the fifth grade because of the difficulty he had had with the material.

In addition to formal education, Esteban also learned agricultural skills by helping tend the Hogares crops and animals (primarily the chickens and rabbits). He also joined the sewing/tailoring workshop at the home where he learned how to sew clothing, bedding and a variety of other household goods that were produced as part of the Hogares sustainability program. Over time, Esteban developed good working
relationships with his vocational shop teacher, the home staff, his teachers at school and his peers. His life was moving in a positive direction. Unfortunately, that direction changed once he started junior high school and entered a period that he, himself, classifies as his “rebellious years.”

Starting at around the age of 15, Esteban’s behavior changed drastically (something which I, myself, witnessed first-hand while initially living at the Hogares). He relates, “I don’t remember exactly an event or something happening in particular that caused me to change my attitude, but I started making tough and ridiculous decisions.” One of those decisions involved sneaking alcohol into the Hogares grounds and secretly drinking with a few buddies who were also enrolled in the home. Additionally, Esteban became increasingly sarcastic with Hogares staff, who expressed their frustration with not being able to control his behavior or effectively discipline him. We (the international volunteers) and the rest of the staff simply could not figure out how to get through to Esteban and to encourage him to change his behavior. Esteban explains, “Internally, I was suffering a lot and I even thought about committing suicide like my dad did in order to end all of my pain.” As a consequence of his erratic behavior, Esteban’s grades in junior high began to bottom out. He was not doing his homework and often skipped school altogether.

During one episode, Esteban snuck out of the Hogares and went to hang out at a friend’s house in a neighboring town for the night. The Catholic sisters were panic-stricken at his absence (the country was still at war during this period even though the period of la violencia had ended and consequently, unidentified troops often roamed the countryside at night randomly killing people who they ran into and who they often
erroneously claimed were “subversives” or guerrilla supporters). The Catholic sisters immediately began an all-night search for Esteban. He was gone for hours and when the Catholic sisters finally found him in the morning at his friend’s home, they simply scolded him and advised him on how what he did was not acceptable. At their wit’s end, however, the Catholic sisters who ran the home reached a consensus the next day and decided to contact Esteban’s extended family members in his natal village with whom he had not been in contact since arriving at the home 10 years prior.

Because of his growing rebelliousness and their inability to work effectively with Esteban, the Catholic sisters decided to transfer legal custody of Esteban over to his paternal uncles even though he did not have any type of relationship (other than biological) with them whatsoever. Having turned 18 years old a few years earlier, Esteban’s older sister had already left the Hogares and lived in Guatemala City where she was working as a secretary, but the Catholic sisters did not feel that she was yet mature or financially stable enough to support Esteban at the time. There simply did not seem to be any other realistic and effective option other than legally releasing Esteban to his extended biological family members and to his uncles in particular. With the decision made, the Hogares social worker accompanied Esteban on a long rural bus ride back to his natal community the next day and officially transferred custody over to his uncles via legal documentation. Esteban was 17 years old at the time and was essentially kicked out of the Hogares, the only real home he had ever known. He had few marketable job skills and lacked a future direction. Esteban had only finished the second of three years of junior high school. Esteban shares, “I thought my life had already ended. I had not even
one idea of what I was going to do. I didn’t really know my uncles or my relatives. I didn’t want to go back to my village. It just made me feel worse inside...so lost.”

I, myself, was incredibly conflicted by the Catholic sisters’ decision to expel Esteban from the Hogares. I grew close to Esteban during my volunteer term and admired his generally positive and inquisitive nature. We spent many, many hours together listening to music and working on Esteban’s English language skills. We would often put music on in the volunteer quarters and would dance and lip-sync to songs on the radio, even the ones presented in English. Esteban may not have known the words to the English songs, but he faked it, and we would laugh and had a great time. Esteban also had the keen ability to mimic visitors from the U.S. who spoke Spanish with a strong southern U.S. accent, especially visitors from Texas. Esteban would have me in stitches as he spoke Spanish with a President George W. Bush-type of accent. In fact, we spoke to each other so often with that accent that when visitors would arrive at the Hogares, I would have to remind Esteban to stop talking that way in case someone would take offense (most visitors never took notice as they were absolutely clueless what their Spanish actually sounded like to Guatemalan Spanish speakers). To this day, when I am with Esteban, he converts to his Bush-like accent and always makes me laugh.

After a year of my being at the Hogares, Esteban asked me to be his sponsor for his Catholic confirmation ceremony—a position that would designate me as a “godmother” for him. I was honored to be asked to fill such an important position and took the responsibility seriously. Therefore, when Esteban was expelled, I felt responsible for not being able to reach him as his behavior became more rebellious—a change that seemed to take place almost overnight. With limited phones and communications systems at that
point in the early 1990s, I knew that maintaining contact with my godson once he left the home would be an incredibly difficult challenge. The morning that Esteban left the Hogares, he made sure to say “good-bye” to his godmother and I felt helpless and full of guilt. To this day, I feel that I failed him in that instance. He assures me that that was not the case and we have since maintained ongoing contact now that internet is so accessible in Guatemala. However, I often wonder what would have happened if I could have convinced the Catholic sisters to have kept Esteban enrolled and to have accessed some kind of services to help him deal with his angst and anger.

At the time that Esteban was expelled and sent back to live with his extended relatives, he had not lived in his natal community or with his extended family members for most of his life. Much had changed since he left with his sister years ago. For the next six months, Esteban lived with his paternal uncles. He shares, “It was the most difficult time for me because I did not know what to do out there [in the world]. I did not know how to make a living despite having learned sewing/tailoring skills in the Hogares.” Realizing his fate and the gravity of the situation that had stemmed from his rebellious behavior, Esteban felt the weight of a life that was going nowhere. For those initial six months, he stayed with his uncles, who treated him like a stranger and domestic servant. He could not find gainful employment to support himself. With no other real options, Esteban contacted his older sister in Guatemala City. Once again concerned with her brother’s life direction, Esteban’s older sister made arrangements for him to move to Guatemala City to live with some new friends who owned a store. He would not only live there but would work with the family at their store as well. Esteban, in utter desperation, decided to take the opportunity his sister created in order to dedicate himself to making
something of his life. With arrangements confirmed, Esteban packed a small bag, boarded the rural bus and headed to the capital, uncertain of his future.

Esteban moved in with his sister’s friends in one of the outer areas of the capital. He relates, “I started working in the store [owned by] my sister’s friends—a couple with children—and I lived with them, paying rent for a small room in their home, which was located right next to the store itself. So for two years, I was fortunate to live with the family and work right there in their store.” Through constant encouragement from the mother of the family with whom he lived, Esteban also eventually enrolled in school and took classes on Saturdays in order to finish the third year of junior high. Managing both school and work was a challenge, but Esteban did well for himself and was constantly encouraged by the family who owned the store to advance his education. After completing junior high, he enrolled in high school and focused on a career track in computer science. He completed his high school training in just two short years and decided it was time to focus solely on employment. He found a job as a sacristan with a Monsignor of a Catholic church in Guatemala City, thanks to a connection made by the Catholic sisters at the Hogares. Esteban remained in the church’s employ for two years, taking up residence at the church pastoral house as well.

All was going well in Esteban’s life and he felt that his life was finally moving in the right direction. One evening, however, Esteban was returning home to the church after running errands when he was robbed at gunpoint. The thieves shot Esteban in the stomach even though he had not put up a struggle and they left him bleeding profusely in the street. It was a completely random, heinous robbery and shooting, which unfortunately is not uncommon even now in the post-war era in Guatemala (Benson and
Esteban anxiously reflects on the shooting, “It affected me greatly—the accident, the assault I experienced. They shot me. That affects me every minute [of my life]. Believe me, I don’t like…I don’t like to think of it because I’m alive but I almost died.” After the shooting, Esteban was hospitalized for several weeks and eventually recovered physically from his wounds. 

Emotionally, Esteban developed a great fear of walking in the streets at night and feels that he still suffers from what he, himself, identifies as “post-traumatic stress.”

Determined not to take life for granted and to make something of his life after his near-death experience, Esteban decided to look for a tiny home to rent in the capital for himself and his sisters so they could finally live together as a family and support each other both economically and emotionally. In order to financially support a small family home with his sisters, Esteban sought various jobs that took him in different directions regarding his career aspirations. First, he secured employment with the Guatemalan National Postal and Telegraph Office in the capital. After a short time, he left the post office and thanks to his older sister who had connections, landed a job with the National Museum of History. At the museum, Esteban, who has always had a knack for learning languages and English in particular, worked as a tour guide for the museum and also worked with restoration officials in cleaning and preserving various artifacts. One month after accepting the position with the museum, Esteban also took a second job with a national bank to work as a collection agent. The hours for the bank were primarily in the evenings, which allowed Esteban to maintain both the full-time job at the museum during the day and the part-time job at the bank during the evenings. Together, both jobs required Esteban to work over 70 hours a week. Because he was dedicated to making
something out of his life and to making a home with his sisters, Esteban did not mind the long work hours. Over the next year, Esteban proved himself to the museum officials and subsequently was promoted to work in the museum’s administrative offices as an accounting assistant. Working countless hours and with renewed ambition to advance his career and earning potential, Esteban decided to also enroll in a private university that same year, taking courses on Saturdays and adding yet another commitment to his already busy schedule.

In 2007, Esteban was once again promoted, this time within the Guatemalan Ministry of Culture and Sports Department itself, which is the primary governmental agency that oversees the nation’s cultural and sports venues and entities (including the National Museum of History where Esteban was previously working). Esteban was promoted to a higher level accounting position within the Ministry itself. He now works downtown near the presidential palace and is an accountant for all of the national museums and sports venues within the Ministry. Esteban also continues to take university courses on Saturdays, majoring in business administration. He has paid for his education course by course (with the assistance of a U.S. family who has supported the Hogares for years and who provided him with an ongoing supplemental college scholarship as well as with constant emotional encouragement). Esteban plans to complete his degree in 2012.

Esteban hopes to next work on a Masters degree in finance and administration, technical marketing or law. He would like to eventually obtain a doctorate degree in order to teach at the university level. He reflects, “I am now very dedicated to education and I really believe that, yes, I can do something for my community by providing others with an education…by teaching and encouraging others to go to college.” He also hopes
to be in a financial position one day that would allow him to help organizations like the Hogares where he grew up. While he works on his educational goals, he plans to continue his employment at both the ministry and the bank. Today, he maintains his 70+ hour work schedule, his Saturday university course load and shares a rented home with his older sister and her four children (his youngest sister is now married and is living with her in-laws). To assist his older sister with her growing financial obligations, Esteban also legally adopted one of her four daughters and is dedicated to making sure that she is provided for both economically and emotionally so that, as he puts it, “she will never know what it is like to live like a ‘street dog.’”

Esteban’s life has been one filled with challenge, pain, trauma, disappointment, hope, growth and success. His father’s suicide left an indelible image in his mind—one that he asserts that he can never escape—and his mother’s death was equally traumatic. While Esteban’s father and mother did not die directly in a war-related incident such as combat, a disappearance or massacre, he believes that his father’s death was an indirect result of his military service during the genocide. Reflecting on his situation, Esteban contends, “Yes, the genocide affected me indirectly…psychologically I would say…psychologically I was affected by the war [but] in an indirect way, as a consequence of my parents’ deaths.”

Esteban believes that la violencia affected his identity as well. His father identified as Maya K’iche and his mother was Maya Uspanteca; however, they spoke primarily Spanish to their children. Having little K’iche or Uspanteca language skills when arriving at the Hogares, Esteban continued to speak Spanish and actually learned Kaqchikel from
the local tías and other community members. When asked to describe how la violencia has changed the way he perceives and expresses his identity today, Esteban explains,

Well, I would say that it affected [my identity] greatly because now I am not K’iche. I am practically Kaqchikel, but my identity as an indigenous person [generally] was not affected because I am indigenous. In no way am I going to forget my roots, my customs…well not customs but my culture. It is my culture….I believe that I can identify myself as Kaqchikel, but I was born in the K’iche [region] and now I am [living] in the city and so someone could say, “Oh no, he’s not Kaqchikel,” or whatever, but I am Kaqchikel or K’iche or both, but mostly Kaqchikel….but you can’t stop being indigenous because you carry it in your blood. I don’t speak the language much, I don’t practice Maya traditions. I don’t do any of this, but I am indigenous and I can’t change that. I can’t deny something that I am physically. I can’t deny myself.

As a result of being orphaned, Esteban’s identification with a particular Maya group has changed. However, Esteban’s pride in and connection with his identity as an indigenous person more generally are stronger than ever. While he may have lost aspects he himself considers part of his identity such as language, customs and traditional belief systems, Esteban simultaneously asserts his indigenous identity in general, illuminating a sense of continuity in identity despite lost aspects.

Esteban’s early childhood was extremely difficult and he argues that portions of his identity were lost in the process; however, he stresses his sincere gratitude toward the Catholic sisters, the Hogares and God for all that he received from the time he arrived at the Hogares until today. Esteban shares,

For me, the home was nothing but advantageous. Not having a stable home, not having a father or mother…for me it was advantageous because I got an education, a place to live—I even received gifts. For me, this was all advantageous. The only disadvantage was not having a father or mother because life took them away…I thank God for the marvelous life [that I have had] after living in my village….The Hogares made me the man I am today…I am so fortunate that God changed my life and gave me the best. I am so fortunate that he gave me the opportunity to know many good people…who have given me such support. I would say I am blessed by God….After what I went through, everything changed and it helped me tremendously. God wanted things to go the
way they did. God had something planned for me. The ability to have an education, the values they taught me and the doctrinal principles I gained…I learned a lot from the Hogares. It was a time in which I could reshape my life through the help I received. If I would have stayed in my village, I would be nobody. I would not have an education. I would barely have a wife and children. Now, even though I do not have many material things, I have the most important things in life which are an education, values and well-formed principles.

Esteban, who self-identifies as what he terms a “víctima indirecta” (indirect victim) of the genocide, has overcome much adversity in his young life. In addition to his future education and career goals, he hopes to regain full legal ownership of his deceased mother’s family home. Esteban has the title and all of the appropriate documents, but he currently lacks the funds necessary to hire a lawyer in order to bring charges against his paternal uncles who took over the property without any legal claim. One of his paternal uncles still argues that the home is his even though the property belonged to Esteban’s maternal relatives and Esteban holds the legal title. This same uncle is currently occupying the house with no intention of ever rightfully returning it to Esteban and his sisters. It will be a long road trying to legally regain the house, but Esteban and his sisters are determined to get it back as it is the only tangible keepsake and living memory of their parents and their familial connection. Given Esteban’s demonstrated persistence and strength gained from a childhood of obstacles and adversity, it will not be surprising one day to find him happily living in his maternal home with a family of his own, as well as those of his sisters.
“The bullets [stop], but the wounds remain.”

Juliana has happy and joyful memories of her father that are further concretized with the stories and memories her older siblings have shared with her about him over the years. Juliana was just three years old when her father was taken away from their family home. They never saw him again. Juliana’s family lived in an area of the Highlands that was also especially persecuted by the military during la violencia (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Juliana’s father was considered a leader in their small Kaqchikel hamlet because he served as a vocational instructor who taught other community members masonry and agricultural skills necessary for sustaining their families. Juliana, the youngest of 7 children, vividly recalls her father providing community instruction. She also remembers him working in the fields and taking care of the animals together with his children. Juliana also fondly remembers their family home. “It was a cozy little house with two rooms and it was in the second room that our [entire] family slept.” Juliana characterizes her family as close-knit at that time in her early childhood, noting, “We shared everything from working together to playing together. We were very close.” Unfortunately, the unity and tranquility found within Juliana’s family would not remain.

Late one evening in 1982 under the cloak of darkness, a group of armed men entered Juliana’s family home. Juliana was in the bedroom sleeping with her older siblings when they heard a violent stir in the kitchen. Juliana describes, “Yes, I was sleeping and when I awoke, they were already hitting him….The [armed men] went to grab my father from where we were sleeping. One of my brothers went to defend him when they were tying [my father] up and they beat [my brother], wounding him in his foot.” Juliana notes that
her brother’s foot injury kept him from walking for days. Meanwhile, her mother hysterically pleaded for her husband’s release. “[My mom] cried and begged the men to not take [my dad] away.” The pleas did not make a difference because the men continued to beat her father and began to drag him out of the house. Juliana explains, “And my dad told [my mom] not to cry because he no longer wanted to continue to struggle [with the men] because he hadn’t done anything to anyone.” Juliana furthers that as the men dragged her father from their home, “…they said that [my dad] would return home in five years and up until now, those five years still have not come to pass.” Juliana’s father simply disappeared. No remains were ever found and no information whatsoever about what happened to him has never been revealed.

According to what Juliana’s mother told her some years later when she was old enough to understand the situation, the men who had kidnapped her father were members of the Civil Patrol (or PAC) unit in the area. Juliana relays, “They were civil patrollers, some from the [hamlet] and others who were not…and the men had weapons.” Thus, Juliana and her family members consider themselves direct victims of the Civil Patrol’s violent power and impunity. Once her father was detained and dragged from their home, Juliana explains,

[The civil patrollers] accused [my dad] of belonging to the group that opposed the soldiers….so, yes, they brought [my dad] to the municipal center in Poaquil [that evening] to face the mayor at the time in order to be judged and [the mayor] found no evidence or any guilt whatsoever.

Despite the lack of evidence against Juliana’s father, he was detained in the municipal building rather than lawfully released. Juliana shares, “He spent the night detained in [the municipal building] and the next day, [the civil patrollers] brought him to where the soldiers were living and from that moment on, we never knew anything more of him.”
That day, Juliana’s father became one more among the over 200,000 innocent victims disappeared during the heightened and most violent years of *la violencia* (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998)

Juliana’s family strongly believes that it was her father’s position as a community educator and advocate that led to the false accusations against him, ultimately resulting in his demise. Juliana notes, “He was working to get electricity in the hamlet. He wanted a hamlet cooperative. He wanted to raise chickens. He wanted to succeed and that’s what he fought for. He wanted to be wealthy, in other words.” Based upon her father’s position and more recent evidence the family has obtained, Juliana shares, “And just a short while ago, we found out that they killed [my dad] solely because of envy.”

With her husband kidnapped and ultimately disappeared, Juliana’s mother was left to pick up the pieces. Unfortunately, the civil patrollers had not only detained Juliana’s father but they also destroyed the family property. Juliana recalls, “In that moment, we had nothing because they killed all of the animals or took some of them and the harvest, well…there had been no harvest later that year [either] because nothing was planted because they burned the house and the fields…” Juliana’s mother and siblings had to work especially hard that first year after her father’s disappearance just to try to survive from one day to the next. Everyone in the family did what they could to find wage-paying work. Juliana reflects, “…I only remember that we had to work so hard with my mom…I remember that she did every kind of work possible and not only in the fields.” Having lost their property, animals, crops and ultimately their primary wage-earner (her father), Juliana’s family began to face extreme poverty that extended well beyond the immediate year following her father’s murder.
For the next four years, Juliana’s mother and siblings worked hard to stay together and to try to make it as a family, even though their family would remain forever fragmented because of the disappearance of their father and then the subsequent disappearance and presumed murder of her oldest brother as well. By working diligently both at home and at various wage-paying jobs, Juliana’s mother was barely able to sustain her family.

Recognizing how hard their mother was working, then nine-year-old Juliana and her ten-year-old brother began looking for work or educational alternatives that would allow their mother to work fewer hours and yet provide an education for all of her children.

Juliana and her brother heard from a cousin about a potential opportunity for the two of them. Their cousin had been enrolled in the Hogares after both of his parents were disappeared during la violencia. Juliana and her youngest brother also talked to two other local children who had just returned to her small hamlet after staying for a short time at the Hogares. The two children reported that Juliana’s cousin was doing quite well there. Juliana and her brother learned from the other children that the Hogares not only provided food, housing and clothing but also offered formal and vocational educational opportunities as well. It was 1987 then and both Juliana and her brother hated to see their mother work so hard despite the efforts of all of her siblings to help economically sustain the family. With their family economic situation in mind, Juliana and her brother approached their mother one evening with the idea of enrolling the two of them in the Hogares, which was less than a day’s travel away from the hamlet.

Their mother did not like the idea at first. According to Juliana, her mother had worked so hard to keep her family together that letting two of her children go to live in some strange place must have been hard to fathom. Juliana confides, “[My mom] didn’t
want us to go, but we insisted on going.” Seeing how much her children were beholden to the idea, Juliana’s mother eventually conceded and shortly thereafter, the local Catholic priest agreed to transport Juliana, her brother and mother to the Hogares where Juliana’s mother would sign over legal custody to the Catholic sisters.

Juliana remembers her excitement the day they travelled to Santa Apolonia where the Hogares was located. She recalls, “And [the priest] brought me to the Hogares and I arrived happy…” Juliana was excited about the new opportunities that life at the home would afford and was especially thrilled that her mother could work much less now that Juliana and her brother were being economically provided for by the Hogares. Juliana’s excitement turned to instant fear, however, when she realized shortly after arriving that the move to the Hogares would be permanent. She relates, “…but when I saw that I wasn’t going to be leaving, never leaving, I became sad and [developed] a fever and I wanted to return to my home, [to] the care of my mother, but I couldn’t because she had already signed [custody papers].” Juliana continues, “[My mom] was a very just woman. She said, ‘I already signed you over, you cannot come home with me.’” Juliana became fearful of her new situation as reality set in even though she had good intentions to reduce the financial burden on her mother. To make matters worse, Juliana had the issue of language to contend with as well. Most of the children at the Hogares and in the local community spoke Spanish as their primary language. Juliana reflects, “I tell you that I was so scared because I really didn’t know how to speak Spanish.” Juliana was also afraid of the presence of soldiers who had marched through the town various times in the first few days that she was living at the home. When asked how she felt the first couple of
weeks after arriving at the Hogares, Juliana answers, “Scared. Very scared...because many soldiers still came around a lot to keep surveillance on the area.”

Within time, however, Juliana found herself adjusting to daily life at the Hogares. She relays, “Yes, I rapidly adapted [to life at the home]. More or less in one month I could already speak [Spanish] a bit and could understand it well.” Juliana also made new friends rather quickly with the other girls at the Hogares. She recalls the other girls exclaiming, “There’s a new girl. What fun!” The girls from the town were equally friendly and accommodating. Juliana relates, “They treated me well...they said to me, ‘Oh, how cute! She doesn’t speak Spanish.’ And they taught me [Spanish], really, the girls from the town. I love them so much.” Juliana’s new found friendships were especially helpful when she started her formal education in the local elementary school.

The Catholic sisters who ran the Hogares enrolled Juliana in the second grade at the local Escuela Primaria Mario Mendez Montenegro public elementary school in Santa Apolonia. While Juliana did have just a bit of formal education prior to enrolling at the Hogares, it was not the standardized public school education most children start out with in the towns. In Juliana’s tiny hamlet, the only education available for early school-age children was a program that she remembers was called Castellanización (Castillianization), which she describes as primarily an introductory program for learning Spanish. Evaluating her general learning abilities, however, the Catholic sisters at the Hogares believed that Juliana was already prepared to take on the challenge of entering the second grade, skipping both kindergarten and the first grade altogether. The Catholic sisters immediately enrolled Juliana in the public school—the academic year had just started two weeks prior to her arrival. At the same time, Juliana’s brother was enrolled in
the third grade, skipping the first three elementary school years. Reflecting on her initial reaction to the teachers at the school, Juliana shares, “They treated me very well, but, I was afraid of them…because I came from a small hamlet….I was afraid of the teachers, but they treated me well.” Within time, Juliana adjusted and began to do well in school (as did her brother) and was soon surrounded by a core group of supportive friends both from the Hogares and from Santa Apolonia as well.

Within days of being registered in the local public school, Juliana was also enrolled in the sewing/tailoring vocational training program offered at the Hogares. Under the guidance of the instructor, don Faustino, Juliana was taught how to make basic hand stitches and then worked her way up to learning how to use the pedal sewing machines that were available in the shop. Together with her orphan peers, Juliana was instructed in how to make bed sheets, table clothes, blankets, school uniforms, cloth diapers, dish towels and many other household items that were made in the sewing/tailoring shop for use at the Hogares. Juliana also began helping out with the home’s vegetable gardens that were used to grow food for consumption at the Hogares as well. Juliana helped plant corn, black beans, squash and a variety of other vegetables such as lettuce, radishes, carrots and beets. She also learned how to care for the various fruit trees and güîskil (a gourd-type vegetable) plants. Once a year, Juliana joined with the rest of the orphans and Hogares staff to harvest corn and black beans by hand in order to prepare them for drying and storage. In addition, Juliana accompanied various tías who went to the local market every Thursday in the neighboring town of Tecpán to purchase the supplemental fruits, vegetables and meat needed in order to provide well-balanced, nutritious meals at the
Hogares. Through her efforts at school and at the Hogares, Juliana soon began to thrive in her relationships with peers and adult mentors, as well as more generally in school.

Unlike many of her companions at the Hogares, Juliana was fortunate to have been able to maintain a close relationship with her mother throughout her time at the home. Because Juliana’s mother lived less than a day’s travel away from Santa Apolonia, she was able to visit her two youngest children nearly once a month or even more frequently, depending on her work responsibilities and financial situation. Juliana recalls, “I don’t judge my mother because she came [to visit] whenever she could, when she had the money for bus fare, whenever she had bits of change [saved up], she came to see me.” The ongoing visits from her mother helped sustain Juliana’s familial connections, as did her relationship with her brother who remained at the Hogares until he turned 18 and then as a legal adult, returned home to help support his family both economically and emotionally.

Juliana continued on at the Hogares for another year after her brother left, completing the third and final year of junior high school in the neighboring town of Tecpán. Juliana was a promising student and had hoped to continue her education through high school, at the very least, if not all the way to the university level. However, in her final year of junior high, just as the academic year was coming to a close, Juliana, who had been informally dating (something the Catholic sisters did not know about or condone), found out that she was pregnant. Terrified, she went to tell the Catholic sisters who were, after all, her legal guardians. The Catholic sisters were extremely upset, especially since they took such care in keeping orphans safe. For example, Hogares policies dictated that all staff members lock the property gates every night at 6:00 p.m. and during the day.
whenever there was a perceived threat (e.g., soldiers entering the area, reported thieves in the town, sightings of potential gang members, etc.). Therefore, Juliana’s pregnancy was a shock for everyone because we were all trained to keep the children safe on the grounds and no one was allowed to leave the area by themselves unsupervised in the evenings. It became an even greater shock when Juliana revealed that the father of the baby was a fellow orphan, Miguel, who also was about to begin his high school career training.

Both Juliana’s and Miguel’s mothers were summoned to the Catholic sisters’ quarters at the Hogares immediately the next day to discuss what should be done in response to the pregnancy. Within just a few short hours of deliberations, the Catholic sisters and two mothers decided that it was best that Juliana and Miguel instantly marry and leave the Hogares. In a quickly organized ceremony, Juliana (age 17) and Miguel (also 17 years old) were married by the justice of the peace in the middle of the day on a workday at the Hogares site with the rest of the orphans, tías and staff attending the event. Once the vows were hastily exchanged, the mothers of Juliana and Miguel spent the next 40 minutes publicly scolding the couple in front of those assembled and warning the other orphans of the negative consequences of an unplanned teen pregnancy out of wedlock.

What made matters worse was that Miguel’s mother was one of the tías working at the Hogares. As a staff member, Miguel’s mother was particularly ashamed of the situation and was placed in a difficult position. I happened to be living and working as a volunteer at the home when the wedding occurred in late 1994 and remember the stern warnings the mothers gave. The warnings were followed up by more scolding and warnings by the Catholic sisters themselves. The hasty wedding ceremony was a somber event. Once the angry, punitive scolding subsided, we all had sweet bread and soda in a not so joyous
celebration of the marriage. With the ceremony and small “celebration” complete, Juliana
and Miguel were swiftly brought to the Hogares social worker’s office where the
Catholic sisters signed the paperwork to turn custody back over to their mothers since
neither of them was yet 18 years of age—the legal age of adulthood in Guatemala. With a
few appropriately-placed signatures, Juliana was cast off to embark on the next phase of
her life with her new husband. For Juliana, this phase was infused with intense and
growing uncertainty as she faced a new marriage and motherhood instead of continuing
her education and enjoying the freedom that late teenage years were already offering her
peers from the Hogares and from the town.

I had only known Juliana for a few months before she and her husband were expelled
from the Hogares. Their marriage occurred just four months into my two-year volunteer
term. In the short amount of time that I got to know Juliana, I found her incredibly savvy
and strong. She always kept an eye on the smaller children at the Hogares and was not
afraid to scold them when necessary. She was the ultimate older sister in that she took
care of the younger children and she enjoyed spending time playing hopscotch and
basketball with them as well. Juliana was also quick to help the tias with food
preparation. She was often in the kitchen after school, helping with the evening meal.
Juliana was excellent at making corn tortillas by hand. She easily outpaced any of the
other girls when the daily batch of tortillas was made late every afternoon. Juliana was
hard-working and dedicated herself to helping the others at the Hogares feel like it was a
true home. Unfortunately, Juliana’s unplanned pregnancy and abrupt expulsion from the
Hogares brought grave uncertainty to both her and Miguel’s futures.
Juliana and Miguel, with no place of their own, decided to move to the city of Chimaltenango (located 35 kilometers southeast of the town of Santa Apolonia) where they could rent a small, simple home and where Miguel could hopefully find unemployment. One of the drawbacks of the unexpected pregnancy was that Miguel’s mother was asked to leave the Hogares as well since she was considered “irresponsible” in the home’s milieu for letting a pregnancy like this happen, especially when it involved her own son. Miguel’s mother, with 5 children of her own, had been abandoned by her husband several years prior to her employment at the Hogares. Miguel’s mother arrived at the Hogares to work, bringing along her six children in tow (an infant daughter died shortly after their arrival). His mother had given up her hereditary rights to her family’s properties when she married and her husband’s family had forced her off their familial property after the separation. Because her husband had left her and she had no access to familial lands, Miguel’s mother no longer had a home or property to which to return after being dismissed from the Hogares. In an effort to try to make something of her life while supporting her son and his new family, Miguel’s mother chose to move to Chimaltenango to live with Juliana and Miguel in their tiny rented space. Together, the family was determined to do their best to create and sustain a strong family home, something they all strongly desired, especially as they were about to bring a child into the world. Miguel’s four siblings remained at the Hogares until each reached the age of 18.

In 1995, Juliana gave birth to a little girl who was in perfect health. Juliana and Miguel were elated in their new roles as parents, and Miguel’s mother was thrilled to have her first grandchild. Within the year, Juliana became pregnant again with their second child (a son) and in an effort to improve his chances of obtaining a higher-paying
job, Miguel enrolled in a high school program that trained students in specific careers. He chose to learn accounting and auto mechanics in addition to taking general high school courses. He worked multiple jobs simultaneously over the next two years and attended school full-time in order to support his family and improve his job prospects for the future. Meanwhile, Juliana had her hands full with two small children and in 1998 she gave birth to another son (their third child). Fortunately, Juliana not only had the support of her mother-in-law, but she could also count on her own mother to help out. Juliana shares, “When I married, every 15 days my mom came to see me to see if they [my husband and mother-in-law] were treating me well.” She later continues, “This is something [my mom] always said to me: ‘I will [be] with you whenever you need me.’”

After graduating from his high school career training program, Miguel continued to work several jobs to make ends meet and to allow Juliana to be able to stay at home to care for their children. In 2000, Juliana gave birth to their fourth child (a little girl) and shortly afterwards, Miguel was able to land a position with an auto mechanic business located directly on a section of the Pan-American Highway that passes through Chimaltenango. Miguel made such a positive impression on his new boss that his boss not only hired Miguel permanently but also invited Miguel to bring his family to live in the large apartment that was located right above the business. After years of renting a tiny, rustic home a kilometer down the road, Juliana and Miguel moved their family into a beautiful two-story apartment with ample room for their growing family. With a new home, Miguel’s steady job and the older kids in school, Juliana decided it was now time to exercise her own talents in order to supplement the family income.
One of the universities in Guatemala City had recently opened a satellite program in Chimaltenango in order to accommodate the increasing student population, which consisted of many young adults who live a significant distance from the capital. The university program in Chimaltenango was located near Juliana and Miguel’s new apartment. For days, Juliana observed the students from her rooftop patio while washing clothes and noticed that there were no nearby cafes or stores selling snacks or light food fare to students. This sparked Juliana’s curiosity, and she wondered what would happen if she sold homemade snack items (e.g., empanadas, sweet bread, corn mush, tamales, etc.) to the university students who certainly would be hungry throughout the day. After sharing her idea with Miguel, who also was excited about the possibilities, Juliana prepared some basic snack items and headed to the university satellite site the next day in an attempt to sell the items and gauge the entrepreneurial potential at the site. It was a complete success.

Juliana soon expanded her menu to include lunch items (e.g., fried chicken, stew, rice, soup, homemade tortillas, etc.) and developed a profitable business. Juliana’s thriving business allowed her to exercise her entrepreneurial skills, while allowing for flexible work hours that permitted Juliana to be back at home once her older children returned from school. Juliana’s business also provided an additional source of income for the family, bringing in an estimated Q1,000 a month, increasing the family income to Q3,200 per month, which was nearly triple the national minimum wage income of Q1,232 for families in Guatemala at the time of Juliana’s follow-up interview in 2010 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social 2010). Juliana was proud of her business and success, as was Miguel who continued to be supportive of her efforts. Their family was now making
greater strides in strengthening their financial future, a future that could support their children’s advanced education.

In 2003, Juliana gave birth to their fifth and last child, a son. Juliana and Miguel were thrilled to welcome a new addition to their growing family. However, shortly after their son’s birth, he began to show signs of illness. After many doctor’s appointments, Juliana and Miguel still were not able to get a confirmed diagnosis. Even though the entire family helped with the care of their youngest son and carefully watched over him, he died when he was just two years old. The loss was horrific for Juliana and Miguel. Juliana was especially devastated and found it extremely difficult not knowing the exact cause of death. She questioned her parenting skills and her level of attentiveness due to her growing business and wondered whether it was taking time away to properly care for her children, a notion Miguel quickly dispelled. In time, however, Juliana found solace in her faith and in her family. She was able to tell me the story of her youngest son without shedding a tear, stating that “[h]e is among the angels now and is watching over us. We are so fortunate to have our own little angel in heaven who is keeping watch over our family.”

Despite the devastating loss of their youngest child, Juliana notes that rather than tearing their family apart, it brought them closer together than ever before. While interviewing her, I observed how Juliana showed such loving affection towards her children. The sweet affection between Juliana and Miguel was also quite noticeable. Having participated in their “forced” marriage ceremony some 14 years prior, I often wondered how their relationship would turn out years later. I had much skepticism for a rushed marriage such as theirs and often wondered if theirs would last much beyond the
birth of their first child. I was amazed, however, to watch Juliana and Miguel tenderly interact with each other during the 8-9 hours I spent with them interviewing, eating lunch and sharing stories from that past. They would often softly touch each other on the arm as they spoke about their lives together. Miguel would kiss Juliana softly on the cheek throughout the meal and they would sweetly tease each other about their idiosyncrasies. I have never witnessed such an openly affectionate relationship between a husband and wife in Guatemala as that of Juliana and Miguel. They are truly happy together and have been successful in creating a loving and supportive family.

I was also amazed at Juliana’s inner strength and strong sense of identity. Despite all that Juliana has experienced from early childhood and even into adulthood, she exudes a resilient and self-assured character. When preparing the vegetables for our lunch on the day of the ethnographic interview in 2008, Juliana shared with me that she is proud of who she is as a woman, a mother and a wife. She reflected, “For better or worse, these things happened to me, but with God’s help, I have been able to become a strong woman who has a lot of love for her family.” In a follow-up interview in 2010, I asked Juliana what makes her such a strong woman. She responds, “I think I have a lot of insecurities because of the loss of my father and sometimes I think that if I would have had a different life, I would have been more focused and I would have taken advantage of the opportunities that I could have had in life. Maybe I am [strong] in some areas, but in others I feel weak and I promise you that I am going to learn how to work a computer. That is one of my goals.” Juliana continues, “Did I tell you that I took a dance class [recently]? And I am taking a sewing and cooking course as well. It’s good to learn how
to cook well instead of burning boiling water!” As her statement reflects, Juliana’s sense of humor also remains ever-present in her life as well.

Juliana’s strong connection to her Kaqchikel heritage is also evident and provides her with a profound foundation on which she claims her sense of identity is built. One of the first questions that I asked her in the initial interview was to describe her identity and without any prompting whatsoever, she responded, “Proudly Kaqchikel!” A little later in the interview, Juliana replies to a more direct question regarding indigenous identity in Guatemala by stating, “And the saddest thing is that there are indigenous people who say they are not indigenous. Well, this is a problem. This is a serious problem that exists in Guatemala. They deny who we are. Whereas I say, ‘I am indigenous. I am Maya indigenous, because I am not indigent, but I am Maya. I come from my ancestors and I feel quite grounded in my ancestry.’” Further on in the interview, Juliana talks about her indigenous identity by detailing, “Because I, yes, am Maya indigenous because I come from in the first place a hamlet. In second place, there are my surnames. How am I going to deny my identity?” Juliana further conveys, “Therefore, it is something that makes me proud that I am pure Guatemalan…I feel Guatemalan, Chapina⁴ and all. Therefore, I do not deny my identity.” At the same time that she is proud of her Mayan heritage, Juliana is equally frustrated by the injustices in Guatemala, especially for indigenous peoples overall. She details,

I am pure Guatemalteca. So, that is what my brother ancestors fought for. So, why do I have nothing? And they fought for what was justice…I don’t understand why plantations that are in the Petén belong to people with foreign surnames. Why does that exist? That is unjust. For that reason, the people fought, for that reason there were guerrillas and they called some people guerrillas who were just pure Chapines. They fought for what was theirs. So, I don’t understand, then, I don’t understand….Why do we Guatemaltecos have nothing?

⁴ Chapin (male) and chapina (female) are the colloquial terms used by locals to denote a Guatemalan.
Juliana offers some final thoughts on identity by telling me a parable-type story of a young Guatemalan man who left for the United States and upon returning home some years later asked his father the names in Kaqchikel of some items in his home as if he had forgotten the Kaqchikel language altogether. When a piglet escaped from his father’s house, however, the young man acted quickly, grabbed the piglet and returned it to its pen. Observing his son, the father reminded his son that although he may have forgotten how to speak Kaqchikel, his quick reaction in easily catching the piglet in the way people have done for centuries in the Highlands demonstrated that he still knew how to respond in indigenous ways when in his natal hamlet. He had not forgotten the Kaqchikel practices that he was taught as a child. Juliana concludes the story by revealing, “It is the root. One never forgets their roots, only that which grows above ground.”

Juliana asserts that she is proud of what she has achieved in her lifetime and of her steadfast connection with her indigenous heritage and her family. She is also appreciative of her experience at the Hogares and all that living there afforded her. However, Juliana is simultaneously concerned about how hard transition to life outside of the Hogares can be for orphans. Juliana reflects, “For me, the advantages [of living at] the Hogares were that they treated us like children of rich people…we had people who worked for us, those who prepared food for us and everything.” She continues, “[We lived] like wealthy people because the wealthy have everything.” While Juliana notes that she had everything she could ever need in the form of food, shelter and education at the home, she realizes that the experience also skewed her perceptions of reality when she left the home. Juliana reflects, “And the disadvantages [of living at the home] were that they did
not make us see the reality…outside of the Hogares. We had everything, but they did not teach us to appreciate it.”

As I was getting ready to leave Juliana and Miguel’s home after our day together reminiscing and conducting the ethnographic interviews (I simultaneously interviewed both Juliana and Miguel), Juliana quickly left the room only to return with something in her hands. She handed me an original 1996 publication of winning junior high school essays from around the country. The eight national award-winning essays published in the book were chosen among numerous entries from junior high school students from all regions across Guatemala in 1994. Juliana’s essay was among the eight that were selected for publication by the Oscar de Leon Palacios Publishers in Guatemala City. Juliana told me that her essay was based on the experiences of her family during la violencia. I was thrilled that she had won such a prestigious award, which I had not known about. I told her that I would copy the publication as quickly as possible in order to immediately return the original to her in excellent condition. I was truly flattered and honored that she would share with me something so important and so personal to her. She had such a gleam in her eye when she showed the publication to me. Later that evening when I returned to Santa Apolonia, I sat down to read Juliana’s essay and to reflect on her life and the thoughts and reflections she so generously shared during our interview. After everything that Juliana has gone through in her lifetime, especially during her early childhood years, I find it not only befitting but also an honor and a privilege to include Juliana’s winning essay in its entirety in Appendix A of this doctoral dissertation. I have translated the essay into English as an important testament of her lived experiences. Any errors in translation or in conveying meaning regarding her essay are mine alone.
Juana

“I, when I was little, suffered so much because I saw my mom so distressed.”

Juana was barely a year old when her father was disappeared and her family faced the grave devastation that had become all too common for families throughout the rural Highlands during la violencia. When asked about that early period of her life, Juana remarks, “No, no I don’t remember anything. The only thing I can recall is that my mom always cried whenever she spoke about what had happened. She always talked about how much it still frightened her because she thought that the [armed men] would come back again.” Similar to the disappearances described in Mario, Debora and Juliana’s profiles, Juana’s family was already sleeping one evening when armed men charged into their tiny home looking for her father. According to what Juana’s mother has told her, the men were hard to identify. Juana explains, “It was hard to tell. They were men dressed in green, according to what my mom says, but it was nighttime and there was no electrical lighting, so you couldn’t distinguish who they were.” After the men forced their way into Juana’s family home, a few of them quickly worked to detain her father, while the other men threw Juana and her youngest brother (just 3 years old at the time) under the only bed they had in the home. The men then began beating her two oldest brothers (7 and 5 years old at the time) who had been standing idly by in the chaos. One man also punched Juana’s mother (who was 9 months pregnant at the time) in the breast. Juana claims that her mother still deals with incessant breast pain, which she contributes to the beating she took that evening. With her father’s hands tied behind his back, the men made their way to the door and dragged him out of their home. Juana relates, “Yes, [my dad] was
disappeared because we never knew anything more of him. After that night in which they [dragged] him away...we never knew anything more of him...we never found his body.”

Unfortunately, like so many hundreds of thousands of innocent victims of the genocide, Juana’s father (who also had nothing to do with the armed conflict or the guerrilla insurgency campaign and was not a community leader) was kidnapped and presumably killed—his remains never located. Juana’s family has no idea why her father was kidnapped and murdered. Juana assumes it was because he was a hard worker and owned land that others may have wanted. With her father disappeared, Juana, her siblings and mother also had to immediately flee from the house, which was located in a tiny hamlet located on the far-reaching outskirts of the town of Santa Apolonia. Juana shares, 

“[T]hey took everything and they burned down the house...they took our food—the corn, the beans, the plates we used.” With no other place to go, Juana’s mother ran with her children to a neighbor’s home to seek refuge and to hide. According to what she tells Juana, her mother was afraid the men would return to kill them all, so she had to find somewhere else to hide her children in order to keep them alive.

Out of desperation, Juana’s mother spent the next few days trying to figure out what to do. Juana’s paternal grandfather had died of natural causes some years earlier and her paternal grandmother was too old and too poor to help support Juana’s family. With no other alternative, Juana’s mother asked for help from the Catholic church in the municipal center of Santa Apolonia that was less than 2 kilometers away from their tiny hamlet. Juana’s family had been members of the church for some time and with her father gone, her mother had to find help wherever possible. Juana details, “Yes, we lost everything. Some people from Santa Apolonia who belonged to the Catholic Church
helped us build a tiny house and the Franciscan sisters provided us with clothing, food, etc.” Through the assistance of other community members, Juana’s family was able to build a small, shack-like home on the property of a *ladina* woman who had a large parcel of land near the town proper. Juana shares, “Yes, we lived on the land that [belonged] to a woman from the capital or in other words, it was not our land and that’s where we had a little house.” Juana continues, “She was *ladina* and what had happened was that my dad had worked for that woman [for years].” The woman lived full-time in Guatemala City, but had family ties in the area and held onto a piece of land that she inherited from her own family. Recognizing the immediate need of Juana’s family and in appreciation for all that Juana’s father had done in taking care of her land, the woman gave Juana’s mother permission to construct a small house on her property, which was closer to the town center of Santa Apolonia and provided a much more secure location during *la violencia* than in Juana’s natal hamlet. Although Juana’s mother had to pay a small fee to build on the woman’s land, it was greatly reduced from what others in the area would have charged. Juana’s mother was grateful for the offer, especially since her own parents (Juana’s maternal grandparents) were too poor and lived too far way to offer her assistance.

With a simple tin roof over their heads and some food and clothing secured for her family, Juana’s mother set out to find employment. During the day, Juana’s mother was forced to leave her two youngest at home while she went to work in the fields with her two oldest children. Juana shares, “What was [my mom] going to do? She had few options because our dad was disappeared and there was no other person to earn money for the family.” Fortunately, Juana’s mother found local farmers who needed help with
their crops and could pay her and her young boys a small fee for their labor. Juana explains, “My mom had to work and they didn’t pay her very much [but] that’s how she was able to feed us.” Juana’s mother worked in the local area so that she could return home for lunch to check on her children and feed them. In the evenings, Juana’s mother left her two oldest boys in charge of the younger ones and went to perform other domestic chores for local families (e.g., cleaning, cooking, washing clothes by hand, etc.). Despite the great efforts Juana’s mother made, earning enough money to feed and sustain her children was difficult. What made life even more challenging for Juana’s mother at the time was that she had given birth to her youngest child just two weeks after her husband’s disappearance. She took the baby with her to the fields and to her other various jobs, but the stress of working so much and the distress of losing her husband made Juana’s mother lose her appetite. Juana explains, “At 6 months [of age], my baby brother died of malnutrition because of the limited milk my mother could produce. She wasn’t eating because of her sadness.” Juana’s little brother, Benedicto, was laid to rest and for the next three years, her mother continued to work extremely hard to maintain and provide for her children.

Three years after her husband’s disappearance, Juana’s mother found a more permanent wage-paying position with the Catholic parish house in the town of Santa Apolonia. The same group of Franciscan sisters who had generously provided her with food and clothing three years prior had offered Juana’s mother a job as a domestic caretaker for the parish. Her duties included cooking, cleaning and washing clothes for the Catholic sisters and the parish priest while they carried out their daily work in the town proper and in the various hamlets and settlements throughout the municipality as
well. *La violencia* had caused much destruction and devastation in areas outside of Santa Apolonia and the Catholic sisters found themselves spending countless hours working with the people in distant villages, leaving little time to prepare their meals, wash their own clothes, etc. The Catholic sisters were also well aware of the predicament of Juana’s family and wanted to help her mother in whatever way possible. Hiring Juana’s mother to help out in the parish would benefit everyone involved and Juana’s mother eagerly accepted the position. In addition, the Catholic sisters were very open to having Juana (4 years old at the time) accompany her mother while she worked so that Juana did not have to stay home all alone while her brothers continued to work in area fields.

The new employment position was a perfect fit for Juana’s mother. With her new job, she had consistent employment, decent pay and could return home in the evenings to care for her children. The Catholic sisters also appreciated the skills and dedication of Juana’s mother and after working for them in the parish house for a year, the Catholic sisters asked Juana’s mother if she would be interested in continuing her work with the Catholic sisters as they had decided to open up a permanent residential home for orphaned children that would be located directly in the center of the town of Santa Apolonia, just a block over from the Catholic church. The Catholic sisters were dedicated to finding a way to care for the growing numbers of war orphans they encountered in their daily work in the parish area and as a result, moved quickly to establish an innovative residential program to meet the needs of scores of war orphans in the region. Juana elaborates,

> When they put together the home [for children], my mom moved over to the home along with the sisters. What happened was that the sisters lived there in the parish house, they were with the priest, but there was a need to help [orphans] in need. They decided to found the *Hogares* and afterwards, they asked my mom if she wanted to work there.
Juana’s mother graciously accepted the position and went to work at the *Hogares* as soon as it opened. Juana explains, “The truth is that when the home started…there were only 10 children…There was just one house, House 1. There was no other construction [on the site].” Juana’s mother was among the first caretakers, or *tías* (aunts), hired by the Catholic sisters to provide daily care for the orphaned children enrolled.

For the next two years, Juana’s mother took care of orphans daily. Juana recounts, “…my mom was working [at the home] and I went with her and we stayed there working—this happened for several years—arriving early at 6 a.m. and returning home late.” She also explains that while her mother was working at the *Hogares* during the day, Juana was charged with running home to cook lunch for her brothers and then washing their clothes before returning to the *Hogares* to continue helping her mother. Juana relates, “Yes, I washed clothes for my older brothers at home and I prepared their food.” Juana was only 4 and 5 years old at the time and clearly recalls cooking beans and making tortillas for her brothers’ lunch, which required cooking skills that she had learned from her mother. Fortunately, just two years after starting her employment with the *Hogares*, Juana’s mother was invited by the Catholic sisters to enroll her own children in the home as well so that they would not have to labor like adults and would have the chance to go to school. Recognizing the increased opportunities that this offer would create for her children’s future, Juana’s mother happily agreed. Thus, Juana (age 6), her three older brothers and her mother all came to live permanently at the *Hogares* in 1986, allowing them to live and share their experiences with other children whose parents were also murdered and disappeared during *la violencia* and who faced an equally challenging future as orphaned survivors of genocide.
Juana recalls fearing the *Hogares* when she had first arrived with her mother two years before she was permanently enrolled in the home. Juana states, “Yes, I truthfully did not want to speak with the other children. I was afraid the first day. But the second day, I already enjoyed playing with all the children because the first day I didn’t know them.” The transition to permanently living at the *Hogares*, however, was a relatively easy one for Juana since she already knew the other orphans and the home itself. Juana expresses, “Yes, the truth is that it was beautiful because I wanted—as I am the only female [in my family]—I wanted to play with the other girls and I liked it a lot.” She continues, “No, it was a normal [transition] afterwards. I believe for the same reason, for the companions and the people who were so good, because of that, it wasn’t hard at all [to live there permanently].”

Within days of moving to the home full-time, Juana began participating in all aspects of *Hogares* life. She was assigned daily chores, was enrolled in first grade at the local public elementary school and participated in daily tutoring/study hall sessions to help her in her studies. Juana recalls, “Every afternoon I had to do my homework and there was always some adult that checked to see who did their homework.” Juana also had the challenge of learning Spanish in her transition to living permanently at the *Hogares*. She shares, “For me, when I arrived at the *Hogares* it was when I learned to speak in Spanish because before that, I didn’t speak Spanish…Now I speak the two [Spanish and Kaqchikel].” Juana considers learning Spanish at the *Hogares* not only as a perk but also as a major achievement for her. She elaborates,

…I think that, well, it was because of *la violencia* that I had to go to the home and learn Spanish and I think that it was a help for me. In reality, you, in order to be able to do something [in life], have to know many things. And if I hadn’t learned
that language, I wouldn’t have learned so many things and I would have been left with only the [Kaqchikel] language that I had…”

With a stable environment, solid routine and new language skills, Juana began to enjoy life at the Hogares where she was able to play and just be a kid. Reflecting on those early days of not only her experience but of the Hogares itself, Juana shares, “What happened was that we were the first [group] of children [at the home] and they tended to us like [we were] kings and queens of the rule.” She later elaborates, “…we received [vocational] training and the living conditions were so good because they practically provided everything….For example, food and nutrition—one didn’t lack anything. One didn’t have to worry about anything.” When asked about the care she received from the tías and the Catholic sisters at the time, Juana reflects, “I still have friendships with the majority of the tías and staff at the home because when you are [living] at the home, they care for you so much…above all, the sisters and everyone!”

While living conditions were stable at the Hogares, relationships with other kids from the town posed somewhat of a challenge for Juana. She shares, “Well, with them I rarely spoke with them…because they thought that we were different from them. In my group, there were girlfriends that said to the others that we shouldn’t talk with them because the girls [from town] would say to others, ‘Huh, don’t talk to them because they live in the Hogares.” Juana further reflects, “[The girls from the town treated] us differently for the same reason, for being from the Hogares. We were separated and they isolated us.” Fortunately, the teachers in the schools and the adults from the town were much kinder to orphans from the Hogares. Juana states, “[The adults and teachers] treated us equally. They treated us well.” Surrounded by her friends from the home who provided a sense of protection and connection, Juana made her way through elementary school and soon
began junior high school in the neighboring town of Tecpán, which was located just 5 kilometers away from the town of Santa Apolonia.\(^5\)

While Juana prepared for junior high school, she initiated her training in the sewing/tailoring shop at the *Hogares*, gaining practical sewing skills that still serve her today. Juana was among the first students to have made all the sheets, shirts, clothing, blankets, diapers and school uniforms used at the *Hogares*. She was also among the talented group that would take clothing from the multitude of bags of used clothing sent from the United States and would carefully take the clothing items apart at the seams so that the material could be salvaged and used as cloth in making new clothing. Most of the clothing items that came from the United States were either in such horrible condition (e.g., holes, stains, tears, etc.) or consisted of adult clothing sizes that were far too large for any orphans or staff to wear. The students in the sewing/tailoring shop learned to take the clothing items apart and use the material that was still in good condition to make other clothing and household items (e.g., sheets, cloth diapers, shirts, shorts for the toddlers, etc.). Juana enjoyed the innovative process of salvaging material and appreciated working in the sewing/tailoring shop overall. Meanwhile, Juana also remained dedicated to her studies and completed junior high school without failing a single class.

Juana was one of the first orphans I got to know when I arrived at the *Hogares*. Her helpful nature and extremely positive attitude immediately drew my attention. In junior

\(^5\) At the time of Juana’s enrollment in junior high, there existed just one small, cooperative junior high school program offered in the town of Santa Apolonia proper with a minimal capacity for students. As a result, orphans attending junior high (roughly 25 orphans at the time) had to be divided up and enrolled in different schools in order to handle the capacity (one junior high school program in the town of Santa Apolonia and two others in Tecpán). The Catholic sisters chose which school each orphan attended based on academic progress, dedication to studies, academic potential, etc. The 25 orphans were split up among the 3 junior high school programs, requiring some to travel daily out of town for their formal education.
high at the time that I arrived, Juana was one of the most welcoming and helpful among the teenage orphans. Juana first helped me set up study hours with the other students. She also quickly brought me to meet her mother (who was working as one of the tías at the time) so that I could get to know the tías more generally and feel comfortable asking for help with anything that I needed. Juana also became an unofficial Spanish language teacher for me, correcting me every once in a while in order to help me advance my skills—she was careful not to correct me too much in case I would find it disrespectful since I was an adult and she was still a teenager. It did not take much time for me to recognize Juana’s keen intelligence. She was quick-witted and even though she participated in the study hours at the home, she hardly ever needed help. In fact, Juana spent most of her time helping the others with their homework since she would finish hers quickly. Juana was extremely dedicated to her studies and loved any academic challenge placed in front of her. The other volunteers and I eventually had to find advanced math worksheets for her to do during study hours in order to keep her challenged and occupied since she found her homework relatively easy to complete. In addition, Juana became the person I would most often seek out to ask what a particular phrase meant in Guatemala or how to say something in Kaqchikel. She was knowledgeable and extremely confident in both her academic and social abilities. Getting to know Juana, I was excited to see where her path would lead her once she completed junior high school.

After junior high, Juana went on to study bookkeeping as her career-specific high school program. She began her studies in the neighboring town of Tecpán, which was closer to Santa Apolonia and with which she was familiar as it was where she attended
junior high school. After she completed the first year, however, Juana decided to attend a much more intensive and higher quality accounting program in Guatemala City. It also helped that several of the other orphans were about to begin their high school training programs in Guatemala City as well. Therefore, Juana and the group of other high school orphans came to live together with one of the tías in a rented house that offered a supportive environment within the capital and that allowed orphans to support each other academically and emotionally throughout their high school careers. This type of living arrangement was effective in providing a stable, familiar environment in the capital that permitted Juana and the others to concentrate fully on their studies and to experience success in their educations, while learning how to adapt to living in an urban center. After just two years of studies, Juana masterfully completed her intensive bookkeeping/basic accounting high school program, and with a degree in hand, set out to find work.

Juana returned to the town of Santa Apolonia to look for work so that she could help support her mother who was still working as a tía at the Hogares. Her oldest brother had just constructed a house in the village, so Juana was able to live there rent-free in exchange for helping with the upkeep of the house (at the time her brother was working and living full-time in the capital). After initially moving back to Santa Apolonia and taking up residence in her brother’s new home, Juana worked odd jobs until 2001 when the Catholic sisters at the Hogares invited her to work part-time at the home itself. The Catholic sisters needed help in the administrative office as the number of orphans had grown to over 125 children. The growth in the number of orphans enrolled necessitated greater fundraising and bookkeeping efforts, which worked to Juana’s advantage. She was very appreciative of the opportunity and worked hard for the Catholic sisters who she
viewed as always taking good care of her mother. Juana relates, “They always looked after my mom, offering her employment and enrolling us there in the home. My mom has worked for many years for the sisters.” Now Juana, too, would officially work with the Catholic sisters and sought to provide them with excellent bookkeeping services, a skill Juana acquired through their support of her high school career program.

Juana continued to work hard for the Catholic sisters over the next few years and was grateful for her employment; however, she also knew that if she was going to get ahead in life, she needed to advance her formal education. Following in the footsteps of her three older brothers (two of whom had started college and were studying to be lawyers at the time), Juana took the national college entrance exams in 2001 and scored so well that she was automatically admitted to the prestigious University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. Juana decided that she, too, would study law. She explains,

I decided to study law because of my dad. They kidnapped him, killed him and we never knew the motive behind it. No one ever sought justice in his case and in the case of the thousands of victims [of that era]. That’s what motivated me to continue studying this career. I also want to help my community of poor people who cannot pay for legal services because they are too poor and I want to be able to help them in their native language so that they get the help they need and understand what is happening.

Having made her decision to study law, Juana became more dedicated than ever to her studies even though it meant a grueling schedule. She explains, “I began [college] in 2002 and for six years I [lived] in Santa Apolonia and every day from Monday to Saturday I went to classes. Monday through Friday I studied from 2:00 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. and on Saturdays, I studied all day.” Juana’s schedule meant that for 6 straight years she worked at the Hogares Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and then had to immediately take the 1.5-hour bus ride into the capital to make her 2:00 class. She
had to participate in classes all afternoon, take the 1.5-hour bus ride back home in the evenings, study until late and then get up early the next morning to start her demanding routine all over again. Saturdays involved getting to the university by 8:00 a.m. and leaving after 5:00 p.m. Despite the exhausting schedule, Juana did very well in her classes and completed her coursework in late 2006. She then began a paid internship in the city of Chimaltenango at a small law office, while also initiating the process of studying for the national bar exam.

In the same year that Juana completed her coursework, she terminated her employment with the Catholic sisters at the Hogares in order to be able to fulfill the full-time requirements of her legal internship, which required her to work Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In addition to her internship, Juana also decided she wanted make an attempt at entrepreneurship. She shares, “I also wanted to try to have a store or some type of business, so I opened the store in 2005. Also, I wanted my mom to not have to work at the Hogares because the work was hard and she was getting older. I didn’t want her to work so hard anymore.”

Juana opened a mercantile-type store based out of her brother’s home, had her mother take over the store duties and offered a wide variety of products from gumballs to black beans to beauty products. One of my favorite things to do while living in Santa Apolonia during fieldwork was to hang out at Juana’s store and take the time to see all the items she sold even though the actual floor space was no more than 150 square feet. Her store contained everything. There were hair gels, scarves, Snickers bars, purified water and even Diet Coke (my personal favorite and not so easy to find at the time). I would often stop by Juana’s store in the late afternoon to pick up an onion, some beans, a chili pepper.
or two, some potatoes and tomatoes—all fresh and ready to be cooked. Juana also diversified and added ready-to-cook chicken meat to her products for sale. Prior to my fieldwork from 2007-2008, I had not seen plucked, cut and ready-to-cook chicken meat for sale anywhere but in the larger cities. Juana explains that as villagers’ schedules got busier and most adults increasingly had to travel daily to larger cities, the situation was ripe for providing a new product such as ready-to-cook chicken that the customers could pick up on their way home and quickly cook up for the evening meal. Juana’s mother was in charge of the slaughtering and preparation of the chicken meat, which she did three times a week, keeping it in the store refrigerator that Juana had procured from the capital. The chicken meat has been a real success with customers, as has Juana’s store more generally. Juana’s entrepreneurial skills are amazing and she has had much success with her store since she opened it in 2005. She is pleased that she was able to bring her mother to live with her in her brother’s home and have her work in the store where she can rest in between waiting on customers. Juana was also glad to have her mother’s help not only in the store but also with her new baby girl who was born in late 2008. Juana had been in a relationship with a Hogares alumnus, Carlos, for many years and while they never legally married, they “united” and came to live together in late 2006 in the home of Juana’s brother. While the pregnancy was not planned, Juana was thrilled to take on the new challenge of motherhood while completing her law degree.

After her internship in late 2008, Juana began studying even more intensely for the bar exam and scheduled it for February of 2010. In the meantime, she also opened a legal services office with two colleagues in the neighboring town of Tecpán. The legal services

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6 The term “united” comes directly from the Spanish term “unido,” which indicates that a couple has joined together in a committed/marriage-type relationship, but without legally marrying, which requires a separate civil and legal ceremony in Guatemala that is both costly and time-intensive.
Juana and her colleagues provide include notary services, legal title transfers, marriage certificates, etc. Her hope is to expand the services to full legal representation once she passes the bar exam. Speaking recently with Juana, however, she related that she had to delay taking the bar exam because her oldest brother died in a tragic car accident almost a year ago, which has devastated her family. Juana’s mother, in particular, was especially distraught over her son’s death. Juana felt that she had to set her studying aside in order to tend to her mother. Unfortunately, just when it seemed that life was about to be back on track for Juana and her family, her youngest brother was in a serious car accident in March of 2010. The accident nearly killed him and he is still working to recover his memory. Juana’s mother has been by his side daily and Juana feels she must further delay taking the bar exam to accommodate the immediate needs of her family. However, Juana says that she will not give up and will take the exam as soon as things have calmed down. When asked what she hopes for in her life, Juana responds, “To always have employment and at the same time, create sources of employment for other Guatemalans.” Juana also hopes to continue studying law and to complete a Juris Doctorate, which will qualify her to become a magistrate judge with a particular focus on advancing the human rights of indigenous peoples in Guatemala.

When I asked her what made her so successful, Juana imparts, “It is for necessity… maybe for many others [what I have achieved] is a great success, but for me, it is very little. I would have liked, at this age, to have reached greater goals, but I have had obstacles such as my oldest brother’s death one year ago and [my youngest brother’s] accident two months ago.” Thinking of the near future, however, Juana shares, “I am now planning on opening a [legal] office in another municipality of Chimaltenango, to
continue with the store and to finish building my house in Santa Apolonia.” Juana purchased a small parcel of land on her own in Santa Apolonia proper several years ago and has initiated the first phase of construction. While Juana is somewhat dissatisfied with the pace at which she has been reaching her goals, she has been extremely successful nonetheless. When asked why she thinks that she and her orphan peers have experienced so much success in comparison with their peers from Santa Apolonia, Juana contends, “It is out of necessity and not having parents to count on. You ought to depend on yourself and if you don’t make the [efforts], no one will do it for you. You have to make decisions and make plans for the future, thinking about how you can’t depend on anyone else.”

Juana is a strong, independent, educated woman who is confident in her abilities to forge her own path in life and who maintains a strong connection to her indigenous heritage. Juana identifies herself as Maya Kaqchikel. She identifies her mother as Kaqchikel, who originates from the neighboring municipality of Tecpán. Juana relates that her father also identified as Kaqchikel and came from the municipality of Santa Apolonia. Unlike many in the Hogares, Juana was able to maintain close connections to her natal community because the home was located so close to Santa Apolonia. This meant that Juana could remain connected to local Kaqchikel practices such as feast days of saints and was able to reinforce her Kaqchikel language skills. Her traditional practices and Kaqchikel language skills were also strengthened by her ongoing interactions with her own mother who worked at the home (she has always spoken to her mother first and foremost in Kaqchikel) and with whom she was able to spend every day. When asked what makes a person indigenous in Guatemala, Juana shares, “Well, the characteristics
are this: to be respectful, to not be arrogant, to be humble, to like to share with others…to not be selfish.” Elaborating on her sense of Kaqchikel identity and pride, Juana explains, “You can change the way you look, but you continue being indigenous from the inside. You carry [identity] inside…in your blood.”

Juana is another impressive example of success among the alumni at the Hogares. Like many of her Hogares companions, she attributes part of her success to the fact that she had the opportunity to grow up in the home. Juana contends, “The advantage for the children living in the [home] is that at the very least, the majority had [access] to education. It didn’t matter if they graduated [from high school] or not. One of the advantages is this—that everyone studied even if it was just a little, but yes, they studied.” Juana furthers, “The advantages were that, at the same time, one gained [practical] skills and that living conditions were so good because they gave us everything.” At the same time that she acknowledges the benefits of living in the Hogares, Juana cautions, “A disadvantage [to growing up in a home for children] would be that upon leaving the Hogares, one is accustomed [to life at the home] and to confront the real world is so difficult because one doesn’t know what reality is like.” Juana continues reflecting on Hogares living by sharing,

There are no opportunities, perhaps, to be independent, to think about greater things beyond yourself because [at the home] they practically provide everything….This is a disadvantage. You don’t envision a future in which you have to struggle for what you want. This is a disadvantage—that there aren’t many opportunities to involve yourself more in the [real world] because when you leave [the home] it is so difficult for the same reason….I think the way in which peers from the village involve themselves more in [community life] is a little better for the same reason because they form relationships with people who are not family members. They form relationships, they go on making friends and through them they can get better jobs. In exchange, those from the home have been [living at the home] and they get to know [other orphans] and it isn’t until they leave that they get to know a lot of other people. While you are at the Hogares, you don’t
get to know many others. There are no opportunities to get to know others and the [real world].

Juana recognizes that living at the *Hogares* did afford her certain advantages that have helped her advance her education. Grateful for all that the Catholic sisters and staff of the home provided and did for her, Juana is adamant that people understand that being orphaned has implications that reach far into adulthood, regardless of whether or not one has had the opportunity to grow up in a supportive residential home environment as she did. Juana states,

I think that, yes, [being orphaned] is a very difficult experience and it’s very difficult because when you are small, you don’t think about it [until] you start growing older. For example, when I was little, I suffered so much because I saw my mom so distressed. When you are older, you suffer. In life outside of the *Hogares*, you are faced with everything….For example, when I graduated [from high school], everyone else went to live with their families and I, as an orphan, had to be strong and have a lot of courage to confront life alone…[and] it’s not easy at all….I would like that people know that for someone not having parents, life is tough and it doesn’t matter if it is just one parent [who they lost] because it is between the two parents that they form a very important bond with their children. The mom or the dad alone can’t [form such a bond] and the child so needs the love of both parents.

Juana offers poignant insight regarding the general experience of orphans at the *Hogares*. While orphans had all the food, clothing, school supplies and stable support they needed as children, not having one or both parents to support them psychologically, socially and economically in adulthood has been quite challenging. Yet, many orphans have learned to support themselves and reach goals far beyond what anyone (orphans included) could have ever envisioned for them. Juana is a clear example of this. As a young Mayan Kaqchikel woman, she is making huge strides in her education and not only will she soon be a professional lawyer, but she will have a profession that will allow her to directly give back to her community. While Juana, one of the most humble and
giving individuals that I have ever come to know, would never brag about her successes, she is a truly amazing young woman who has achieved so much despite the odds. And yet, her primary goal in life (besides taking and passing the bar exam) is for her daughter to get an education so that as Juana states, “She can achieve something much greater than I have.” Juana is a clear example of strength, courage and humility.

Understanding War Orphans’ Life Experiences

The life experiences detailed in the profiles of Mario, Debra, Esteban, Juliana and Juana offer a unique and intimate glimpse into the lives of Guatemala’s war orphans who are now adults in their 20s and 30s. Some of orphans are clearly “direct” victims of the genocide in that soldiers or civil patrollers murdered or disappeared one or both of their parents. Such was the case with both of Mario’s parents, Debra’s mother, and the fathers of Juliana and Juana. Other orphans were what Esteban, himself, terms as “indirect” victims whose parents succumbed to the pressures created by the genocide and took their own lives instantly or slowly died of illness or disease such as alcohol poisoning (as was the case with Esteban’s mother). Orphans who did have one remaining parent alive often found themselves in precarious living situations as their remaining parents turned to alcohol to deal with their trauma and loss (such as Debora’s father) or found themselves working multiple jobs in order to barely maintain their families (as with Juliana’s and Juana’s mothers). Vices and economic struggles left many surviving parents with little capacity or time to provide their newly orphaned children with a stable home environment. Further exacerbating orphans’ already dubious situations were their own personal struggles with understanding and coming to terms with their eye-witness experiences of watching their parents being dragged from their homes or fleeing military
massacres in their own natal villages, detailed in Mario and Juliana’s situations. Fortunately, a number of orphans were so young at the time of their family members’ demises that they do not recall seeing the actual events. However, even orphans who were too young to remember lived through the perilous aftermath of the genocide and witnessed the overwhelming distress it caused surviving family members and their communities for many years that followed. As the profiles demonstrate, war orphans have experienced more hardships, distress and struggle in their early childhoods than most individuals do in a lifetime, and orphans continue to face challenges caused by the genocide even as adults because of their orphan status. Thus, the profiles clearly reveal that orphans do, indeed, contend with long-term consequences of la violencia that continue to affect them today in adulthood and bring to the surface two sets of key themes underscoring their life experiences.

**Themes of Trauma, Loss and Severed Ties**

The two sets of key themes that emerge from the profiles presented in this chapter involve negative consequences of the genocide on one hand and orphans’ positive responses to those consequences on the other. The vital themes regarding orphans’ experiences with the negative long-term consequences of the genocide include trauma, loss and severed ties. Thus, as the first theme in this set, trauma derives from orphans’ experiences with traumatic memories and trauma more generally. Esteban recalls his father’s shocking suicide as if it happened yesterday and explicitly terms the event as “traumatic” for him. Esteban also vividly remembers the tortured cries of his mother when she was on her death bed, which he still tries to erase from his memory. Mario and Juliana recollect memories of their parents being tragically detained and dragged from
their homes in moments they describe as sheer terror. Even Debora and Juana, who were too young to have witnessed when their parents were detained and disappeared, speak about traumatic memories such as Debora’s father walking away from the Hogares and leaving her behind, and Juana watching as her mother’s immense distress ultimately led to her baby brother’s death. Orphans all experienced trauma in some form and the associated memories of those horrific events are ever-present today.

The second theme regarding negative consequences culled from the profiles is the grand sense of loss that the five orphans experienced in their early childhoods. The loss of their parents, whether as direct or indirect victims of the genocide, has had lasting effects in orphans’ life experiences. Not only were they left without one or both parents to raise them, but they continue to feel their parents’ absence even today. Debora consistently speaks about not having a mother from whom she can seek advice in order to help her navigate the complexities of adulthood. Mario does not have parents who can proudly participate in major life events such as accepting his high school diploma or attending his college graduation. Esteban is ever-conscious about not having parents as a “safety net” on whom to rely for emotional and economic support. The loss of siblings is also evident in the orphans’ profiles. Mario’s older sister, Debora’s only brother, Juliana’s oldest brother and Juana’s baby brother all perished as a result of the genocide and its aftermath, further adding to the physical and emotional loss of family experienced by all five orphans.

The orphans’ sense of loss also encompasses resources. All of the five orphans’ families lost some combination of their homes, material goods, crops and animals. In the case of Juana’s family, they lost everything when their home and crops were destroyed,
and their material goods and animals were taken by the armed men who kidnapped her father, literally leaving Juana’s remaining family with nothing more than the clothes they were wearing at the time. For Debora’s family, their house remained but the danger in the area prevented her father from returning home and instead, he lived with his two small daughters in the mountains and in the streets, relying on the generosity of others in order to survive. The loss of resources also took the form of losing the main wage-earners in the family (primarily the fathers), which meant that the surviving family members had to work exceptionally hard for their survival. This was not uncommon because women, especially indigenous women, in the Highlands disproportionately had less education and were deemed less employable than their male counterparts. Finding wage-paying jobs was difficult and widows, in particular, were paid significantly less for their labor, making their new position as the sole breadwinner in the family extremely difficult. The limited income that the widows could earn made replenishing what their families had lost in the acts of violence carried out during the genocide seem a near impossibility for the many years that were to follow.

Losses stemming from la violencia brought about an often overwhelming sense of instability for orphans’ early childhoods, which is evident in the profiles. Mario speaks of how he and his siblings, left without either parent, had to figure out a way to maintain their precarious family situation amidst the consistent brutality and attacks on their small hamlet during la violencia. Debora and Juana clearly recall the intense insecurity that surrounded their remaining family members before they were enrolled in the Hogares. Debora remembers living in the streets with her sister, never knowing where they would sleep for the night or if they would have anything to eat for the day. Juana recollects the
ever-present angst surrounding her mother’s distress over whether she could find work or earn enough money to keep her family afloat. Juana’s mother also projected an incessant fear for years that the men who kidnapped her husband would return to destroy the rest of her family. Esteban explicitly remembers nervously questioning what would happen to him and his sisters when his mother died and left her children completely orphaned.

Esteban’s fears and insecurities were concretized as he spent the initial two years after his mother’s death living like a “street dog,” roaming from house to house every day in search of food and a somewhat secure place to sleep for the night. Juliana recalls her father’s kidnapping and while the remainder of her nuclear family stayed together, she recognizes the immense instability that enveloped her family as they worked so hard to survive day-to-day and constantly faced the brutality of the genocide, which hit their small hamlet especially hard.

The initial transition to life at the Hogares also fueled orphans’ feelings of loss and resulting insecurity. Mario notes his persistent anxieties during the transition to initially living at the Hogares and shares his insecurities at the time with trying to grapple with why his brother left him behind. Debora similarly recounts her devastation as she watched her father walk away from the home, leaving her and her sister behind. Juliana remembers the sudden feeling of sadness and loneliness as her mother was about to leave her at the Hogares on the first day of her enrollment. While Juliana and her brother chose to move to the home, the actual transition was trying as she was uncertain what this major life change would bring. Only in the case of Esteban and Juana did the transition to living at the Hogares immediately pose positive opportunities. Esteban was excited to be with his sisters again and to receive his very own pair of shoes. He had no qualms about living
at the *Hogares* because it was certainly better than living like a “street dog.” Juana was already familiar with the *Hogares* since her mother was employed there and she routinely accompanied her mother at work. Juana’s familiarity with the home and the other orphans enrolled made her transition relatively smooth and calm. Overall, orphans experienced a wide range of loss and instability during their initial transition to living at the *Hogares*; however, the move to living outside of the home and entering adulthood proved to be overwhelmingly onerous for all orphans featured in the profiles.

Esteban and Juliana faced the most challenging transition to life beyond the *Hogares*. After being kicked out for unruly behavior, Esteban was faced with a future that he deems was going nowhere. After months of living with unconcerned extended family members in his natal community, Esteban relocated to the capital and embarked upon a long, challenging journey to educate and support himself, which required him to work and study fulltime for nearly all of his young adult life. Also prematurely asked to leave the *Hogares*, Juliana faced not only the challenge of supporting herself but also of becoming a young mother at the age of 17. Neither Juliana nor her husband (also an orphan) had the financial support of family and found themselves alone in their struggle to become adults and make it as a family. Mario also moved to the capital and had to find ways to support himself in an environment that he found both strange and challenging. Fortunately, he had the emotional support of the family of the carpentry instructor who helped ease the shift to urban life. Debora found herself with no place to live and no family members who could help support her beyond the *Hogares*. With no other options, Debora found help from a fellow orphan who invited her to live with the orphan and her grandparents in the capital. Debora was grateful for the opportunity because she had no
idea where she would live or what she would do as an adult with no familial or natal community support. Even Juana, who continued to live in the town of Santa Apolonia after completing her enrollment at the Hogares, found the transition to adulthood difficult. While Juana’s mother provided her with much needed emotional support, she earned so little income that she had no way of offering Juana financial support. Juana knew that the only way she would make it as an adult was by working to support herself and by advancing her education.

The final theme revealed in the profiles regarding the negative long-term consequences of la violencia on the lives of orphans is that of severed ties. The deaths and disappearances of orphans’ parents resulted in almost immediate severed ties with their surviving family members and natal communities. Esteban’s extended family members only viewed him as a material asset because hereditary rights made him the sole heir to his mother’s home. The wellbeing of Esteban and his sisters was not of concern to his extended family members; only Esteban’s inheritance mattered to them. Ties with Esteban’s extended family members consequently have all but disappeared. For Debora, her father’s alcoholism became primary in his life and as soon as she was enrolled in the Hogares, he left to work on the coast and has not since been a part of her life. Debora’s surviving sister and other extended family members also remain aloof and have been mostly absent in her life. Mario, Juliana and Juana all maintain close ties with their surviving siblings, and Juliana and Juana remain especially close to their mothers; however, their extended family members have either perished in the genocide as well or simply have not played a significant role in their lives for various reasons.
Severed ties with natal communities similarly have been a challenge for orphans, nearly all of whom no longer live in their natal communities. Esteban’s extended family members illegally took control of his mother’s home, leaving him and his sisters without familial property and with little reason to return to their natal community, which is also located in a region too far away from professional opportunities for Esteban and his sisters. The families of Mario and Juliana still maintain family home in their tiny hamlets, but the location is also too far away from education and employment opportunities. Family members of Mario and Juliana still live in their natal communities, but due to economic conditions, Mario and Juliana live in urban centers for work, which has eroded their community ties. Juana is the only orphan featured in the profiles who generally maintains ties with her community by living in Santa Apolonia proper. While her familial home was initially located a short distance from the town, her family has always had ties with the larger town of Santa Apolonia where Juana now lives and is building a home of her own. Yet, Juana’s ties with the tiny settlement where her father had constructed their family home have weakened considerably, but the ties with the town of Santa Apolonia remain increasingly strong.

As the cases of Mario, Debora, Esteban, Juliana and Juana demonstrate, war orphans faced ongoing trauma, loss and severed ties not only in their formative years but also into adulthoods. However, for as many negative challenges and threats that they faced in their lives, orphans also experienced remarkable growth and perceived success, which constitute a second set of key themes elucidated in the profiles.
**Themes of Resilience, Education and Identity**

The life experiences featured in the profiles simultaneously bring to light three primary themes related to orphans’ positive responses to the negative long-term consequences of *la violencia*. The first positive theme is that of resilience. Based on the definition offered by Bonanno (2004), I use the term resilience to denote orphans’ abilities to return to and maintain psychological and physical equilibrium following a traumatic event or events. Mario, Debora, Esteban, Juliana and Juana were exposed to various traumas at a young age and they all have some form of vivid memories regarding the traumatic events or resulting hardships. Such traumatic events are hard to fathom and one can only imagine the effects that such horrific events have on children, especially those who are forced to continue to live in an unstable and violent environment as was the case for so many orphans and children, in general, in the Highlands during the *la violencia*. In the profiles, orphans illustrate how they recognize the challenges, complexities and complications associated with witnessing their parents’ demises and experiencing such life-changing traumas. However, none of the five orphans speak of their traumatic experiences as overwhelming barriers that have prevented them from becoming resilient, successful children and adults.

Instead of focusing on debilitating trauma, orphans assert the positive aspects of their experiences such as having access to positive mentorships, friendships and opportunities afforded by the *Hogares*. Mario speaks about his supportive relationships with the carpentry shop teacher and choir director. He also talks about his many friendships with other orphans and his appreciation for all that the *Hogares* gave him. Juliana expresses her deep fondness for her friends from the *Hogares* and from town, and her gratefulness
for the supportive environment at the home and the skills the home helped her develop. Esteban recognizes the optimistic, stable environment that he also found at the Hogares and credits the home with making him the man he is today. Debora and Juana focus on the various opportunities they have had because of the Hogares, including key friendships and consistent emotional support. Thus, instead of portraying their lives as completely devastated and permanently destroyed by their traumatic experiences or speaking of themselves as perpetual victims of the genocide who face nothing but hopelessness, all five orphans instead concentrate on their personal growth and abilities to not only emotionally overcome the traumatic challenges of their early childhoods but of their adulthoods as well (e.g., Esteban’s shooting, Mario’s car accident, the death of Juliana’s son, the infidelity of Debora’s husband and the accidental death of Juana’s oldest brother). The positive focus the profiles encompass conveys the orphans’ amazing resilience to bounce back and maintain psychological and physical equilibrium in the face of extreme adversity experienced both as children and now as adults in the post-war era.

The second theme that highlights orphans’ positive responses to the negative long-term consequences of la violencia is that of education. All of the profiles convey orphans’ deep appreciation for formal and vocational education and the importance it plays in their lives. All orphans featured in the profiles had little to no education prior to enrolling in the Hogares. They also had little to no Spanish language skills prior to arriving at the home. However, as soon as all five orphans arrived, they were immediately enrolled in the public school system and received one-to-one tutoring in the afternoons at the Hogares itself. Within a relatively short period of time and with the help of the Hogares staff, all five orphans attained Spanish language skills and advanced their
education at an accelerated pace. In addition, Mario, Debora and Juana were all able to maintain Hogares economic support of their educations up to their high school graduations and received certification in various technical skill areas as a result. Esteban and Juliana were not as fortunate as their early disenrollment left them to finish their high school degrees on their own, which was challenging, but not impossible.

Interestingly, the five orphans featured in the profiles could have stopped at a high school education, which would have left them in equal stride educationally with most of their non-orphans peers. However, three of them pushed hard to continue their studies at the university level on their own accord. Both Mario and Juana have graduated from college and Juana is planning to take the bar exam within the next year. Esteban is just about to finish his college degree as well and while Debora and Juliana have not been able to continue their formal educations because of various constraints, they continue to encourage their own children to take their studies seriously and to advance their educations as far as possible. For orphans, education is an imperative theme and is perceived as a pivotal asset that is central to their own growth and success. Through their formal educations and resulting professional careers, orphans have been able to initiate and build a solid economic base on their own for their families despite having lost familial property and the economic support of parents and natal communities as a consequence of the genocide.

The third and final theme that undergirds orphans’ positive responses to the negative long-term consequences of la violencia is that of identity. Despite major upheaval and disruption regarding familial and natal community ties—which serve as primary sources of socialization and enculturation especially in rural indigenous Guatemalan children’s
lives—the five orphans featured in this chapter do not express any sentiments of major loss of identity or an “identity crisis.” Mario and Esteban mention losing skills related to their primary Mayan languages, but they do not equate changes in language skills (which they identify as an aspect of indigenous identity) with overall identity loss. Instead, all five orphans express continuity in their sense of identity. Mario still feels emotionally connected with his natal community and indigenous heritage, which he believes has fostered constancy in his own identity formation. Esteban notes that he may no longer be K’iche’ and feels that he is practically Kaqchikel, but states that his identity as an indigenous person, more generally, has not been affected by his severed familial and community ties or lost aspects of identity. Debora believes that being indigenous is a tradition that is passed down from other generations and she notes that she feels happy to be indigenous, indicating that she perceives no rupture in her identity formation despite having grown up at a home for orphaned children. Juliana, who explicitly proclaims that she is “proudly Kaqchikel,” relates that she comes from her ancestors and as such, cannot deny her identity. Juliana perceives identity as something rooted in heritage, which makes forgetting one’s roots impossible even if a person forgets the parts of identity that “grow above ground.” Juana similarly purports that an individual can change the way she looks, but she continues being indigenous in the inside regardless of outward appearances.

The individual profiles clearly demonstrate that Mario, Esteban, Debora, Juliana and Juana all perceive identity as deeply rooted in ancestry and in family and natal community origins. They also view identity as located centrally within the individual. Therefore, identity can remain constant regardless of changes in or loss of overt markers or traits associated with identity. The five orphans’ perspectives on and personal
experiences with identity thereby reveal a strong undercurrent of unshakable continuity that is unaffected by the tragedies and severed familial and community ties that have befallen them. The constancy inherent in the orphans’ sense of identity, in turn, has forged a strong and steady foundation upon which orphans have constructed what they perceive as resilient and successful lives.

While the profiles demonstrate that orphans perceive a strong sense of continuity regarding identity, they also reveal that orphans simultaneously are actively engaging in creative practices such as higher education, entrepreneurship and professional careers in order to adapt to their circumstances as orphaned survivors of genocide. Orphans’ participation in creative practices is ultimately transforming what it means for them to be indigenous peoples in Guatemala today. Mario attained teaching positions with two prominent academic institutions in the capital and graduated from the prestigious University of San Carlos. He launched his own internet service business and is currently working on a Master’s degree. Debora completed high school, is supervising the construction of her own home, involves herself heavily in her son’s education and hopes to expand her family in the future. Esteban moved up the ranks of the national Ministry of Culture and Sports and is about to graduate from college. He has created a home with his sisters, plans to legally fight for and regain ownership of his mother’s home, and intends to work toward a doctorate degree so that he can effectively educate others. Juliana has created a supportive family and home, fully supports her children’s educational processes and had launched a business of her own. She also continues to educate herself via cooking classes and other forms of instruction, and is extremely proud of her Maya heritage, instilling that pride in her children as well. Juana supported herself
through college and is about to become a fully licensed lawyer, working for the rights of the people of Guatemala. She also has launched two businesses in two separate towns: a mercantile-type store and a legal services office. Juana also plans on trying her hand at an even larger type of business in the future in order to provide employment opportunities for other Guatemalans. Orphans’ creative practices highlighted in the profiles illustrate that they are simultaneously transforming what it means to be indigenous citizens in Guatemala today, and does not reflect either “identity loss” or “identity crisis” for them.

As the profiles demonstrate, the goals orphans have achieved and plan on attaining in the future are astounding. Not only have they developed into resilient individuals who have overcome the traumatic challenges of the past and present but they also have thrived, accomplishing so much more than what anyone could have ever imagined they would in their lifetimes given the challenges they have faced and continue to face as war orphans. Yet, nowhere in the profiles do orphans explicitly boast about their achievements or their abilities to achieve perceived success (I believe their general humility would not support such a stance of self-promotion). However, the evidence is clear that they have both the confidence and motivation to reach whatever goals they set out to achieve. College degrees, entrepreneurship, post-graduate education, families, homes and gainful employment are all part and parcel of the orphans’ lived experiences. Orphans have reached goals that move far beyond the goals common in daily rural life in Highland Guatemala. They also continue to strive for new ways of stretching themselves, learning, advancing their families and creating opportunities for others that is transforming what it means to be an indigenous Guatemalan today. Thus, the war
orphans’ strong sense of identity based on concurrent notions of continuity and creativity is another important element in their personal growth and perceived success.

Conclusion

The life experiences detailed in the profiles of Mario, Debora, Esteban, Juliana and Juana poignantly elucidate two main sets of themes. The first set of themes includes trauma, loss and severed ties, which reveals orphans’ overall experiences with negative long-term consequences of la violencia. The second set of themes includes resilience, education and identity, which demonstrates orphans’ positive responses to those consequences. These two sets of themes represent two divergent realms of influence ever-present in orphans’ overall life experiences. The two realms consist of the negative long-term consequences that orphans have had to confront because of the genocide on the one hand and orphans’ own creative and constructive (or positive) responses to those long-term consequences on the other. The following three chapters focus on the relationship of these two sets of themes. In Chapter 4, I examine orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma and associated loss on one hand, while I discuss their abilities to enact resilient, thriving behaviors as a positive response to those traumatic experiences on the other. In Chapter 5, I detail the long-term economic challenges orphans experienced and continue to face as a consequence of their orphan status, and then focus on their dedication to education as a constructive means of overcoming those economic barriers. In Chapter 6, I examine the long-term consequences of orphans’ severed ties with families and natal communities that had served as their primary centers of socialization and enculturation in early childhood, and follow by demonstrating that despite the severed ties, orphans have developed a strong sense of identity that is forged upon
simultaneous notions of continuity and creativity that are transforming what it means for
them to be indigenous citizens in Guatemala today.
CHAPTER 4

Trauma and Resilience

“[T]he terror does not end automatically when the levels of violence descend, rather it has cumulative and lasting effects, those which require time, effort, and new types of experiences to overcome” (CEH 2004:34).

The orphan profiles presented in Chapter 3 demonstrate that Guatemala’s war orphans have experienced more hardships, distress and struggle in their early childhoods than most individuals commonly do in a lifetime. Orphans’ experiences include witnessing some of the most horrendous acts ever carried out against humanity. Many watched with horror as their parents were murdered or kidnapped by masked soldiers. Others saw their villages ransacked and community members massacred, while even more were forced to flee their homes and to live precariously in the mountains in order to avoid death or persecution by the military. Other orphans observed their parents’ self-destruction as what they themselves deem an indirect consequence of the genocide. For orphans too young to recall these heinous acts, the peril in which they were forced to live as a consequence of losing one or both parents caused such overwhelming distress that it further exacerbated their sense of loss. That sense of loss not only encompassed the pain of losing their parents and other family members but also of losing their homes, economic resources, and familial and natal community ties, all of which fomented an ever-burgeoning sense of instability in their young lives.

What war orphans were forced to face as children, both emotionally and physically, is hard to imagine. The five life experiences presented in Chapter 3 demonstrate that orphans recognize the challenges, complexities and complications that their early life
experiences have caused them. At the same time, however, they refuse to perceive those early life events as permanently debilitating or as creating life-long barriers to becoming what they perceive as well-adapted and successful adults. In fact, the orphan profiles presented in Chapter 3 clearly reveal that as adults today, war orphans do not dwell solely on their pasts, but in fact, focus primarily on positive life aspects such as friendships, education, professional careers and their new families now consisting of spouses and their own children. The ability to not only move beyond their childhood trauma but to also actively engage in creating positive, productive and meaningful life paths is a testament to these orphans’ own resiliency both as children and adults.

In this chapter, I more fully explore the experiences with both childhood trauma and resilience of the 20 orphan participants in my research project, and compare their experiences with 20 of their peers who grew up in the town of Santa Apolonia. My aim is to demonstrate that despite suffering intense childhood trauma, war orphans have overcome the negative effects of childhood trauma by becoming well-adapted, resilient adults today. To achieve this aim, I begin this chapter with an overview of the militarized state’s overt use of psychological warfare during la violencia to deliberately traumatize the majority indigenous population into submission. I continue by discussing the effects the psychological warfare of the genocide has had on adult survivors in order to demonstrate the breadth and depth that the state went to in order to traumatize citizens of all ages. I next address the limited knowledge that exists regarding children who fell victim to and survived the genocide in order to provide the context and to substantiate the immediacy for better understanding war orphans’ particular experiences with childhood distress and trauma derived from la violencia. I then expand the discussion of childhood
distress and trauma by presenting orphans’ personal experiences and compare their experiences with those of their peers. I further demonstrate how orphans and their peers experienced and perceived genocide-related childhood trauma, while also presenting their own views on what type of long-term effects they believe childhood trauma has had on their lives and on the lives of war orphans more generally. I conclude this chapter by discussing war orphans’ own resilience in overcoming the long-term effects of intense childhood trauma by becoming well-adapted adults today instead.

**Genocide and State-Sponsored Terror in the Highlands**

The military counterinsurgency campaign in Guatemala consisted of more than the direct murder of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. Based on overt military strategies modeled on the United States’ Operation Phoenix campaign in Vietnam, the Guatemalan military also used state-sponsored terroristic strategies that involved “the most extreme displays of disregard for human life” (REMHI 1999:7). The aim of these terroristic strategies was to terrorize and severely intimidate the majority (mainly indigenous) population so that they would become too frightened to support the guerrillas or to participate in any sort of mass uprising against the terror-wielding state (Afflitto and Jesilow 2007; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Handy 1984; Perera 1993; REMHI 1999; Saavedra 2001; Smith 1984; Wilson 1995). To achieve this aim, the military implemented its overt strategy to “drain the sea” (eradicate the Maya indigenous populace) in order to get at the “fish” (the Marxist guerrillas), which essentially marked the most horrific period of *la violencia* and had long-lasting psychological ramifications for the majority of Guatemalans for years to come (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Jonas 2009; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2003).
The Guatemalan military’s overt terroristic strategies consisted of the use of arbitrary terror and destruction to create a culture of fear that not only permeated daily life during *la violencia* but also persisted well beyond that era (Afflitto and Jesilow 2007; Davis 1988; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; Taylor 1998; Zur 1998). The culture of fear quickly expanded and intensified during the regime of General Ríos Montt who executed *Victoria 82*. As discussed in Chapter 2, under the first phase of *Victoria 82* (called *fusiles y frijoles*), the military murdered any villagers even remotely suspected of supporting the guerrillas, destroyed their belongings, and forced as many remaining survivors as possible into military-controlled settlements. Through these tactics, the military fully established and intensified the culture of fear that persists throughout the country even today (CEH 1999; Frank and Wheaton 1984; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2003). Recognizing the culture of fear as a military strategy, Davis notes,

Most observers are in agreement that the purpose of the Guatemalan army’s counterinsurgency campaign was as much to teach the Indian population a psychological lesson as to wipe out a guerrilla movement that, at its height, had probably no more than 3,500 trained people in arms. In essence, the purpose of the campaign was to generate an attitude of terror and fear—what we might term a “culture of fear”—in the Indian population, to ensure that never again would it support or ally itself with a Marxist guerrilla movement [1988:24].

For Highland inhabitants who remained outside of militarized model villages, the army used a horrific array of terror-inducing tactics to instill deep-seated fear and ensure submission to the state. These tactics were not only perpetrated by the military itself but also by individuals from within the community who were forced to carry out horrendous acts against their own community members. In essence, the military’s ideology of violence spread well beyond its own ranks to the communities it infiltrated, turning communities against themselves (CEH 1999; Frank and Wheaton 1984; Sanford 2005;
Violence and threat from perpetrators outside of the community were simultaneously fortified by violence and threat carried out by perpetrators within the community itself, and by economic devastation that left thousands with little to no economic resources on which to survive. I now discuss both the use of violence and threat from outsiders and insiders below.

**Violence and Threat from Without**

The military carried out over 400 massacres in which entire villages were razed. The massacres were used not only to eliminate “the water” (the Highland indigenous populace) but also to produce overwhelming anxiety in inhabitants from surrounding villages and hamlets who never knew if their community was the next to be attacked (Aguilera Peralta and Beverly 1980; CEH 1999; Jonas 2009; REMHI 1998; Taylor 1998; Warren 1993). Key to spreading the terror of massacre beyond the targeted community was leaving behind a few sole survivors as witnesses who were used to spread the message of terror to other communities by warning others about what they had witnessed (CEH 1999; Falla 1994; REMHI 1998). Molina Mejía describes,

> The massacres of the Indian peasant population have been accompanied by the most horrendous sadism: killing children in front of their parents, killing parents in front of their children, people of all ages burnt alive, heads of men placed in the wombs of women, to mention only a few examples [1984:38].

Less public than the massacres of entire villages but equally terrorizing was the military’s creation and use of notorious clandestine death squads. The death squads served as unpredictable, autonomous right wing terrorist groups that carried out some of the most inhumane acts of violence and terror in the Highlands where they indiscriminately murdered and kidnapped villagers, made mass arrests and published ominous death lists (Afflitto and Jesilow 2007; Aguilera Peralta and Beverly 1980;
Amnesty International 1998; CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; Handy 1984; Jonas 1991; REMHI 1998; Saavedra 2001). The death lists, known as “black propaganda,” were published both locally and nationally in print media, distributed in the streets and posted in public spaces. The lists contained the names of individuals the death squads and the military designated as *condenados a muerte* (condemned to death) (CEH 1999; Figueroa Ibarra 1991; REMHI 1998). Wanted posters of innocent individuals whose names were randomly added to the death lists were also posted around communities in the Highlands, as well as in local newspapers. The military and its vicious death squads deliberately used the highly publicized death lists and wanted posters to intensify the growing climate of terror as everyone feared their names would randomly appear on the death lists at any moment, which was often the case (Aguilera Peralta and Beverly 1980; CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Jonas 1991; Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achi 2003; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

Equally overt but more individually-focused, torture-filled detentions and public displays of tortured bodies became commonplace during the military’s “scorched earth offensive” as well. Torturous detentions were used to extract information from villagers regarding guerrilla or other community activity considered subversive in nature (Amnesty International 1998; Manz 2004; Warren 1993). For victims who survived the torture, the psychological effects were devastating for themselves, as well as for their families and communities to which they returned. Most often, however, torture victims were murdered and their mutilated bodies were either dumped in public places or hung from trees or light posts as a warning to others and as a means of evoking even greater fear among local

 Corpses are left in visible, public places for a reason. The more horrific and spectacular the death and subsequent display of annihilated political opponents, it is arithmetically argued, the more pronounced the deterrent effect for opposition activities. The sensationalistic nature of the violence maximizes the terrorist actor’s message of apparent omnipotence, invincibility, and surety of victory [2007:24].

While the myriad ways in which dumped bodies showed signs of torture are too heinous to detail here, it is important to note that the state-sponsored terroristic tactic of torture and public displays of torture victims added exponentially to the culture of fear that was mounting in the Highlands during la violencia. Such horrific displays of violence terrorized survivors, both young and old, in ways that continue to have lasting effects even today (CEH 1999; Falla 1994; Green 1999; Montejo 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). As inhumane and commonplace as torture had become during la violencia, it was not the only means the military used to destroy bodies and psychologically terrorize innocent individuals in the Highlands during this brutal period of Guatemala’s history.

For thousands of women and girls in Highland communities, the military reserved a particular form of violence and threat for them. The military raped innocent women and girls as a warning to their relatives that foretold of family members’ future disappearances, as an expression of military punishment and domination, as a means of interrogation to solicit information about potential guerrilla supporters, and as a way of generating even greater fear throughout the Highlands (Amnesty International 1998; CEH 1999; Consorcio Actoras de Cambio 2006; Green 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Warren 1993). The military also used rape to destroy the “seed” of guerrilla supporters and in its place, to inseminate women and girls with the “seed” of pacification and
submission to the military state (CEH 1999; Consorcio Actoras de Cambio 2006; Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achi 2003; REMHI 1998). Many soldiers either voluntarily or under threat of death raped while their commanders commended them for dispersing the military “seed” of subjugation. Women and girls who were raped were often subsequently murdered and their violated bodies were left in public spaces to warn and instill fear in others. The victims who did survive faced disastrous consequences such as permanent body mutilation, infectious sexual diseases, decreased physical health, unwanted pregnancies, spontaneous and intentional abortions, infanticide, decreased future fertility, extreme shame, social stigmatization, excommunication from families and communities, and grave psychological suffering (CEH 1999; Consorcio Actoras de Cambio 2006; Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achi 2003; REMHI 1998).

Random bus passenger interrogations and night raids were two more terroristic tactics the military used to intensify the culture of fear and further drive home the message that anyone could be detained, violated and killed at any moment during la violencia. Patrollers and soldiers commonly stopped rural buses, forced passengers to get off and interrogated them in order to detain anyone they deemed “suspicious” at the moment. Many innocent passengers were subsequently arrested and disappeared (CEH 1999; Fischer and Hendrickson 2003; Warren 1993). Soldiers and other military collaborators also carried out night raids on villagers’ homes to instill fear and kidnap individuals whom they later murdered (CEH 1999; Frank and Wheaton 1984; REMHI 1998). To strengthen the effectiveness of the night raids, curfews were put into place throughout the Highlands during la violencia, forcing villagers to stay in their homes as soon as night fell. Any movement outside of homes past dark was viewed as subversive in nature and
the “perpetrators” (those who simply left their homes at night to buy medicine, visit relatives, feed their animals, etc.) were commonly murdered and disappeared by soldiers or Civil Patrollers without any legitimate reason (Aguilera Peralta and Beverly 1980; CEH 1999; REMHI 1998).

Violence and Threat from Within

One of the most horrific measures the military used during la violencia was the forced participation of Highland villagers in the murders, disappearances, torture, rape and interrogation of their fellow community members via the civil patrols. The establishment of the government-mandated civil patrols in villages was designed to help the army maintain localized surveillance and control of the Highland populations (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Montejo 1999; REMHI 1998; Warren 1993; Zur 1998). Villagers had two choices: patrol the village on behalf of the army or be accused of being a subversive guerrilla supporter and die (CEH 1999; Thompson 2001; REMHI 1998). Faced with such a choice, most male Highland inhabitants had no choice but to carry out surveillance on their neighbors. Soon community members came to fear the patrollers and their relatives who were perceived as orejas (ears), or spies. Orejas fed information to the patrollers who often made false accusations or denuncias (denunciations, or reports of insurgent participation) in order to clear their own names from suspicion or to receive payment for information they passed on to the military. Orejas also fueled malicious rumors that could be transformed into deadly denuncias at any time (Foxen 2007; Green 1999). The fear that orejas were everywhere at all times and could be anyone was yet another mechanism that contributed to the pervasive culture of fear (CEH 1999; Davis

The responsibilities of the civil patrollers were not limited to mere surveillance however. They also committed murders of fellow villagers in fear of retaliation of the army. Some used their position to ignite old rivalries with fellow villagers who they accused of being subversives and who they delivered to the military for questioning that ultimately led to their demise. These unpredictable actions of the civil patrol members (who were ultimately fellow villagers) caused increasing ruptures in family and community social relations, and contributed significantly to the ubiquitous culture of fear proliferating across the countryside (Green 1999; Thompson 2001; Warren 1993). Neighbors feared neighbors, trust in community members was lost and silence became a desperate tactic used by villagers to avoid serious repercussions from the civil patrols in a place where violent death could occur at any moment. Thus, the civil patrols added to the culture of fear by turning community members against each other and increasing the shift toward permanent militarization of daily life in the Highlands (Americas Watch 1989; CEH 1999; Davis and Hodson 1983; Green 1999; Jonas 2009; Molina Mejia 1984; Moser and McIlwaine 2001; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

Highland villagers also carried out horrendous acts against their fellow community members via their obligatory participation in the military as conscripted soldiers. During *la violencia*, the military stepped up its efforts at forcing mainly young indigenous males into the army. The young men were most often randomly and illegally captured in rural villages, tossed in the back of large military trucks and taken away to military bases where they were forced (often at gunpoint) into military service (CEH 1999; Davis and
Hodson 1983; REMHI 1998). Up to as many as 8,000 young indigenous men from the rural Highlands were rounded up and forced into the military every year until conscription was abolished in the mid-1990s (Zur 1998:36). The CEH truth commission report confirms that between 1980 and 1985 alone, the number of conscripted soldiers tripled and, by 1985, the number totaled over 50,000 (1999d:207). During la violencia, the young, mostly indigenous conscripted soldiers were soon forced to murder, rape and torture their own people in the name of mandatory military service. Consequently, the conscripted soldiers’ service caused even greater divide and distrust throughout the region (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998a-d; Taylor 1998; Zur 1998).

The results of the military strategies carried during the Guatemalan civil war and subsequent genocide were horrific on multiple levels. Through the use of cruel, inhumane and unimaginable terroristic tactics, the military executed whatever means possible to eradicate Highland inhabitants, to further subjugate survivors and to cultivate a culture of fear that has had devastating psychological effects that have lasted well beyond la violencia for survivors.

**Psychological Effects of Genocide and State-Sponsored Terror on Adult Victims**

The state-sponsored terroristic tactics used by the military escalated exponentially during la violencia and had horrendous psychological effects on hundreds of thousands of poor, innocent, mostly indigenous rural inhabitants of the Highlands (CEH 1999; Falla 1994; Frank and Wheaton 1984; REMHI 1998). While detailing some of the tactics as I have above can seem overly sensationalistic or almost pornographic-like in nature\(^1\), it is

\(^1\) In her work in Guatemala, Garrard-Burnett notes that “the retelling of violent acts can quickly degenerate into a type of pornography, as sympathetic readers are unwittingly transformed into voyeurs” (2010:9). I agree with Garrard-Burnett’s argument and in no way wish to dishonor survivors’ experiences by concentrating on the gore, bloodiness and cruelty of la violencia. However, I also recognize the importance
necessary to at least summarize what survivors actually faced in order to understand the psychological effects the terror has had on their lives. What is essential to learn from the above overview of the state-sponsored terroristic tactics is that the Guatemalan military executed brutal terror not only to kill people but also to carry out overt psychological warfare designed to entrench the masses into further subjugation to the militarized state. Unfortunately, the militarized state was successful in its efforts as hundreds of thousands of Highland people were forced to live in a constant culture of fear that infused every part of their daily lives and affects many people still today (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Taylor 1998; Zur 1998).

The Culture of Fear

For Highland populations, the culture of fear has, indeed, had lasting psychological effects that have persisted well beyond the period of la violencia. Thus, the lasting psychological effects of the genocide cannot be underestimated (Frank and Wheaton 1984; Green 1999; Sanford 2003; Zur 1998). As Jonas details,

Along with the thousands of deaths, the protracted violence took a psychological toll on the living. The population was maintained in a permanent state of fear and uncertainty. The apparently indiscriminate nature of the violence, the steady stream of political assassinations in broad daylight, the tales of torture by the MANO [death squads], the blurring of distinction between official repression and death squad terror, the omnipresence of police bearing machine guns in the streets—all these were weapons of psychological warfare. The goal was to wipe out from the collective mind of the Guatemalan people the memory of the Revolution and to assure the permanent demobilization of the popular classes [1991:64].

Because of the military’s relentless campaign of terror, villagers lived with the ongoing fear that they or their family members’ would succumb to death, disappearance, torture or...
rape at any time. These fears did not subside after the heightened counterinsurgency period of *la violencia*. For years following that era, villagers often fled their homes, camped out in the mountains and lived in hiding in order to avoid being further subjected to military violence and terror (as was demonstrated Debora’s profile presented in Chapter 3). Villagers’ community networks and ties that had once provided them with strong social support were severely ruptured during *la violencia*, and continued to unravel and dwindle in its aftermath. Villagers also faced extreme economic hardship that took years to overcome, which I further detail in Chapter 5. Therefore, economic hardship added to the difficult struggle of living with painful memories of past horrors and the anxiety those memories created and perpetuated, which have all contributed to the psychological suffering of scores of Highland inhabitants (Davis 1988; Green 1999; Manz 1988; Taylor 1998; Zur 1998).

**Psychological Suffering of Highland Inhabitants**

Health workers and scholars working with survivors in the aftermath of *la violencia* have recorded individual testimonies in which survivors overwhelmingly describe suffering from sadness, anxiety and helplessness that the survivors themselves deem is a direct result of the terror they experienced during the genocide. Survivors often describe feelings of despair that they believe have manifested in symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, chest pain, gastric problems, and sleep disturbances, as well as traditional categories of illness such as *tristeza* (sadness) and *susto* (shock) (Falla 1988; Foxen 2007; Green 1999; Zur 1998). Health workers and scholars also note that trauma, paranoia, grief, depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse and suicide are common experiences among survivors following *la violencia*, clearly demonstrating that the militarized state was
essentially “effective” in psychologically terrorizing the masses well beyond the period of the genocide itself (Davis and Hodson 1983; Manz 1988).

The two primary truth reports on Guatemala’s genocide further demonstrate that *la violencia* has left deep psychological wounds in individuals and families, as well as in Guatemalan society as a whole. Although the violence of the genocide has subsided, the effects of state-sponsored terror used to control and dominate the masses have had cumulative and lasting effects. Based on the 5,465 testimonies compiled and analyzed in the REMHI truth commission report (1998a-d) and the 7,338 testimonies collected and examined in the United Nations-supported CEH report (1999), survivors overwhelmingly report experiencing ongoing genocide-related fear and trauma that persist today.

According to the testimonies collected and analyzed in the truth reports, individuals frequently speak of experiencing fear, *susto* (shock), sadness, depression, emotional pain, mistrust, silence, rage, passivity, humiliation, heightened startle response and defenselessness. Individuals also express unsettled and prolonged emotional pain and guilt for not being able to bury their disappeared loved ones in accordance with burial customs and for not having the opportunity to properly mourn their deaths because they do not know where their loved ones’ remains are located. Torture victims speak of experiencing low self-esteem, anxiety, lapses in memory, interrupted sleep, nightmares, mistrust, lethargy, irritability, disorientation and depression. Testimonies of rape victims are commonly infused with feelings of shame, guilt, stigma, nervous tension, insecurity and the decreased will to live. Individuals forced into the civil patrols or the military speak of intense feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, helplessness and anxiety because of
their forced participation in the killing and terrorizing of their own people (CEH 1999; REMHI 2002, 1998a-d).

The testimonies presented in the REMHI and CEH reports reveal a host of physical symptoms as well, including blurred vision, insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, ulcers, chronic headaches, migraines, loss of appetite and fatigue that survivors report in association with their experiences with the genocide. Survivors also describe experiencing mental health problems such as apathy, panic attacks, general anxiety, addiction, uncontrollable rage, isolation, depression and suicide. These mental health issues continue to be present in survivors’ lives even today.

While the REMHI and CEH reports both reveal important findings regarding persistent psychological effects of the genocide, data were mostly culled from the experiences and testimonies of adults. The particular experiences of population segments such as children can vary drastically in both form and content. Therefore, rather than assuming that child survivors’ experiences merely reflect the general narrative of adult survivors, scholars must acknowledge and explore child survivors’ particular experiences in order to more fully understand the extent and magnitude of the consequences of genocide both immediately and well beyond the period of la violencia.

**Children as Victims of the Genocide and State-Sponsored Terror**

Children, as a segment of Guatemala’s population, were not in any way immune to the horrors of the genocide and the state-sponsored terror of la violencia. In fact, the REMHI truth commission report states that “as a social group, [children] have been deeply affected by violence and political repression, whether as indirect victims of violence against family members, as witnesses to numerous traumatic events, or through their
firsthand experiences of violence and death” (1999:29). The military purposely victimized children during and following la violencia in the attempts to “destroy the seed” (or Maya indigenous children) as a means of “eliminating the possibility of rebuilding the community and of circumventing the victims’ efforts to attain justice” (REMHI 1999:31). Many children died as a result and those who did survive suffered the horrific consequences of the military’s psychological warfare, causing them to live their childhoods in a violent, unstable environment permeated with chronic fear and threat.

Children, officially identified as individuals under the age of 18 in Guatemala, comprised over 53% of the Highland population at the time of la violencia (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica 1981). As the majority among the Highland population at that time, children likely also comprised a significantly large portion of the total number of victims of la violencia. Despite the potentially massive number of child victims, however, most reports and academic studies examining the effects of Guatemala’s genocide and state-sponsored violence focus primarily on adults as victims.

Consequently, current data available regarding the number of children killed, disappeared, orphaned and terrorized during the Guatemalan genocide are limited. Total death counts and disappearances presented in published materials do occasionally include children, but the number of child victims is merely estimated at best. General orphan tallies provide a case in point. The number of children who were orphaned as a result of the deaths or disappearances of one or both parents during the civil war and particularly during la violencia at the hands of the military and Civil Patrollers is commonly presented as an estimate ranging anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000 in most published materials (e.g., Afflitto and Jesilow 2007:2; Davis 1988:11; Green 1999:4; Jonas
While data regarding child victims remains limited and generalized, there have been two initial key efforts made to recognize children as a specific social group of victims of *la violencia*.

The REMHI and CEH truth commission reports are the two primary sources of data offering some explicit information on children’s experiences and the effects of *la violencia* on children as a specific social group within Guatemala. Based on the collection and analyses of survivor testimonies, the REMHI report reveals that over 17% of the victims who provided testimony for the report spoke about children under the age of 17 as victims and over half of those child victims were under the age of 14 at the time of *la violencia* (1998d:483-484). Similarly, the CEH truth commission report details that 18% of the violations of human rights and violence reported in the witness testimonies were committed against children under the age of 18 (1999b:317-318, 1999c:58). This statistic indicates that one out of every five victims identified in the testimonies was a child at the time of *la violencia*.

The CEH report provides further general statistics regarding the victimization of children during the genocide. According to the report, 20% of the total number of reported victims of indiscriminate executions and 11% of the total number of disappeared victims were children. Over 14% of the victims subjected to torture and inhumane treatment, and 60% of the displaced people who perished while fleeing the country were children as well (1999c:59). Furthermore, approximately 27% of female victims who were raped and sexually abused during the genocide were girls under the age of 17, indicating that nearly one in every three victims of sexual violence was a minor. Of the

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2 The REMHI report notes that 8% of the individuals who provided testimony for the report were children under the age of 14 at the time of *la violencia* (1998a:81). The CEH report does not indicate what percentage of individuals providing testimony were children at the time of *la violencia*.
total number of minor female victims of sexual violence, 70% were between the ages of 13 and 17, 22% between the ages of 6 and 12, and 8% of the victims were little girls under the age of 5 (CEH 1999c:59, 66). Furthermore, analyses of witness testimonies determined that 16% of the total number of victims whom the military (in 96% of the cases) unlawfully detained or held against their will with no formal charges consisted of children (CEH 1999c:70-71).

While lacking further statistical data, the REMHI report does provide some additional general findings regarding child victims. It notes that of the massacres recorded in the testimonies, over half of them included witness reports of the collective murder of children (1998a:82). However, the actual total number of child victims in those massacres is undetermined. The REMHI report also concludes that an estimated 86,000 children identified as victims by witnesses who provided testimony were directly affected in some way by the genocide and that over 50% of them were orphaned due to the murder, death or disappearance of one or both parents (1998d:485). The REMHI truth report, similar to the CEH report, likewise acknowledges that the genocide created a significant number of orphaned and homeless children, especially among the Mayan populations, but does not offer specific data regarding the total number of children orphaned during that period (CEH 2004:26, 1999d:193).

The REMHI and CEH truth reports may only offer minimal statistics regarding child victims, but both reports highlight the fact that the military did, indeed, use various forms of violence specifically targeted at children. Eye-witness accounts and soldiers’ own testimonies verify that the military indiscriminately and commonly killed numerous children because children had greater difficulty fleeing and were an easy target. Many
children who did not become targets of indiscriminate killings were later murdered, became lost or simply died during massive displacements. The REMHI report furthers that “[t]he extreme hardship associated with persecution and flight into the hills or into exile caused rampant disease and death among children” (1999:34).

In addition to indiscriminate killings and death via displacement, the military commonly threatened and tortured children in order to elicit information and to terrorize their families and communities. Some children survived the torture, but many others perished. The military also forced older children into the Civil Patrols and into military service where they were frequently required to murder fellow community members. The military commonly abducted younger children in order to give them over to families (mainly of the higher ranking military officers and soldiers) who used them as indebted servants. Children conceived during rape by military soldiers or Civil Patrollers were shunned and stigmatized by family members. Lastly, the military frequently forced many children to witness massacres so that they would tell of the atrocities they saw to others in surrounding communities as a means of spreading terror and fear among other inhabitants of the Highlands (CEH 1999c:70-80: REMHI 1998). While the REMHI and CEH truth reports offer limited statistical reporting on child victims and survivors, they both effectively demonstrate and validate that children, as a social group, also were deliberate victims—both directly and indirectly—of la violencia.

The REMHI and CEH truth reports provide critical preliminary data and insight that serve as a foundation for further understanding the life experiences of child victims during and following la violencia. The task now is to expand this work, gathering information directly from the child survivors themselves who are now in their 20s, 30s
and 40s. This is especially vital as the total number of children who were directly and indirectly affected by the genocide (which is likely to number in the hundreds of thousands) remains a mere estimate and specific details regarding their particular experiences is often omitted from academic work and publications that explicitly discuss victims of *la violencia* (e.g., Fischer and Hendrickson 2003: 66-67; Jonas 2000:24; Nelson 1999:9; Schirmer 1998:1; Warren 1993:25, etc.). In order to address the current lacuna of information regarding the experiences of children during and following *la violencia*, I now present the experiences and perspectives of the 20 orphan participants in my research project who grew up in an environment infused with the chaos of genocide.

**Orphan Experiences during *la violencia***

Current research and information regarding children’s experiences during and following *la violencia* may be lacking, but it is clear from the general research that exists that those who did survive that brutal era during their childhoods experienced emotional trauma and distress. When I first arrived at the *Hogares* in October of 1994, it took little time to realize that many of the war orphans who were in their adolescence at the time were suffering from emotional distress that could not be attributed simply to general teenage angst. Even in the first several weeks after I arrived and had such limited Spanish language skills, it became apparent that the teenage orphans at the *Hogares* were struggling with memories and emotions born of their earlier traumatic childhood experiences. In my first year as a volunteer at the home, I quickly realized that many orphans experienced emotionally difficult days on the anniversary of their parents’ deaths. Others demonstrated heart-wrenching sadness on special days such as their own birthdays or schools events because their deceased parents or other family members could
not be present. However, it was not just on anniversaries or special occasions that I observed the teenage orphans displaying aspects of intense emotional distress. In fact, it was common on any given day to encounter at least one orphan having a particularly emotionally difficult day because of their experiences during and following la violencia.

The older orphans I worked with when I was initially a volunteer at the Hogares commonly showed signs of emotional distress throughout the year. Sixteen-year-old Julio would often nervously wring his hands over and over while he spoke quickly and rocked back and forth in a feverish pace for no apparent reason. Julio (whose father was disappeared when he was a young child) would work himself up into such an anxious state that we (the tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers) had a difficult time calming him down. It was likely that Julio was experiencing panic attacks, but no official diagnosis was ever made at the time as mental health services were simply unheard of in rural Guatemala, especially since the country was still technically at war. We, as untrained personnel, would try our best to help calm and soothe Julio by talking with him and assuring him that everything was okay and that he would always be supported by the Hogares community. However, Julio’s anxious episodes continued to occur frequently throughout the time he lived at the Hogares.

In another instance, 17-year-old Yohana would frequently begin hyperventilating for no discernible reason, which often escalated to the level of nearly passing out. While uncertain of what would provoke her attacks, the volunteers and staff would quickly jump to her aid, offering her home remedies and eventually a brown paper sack with which to breathe and restore normal respiration. Yohana’s attacks would often come on the tail-end of some sort of general emotional experience such as talking about the past, fighting
with other orphan girls about some small disagreement or describing some past event that
would then trigger past memories.

One of the most poignant moments that will forever remain in my memory is when
we, the volunteers, took a group of teenage girls to Guatemala City in 1995 to stay in the
Casa Madre (central Mother House) of the Catholic sisters who operate the Hogares. We
decided to conduct a weekend retreat for the girls to work with them on issues of self-
esteeem and future aspirations. We agreed that a weekend retreat just for the girls would
be the most effective way to reach them as it became apparent that whenever we had the
teenagers (both female and male) together at the Hogares, the girls would background
themselves and would never fully participate or speak up in front of the boys. In an effort
to focus solely on the teenage girls in an environment that was more comfortable and
conducive for addressing the issues that were important to them, we created a weekend
self-esteem building retreat customized to their interests and particular needs.

All was going well the first day of the retreat until 17-year-old Carmen left the room
during one of the sessions in which we were addressing what the girls felt were their
strengths and talents. Carmen sat on a set of stairs adjacent to the outdoor room and
began to rock back and forth incessantly. The other girls alerted us immediately that
something was wrong because Carmen would not respond to them when they called out
to her. She simply sat and rocked back and forth as she stared blankly into the distance.
As soon as we volunteers went to check on her, Carmen’s eyes rolled back into her head
and she passed out cold. We spent the next 20 minutes trying everything to bring her
back to consciousness. In a panic, we took Carmen to a hospital just down the street.
After several hours, Carmen regained consciousness, but the doctors had absolutely no
explanation for why she had passed out. Even after a panel of blood tests, there was no answer. The doctors simply stated that she likely suffered from some emotional trauma that was brought to the surface by activities that addressed feelings and emotions.

Carmen’s diagnosis remains a mystery; however, the event left a poignant impression on me. At the time, I was only remotely aware of what orphans had experienced as children. Over time and as my Spanish language skills improved, orphans spoke more openly with me about their past experiences related to the genocide and the distress they felt those experiences had caused them. These conversations eventually developed into an ongoing dialogue that has lasted for more than 17 years. Through orphans’ experiences and perspectives, I have gained a much deeper sense of and appreciation for what they have lived through not only during but also following la violencia. Through the relationships forged in their adolescence and maintained over nearly two decades, orphans have taught me about the extent to which they have felt and in some cases, continue to feel tremendous trauma and loss because of the genocide. I now present an overview of orphans’ experiences and perspectives regarding their personal experiences with the terror of the genocide in order to relay what they have been through and to illustrate just how much they have overcome at this point in their adult lives.

Orphans’ Childhood Experiences Prior to Living at the Hogares

The profiles of Mario, Debora, Esteban, Juliana and Juana presented in Chapter 3 demonstrate that at a very young age, war orphans commonly faced the traumatic loss of one or both of their parents. Mario and Julietta recall their parents being taken from their house never to be seen again. Debora and Juana both lost a parent to kidnappings as well, but do not recall the events because they were simply too young to remember what had
happened. Esteban does remember the deaths of both of his parents who did not die directly from the genocide, but who he believes were indirect victims who had to endure emotional suffering common in that tumultuous era. The profiles demonstrate that orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma and loss varied in both intensity and content, but that their experiences were extremely distressing overall. The following presents a summary of the particular early childhood experiences with genocide of the 20 orphan participants in my research project.

Of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, two had both of their parents murdered and disappeared during la violencia and eight had one parent (typically the father) murdered and disappeared. Four of the 10 orphans whose parents were murdered and disappeared during the genocide clearly recall the events that led up to and included their parents’ kidnappings. As demonstrated in the profiles chapter, Mario and Juliana both remember when their parents were taken from their homes. Natalia, now 31 years old, also recalls some of the events that led up to the massacre of her village in the Ixil region, which ultimately led to her parents’ murders and disappearances. She remembers being transported to a military base in a helicopter. She was kept at the military camp from the age of roughly 4 and was cared for by one of the women who cooked for the soldiers at the camp. The same woman, whom Natalia came to call her foster mother, eventually snuck Natalia out of the military camp four years later and brought her to live in the Hogares where she could go to school and live in peace. In our interview, Natalia declined to go into detail about her early childhood experience partly because we have talked about it many times before in the past and partly because she did not want to revisit those memories, a decision I respected. When asked what type of
effect *la violencia* has had on her life, however, Natalia responds, “I don’t even know how to respond…well, materially, the loss of home and family….because there are children without homes, without the possibility of having an education.”

Sheni, now 28 years old, remembers only some of the events that led up to her father’s murder and disappearance. Sheni is the second of three children born in San José Poaquil during *la violencia*. Her parents were living in their father’s family home when their house was raided and their father was dragged away. They never saw him again. With her father no longer present, Sheni’s family was forced to find a new place to live as her paternal relatives could no longer afford to support them. Sheni also elected not to go into further detail about her father’s disappearance or the events that she witnessed as a small child because she wanted to focus on other events in her life, but she did share her opinion regarding what type of effect she thinks *la violencia* has had more generally on war orphans,

Many of the orphans continue to be traumatized because they witnessed [violence] in the flesh, whereas my situation was a little less intense because I was still small and we didn’t understand everything that was going on.

The remaining six orphans whose parents were murdered and disappeared during *la violencia* state that they were too young to remember any details about the actual kidnappings. Thus, their early childhood memories consist not of the actual events that led to their parents’ deaths and disappearances, but of the consequences that immediately followed for their families. These memories are vivid and equally distressing for orphans. Debora and Juana, whose experiences were presented in Chapter 3, speak about how their families were left with nothing—no material goods, no home and no sense of security. They also talk about the grave impact that the disappearances had on their remaining
parent and siblings. In Debora’s case, her father turned to alcohol. For Juana, the stress of her mother working hard to maintain her family was distressing not only for her but also for her siblings who were also required to work to support the family even though they were still young children.

Debora and Juana are not alone in their experiences with distress occurring in the aftermath of losing a parent. Sofia (age 28\(^3\)), whose mother tía Chenta was featured in Chapter 1, was almost two years old when soldiers stormed her family home one evening, only to drag her father out of the house and shoot him point blank outside in the patio area. Sofia does not remember anything from that evening, but memories of her mother’s suffering are vivid and ever-present. She shares,

> Well, for me it is so sad because I lost my dad and my uncles…two brothers of my mom and one brother of my dad and also some distant relatives....We spent much of the time (with my sister) sad because we stayed home alone and my mom looked for work so that she could feed us every day. …We didn’t receive much love from my mom because she had to work. She couldn’t be with us to feed us or clothe us. I saw other children who had parents and they were content. I didn’t have a dad, I didn’t have toys, I couldn’t spend time with my dad and that has resulted in a lot of resentment, which has greatly affected me.

Oscar (age 29) also was too young to remember the actual events that led to his father’s kidnapping and disappearance. He was only three years old when his father was dragged from their home one evening by men in uniforms and ski masks. One of six children, Oscar (brother to Juana featured in Chapter 3) remembers how his family struggled after his father (the household primary provider) disappeared. He recalls,

> I remember some things because they had an impact, some events but not everything. The truth is that I do not remember how it was that they kidnapped my dad. No, I don’t remember anything. For me, it was as if I hadn’t existed when

\(^3\) When the age of an orphan or peer is noted in parenthesis throughout this chapter, the age listed signifies the age of the individual at the time they participated in the ethnographic interview. Each person participated in at least one ethnographic interview that was conducted during fieldwork, which began in May 2007 and ended in May 2008.
it happened. So, when they kidnapped my dad, we were forced to abandon the place where we lived and we moved here to the outskirts of Santa Apolonia. Therefore, we lived here for some time, maybe about two years or so, all six children and my mom and I remember that we, my sister and another brother, we always stayed home and our three oldest brothers always had to go out to work and my mom also had to go out to work….I remember it was so difficult.

While some orphans had one or both parents murdered and disappeared during *la violencia*, many other orphans lost parents who unexpectedly died because of suicide or illness, which this group of orphans deems an indirect consequence of the genocide. Of the 20 orphans who participated in my project, six were orphaned due to one or both parents’ death from suicide or illness. Esteban, whose life experiences were presented in Chapter 3, lost his father who committed suicide. His mother also died as a result of a lethal combination of alcoholism and a battle with an unknown illness. Esteban attributes his father’s suicide to the fact that he was a military soldier who Esteban believes was deeply angered and disturbed by what he saw and was asked to do on the behalf of the military. Esteban explicitly identifies his father as an “indirect victim,” but a victim nonetheless of *la violencia*. Esteban ascribes his mother’s death to the general chaos of the environment and the bitter struggles between family members, which he views as only loosely connected but still associated with the genocide. Esteban’s parents may not have died directly in the violence, but the distress and sense of loss their deaths caused is still significant for him and made his earlier childhood experience extremely difficult. Esteban’s older sister Noemi (age 34), who also participated in my research project, similarly remembers her childhood before living at the *Hogares* as one imbued with great distress and loss. She notes,

Generally, as a child I was a bit neglected because my mom had problems with alcohol, so yes, I was a bit neglected, but at the same time, I also had to mature faster because I had to care for my two younger siblings.
Nidia (age 27) also lost her mom to an illness during the height of *la violencia*. Nidia has no idea whether her mother’s illness had any connection to the genocide, and surviving relatives have not provided her with any further clarification. *Hogares* official records reveal that her mother died of an attack of colic. Though an actual diagnosis of her mother’s fatal illness remains a mystery, Nidia clearly recalls her mother’s death. She explains,

I remember it very well because I was already older….I became an orphan because of my mother. My mom died of an illness when I was five years old. Afterwards, I went to live with my grandma for a time….Everything we had in the house was scarce and rationed, whereas in the *Hogares* everything was provided. My home was very poor.

Cris (age 26) is another orphan participant who lost his father to an illness. The official enrollment records at the *Hogares* records indicate that Cris was brought to the home because his father had died of cirrhosis of the liver and his mother had abandoned him sometime later. The Catholic sisters at the *Hogares* think that his father’s illness could have been caused by alcoholism, but no further details were provided by relatives when Cris was enrolled. From their work within various Highland communities, the Catholic sisters note that alcoholism became all too common during and following *la violencia* for many adults who used alcohol to anesthetize themselves in order to deal with the pain of losing family members and of suffering from the terror of the genocide themselves. As a result, many children were sent to live at the *Hogares* because one or both parents died of alcohol poisoning or cirrhosis of the liver. Cris has no idea if his father’s death was either directly or indirectly related to the genocide, but he does know that his father’s death has left him with many unanswered questions. It has also left him feeling little connection with his extended family. He elaborates,
I don’t know what happened and even today, I don’t even know my uncles. I
don’t know who they are. I didn’t know anything of them and I don’t have a
connection with them or know if one of them has died or not. The truth is that I
don’t know anything…For example, with my dad, I never knew him. Sometimes
I think about it and wonder, “What was his name?” Maybe he died in the
violence…because nobody will tell me about it. Even today, no one has ever said
to me, “Look, your dad was like this and this.” Nobody. Not even my own brother
because he at least…lived with my dad, but maybe he doesn’t want to hurt me by
telling me about it. To this very day, he has told me nothing. I don’t know. I don’t
know anything about his history. And my mother doesn’t know either. I have
asked her about my dad and she never tells me anything because perhaps she
doesn’t want to say anything…she doesn’t want to mention anything about why
he is not here, but, yes, it is difficult to be without him.

Yohana (age 29) lost her father to illness after having been abandoned by her mother
at a very young age. She does not recall her mother abandoning her, but Yohana does
remember her father and was told that he died from problems with convulsions. The
Hogares’ records simply state that he died and her mother had abandoned her. In recent
years, Yohana was able to reconnect with an extended family member who shed some
light on what actually happened to her father. Yohana shares,

[W]hen I was small, I was in the Petén with my dad, not with my mom. They say
that my mom, since the time that I was very small (perhaps around two years old)
had left me with my dad. So, my dad was in charge and took me around from here
to there with him. That’s how my dad was. Well, they say that my dad had a case
of convulsions. I don’t understand why that happened to him. When he had to go
to work—he went to his parcel of land to work—they say that he carried me on
his shoulders, but that he had to cross a river. This is what they tell me. He had to
cross the river in order to get to his parcel of land. So, one of those times, he fell
into the river and died.

Many other children during or immediately following la violencia were also orphaned
because they were abandoned by parents for a variety of reasons that may or may not
have been directly linked to the genocide. Among the 20 orphan participants in my
research project, four were enrolled in the Hogares because they were abandoned by one
or both of their parents. Lina (age 28) was just a little girl when she was abandoned by
both of her parents. According to the Catholic sisters at the Hogares, Lina was left at a small Highland hospital and no further information regarding her family or natal community was provided. Lina became a ward of the state and the state simply transferred custody of her to the Hogares when she arrived in 1986. The Hogares’ records indicate that she was likely born in a small hamlet of the department of Sololá, which was located directly in the path of the most intense counterinsurgency “ scorched earth offensive” during la violencia. While no direct link between la violencia and Lina’s abandonment can be made or confirmed, the Catholic sisters maintain that it is highly likely that her parents were either threatened or murdered (she may have been brought to the hospital by unrelated community members at the time) and that she was brought to the hospital in order to save her life. Lina has no idea why she was abandoned and still feels the pain of not having parents. She reflects,

Memories of my parents, I have none. Who knows what happened? I know nothing about them. Nothing….I was left in a hospital and from that hospital, they transferred me over to the Catholic sisters in Guate [the capital], in zone 2 and from there, they brought me here….All I know is that I came here and they took care of me.

Medelin (age 28) and her sister, Jacki (age 30) arrived at the Hogares at the ages of 10 and 11 years old, respectively. They had been abandoned by their mother and left only with their father. The reason their mother abandoned them has never been made clear to Medelin or Jacki, but each both contend that it likely had little to do with the genocide since their natal community, located in the northernmost tropical region of Petén, was located far from the central Highlands were the counterinsurgency campaign was most intense during la violencia. It is through a relative that their father, who no longer had the resources to care for his three young children (including his youngest son), had heard
about the *Hogares* and made the decision to send his children there so that they could
have food, shelter and an education, which he could no longer provide them. Even though
their mother’s abandonment is not necessarily linked to *la violencia*, it has had a lasting
effect on their lives, especially for Medelin. She shares,

> My mom and dad separated and for my dad, it was supposedly very difficult to
take care of us. So, because of financial resources [we came to the *Hogares*]. My
grandparents also could not maintain us because of little financial resources….It
was not a good situation because my other cousins or family members would look
at us with pity and say, “Oh, their mom abandoned them!” So, they made us feel a
certain way as if we were responsible for it or that we weren’t any good because
we were naughty…..[M]y mom left. She left. I have never overcome that….It still
affects me and I blame her for all the bad things that have happened in my life.

Jacki describes herself as being less bitter about being abandoned by her mother than
her sister and understands why her father sent them, along with her little brother, to live
at the *Hogares*. She also explicitly identifies their orphan situation as unrelated to *la
violencia*. Jacki explains,

> [M]y mom abandoned us and the money that my dad earned was not enough to
pay for our food, education and for someone to take care of us. In that time, my
grandma and grandpa were very sick and that’s why they couldn’t take care of us
either. A woman who initially took care of us was charging more than my dad
earned at the time….In our case, I feel that *la violencia* was not the problem that
caused this to happen to us. It was the separation of my mom and dad or that was
the biggest blow because although [my dad] loved us, he had to leave us. It
certainly was the best decision that he could have made and it wasn’t because of
him that we came to the *Hogares*, but because he had no other way to be able to
best educate us.

Miguel (age 33) was already 13 years old when he was enrolled in the *Hogares*. His
father had abandoned his family just a year prior to Miguel’s enrollment. One of six
children, Miguel remembers his father, but does not understand why his father suddenly
abandoned him, his five siblings (including an infant sister) and his mother. With their
father gone, Miguel’s family had no place to go. Their father’s family, who lived in San
Martín Jilotepeque, could no longer support them, especially since they resided in one of the hardest hit regions during la violencia. Miguel’s mother took her children with her as she tried to find work. After nearly a year of searching, Miguel’s mother found employment with the Hogares itself and was allowed to bring her youngest four children along to live with her at the home as well. All four of Miguel’s youngest siblings were severely malnourished by the time they arrived at the Hogares. In fact, they were so malnourished that just a short time after arriving, the Catholic sisters invited Miguel and his remaining siblings to live at the Hogares as well. However, for their youngest sibling the care and resources provided at the Hogares came too late. Miguel describes,

My dad abandoned us. My mom began working at the Hogares and my little sister, the youngest sibling I had living at the home, died and there was a wake. I came to the wake and stayed at the home from that moment on with my mom who stayed working at the Hogares.

In addition to losing one or both parents either directly or indirectly in the genocide, orphan participants experienced one major childhood event distinct from what their peers had to face. Unlike their peers, the 20 orphan participants were brought to and enrolled in the Hogares where they lived for the remainder of their childhoods instead of living with family members. Even peers who lost a parent in the genocide were able to stay with their surviving family members, including both immediate and extended relatives. Orphans in my project, on the other hand, were brought to a strange and initially intimidating place that for some was located quite a distance from their natal communities. The initial transition to living at the Hogares was difficult for most orphans and the distress of that transition remains vivid in their memories. Of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, only three of them remember the transition to the Hogares as a generally happy event. Esteban, presented Chapter 3, was ecstatic to arrive
and have his first pair of shoes. He recalls having lots of kids to play with and having his very own bed. Juana, also featured Chapter 3, similarly had an easier transition because her own mother was already working at the Hogares, allowing Juana to permanently become a part of an already familiar environment and to remain with her mother on a daily basis. Carlos (age 28) was living in the streets with his mom prior to being enrolled in the home and equally found the transition to living at the Hogares as a much welcomed change. He shares,

It was a different world when I arrived to live in Santa. I had been living for a short time in the parish house at first. So, the Hogares was a different environment than the one in which I lived with my mom, sometimes living in the street and there [at the parish] it was a bit more comfortable. Then I arrived at the Hogares, it was in Casa 2 that I went to live the first day. It was different than living in the parish as well. It was not at all a sad [transition], for nothing….It was happy and it was the best because I had others to play with.

For the overwhelming majority of orphan participants, however, the transition to living at the Hogares was extremely distressing. Seventeen of 20 participants report having had a hard time adjusting not only on the first day that they arrived but also in the days and months that followed. In Chapter 3, Mario, Debora and Julietta all share the difficulties they had being suddenly left at the Hogares and trying to adjust to a new life there. The distress of the transition is also evident in many of the other orphans’ reflections on their initial arrival and subsequent weeks of adjustment to life at the Hogares. Four additional orphans reflect,

It was the saddest day of my life. Truthfully, we were some of the first children to arrive at the Hogares, but I am never going to forget it. At the time, I didn’t want to stay. Yes, truthfully it was very, very difficult for me. I remember that I didn’t eat for I don’t know how many days (Oscar, age 29).

What was most difficult was at night because I slept with my grandma and then I arrived at the Hogares completely alone and had to sleep alone in my own bed. That made me uncomfortable (Nidia, age 27).
Well, I arrived and it was a somewhat strange place for me, definitely. I had never even left my house or had been anywhere and at that time when I arrived, I found it so strange, its location, everything. It was a strange place I had never known before. It was difficult. That was difficult and it was hard to accept something that is not from within the family. It was so difficult (Cris, age 26).

The first few days, the first year, yes, it was difficult! I didn’t know anything, not even my family…I knew nothing (Lina, age 28).

Most orphans say that they understand why they were enrolled in the Hogares. They recognize that surviving family members did not have the economic resources at the time to be able to raise them once their parents had either been murdered, died or abandoned them. However, the drastic shift to a strange new living situation was difficult for most and the transition to the Hogares itself was yet another significantly distressing event that orphans associate with their childhoods.

The experiences presented by orphan participants clearly demonstrate that distress played a significant role in the early life experiences of Guatemalan children living in the Highlands. Working as a volunteer with orphans over 17 years ago, I quickly became aware that the distress of earlier childhood experiences related to the genocide was ever-present in orphans’ lives even in adolescence at the time. However, orphans were not the only children to experience tremendous trauma and distress caused by la violencia. Their peers also grew up in the same era of brutal violence, chaos and terror. Thus, in order to fully understand orphans’ distinct experiences, it is imperative to understand what life was like for child survivors, in general, who may not have lost family members in the genocide and were not permanently separated from them in early childhood. To achieve this aim, I now turn to the specific experiences of the 20 peer participants who grew up primarily in the town of Santa Apolonia.
Peers’ Childhood Experiences in Santa Apolonia and its Hamlets during la violencia

Even during the most brutal period of the genocide, inhabitants of the town of Santa Apolonia characterized their community as tranquilo (peaceful) in comparison to the towns and villages in the surrounding regions that experienced extremely violent events (e.g., San José Poaquil, Quiché, San Martín Jilotepeque, etc.). Santa Apolonia, one of the smallest municipalities in the Highlands, has never had its own police force or official means of enforcing laws. Instead, townspeople have worked together for generations to try to keep their community safe by monitoring who passes through town and keeping an eye on each other’s properties. Santa Apolonia is a relatively small town (fewer than 5,000 residents) and has consisted of a network of several families that have known each other for generations. During la violencia, the townspeople of Santa Apolonia were able to maintain some sense of security even amidst the chaos of the counterinsurgency campaign that was at full-force in the surrounding mountains and valleys. Perhaps due to its small size, its location just two kilometers off of the Pan-American Highway (making it more difficult to serve as a “hiding” place for soldiers or guerrilla combatants), its relative lack of resources as an impoverished municipality or some combination of all of these elements, Santa Apolonia was not a particular target for either the military or the guerrilla forces during la violencia.

The peers who went to school with and in many cases were childhood friends of orphans participating in my research project recognize the general security and peacefulness that existed in their community during la violencia. Out of the 20 peers interviewed for this research project, 16 were born and raised in either the town proper or in one of Santa Apolonia’s immediately adjoining hamlets. Overwhelmingly, the 16 peers
for whom Santa Apolonia is their natal community agree that the town was a safer and more peaceful place during la violencia. For example, in answering the question of what was advantageous about growing up in Santa Apolonia, two of the 16 peers share,

[W]e are very united. Perhaps here we are not only more united, we are also all very close [in proximity], but in the hamlets, they are more distant, one house from the other and they can come and kill you. It’s not the same here. There is a house next door and if anyone comes here, the neighbors are around. That’s why la violencia here in the town was less intense, but the massacres happened more in the hamlets (Otto, age 33).

What I remember most is that it has always been a peaceful town…calm. The people are peaceful. Santa Apolonia has been characterized like that, for being peaceful and during the time of la violencia, neither the national police nor the army were given permission to be here….No, here there was never any encampment or any police substation….One of the advantages always was the [town’s] security (Marco, age 32).

For the four peers for whom Santa Apolonia is not their natal community, their parents made the deliberate decision to move to Santa Apolonia because of its relative safety in the middle of the highly contentious Highlands region. The peers whose families relocated to Santa Apolonia originated from some of the most violent areas in the Highlands at the time including: Quiché, a Tecpán hamlet, San Martín Jilotepeque and San José Poaquil. Two of the four peers explain how initially living in other areas during la violencia was especially harsh and brutal,

Yes, for a long time…a long time it was dangerous because we didn’t know if they would attack the house, kill someone or take people from their homes [in Quiché]….They killed my brother and brother-in-law…. They took them from the house. My brother left the house and they grabbed him and killed him, and the other left the house and they killed him just up from the house. In an instant, they killed them both….they paid no attention to who they killed. They took people. They kidnapped them and they never reappeared and oh, you would be so afraid and you would think, “They are going to kill me!” Many people fled. Many people were exiled. They left because there was so much fear here that someone would say, “They are going to kill you!” (Olivia, age 33).
I remember one morning we got up and on all of the houses of the *ladino* people [in San José Poaquil] there were death wreaths signifying that everyone had to die. They left them on all of the houses…we were still young, so we viewed them as toys, but they were death wreaths because they said that all of the people who had been left a wreath were those that they had to kill. So, it was very difficult…. It was also by chance that we were once in the market and they started entering and they were killing anyone they could. Imagine the terror of hearing someone shout, “Save yourselves if you can!” Everyone ran from one side to the other. I always remember it because it was so difficult…we lived through it and that’s why my dad brought us here…We came with only what we were wearing. Because of the army, there were many houses left empty there. Those who could, left with their families (Andrea, age 36).

Similar to the 16 peers who were born and raised in Santa Apolonia, the four peers whose families relocated to the town also perceived Santa Apolonia as a relatively peaceful community in which to live during *la violencia*. Moving to Santa Apolonia gave these families reprieve from the most brutal horrors of the genocide that they had experienced in their own natal communities. Two of the four peers observe,

[T]his is a peaceful town. Thank God you never hear of anything bad. God has blessed it….here is a town that is small, but it is a happy place. The people made rounds in the evenings. There were rounds. My dad went about in these rounds, yes, but thank God, nothing ever happened. Yes, all the people made rounds here in the town, watching over the streets because you never knew what could happen (Olivia, peer, age 33).

It was joyful for me. It was joyful because I came here to live. There wasn’t any fear. There wasn’t any violence. It wasn’t like our other hamlet where there was so much violence. When I came here to live, I began to have a life. It changed my life. So, that’s how I was no longer fearful. Here, you could go out and see what was happening in the streets (Teresa, peer, age 37).

In accordance with the experiences cited above, the literature on the period of 1978 to 1983 reveals that the town of Santa Apolonia and its adjoining hamlets remained relatively safe during *la violencia*, having never experienced a massacre, an all-out night raid by the military or public hangings (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Several peers and other townspeople talk about how they could often hear gunfire in the distance in the
evenings, but that direct combat never occurred on community terrain. Nonetheless, Santa Apolonia’s inhabitants were not insulated from the genocide. Of the 16 peers born and raised in Santa Apolonia and the surrounding hamlets, nine had one or more family members who were murdered and disappeared during *la violencia*. Without asking the peers directly\(^4\) about whether or not they lost a family member in the genocide, several of them spoke openly about what happened. For example, Otto (peer, age 33) shares,

> We are now four children. We were three boys and two girls, but right during *la violencia* I had a brother who taught classes in a [local hamlet]. He taught classes and they grabbed him. They abused him and accused him of being a guerrilla. There were three teachers. They grabbed those three teachers, so a total of four in all and the army took them away. So, the people knew that they had taken them and my father came home and brought my uncles and me together and headed out on the road. There is a road to San José Poaquil, so they left and they knew that the soldiers had to pass that way. My dad headed out with the others and saw my brother and the three others being marched down the road by the soldiers. The soldiers marched behind them. My dad saw my brother’s face and he shouted, “Save me!” Three days later it came out in the news that some dead bodies had appeared in a particular place. We realized that there was a chance that it was my brother and we headed out and arrived at the place and it was by the dental records that we could identify him. [The bodies] of the four teachers were burned. My brother was only 30 years old.

The 16 peers who were born in Santa Apolonia or an immediately adjoining hamlet lost a total of 8 family members who were murdered and disappeared during *la violencia*. Family members included grandfathers, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins. Thus, while the number of murdered and disappeared victims in Santa Apolonia may have been small in proportion to other regions and the town was characterized as relatively peaceful by its inhabitants, *la violencia* still had both direct and indirect effects on the residents of Santa Apolonia and their children.

\(^4\) I chose not to ask direct questions regarding the deaths or disappearances of family members in order to avoid causing research participants distress during and/or following the interviews. If the participants brought up such events in the context of describing what they felt *la violencia* meant within the context of Guatemalan history, I recorded it and asked follow-up questions only if the participant said it was okay to do so.
Most peers who grew up in Santa Apolonia were exposed to terror of *la violencia* via violent threats and events that occurred in the area at the time. The threats and events included occasional murders and kidnappings of other community members, military detentions, destruction of property, and nearby gunfire. Three peers explain,

It was a period when the government wanted to eliminate people they considered to be the creators of good things...because I remember that one day, [the soldiers] entered the school here in Santa to kill a teacher in the school (Otto, age 33).

They also took away families and up above from where we lived, the path that comes down from there to here, they went and detained a man. Afterwards, his dead body was found among the weeds (Julietta, age 32).

Well, I remember we were making dinner early on, but there we had a candle burning because we were afraid and the soldiers, well they arrived at our house asking for tortillas, but they said the soldiers wouldn’t do anything, but they scared us. We opened the door and they said they wouldn’t do anything, but they still scared us. So, they asked for tortillas and as they were leaving through our kitchen door, someone shot two of the soldiers. We didn’t move. We were so afraid. We didn’t do anything, I was so scared. We said, “We didn’t do anything! We took care of them!” but it scared us (Elena, age 37).

Inhabitants of Santa Apolonia and its adjoining hamlets experienced somewhat peaceful community stability during the most intense and brutal years of *la violencia*, but as the peers describe above, the town did not go without incident and was not free from the reach of the ever-present and expanding culture of fear created by the military during the civil war and subsequent genocide. Local murders, disappearances, military detention, death threats, destruction of property and gunfire all contributed to the expansive and persistent culture of fear that permeated the Highlands and even reached deeply into relatively peaceful communities such as Santa Apolonia. Thus, growing up in a culture of fear became a common experience for many children, including both orphans and their peers, not only during the era of *la violencia* but also in the years that were to follow.
Growing Up in Santa Apolonia in the Aftermath of la violencia

Most orphans enrolled at the Hogares within the first four years of its founding (from 1985 to 1988) originated from some of the most brutalized areas of the Highlands during la violencia. Coming to live in Santa Apolonia, however, did not necessarily equate to living in complete absence of violence or fear-inducing threats. The Hogares staff did their best to protect and insulate orphans from violent events and threats that continued to occur in and around Santa Apolonia in the aftermath of la violencia, but the penetrating culture of fear continued to envelope both the community and the Hogares itself. Even though the town was not a hotbed of combat or counterinsurgency activities, a long single line of soldiers frequently filed through the town to tout the military’s omnipresence and to intimidate townspeople. The presence of soldiers in Santa Apolonia was discussed by Juliana in Chapter 3 in which she notes that the soldiers often came through the town after she was enrolled in the Hogares, which frightened her immensely. When foot soldiers were not considered intimidating enough, the military drove tanks down the main road leading through the center of Santa Apolonia during the middle of the night. Such events occurred as recently as even two years before the Peace Accords were signed in late-1996 when I was a volunteer at the Hogares and witnessed such overt intimidation first hand. On at least two different occasions during my two-year volunteer term, tanks loudly rumbled through Santa Apolonia in the middle of the night, while guerrilla forces blew up telecommunication towers in the neighboring town of Tecpán.

In one particular incident in 1995, the Hogares director received word from fellow community members that the military had threatened to enter Santa Apolonia that evening in order to “weed out” any guerrilla forces that kept knocking over the local
telecommunication towers. Even though the townspeople had not seen or heard any guerrilla forces anywhere near Santa Apolonia and the towers were located away from Santa Apolonia, the military was persistent with its threat to take over the town. Within minutes of receiving word of the impending attack, the Hogares director immediately mobilized tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers to evacuate four of the eight small houses in the Hogares complex that are located on the west side of the main road that leads into the center of the town. Within 15 minutes of receiving notification, we had the 50+ children who lived on the west side evacuated and camped out in two of the classrooms located in the main concrete building on the east side of the Hogares property, which was better protected from outside threat. For a 36-hour period, the home was in complete lock-down and we (the tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers) stayed with the children in the classrooms and comforted them, while we also watched over the children who remained in the protection of the four houses located on the Hogares’ east side. The Catholic sisters kept vigil outside of the main building but behind locked gates in order to watch for any impending threat of attack. Fortunately, the military did not invade the town that evening or the next day, and a day later, the children returned to the west side houses and resumed their regular schedules, including going to the local elementary and junior high schools. However, the event was extremely distressing for the children, tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers, and was a poignant reminder of just how invasive the military’s terror-inducing tactics and resulting culture of fear had

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5 The Hogares property is roughly the size of one-half of a city block in the United States. The property is split in two with one-half of it located on the west side of the main road leading into the center of the town of Santa Apolonia and the second half located directly across on the east side of the road. Each half of the property is fully enclosed with cement block walls and locking gates to protect the children from passing traffic and any other outside intruders.
remained even years after the heightened era of the counterinsurgency campaign during
\textit{la violencia} had ended.

The peers who grew up in Santa Apolonia, while describing their town as more
peaceful during \textit{la violencia} as noted above, simultaneously remember being frightened
by public displays of dead bodies, the presence of soldiers, the threat of being monitored,
food rationing and military conscription of mostly young, indigenous males. These types
of events continued to happen even after \textit{la violencia}. Three peers explain,

When we were children and it was that time, we once went to the municipal
center and saw a lot of dead people because they had gone to the mountains to
bring them back and it was something frightening for us. So, yes, everything was
bad then (Fatima, age 32).

In that time, they came to kidnap, to murder…because I remember I was about the
size of my little girl when the soldiers passed through and my siblings said,
“They’re coming to get us and take our lives!” And we hid in the \textit{temazcal}\footnote{A \textit{temazcal} is a traditional Mayan sweatbath that locals use for bathing. It is typically a small, dome-like
adobe structure three feet tall in the middle that is located outside of the house that is warmed with heated
stones (Groark 1997).} (Laya, age, 27).

All of us had to lock ourselves in [at night] because if we didn’t lock ourselves in,
they would kill us in the street. We couldn’t go out at night during that time.
During that time after six in the afternoon and on, we had to shut off the lights and
in order to eat…we ate by candlelight. We had to measure the food because if
there was too much, they would say that perhaps we were giving food to the
guerrillas or the soldiers (Teresa, age 37).

The inhabitants of Santa Apolonia and its adjoining hamlets have depended on each
other for generations to keep their homes and community safe. Overall, the townspeople
have been relatively successful at maintaining some sense of security and calm even
during the worst period of the genocide. However, intermittent military presence and
violent events coupled with the ever-present threat of being terrorized for no apparent
reason caused the peers and their families a great deal of fear and distress that endured
well beyond la violencia. For peers, as with orphans, fear became inextricably linked with memories of their childhoods. Several of the peers elaborate,

Well here the only effect was fear. The fear, the terror that it could be your turn that night because they took away a few people here. Here no, no there wasn’t much murder, thank God, no. However, it was just this terror….Well, for me, it affected me a little because it was in the night. There was tension whenever we heard cars passing. Cars passed and the next day, everyone was frightened because they took away someone who disappeared. So, it was in this type of moment that I felt a little distressed (Nina, age 37).

They lived in fear. All of the people lived in fear with mistrust, with the terror that they were going to be murdered or as in the case here, they killed many teachers. Some never reappeared. So, all of that affected the town. There was more poverty because nobody could work because everyone was afraid to leave their homes. They didn’t have a way to earn money for food…It is awful to live in fear. Everyone lived in fear. They didn’t want to leave their villages or even go outside here in the town….When I was going to school….I saw gunfire and we, with my dad, worked up in the fields at that time and my mom worked in the school and she would always come home with such fear that something awful would happen (Dario, age 31).

Oh, it caused so much terror! So much terror and even today, many people who lived through the violence, even I realize, that some people even when they eat grilled meat, it has to be very, very well-cooked because when they see the meat and it isn’t well-done and there is a little bit of blood, it disgusts them and they can’t eat it…[T]here are people who can’t see blood because it still very much distresses them (Josue, age 29).

Nearly all orphan and peer participants characterize Santa Apolonia as having been a more peaceful community during la violencia than most any other municipality in the Highlands. While Santa Apolonia did not see large-scale combat and violence during la violencia, residents (both children and adults alike) did lose family members, witnessed violent events and lived in the persistent culture of fear that had become all too common throughout the Highlands region. The terrifying experiences that peer participants had as children with the genocide and the culture of fear it produced did affect their childhoods and continue to remain in their memories. As children, peers were exposed to horrific
events and incessant fear. Based on peers’ experiences, therefore, it is evident that children in general as a social group did suffer significant distress during and following *la violencia* even in areas that were supposedly more peaceful at the time. For Guatemala’s war orphans, however, that childhood distress was only further exacerbated by the fact that they could no longer live with their family members or remain in their natal communities and instead came to live in the *Hogares*. One can only wonder what kinds of effects these types of experiences had on children. Severe violence, brutality, loss, distress, uncertainty and fear were commonplace for children in the Highlands not only during *la violencia* but also in the years that followed. In order to examine and understand how children were affected emotionally by the genocide and terror, I now turn to orphan and peer experiences specifically with childhood trauma.

**Experiencing Childhood Trauma Caused by Genocide and State-Sponsored Terror**

In the summer of 2005, I returned to the *Hogares* in Santa Apolonia to conduct preliminary dissertation research for a five-week period. I had two goals during this phase of research. The first was to determine if the *Hogares* alumni would be interested in participating in a research project focused on their childhood experiences. The second goal was to begin gathering orphans’ reflections on their childhood experiences if they did, indeed, express an interest in participating. After meeting and talking with several of the *Hogares* alumni, I realized that they were not only overwhelmingly enthusiastic to participate in my research project but they also were excited to help me with my education\(^7\). Seeing the alumni’s overwhelmingly positive responses, I decided to go

\(^7\) During the two years that I was a volunteer at the *Hogares*, one of my primary duties was to provide homework assistance to orphans. Several orphans remarked that by participating in my research project, they could finally “return the favor” for helping them with their education when they were in junior high by now helping me with my “education.”
ahead and conduct preliminary interviews with nine of them. Through the preliminary interviews, I was able to begin asking questions that were designed to elicit whatever themes the nine orphans deemed most pertinent in their life experiences. The preliminary interview questions were general in nature and I avoided using any type of terminology or labels that could have skewed their responses or influenced their own use of terms to categorize their experiences. It was to my great surprise, therefore, when four orphans explicitly used the term “trauma” to define their early childhood experiences with distress, loss and fear. This was especially surprising as “trauma” was one of the terms I purposely avoided using so that I would not force what I thought were Western psychological concepts on orphans’ reflections of their childhood experiences. Yet, during the preliminary interviews, the use of the term “trauma” came up in several contexts as it also did in informal conversations outside of the 9 interviews. One of the questions I asked in the preliminary interviews was: Do you think that \textit{la violencia} continues to affect you in some way today? Even though each orphan was interviewed separately at a different time and location, two of the nine orphans explicitly used the term “trauma” in their responses. They stated,

Yes, because the \textbf{trauma} and violence continue. The fear is still here. If I still had my dad, my life would be better. My mom struggled so hard for her daughters. My father was the breadwinner. He had land and that’s why my life would have been better (Eva, age 27).

It affected me a bit. Sometimes I feel \textbf{traumatized}. Sometimes, when I am at home, I think about the things that have happened and I get sad and begin to cry (Sofia, age 28).

In another preliminary question, I asked the nine orphans: In your opinion, how has \textit{la violencia} affected the lives of orphans? Again, I was intrigued when two additional orphans used the term “trauma” in their responses. They stated,
In the fact that they were left without parents and those who lived through this era, the trauma of having seen how their parents were murdered or abused. What affects them most is the “why” of it all. A lot of bitterness was born in that period. Some have forgotten it and have moved forward. Others seek revenge (Nidia, age 27).

The orphans of *la violencia* suffered a lot because the orphans of *la violencia* practically lived those moments in terror from witnessing [what happened]. There are many cases in which they saw their parents murdered and family members murdered in front of them and they were left with nothing. That affects them in the long run because they are left with a trauma inside of them and they are afraid to express themselves or well, they demonstrate an action that is inappropriate, let’s say. Nothing matters to them because they saw how their parents suffered (Cristina, age 25).

Realizing that orphans, themselves, used the term “trauma” in the preliminary interviews, I decided that I would pose several trauma-related questions in the actual dissertation research interviews conducted two years later. The trauma questions were designed to follow several sets of questions focused on basic demographic background information, childhood life experiences, politics and economics. I was surprised, however, when the use of the term “trauma” consistently and frequently came up in orphans’ responses to even initial interview questions that preceded the specific trauma-related questions. For example, Nidia (age 27) responds to a question regarding what *la violencia* signifies in the political history of Guatemala by stating,

> Well, in reality it was a very difficult period, very difficult for the people because at the time, it created a lot of psychological trauma, a lot of emotional fear….The people remained or felt very discriminated against and vulnerable.

In another instance, Mario (age 29), who is featured in Chapter 3, responds to the question of whether he thinks *la violencia* and general politics in Guatemala had affected his childhood in any way by stating,
Yes, it began, why? What were the interests of the people, the reasons for it then? There were many reasons, but what was certain and what was untrue? What was certain is that yes, it affected me in my childhood because I lost my family. There was family disintegration, deaths, murders of my family members and in other cases traumas that still in this moment one cannot overcome, right? So, yes, yes, it affected me.

Further along in the interviews, I asked orphans in general: How has la violencia affected the lives of the war orphans in general? Again, two more orphans explicitly referenced trauma by responding,

Those long and gloomy histories of their pasts affect them in their behavior. They are timid, rebellious. They have suffered from trauma caused by images of the past (Sheni, age 28).

Many of them remain traumatized because they saw it in the flesh, whereas in my case, it was a little less intense because I was younger and we didn’t understand much of it (Brandon, age 28).

When asked whether orphans thought that la violencia continued affecting some of their companions from the Hogares in some way even today, several orphans again reference trauma. They reflect,

I imagined that they have lost contact and still have problems overcoming the trauma of their childhoods (Brandon, age 28).

Yes, really there are psychological traumas that they are never going to leave behind. They are never going to be able to separate themselves from them because only the person who lived through the experience is the one who can feel and understand what really happened….If someone listens to everything you have gone through, perhaps they don’t feel anything, right? The impact is not the same. It doesn’t affect them in any way, right? But someone who has lived through it and has been in such situations, well, it’s incredible because they are things one can never forget (Oscar, age 29)!

At the time that Juana Carolina was in the Hogares, they couldn’t say at all whether she did have a mom. So, the sisters didn’t know whether her mother existed. Nobody, but nobody knew. So, it was through psychological therapy that she got everything out and the psychologist through all of the therapy realized that something was affecting this child and what was affecting her was the absence of her mom because consciously she knew that she was alive and she couldn’t see her or even speak with her. Nothing. So, yes, it was a very difficult trauma…
Juana Carolina was \textit{traumatized} in this sense. The sisters found her mother. So, [Juana Caroline] had to make a decision and in the end, she decided to leave to be reunited with her mother and all of her family again, and now they live in El Rincon, all of the family live there, and Juana Carolina is now a lawyer and notary (Nidia, age 27).

Peers who participated in my research project also exhibited the tendency to spontaneously use the term “trauma” to describe the emotional distress caused by the genocide. Similar to orphan participants, several peers used the term “trauma” in the earlier sections of the ethnographic interview before I had even used the term myself to pose trauma-specific questions. For example, when I asked what \textit{la violencia} meant in the history of Guatemala, two peers offer the following responses,

The era of \textit{la violencia}, I can say, was when the Mayan people could not participate directly in the government. They were discriminated against. Therefore, for this reason the politicians that existed at that time could do whatever they wanted because they were part of the wealthy elite here. But, today what it has taught us is, what \textit{la violencia} has left us with is difficulties. For example, I have the grand task of helping my wife. She still suffers from various \textit{traumas} because she grew up without her dad and she knows very well that they killed her father in her own house. So, the work that I have before me is to teach her that in life, one can overcome many things and move forward and that God gives you the ability to triumph (Josue, age 29).

So, imagine the \textit{trauma} of always wondering if you are going to be okay….you are not going to be calm….So yes, it had a huge effect. \textit{[la violencia]} affected education. It affected the economy and caused great fear (Otto, age 33).

In another ethnographic interview, when I asked a peer whether he thought \textit{la violencia} and the politics in Guatemala had affected his childhood in some way, he spontaneously references trauma by stating,

No. No, because at the time I didn’t have to think about working, just about studying, but perhaps it could have affected my life differently. Imagine if my dad or mom had died. Then, yes, it would have been a \textit{trauma} for me and that’s what many people suffered. They suffered from the \textit{trauma} of \textit{la violencia} (Dario, age 31).
Finally, when I asked the question of whether peers thought that *la violencia* had affected the lives of war orphans in general, two peers again spontaneously use the term “trauma” in their responses. They share,

Yes, because first off, they were left without parents. Secondly, they were affected by terrible trauma for which they need help from professionals in order to move forward in life (Nina, age 37).

The loss of family members and loss caused because many people left for another country, for Mexico and that was a trauma, but more than anything, the effect was greatest for those who lost family….Because of the loss of family, I believe that many still have that trauma even though they are adults (Dario, age 31).

It is clear based on the preliminary interviews I conducted with nine orphans and on the dissertation ethnographic interviews with both orphans and their peers that, as survivors, orphans and peers themselves identify childhood distress related to *la violencia* as “trauma.” Their own consistent use of the term “trauma” to describe their earlier childhood experiences and those of other child survivors demonstrates that trauma is a personally meaningful and salient concept for conveying and understanding Guatemalan child survivors’ earlier life experiences with genocide-related psychological distress. Through the combination of personally witnessing orphans’ reactions to their emotional distress when they were teenagers and in conducting ethnographic interviews, I recognize that trauma is an important, viable and meaningful theme that is essential to examine in order to best understand child survivors’ experiences with genocide in Guatemala.

Recognizing trauma as one of the primary themes that orphans use to reflect on their childhood experiences, I specifically designated a section of the ethnographic interview to focus solely on child survivors’ personal experiences with trauma. The trauma-related section also sought to ascertain their perceptions of how trauma has affected child survivors overall and what general psychological effects it has had on child survivors in
the long-term. I now present below the findings revealed in the responses to the trauma-related questions of the ethnographic interviews in order to convey these child survivors’ perceptions of their experiences with childhood trauma caused by the Guatemalan genocide and its associated state-sponsored terror.

**Survivors’ Perceptions of their Experiences with Childhood Trauma**

In order to best understand orphan and peer personal experiences with childhood trauma, I developed six open-ended questions within the ethnographic interview that directly solicited participants’ reflections on their general perceptions of how trauma has affected other child survivors both in the short- and long-term. The questions that I posed did not in any way ask participants to provide specific details regarding their own childhood experiences. Rather, I created the trauma-related questions to elicit general information about trauma-related themes in order to threaten orphans’ or peers’ psychological wellbeing. My aim was to avoid placing participants in an uncomfortable and vulnerable emotional position that revisiting past memories of violence can cause.8

With participants’ emotional wellbeing as my primary concern, I first asked orphans and peers whether they generally thought that they had been affected in any way by one or more traumatic experiences as a child and if so, in what sort of way they believe they had been affected. Of the 20 orphan participants, 14 affirm that they had been affected by one or more traumatic experiences when they were children. Several explain,

Yes, because just seeing other children who had their dads, who gave them love and bought them little things such as toys or little trinkets. Well, for me it was so sad because I lost my dad and my uncles (Sofia, age 28).

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8 In addition to specifically avoiding questions regarding any details about particular events associated with childhood trauma, I also provided participants with contact information for a local counselor and a psychologist in the capital who agreed to assist participants with psychological therapy free of charge if any participant experienced any distress during or following the interviews caused by the interview questions or content.
Yes, especially in some situations like seeing soldiers. It really frightens me to see soldiers (Sheni, age 28).

The moment that I had to leave my family behind, well if we could have had better communication, then things would have been different, but I don’t bear any grudge against my family. Thank God, no. (Mario, age 29).

Similar to orphans, peer participants also report experiencing childhood trauma. Of the 20 peer participants, 10 confirm that they had, indeed, suffered from one or more traumatic experiences when they were children. The experiences were especially difficult for the four peers whose families fled their natal communities and moved to Santa Apolonia in search of a more peaceful living environment. As a whole, the peers also suffered childhood trauma related to the genocide as well. While the percentage of peers who identify as suffering childhood trauma was less overall than the percentage of orphans, the fact that half of the peers did experience childhood trauma demonstrates that children in the Highlands, regardless of orphan status, were exposed to violence and terror that they perceive as having directly affected their childhoods. Some of the peers respond to the question of whether they experienced childhood trauma by answering,

Yes! Yes, because of what happened to my brother and my grandfather (Otto, age 33).

Yes, because they took my mom and killed my three nieces in front of me (Teresa, age 37)!

They kidnapped my grandfather, so yes (Laya, age 27)!

Orphan and peer participants who state that they did not experience childhood trauma related to la violencia attribute the lack of trauma to their age and family circumstances. Among the six orphans who report that they did not experience childhood trauma, four of them say that they were simply too young to remember the actual events and therefore,
did not feel that they were traumatized by the tragic, violent events that did occur in their early childhoods during la violencia. Instead, these four orphans state that they felt distress and loss later on in childhood, which developed as a result of the earlier murders and disappearance of family members and from the extended economic challenges those events brought about such as the loss of property and consequent extreme poverty. In addition, two orphans who claim that they did not experience childhood trauma believe that it was because they lost a parent due to illness or were abandoned by a parent that they do not recall. As a result, neither of these two orphans felt that they were traumatized by their parents’ natural death or general abandonment.

Among the 10 peers who report that they did not experience childhood trauma, seven did not lose an immediate family member in the genocide and did not claim to have been deeply distressed from persistent state-sponsored terror. The families of these seven peers remained mostly intact during and following la violencia. Of the remaining three peers who did not identify themselves as experiencing childhood trauma, two lost a distant family member in la violencia, but did not see the actual kidnapping, and one states that he was just too young to remember anything regarding his uncles’ disappearances.

To follow up the question regarding general childhood experience with one or more traumatic events, I next asked participants if they believed that one or more experiences with childhood trauma was still affecting them in some way today. Out 20 orphans interviewed, 10 answer that they do, indeed, feel that their childhood trauma still affects them today. Several of the 10 orphans respond,

The trauma perhaps of my father, I would say, because I keep thinking about him and asking questions. What was he like? Why did it happen? I keep asking these questions because I really don’t know what the situation was about (Cris, age 26).
Quite a lot! I believe quite a lot. I have experienced so much and it still affects me in that it is hard for me to have relationships with other people. I don’t have a lot of confidence. I have very few friends here in the neighborhood. I can’t speak with just anyone about anything. I have problems developing relationships with people. I am a very difficult person in that I am not very open in the beginning to being a friend. So yes, I have problems relating with my peers. Sometimes I am affected by emotional problems that even affect my job (Esteban, age 28).

Well, sometimes, yes. Sometimes it frightens me to see a big group of men passing by because I think they have mean expressions on their face (Sheni, age 28).

Yes, because of the soldiers. I just see their uniforms and it frightens me, just seeing their weapons (Juliana, age 30).

Interestingly, among the 10 orphans who affirm that they are still affected by experiences with childhood trauma, one (Kike, age 28) responds affirmatively even though he answers negatively to the question of whether he suffered any traumatic childhood event in the first place. In responding to whether childhood trauma still affects him today, Kike states, “Well, what affects me is not having a father because his kidnapping I did not see. I didn’t see anything.” Kike’s response that he did not suffer from childhood trauma, but that he does still suffer from an experience with childhood trauma today provides a glimpse into the often confounding complexity of child survivors’ experiences with trauma both as children and now as adults.

Among the 10 orphans who express that they no longer feel that they are affected childhood trauma, five of them did not identify themselves as experiencing childhood trauma in the first place. The remaining five contend that they did experience childhood trauma, but report that they no longer feel affected by it because they have overcome it. Three of the five orphans share,

No. Not anymore because you have to adapt after that (Nidia, age 27).
Perhaps not anymore because I have already overcome it. I have already overcome it. If I would remain stuck in those memories, perhaps, but not anymore. I don’t want to think about it because it makes me sad, so it’s better not to (Yohana, age 29).

No, not anymore because I think I have overcome it (Noemi, age 34).

I also asked the 20 peer participants whether they felt that experiences with childhood trauma were still affecting them in some way today as adults. Only five respond affirmatively. One of the five peer (Laya, age 27) who lost her grandfather states, “Yes, I still think of my grandfather and what a good person he was!” The remaining four peers who respond affirmatively to this question are the same four who witnessed and experienced extreme violence in their natal communities before their families relocated to the town of Santa Apolonia. These four woman share,

Me, yes! Yes it affects me because, go figure, at least if [my dad] was still alive, I wouldn’t be going through so many hardships along with my children (Julietta, age 32).

It affected me a lot when I got together with the father of my children, but I am seeing a person who is helping me quite a lot psychologically…It is a person who gives me advice and I do the same for her with everything that remains in our minds. You say, “I am going to see the same things again!” You remain with that trauma in your head, but it is better to say, “It’s better to forget it and instead think about God” (Olivia, age 33).

I believe [it affects me] a little, ma’am, because as they say, it is a little difficult to forget it (Andrea, age 36).

Yes! It affects me a lot because sometimes they say, “Wow, go figure, they killed such and such a person.” How that frightens me because it’s as if it is all going to start up again and all that has already happened to me because I saw it all. That’s why I have problems with nervios9 (Teresa, age 37).

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9 Nervios (nerves) is defined as "powerful idiom of distress used by Latinos from a variety of Caribbean, Central and South American countries. It is a way through which people express concerns about physical symptoms, emotional states, and changes both in the family and in the broader society" (Guarnaccia and Farias 1988:1223).
Five peers, who initially answer that they did experience childhood trauma, state that they are no longer affected by those experiences today. Curiously, these five peers did not provide any explanation for why they no longer felt any effects of childhood trauma. They all simply answer, “No,” or “Not anymore.”

In order to better understand both orphan and peer experiences with childhood trauma, I next asked participants about their experiences with trauma as adults. My aim was to determine whether there was any type of common link between those who suffered childhood trauma and those who suffered from trauma as an adult. To achieve this aim and without requesting specific details, I asked participants if they thought that they had experienced one or more traumatic events in adulthood that they view as still affecting them in some way today. Of 20 orphan participants, only two respond stating that they did, indeed, suffer from a traumatic experience as an adult. The first to respond has had a difficult marriage involving violent domestic abuse, bitter confrontations with in-laws and custody battles over her two small children. She reflects,

Oh, yes! In my life with my spouse...my life as a couple is something that when I got married and I first came to know him, it was an illusion that in the end never came to be. It was all to the contrary, we could say, in that all that I had hoped of him and what he had hoped of me, well...I had never had a house, a home, a family. I dreamt of having those things with him, that we would form a family and live together with our children and that we would have something of our own and be able to say, “This is my house; these are my things.” But, all of it, as I told you, all was to the contrary. So, this is practically a trauma too (Nidia, age 27).

The second orphan to respond that he has experienced trauma as an adult was Esteban (age 28), who was featured in Chapter 3. Esteban’s experience with trauma as an adult stems directly from the near fatal situation in which he was robbed and shot in the street. He responds,
It affected me greatly—the accident, the assault I experienced. They shot me. That affects me every minute. Believe me… I don’t like to think of it because I’m alive, but I almost died.

Similar to orphan experiences with trauma in adulthood, the peers generally have experienced little trauma as adults overall. Of the 20 peer participants, only two report that they have experienced trauma as adults. One of the two peers attributes it to his journey north. Josue (age 29) made his way to the U.S. border in 2005 and crossed illegally under harrowing circumstances. After successfully crossing the border, he was detained and held in slavery-like conditions by the men (called coyotes) who helped him cross. The men had Josue locked up in the evenings over several months until he worked hard enough and earned enough money to pay their exorbitant “crossing” fee. Josue explains,

I really wanted to go to the United States. Three years of planning went by figuring out what I was going to do. Suddenly, the opportunity arrived to go there. They advised me about it on a Thursday and the following Tuesday I left. I didn’t waste any time. I left and traveled quickly and traveled quickly. I went as fast as I could. The problem that I had was that I couldn’t pay the fee they charged me to cross fast enough. It was so much money that they charged. So, the people there [in the U.S.] had me locked up. So, they told me, “Until you finish paying, you aren’t leaving.” That’s what they told me. When I went, they charged forty thousand Quetzales\(^{10}\). Now the cost is rising to fifty thousand. So, I didn’t have enough money to pay that, but when I thought of my children and wife, it made me work even harder.

The second peer to report experiencing trauma in adulthood has had a tumultuous relationship with her spouse. Olivia (age 33) had four children with her husband, but her husband left her and their children for a mistress in a distant village after their youngest was born. Olivia was left with no home, few personal belongings and four children to

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\(^{10}\) At the time that Josue left for the United States in 2005, one Guatemalan Quetzal was worth roughly US$.13. The total cost of his passage (45,000 Guatemalan Quetzales or Q45,000) would have been equivalent to US$5,894. This amount was over 23 times more than the average monthly salary of Q1,891 for individuals living in the Santa Apolonia region in 2005 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social 2010).
raise on her own. The experience has been extremely distressful for her. Without providing details, Olivia simply answers the question regarding adult trauma by stating, “Well, yes, because of the problems I have had with the father of my children.”

Broadening the scope of questions focusing on both orphan and peer experiences with childhood trauma and distress overall, I next asked whether they felt that the war, or the period of la violencia in particular, still affects them psychologically in some way even today. Among the 20 orphan participants, nine answered that it does. The majority of the nine respondents directly link la violencia with the psychological effects of losing family members who perished. Others also note that losing connections with surviving family members is also a major factor this group of orphans was brought to live at the Hogares and could no longer live with their surviving family members. They also identify lingering fear as resulting in long-term psychological effects. Responding to the question about experiencing general psychological effects, several orphans answer,

Yes, the genocide affected me indirectly...psychologically I would say...psychologically I was affected by the war in an indirect way, as a consequence of my parents’ death (Mario, age 29).

Well, for the same reason, for not having my dad. In addition, for missing out on living together with my brothers and mom (Kike, age 28).

The fear remains but little by little, it’s not that we are erasing it but that we are setting it aside (Sheni, age 28).

For peers, the terror of the genocide has also had lasting psychological effects on their lives. Of 20 peer participants, nine respond that they do believe that la violencia continues to affect them psychologically in some way today. Two of the nine respondents mention under-achievement and loss of trust in others as causes of the continued psychological effects on their adult lives. Seven of the peers, however, attribute persistent
fear caused by the genocide and state-sponsored terror as the underlying source of continued, long-term psychological effects even in adulthood. Several peers relate,

Well, it’s as if it chills you. Yes, it chills you as if you were bathing in cold water. You tremble from fear because it frightens you (Marisol, age 29).

la violencia is a scar that you can’t get rid of….I remember some of what happened and those older than me remember even more….I believe the memories are still with us (Manuel, age 30).

Yes, it still does because we live in fear. We live in fear because you can’t go out and travel about without saying, “They are going to assault me; they are going to kill me” (Olivia, age 33).

Yes, the fear of them killing you or being affected by la violencia still exists….I think what’s happening in Guatemala now is for the same reason that I told you in that the guerrillas, what were they going to do once the peace [accords] were signed? What were the soldiers who only knew how to kill going to do? All of these people, what were they going to be after it all? They are the ones who now go about as drug traffickers. All of these people that came out of the peace signing, they signed the peace in a book, in a notebook, a piece of paper and yet, the same violence continues. They are never up to anything good. You watch television and there are only dead people and more dead people. Nothing wonderful is ever televised, that somewhere something good is happening. Nothing! Just dead people. Yes, only blood (Dario, age 31)!

After asking orphan and peer about their own personal experiences with both childhood and adult trauma, and the long-term psychological effects they believe la violencia has had on them as individuals, I next posed the question of whether they thought that Guatemalan war orphans, in general, had experienced trauma as children. While this question may appear leading, my aim with it was ultimately to extend the scope of trauma inquiry by assessing how both orphans and peers perceive other orphaned child survivors’ experiences and reactions to the terror of the genocide. All 20 orphans respond that they do believe that war orphans, generally-speaking, have experienced childhood trauma. This is particularly interesting as only 14 of 20 orphan participants identified themselves as having experienced childhood trauma. In essence, all
orphan participants perceive war orphans, in general, as experiencing childhood trauma even though only some identify as having experienced it themselves. This discrepancy is likely a result of the fact that several of the 20 orphan participants report that they were simply too young to remember the actual traumatic events such as the murders and kidnappings of their parents. A few orphans further explain,

Yes. They feel so alone and they saw the death of their parents or their disappearances (Noemi, age 34).

I believe that yes, it has affected them quite a lot! It affects them in part because they saw people die. They were there at the same moment when all the tragedy occurred. And they were there and they were left thinking, “I want to harm someone!” They are stuck with that in their minds. Death, seeing blood, seeing all that they had so see, sure, it remains in their minds (Cris, age 26).

I would say that yes, those who were affected most were the older ones because the younger one were not cognizant of what was happening. It really affected those who saw how their parents died, how they were killed. Yes, that was so hard. I never wanted to go through that (Mario, age 29)!

Yes, a lot! Many! My brother is one of those. It is a struggle. My brother struggles so much to maintain his family, but he suffers from the trauma. He falters and falters, but thank God, he has a wife that understands him and I have a spouse who understands me (Juliana, age 30).

The remaining orphans reference separation from family members, uncertainty and general consequences of *la violencia* such as other violence, exploitation and abuse as some of the primary underlying sources of war orphans’ general experiences with childhood trauma. Three orphans explain,

Yes, the majority always thinks that the biggest trauma was being separated from their loved ones (Oscar, age 29).

Many of them in the sense that they lived apart from their parents and suddenly they realize, “Goodness! I haven’t even seen my dad or mom or aunt or uncle any more after they left me here” and things like that. Of course, in the end, they accept their situation of not seeing them regularly, but yes, the pain of it remains (Nidia, age 27).
Oh, yes. I think so because they were exploited by their own parents or by some family member or also because they were exploited in the streets in that they were sent to do some odd job and then they were obliged to bring the money home. If they didn’t bring anything, they were beaten. It was child abuse more than anything. So, yes, I think so (Yohana, age 29).

Among peers, 19 respond that they do believe that war orphans, in general, experienced childhood trauma. The one peer who responded negatively simply answered “no” without further elaborating. For the 19 who answered “yes” to the question, the majority attributed witnessing their parents’ murders and remembering those harrowing events as the underlying causes of childhood trauma for war orphans. Three peers offer further explanation,

Yes! Yes, because some of them have told me that they saw when their parents were shot or dragged away or when they cut them right there in front of them….Whether they want to or not, it is hard to forget it (Julietta, age 32)!

Yes, many have! Especially those who saw what happened when their dads were kidnapped and they even saw them murdered in their own houses. They saw it all (Elias, age 26).

Perhaps yes. Some saw and others didn’t see but perhaps the problem with them is that there wasn’t any protection or help. There wasn’t any moral security or economic security because they didn’t have parents to provide that (Otto, age 33).

The remaining peers who responded affirmatively to the question regarding war orphans’ general experience with childhood trauma attribute the loss of family members and parents, in particular, as the root causes of war orphans’ childhood trauma. Some of them share,

Yes, they have experienced trauma because they don’t have parents (Melvin, age 33).

I believe so, yes. Yes, because they continue to suffer because they don’t have fathers or mothers (Laya, age 27).

Yes, in the time of la violencia, the time of Ríos Montt, oh, how they murdered! Yes, trauma and because of living in an unknown place. They have trauma
because they are not with their families. It still hurts them at times (Fatima, age 32).

In the final trauma-related question posed to both orphan and peer participants, I asked whether they thought that war orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma were different than that of other Guatemalan children of the same age. Of 20 orphans, 14 state that they believe that war orphans, in general, have had more experiences with childhood trauma than their peers. Orphans attribute having witnessed parents’ murders, losing close family members, and just living through _la violencia_ and its aftermath as major factors that distinguish war orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma from that of other child survivors. Four orphans elaborate by stating,

The traumas are very distinct or it’s that they have different magnitudes, more elevated magnitudes because it is not the same when some other person scolds you. Right? A strange person that isn’t your dad or your mom is not the same as when you have your own father. It’s very different to have someone else stay with you other than your dad or mom. So yes, the level of trauma is a little more elevated then (Oscar, age 29).

Yes because those who have suffered see life in another way or they value it more. Those who haven’t lived through it, they believe that everything is just fine because it has always been fine (Kike, age 28).

Yes, there was a lot of difference because we orphans don’t have anyone to help us get ahead in life (Medelin, age 28).

It would have to be that there is a little more fear for us, but little by little, we have gotten beyond it (Sheni, age 28).

Interestingly, six orphans view experiences with childhood trauma for both war orphans and their peers as equally distressing and without distinction. This group of orphans reference common suffering, general violence, loss of parents and individual differences in taking responsibility for overcoming childhood trauma as factors that
negate any general distinction between orphan and peer experiences with childhood trauma. Two orphans explain,

I think that not just them, not just the orphans, but all of those who lived with their parents as well, all of us have experienced trauma, I believe (Cris, age 28).

It is the same for everybody because children that lived through the war have become a little intimidated, I think. Whereas normal children that had nothing happen to them, that haven’t lived through that type of experience, they didn’t experience trauma, nothing. A normal child only thinks about being treated well, whereas the poor children who had to flee or run away with their parents from place to place so that nothing would happen to them, that was horrible. It was terrible, the murder. So whether they want it or not, those children ended up worse (Yohana, age 29).

Unlike orphan participants, nearly all peers respond that they believe war orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma do differ from those of other Guatemalan child survivors of the same age. Of 20 peer participants, 17 state that war orphans have experienced both different and more intense levels of childhood trauma. Loss of parents, witnessing violent events, loss of connection to natal communities and decreased socialization skills were the primary reasons that the peers give to explain the difference in childhood experiences with trauma. For example, four peers relate,

Yes, it was difficult because many of them lost their parents. It was difficult. They had to live in some other house with other people. All of it was difficult (Laya, age 27).

Yes, because they became orphaned after all of it because here it wasn’t like in the hamlets where their parents were thrown into big pits. Those things remain recorded in the mind. Thank God I didn’t have to experience that (Manuel, age 30)!

Perhaps it was a little different. It was different because if you have your parent, in the end, as a child you can confide in your parent. But as an orphan, who can you confide in? To be with a family member, a cousin or sibling just isn’t the same. An orphaned child does not have the love of a father, of a mother. So, there is a difference (Elena, age 37).

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11 Manuel is referencing the clandestine graves that the military used throughout the Highlands to bury mass numbers of victims.
A little bit perhaps. Yes, in the way that they express themselves with others. Sometimes they have difficulties communicating with others or lack the ability to communicate because they may say, “Oh, I just can’t talk with them.” They developed this lack of ability because of what happened to them (Fatima, age 32).

Among the 20 peer participants, only two\textsuperscript{12} think that there was relatively no difference between orphans’ experiences with childhood trauma related to \textit{la violencia} and those of other child survivors. Understandably, the two women who responded negatively to this question were two of the four women whose families were forced to flee their natal communities and relocate to Santa Apolonia in order to stay alive during the genocide. These two women experienced \textit{la violencia} first-hand and suffered significant distress as a result. Therefore, it makes sense that they similarly share orphans’ sense of trauma. The women relay,

Yes, the experiences were the same because we all were afraid of what was happening (Teresa, age 37).

I think that everyone has had very different experiences, very different and it is something that even the youngest child can always remember with great fear what had happened. It is an experience you can never forget (Andrea, age 36)!

\textit{Interpreting the Findings Revealed in the Trauma-Related Ethnographic Questions}

The findings revealed in the ethnographic interview questions that focused specifically on trauma provide compelling insight into both orphan and peer personal experiences with and perceptions of childhood trauma caused by \textit{la violencia}. First, the findings demonstrate that many of orphans and peers use the term “trauma” on their own to describe their and other survivors’ childhood distress brought on by the terror of the genocide. Therefore, the findings establish that trauma is a personally meaningful and

\textsuperscript{12} A third peer answered no to this question; however, it became apparent halfway through my interview with him that he was uninterested in both the interview and in elaborating on any answers. He mostly provided simple “yes” or “no” answers for most questions without giving further details.
salient concept for identifying, conveying and understanding both orphan and peer childhood life experiences in Guatemala during and following the most brutal period of the genocide.

With respect to the trauma experiences of participants, the findings also clearly reveal that a significant portion of child survivors experienced trauma in their earlier childhoods. Of the participants in my research project, 14 orphans and 10 peers identify themselves as having experienced childhood trauma. Those who say they did not experience trauma point to their young age, other family circumstances and the fact that they did not lose a close family member as tempering the psychological effects of the genocide in their particular childhood experiences. For those who did identify themselves as experiencing childhood trauma, ten orphans and five peers believe that they continue to be affected in some way by their experiences with childhood trauma. The loss of parents and other close family members, traumatic memories, persistent fear and sadness are some of the factors that these particular orphans and peers indicate as causing long-term effects of trauma in their life experiences even in adulthood. At the same time, five orphans and five peers who identified as experiencing childhood trauma state that they no longer feel they are affected by it. The five orphans explicitly state that they have overcome their childhood trauma, while the five peers who report no longer feeling affected by their childhood trauma offer no explanation other than that they simply no longer feeling affected.

Turning to adult experiences with trauma, only two orphans and two peers identify themselves as having experienced trauma as adults. Domestic violence committed by spouses, a random shooting and illegally crossing the United States border were the
underlying causes of adult trauma for these four individuals. The remaining 36 orphans and peers who participated in my research project report that they have not suffered from trauma that has occurred specifically during adulthood. When asked if their experiences in childhood have had other lasting psychological effects other than trauma, nearly half of the orphan and peer participants state that they have. Losing parents, living apart from surviving family members, lingering fear, loss of trust in others and under-achievement were identified as contributing to the general long-term psychological effects felt by orphans and their peers even now in adulthood.

The findings from the trauma-related questions also reveal that all orphans and almost all of their peers believe that war orphans, in general, have experienced childhood trauma. Orphans and peers specify witnessing their parents’ murders and other violent events, remembering the tragic events, experiencing violent acts directly, being separated from family, and experiencing grave uncertainty, exploitation and abuse as the underlying sources of war orphan childhood trauma overall.

Lastly, the findings culled from the trauma-related questions in the ethnographic interviews demonstrate that the majority of orphan and peer participants believe that war orphans, overall, have had more exposure to tragic events and consequently have experienced greater and more frequent childhood trauma than other child survivors. Witnessing parents’ murders, losing immediate family members, losing connections with natal communities and just living through la violencia were some of the primary factors orphans and peers suggest has caused greater levels of childhood trauma among war orphans in relation to other child survivors in Guatemala.
As the findings presented above demonstrate, orphan and peer responses to the trauma-related questions posed in the ethnographic interviews provide revealing and intriguing insight into the experiences and perspectives of Guatemalans who were children during and immediately following *la violencia*. Based on orphan and peer experiences and perceptions, it is evident that children as a social group did comprise a major portion of the victims and survivors of the genocide and lingering state-sponsored terror of *la violencia*. Consequently, further investigation into their particular experiences is fully warranted.

As orphan and peer experiences presented above attest, the effects of earlier childhood experiences with trauma and distress did not necessarily dissipate with time or the onset of adulthood. Half of the 20 orphan participants and five peers report in the ethnographic interviews that they are still affected by childhood trauma today in adulthood. In addition, nine orphans and nine peers report experiencing general long-term psychological distress stemming from *la violencia*. Relationships between childhood trauma and adult psychopathology have been firmly established in psychological research (e.g., Breslau, Chilcoat, Kessler and Davis 1999; Bolstad and Zinbarg 1997; Kulkarni, Pole and Timko 2012; Philippe, Laventure, Beaulieu-Pelletier, Lecours and Lekes 2011). Therefore, in order to further explore the long-term effects of childhood trauma and other genocide-related psychological distress for participants who are now adults, I administered three psychological assessment instruments to all 40 participants. The following presents a summary of the quantitative findings culled from the psychological assessments and demonstrates the benefit of combining qualitative ethnographic methods with quantitative psychological assessment instruments in order to more fully understand child survivors’
experiences with the long-term effects of genocide-related childhood trauma and distress that persist even in their adult lives today.

**Quantifying the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Trauma and Distress**

After completing preliminary dissertation research and finding that orphans themselves used the term “trauma” to describe their experiences with intense childhood distress, I began considering whether combining the use of psychological assessment instruments with my ethnographic methods could perhaps provide a more comprehensive approach for gaining further insight into orphans’ and peers’ earlier childhood experiences with trauma and distress. However, I cautiously approached the idea of using psychological assessment instruments in my research. After taking a course on trauma offered in the psychology department at the University of New Mexico and reading extensive material on trauma and trauma assessment, it became clear that the manner in which individuals across the globe perceive, experience and respond to distress and trauma can vary dramatically both within and between various ethnic and cultural groups and yet, these differences are commonly overlooked in psychological assessment and treatment worldwide (Bracken 2001, 1998; Good and Good 2008; Marsella, Friedman and Spain 1996; McNally 2003; de Silva 1999).

As I delved more deeply into trauma literature, I became particularly concerned with how well the concepts of “trauma” (most often considered a “Western” category of distress), post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD), and trauma assessment instruments would fit with the perceptions of and responses to tragic events experienced by Guatemalan orphans and their peers even though many of them use the term “trauma” to describe their experiences. Scholars across various disciplines strongly caution that
conceptual constructs such as “trauma” used to categorize distress and the utilization of psychological assessment instruments created in “Western” societies to measure for the effects of “trauma” (such as PTSD) may not truly capture the essence of universal human response to severe distress across diverse groups of peoples and societies (Bracken 2001, 1998; Desjarlais and Kleinman 1994; Foxen 2000; Guarnaccia and Rodriguez, 1996; Kleinman 1987; Lewis-Fernández and Kleinman 1994; López and Guarnaccia 2000; McNally 2003; Summerfield 2000; Zarowsky 2000).

While some scholars and practitioners warn against the universal use of “Western” psychological constructs and assessment instruments, other psychological and anthropological researchers have found significant value in combining psychological assessment instruments along with other qualitative methodology to more fully examine and understand individual and community experiences with intense psychological distress and human suffering. For example, research combining quantitative psychological assessment tools with qualitative methods has revealed vital, meaningful and reflective data and information regarding the particular life experiences of Bosnian child and mother genocide survivors (Dybdahl 2001), adult Mayan refugees after repatriation to Guatemala (Sabin, Sabin, Yong Kim, Vergara and Varese 2006), Guatemala Mayan refugee children living in Chiapas (Melville and Lykes 1992; Miller 1996), Rwandan child genocide survivors (Dyregrove, Gupta, Gjestad and Mukanoheli 2000), children living in post-war Iraq (Dyregrove, Gupta and Raundalen 2002), child refugees from Southeast Asia and Central America (Rousseau and Drapeau 1998), East Timorese asylum seekers living in Australia (Silove et al. 2002), and orphans in Eastern Zimbabwe (Nyamukapa et al. 2010).
After careful and prolonged consideration of both sides of the debate regarding “Western” constructs and assessment instruments, I decided that I would include three psychological assessment instruments with my ethnographic methods in order to broaden my methodological approach as a way to more fully understand orphan and peer childhood experiences with trauma and distress. Once my decision was made, I took appropriate coursework to substantiate the use of quantitative psychological assessment tools and to formalize the use of the quantitative measures in my own research methodology. My goal in utilizing the psychological assessment instruments was first to evaluate the impact of orphan and peer childhood distress in adulthood and to assess whether there is a difference in how long-term effects are experienced between these two groups of Guatemalans who were children during la violencia. The second goal was to determine whether the psychological instruments would corroborate or counter orphan and peer responses to the trauma-related questions in the ethnographic interviews, which in turn would further my understanding of whether quantitative psychological measures facilitate or skew our understanding of how individuals report experiencing extreme childhood trauma and distress. My final goal in using psychological assessment instruments was to evaluate the validity of using an interdisciplinary approach that combines qualitative and quantitative measures in assessing and understanding Guatemalan child survivors’ experiences with childhood trauma and distress.

With the three aforementioned goals as a basis for using quantitative measures, I carefully selected three instruments that evaluate a broad range of psychological stressors and symptoms in order to measure overall psychological distress and distress specifically associated with trauma. Each of the three instruments that I selected were Spanish-
version, empirically-tested psychometric measures that had been used with various ethnic and cultural groups, including indigenous populations in Mexico and other regions of the world. The three Spanish version assessment instruments I selected for use were: the Revised Civilian Mississippi Scale [RCMS] (Norris and Perilla 1996), the Symptom Checklist [SCL-90-R] (Derogatis 1983), and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory [PTGI] (Weiss and Berger, 2006). A copy of the Spanish version of each of these three assessment instruments is presented in Appendix C of this dissertation.

I administered all three psychological assessment instruments immediately following each ethnographic interview. The instruments were administered in the following order: RCMS, SCL-90-R and PTGI. Participants were given the option of completing the self-report assessment forms themselves or having me read the items to them if that was preferable. Once the three assessment instruments were completed, I entered the raw data for each participant’s assessment form into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software package (or SPSS) and ran a series of multivariate analyses of variance (or MANOVAS) on the data collected in order to compare orphans’ various mean scores for each instrument with those of their peers. I now present each psychological assessment instrument and the associated findings below.

The Revised Civilian Mississippi Scale (or RCMS)-Spanish version is a 30-item psychometric instrument that measures self-reported symptoms of posttraumatic stress in a civilian population. The Spanish version was established by Norris and Perilla (1996) using translators from Colombia, Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Cuba, some of whom translated the instrument into Spanish while the others back-translated the instrument into English to check for discrepancies or changes in meaning resulting from
the translations. The translators’ varied backgrounds were vital in allowing regional
variations of Spanish to be taken into account. The instrument was then utilized in two
studies with Spanish speakers: one in Atlanta, Georgia and one in Dade County, Florida.
The findings of the two initial studies revealed that the instrument is reliable and
correlates in meaningful ways with known traumatic stressors among the heterogeneous
Spanish-speaking study populations. The RCMS-Spanish version has since been used and
deemed meaningful for use with other Spanish-speaking populations both within and
outside of the United States, including various regions throughout Mexico (e.g., Norris,
Perilla, Ibañez and Murphy 2001; Norris et al. 2002; Norris et al. 2003; Perilla, Norris
and Lavizzo 2002, etc.)

The RCMS requires respondents to rate 30 items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1
(nada cierto/not at all true) to 5 (extremadamente cierto/extremely true) in response to
questions regarding a traumatic event such as: I feel like I cannot go on; I enjoy the
company of others; and Since the event, I have been afraid to go to sleep at night. Items
in the RCMS are grouped based on the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD,
diagnostic criteria presented in the American Psychological Association Diagnostic and
Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Version 4, simply cited as the DSM-IV (APA
2000). A copy of the DMS-IV diagnostic criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in
included in Appendix C of this dissertation. The four primary PTSD symptom groups
used in the RCMS are: Criterion B-Intrusion (or the persistent re-experiencing of the
traumatic event); Criterion C-Avoidance (or the persistent avoidance of stimuli associated
with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness); Criterion D- Arousal (or
persistent symptoms of increased arousal); and Criterion E-Other Symptoms (includes
symptoms of significant distress that do not clearly fit into the other criteria). Criterion A for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the DSM-IV stipulates that a person: 1) experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; and 2) the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Given that all 40 participants in my research project survived the period of la violencia and reveal in their ethnographic interviews that they have all been exposed to warfare and related violence in various ways, I considered Criterion A as generally having been met for all 40 participants. Therefore, in order to complete the RCMS, I asked each participant to think about her or his earlier experiences with childhood trauma and genocide-related distress, and then to rate the 30 items presented on the RCMS accordingly.

Once the participant ethnographic interviews and psychological assessment instruments were completed, I entered all 40 participants’ ratings for each of the 30 items of the RCMS into SPSS. Responses to items 19, 21, 24, 25 and 27 were reversed scored before data analysis to be symptom affirming rather than symptom rejecting. These five items are worded in a symptom rejecting direction in the RCMS. Using the algorithm developed by Norris and Perilla (1996) to determine whether participants met or did not meet criterion B, C and D for PTSD, I grouped each item by PTSD symptom group. Items 2, 5, 9, 13, 16, 17, 18 and 22 were considered together as Criterion B (intrusion). If a participant rated any of these eight items with a 3 or higher, I counted her or his response as meeting Criterion B for PTSD as required by the DSM-IV. Criterion C included items 1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 19, 24, 26 and 28. A rating of 3 or higher in a minimum of three of the following Criterion C symptoms was counted as meeting
Criterion C for PTSD: avoidance (item 12 or 14), amnesia (item 15), diminished interest (item 24 or 26), estrangement (item 1, 19 or 28), and numbness (item 7 or 10). Criterion D consisted of items 4, 11, 21, 25, 27, 29, and 30. A rating of 3 or higher in a minimum of two of the following Criterion D symptoms was counted as meeting Criterion D for PTSD: sleep disturbance (item 21 or 27), anger/irritability (item 4 or 29), concentration difficulties (25), hyper-alertness (item 30), and jumpiness (item 11).

Within Criterion C and D, only one item in a multi-item symptom grouping was counted. For example, if a participant rated a 3 or higher for items 4 and 29, their response would count as only one symptom (anger/irritability) present under Criterion D. This procedure helped ensure that the same symptom (e.g., anger/irritability) did not contribute twice to a criterion just because there were two or three items related to that particular symptom that had a 3+ score. After assessing each participant’s ratings of the 30 items on the RCMS, I classified any participant who met the minimum of one Criterion B symptom, 3 Criterion C symptoms and 2 Criterion D symptoms as likely having PTSD. However, because I am not a trained clinician qualified to administer a diagnostic interview, I cannot make an official diagnosis of PTSD. I can only indicate that there is a likelihood of PTSD present.

Based on the findings culled from the RCMS, I determined that eight orphans and eight peers do meet the criteria that indicate a likelihood of PTSD. Thus, the findings reveal a likely PTSD rate of 40% among the orphan group and 40% among the peer group, indicating no significant difference whatsoever between participant groups. While there is no norm group with which to compare orphan and peer responses for the RCMS, a 40% rate of likely PTSD suggests that a sizeable number of orphan and peer
participants currently experience trauma-related symptoms that are potentially diagnosable as PTSD.

In order to gain some sense of whether a 40% rate would be considered high among Guatemalans who survived the war and subsequent genocide, I conducted a psychological literature search and found three recent psychological studies that analyzed the rate of PTSD among other groups of Guatemalans. The PTSD assessment instruments used in these three studies differed from the RCMS, but did reveal an overall PTSD rate for the study populations. For example, one study revealed a PTSD rate of 34% among a group of survivors who were physically disabled during the Guatemalan war (Herrera Rivera, Mari, Andreoli, Quintana and Ferraz 2008) and another study established a PTSD rate of 36% among Guatemalan aid workers (Putman et al. 2009). The third study with Guatemalan Mayans living in refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico differed from the former two studies in that it revealed a PTSD rate of only 11.8% among participants (Sabin, Lopes Cardozo, Nackerud, Kaiser and Varese 2003). The PTSD rate of 40% among orphans and peers seems to be somewhat in line with the first two of the three studies specifically focused on Guatemalans, but it remains difficult to determine whether the 40% rate among orphans and peers is high. Furthermore, determining the likelihood of PTSD among orphans and their peers is complicated by the fact that there is no way of identifying whether the symptoms participants report are causing clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (PTSD Criterion F in the DSM-IV), which would typically be ascertained in a diagnostic interview. Thus, while 40% of orphans and peers have a likelihood of PTSD, there is no way of knowing whether the symptoms they report that may be associated with PTSD are
debilitating in that they are disrupting participants’ social, occupation or other important areas of functioning.

While I cannot make a concrete PTSD diagnosis for participants in my research project, what is interesting regarding the RCMS results is that the eight orphans who indicate a likelihood of PTSD are among the 10 who respond in the qualitative data presented above that they feel they are, indeed, still affected today by childhood trauma or general psychological distress caused by la violencia. Similarly, the eight peers who may have PTSD according to the RCMS results include all five peers who respond in the ethnographic interviews that they still feel affected by childhood trauma today. The remaining three peers with likely PTSD are among the nine who respond affirmatively to the question of whether they feel la violencia still affects them psychologically in some way today. Thus, there appears to be a general correlation between participants who report long-term effects of childhood trauma and distress in the ethnographic interviews and those who indicate a likelihood of PTSD according to the RCMS, which offers evidence of corroboration between the qualitative and quantitative findings related to trauma in my research project.

The results culled from the RCMS also reveal that even though more orphans than peers report in the ethnographic interviews that they still feel affected by childhood trauma and general psychological distress stemming from la violencia, there is no significant difference between groups regarding PTSD as the same number of orphans as peers indicate a likelihood of PTSD. Thus, the percentage of orphans and peers indicating a likelihood of PTSD may appear to be relatively high\textsuperscript{13}, but participants’ status as either an orphan or peer does not seem to correlate with the results. Given the qualitative

\textsuperscript{13} For example, lifetime prevalence of PTSD for adults in the United States is roughly 8\% (APA 2000).
findings and the fact that orphans grew up in a much different residential setting, I would have expected a higher percentage of likely PTSD among the orphan group when compared to their peers; however, this clearly was not the case.

The second psychometric instrument I selected for use in my research methodology was the Symptoms Checklist 90 Revised (SCL-90-R), Spanish version. The SCL-90-R is a widely-used assessment instrument that measures the overall psychological functioning and distress of a population (Bermejo-Toro and Prieto-Ursúa 2006; Güell et al. 2006; Pedersen and Karterud 2004; Todd, Deane and McKenna 1997). Given its popularity and usefulness in measuring general functioning and distress, I elected to use the Spanish version with my research participants in order to gauge any general symptomatology that might not necessarily denote PTSD. The Spanish version of the SCL-90-R was created based on the original SCL-90-R developed by Derogatis (1977) to measure a broad range of general psychological distress experienced by individuals. The Spanish version of the SCL-90-R was translated and back-translated, and has been used among various Spanish-speaking groups of people in Spain and the Americas since its inception. It also has been translated into numerous other languages and used with various diverse populations around the globe (e.g., Caparrós-Caparrós, Villar-Hoz, Juan-Ferrer and Iiñas-poch 2007; González De Rivera y Revuelta and Rodríguez Abuín 2006; Prieto Ursúa, María and Laura Bermejo Toro 2006; Shanahan, Anderson and Mkhize 2001; Tomioka, Shimura, Hidaka and Kubo 2008; and Zsolt et al. 2004, etc.).

The SCL-90-R Spanish version is a 90-item self-report symptom inventory that requires respondents to rate items on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (nada/not at all) to 4 (mucho/extremely) in response to the frequency of symptoms experienced in the seven
days prior to completing the assessment instrument. Symptoms include headaches, nervousness, lack of appetite, feeling trapped, sudden fright and feeling low energy. The 90 items included in the SCL-90-R Spanish version are grouped into nine primary symptom dimensions that include: somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism. The instrument also measures three global indices of distress: the Global Severity Index (GSI), the Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI), and the Positive Symptom Total (PST). The GSI indicates the current level or depth of psychological distress and is used most frequently when a single summary measure of distress from the SCL-90-R is required (Derogatis 1983). The PSDI reveals symptom intensity and the PST indicates symptom breadth experienced by each respondent in the week leading up to the day they completed the assessment. By determining the level of distress in the nine areas of symptom dimensions and overall in the global indices, the SLC-90-R Spanish version determines individuals’ current, point-in-time, psychological symptom status.

The SCL-90-R Spanish version is an intricate assessment instrument in that it requires conversion of raw scores to standard (or normalized) T-scores using a norm group that is appropriate for the group of individuals completing the form. However, because there is no norm group consisting of similar Guatemalan individuals, comparing participants in my research project to a norm group from the United States would be neither appropriate nor accurate. Nonetheless, I was able to use the raw scores to determine whether there were any significant differences between orphans’ and peers’ mean scores on the nine symptom dimensions and overall in the global indices, and to generally gauge whether
symptoms existed. Table 1 presents a summary of the mean scores for orphan and peer responses to the nine symptom dimensions and the three global indices.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1: SCL-90-R Spanish Version Means of Orphan and Peer Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Symptom Dimension</strong></td>
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<td>Obsessive-Compulsive</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Sensitivity</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
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<td>Psychoticism</td>
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<td>Global Severity Index</td>
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<td>Positive Symptom Distress Index</td>
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<td>Positive Symptom Total</td>
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The MANOVA performed on the data collected from the SCL-90-R Spanish version first revealed that orphans and peers do not differ significantly overall on general psychological distress even though orphans’ mean scores are slightly higher on almost all nine symptoms dimensions (with the exception of the psychoticism dimension). As far as the individual symptom categories, there are no differences between orphans and peers in the severity of reported symptomatology on any of the 9 symptom dimensions, with all Fs (1,38) < 3.70, all ps > .05. Only two symptom dimensions (Obsessive-Compulsive and Hostility) show trends toward a significant difference between groups, with ps of .067 and .062, respectively. Orphans and peers also do not differ significantly in their mean scores for the three global indices of distress, with all Fs (1,38)<1.72, all ps>.05.
While there is not a norm group with which to compare the orphan and peer mean scores on the global indices of distress, the GSI mean scores for both groups suggests that the levels of psychopathology for participants appear to be relatively low overall. The GSI total score is the most commonly used overall measure of distress for the SCL-90-R (Derogatis 1983). Güell et al. (2006) based the following categories of psychopathology for the SCL-90-R on the 5-point-Likert scale used in the SCL-90-R instrument itself: 0-0.99 (normal), 1-1.99 (slight psychopathology), 2-2.99 (moderate psychopathology), 3-3.99 (considerable psychopathology), and 4 (extreme psychopathology). Assessing research participants’ GSI mean scores according to the Güell et al. (2006) categorization would suggest that the overall GSI mean score for orphans indicates slight psychopathology, while the peer mean score indicates normal psychopathology. However, I am hesitant to classify the orphan group as slightly psychopathological and the peers as normal because there are no significant differences between groups. Instead, I believe the results demonstrate a generally low rate of symptomatology overall with no significant difference in mean scores between orphan and peer groups.

The results of the SCL-90-R Spanish version for orphans and their peers reveal that each group does continue to experience various general psychological symptoms today in adulthood, but does not indicate that either group is necessarily highly symptomatic or pathological in any one symptom dimension or in the level of overall distress. Similar to the RCMS-Spanish Version findings, the results from the SCL-90-R Spanish version are consistent with what orphans and peers reveal in their responses to the trauma-related questions posed in the ethnographic interviews and their responses presented above. Nearly half of 20 orphan and 20 peer participants respond that their childhood
experiences have had other lasting psychological effects in general even today in adulthood, yet they do not tell about those effects as currently debilitating or causing high levels of current distress. Therefore, similar to the findings of the RCMS-Spanish version, orphans and peers self-identify general psychological symptoms as currently present according to both their interviews and their SCL-90R results, but they do not necessarily indicate a high level of psychopathology resulting from their current symptomatology in either. Therefore, the quantitative findings culled from the SCL-90-R Spanish version also corroborate the findings of the qualitative ethnographic interviews.

The final psychological assessment instrument I selected to use in my research methodology was the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)-Spanish version. In contemporary psychology there is growing literature that suggests that there are individuals who may actually perceive some benefit and growth following even the most traumatic of events (Burt and Katz 1987; Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996; Veronen and Kilpatrick 1983). For example, a study with children who survived Hurricane Floyd along the east coast of the U.S. in 1999 revealed that participants experienced positive change and growth following the natural disaster (Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi and Calhoun 2006). I became interested in analyzing the potential for post-traumatic growth among my research participants because of the focus on positive growth following traumatic events rather than solely negative repercussions. I felt that examining the potential for post-traumatic growth would offer yet another perspective on the long-term effects of orphan and peer childhood trauma and general psychological distress in adulthood. To measure post-traumatic growth, I elected to use the Spanish version of the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) originally designed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996).
that gauges the degree to which individuals perceive benefits following adversity. The PTGI has been translated from English into a multitude of languages (e.g., Ho, Chan and Ho 2004; Mystakidou, Tsiliki, Parpa, Galanos and Vlahos 2008; Prati and Pietrantono 2006). The PTGI-Spanish version was translated and back-translated by bilingual Spanish speakers several times to ensure accuracy and was tested for reliability with various Spanish-speaking populations (Weiss and Berger 2006). The Spanish-speaking populations included U.S. immigrants who originate primarily from Peru, El Salvador, Mexico, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. The PTGI-Spanish version has also been used with Spanish-speaking populations outside of the United States to further validate its reliability regarding use among heterogeneous groups of Spanish-speakers (e.g., Costa and Gil 2008; Fernández et al. 2009; Páez, Basabe, Ubillos, González-Castro 2007; Val and Linley 2006).

The PTGI-Spanish version is a 21-item self-report scale that assesses positive outcomes reported by individuals who have experienced traumatic events in their lives. The PTGI measures individuals’ perceived benefits following a traumatic event or events that fall into three categories: changes in self-perception, changes in interpersonal relationships, and a changed philosophy of life. Specifically, the instrument requires respondents to rate the 21 items on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (no cambio/no change) to 5 (muy alto grado de cambio/high level of change) in response to questions regarding an individual’s perceived changes in life experiences. The 21 items in the instrument were originally grouped into five factors that index positive changes following an individual’s experience with a traumatic event. The five factors include: relating better to others, recognizing new possibilities, increased personal strength, spiritual change and
greater appreciation of life. In order to complete the PTGI, I asked each participant to, once again, think about their earlier experiences with childhood trauma and general psychological distress resulting from la violencia, and to rate the 21 items presented on the PTGI accordingly.

I based my analysis of the PTGI results for all 40 of my research participants on the reliable and valid Spanish version of the PTGI conducted by Weiss and Berger (2006). Weiss and Berger conducted their study with 100 Latina immigrants in New York. In their study, Weiss and Berger found that 8 items in the original 21-item PTGI failed to load differentially on the original five factors used in the PTGI-English version, meaning that these 8 items did not selectively map onto the original five factors. They also found that the remaining 13 items did load differentially on three new factors established that combined subscales from the original PTGI-English version. The first new factor Weiss and Berger developed, Philosophy of Life, combined the original Spiritual Change and Appreciation of Life subscales and consists of items 1, 13, 16, 18, and 19. The second new factor, Self/Positive Life Attitude, combined the original Personal Strength with the New Possibilities subscale and consists of items 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, and 14. The third new factor, Interpersonal Relationships, partially replicated the original Relating to Others subscale and includes items 6 and 9. Weiss and Berger (2006) determined that the truncated 13-item Spanish version of the PTGI and the three new factors utilized to categorize results established a very high internal consistency in line with the English version. Using the 13-item and three new factors form of the PTGI-Spanish version (Weiss and Berger 2006), I calculated the mean scores of the total of the items constituting the three new factors and the total overall PTGI score for both the orphan
and peer groups. Table 2 presents a summary of the results culled from the PTGI-Spanish version that I used with orphan and peer participants.

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<th>Table 2: PTGI Spanish Version Means of Orphan and Peer Groups</th>
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<td><strong>Factor</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mean(SD)</strong></td>
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<td>New Factor 1: Philosophy of Life</td>
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<td>New Factor 2: Self/Positive Life Attitude</td>
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<td>New Factor 3: Interpersonal Relationships</td>
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<td>Total PTGI Score</td>
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*p<.05, **p<.005

The results presented in Table 2 reveal that the mean for the total score of each of the three new factors obtained through a MANOVA, as well as the total score on the PTGI, were significantly higher for orphans than for their peers, with all Fs(1,38) < 19.09, all ps < .019. Using the Likert scale categories of growth from the PTGI-Spanish version itself as derived from the PTGI literature, the results suggest that orphans report an above-high level of posttraumatic growth (M=52.8), while peers report only a moderate level of posttraumatic growth (M=39.4). Using a simply ratio conversion, I determined that the total mean scores for orphans and peers derived from the 13-item analysis as described above is equivalent to mean scores of 85 and 63, respectively, on the original 21-item scale (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). Recent psychological studies utilizing the 21-item PTGI report a total mean score of 69 for World War II Dresden bombing survivors (Maercker and Herrle 2003) and 35.8 for Bosnian refugees and displaced people (Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi and Calhoun 2003). Two studies with Holocaust child survivors report a total 21-item PTGI mean score of 56.09 (Lurie-Beck, Liossis and Gow 2008) and 43.21 (Lev-Wiesel and Amir 2003). Comparing orphan and peer total mean scores to other studies with war and genocide survivors suggests that orphans’ total mean
score on the PTGI is much higher (indicating more growth) than the scores for other war and genocide survivors, while the total mean score for peers is similar to other survivors.

The PTGI-Spanish version was particularly useful in further elucidating orphans’ and peers’ earlier childhood experiences with childhood trauma and distress because it revealed information not otherwise explicitly captured in the ethnographic interview questions focused on trauma. The life experiences of orphans demonstrate that in general they perceive themselves as having grown psychologically from their experiences with childhood trauma and general distress stemming from la violencia at a rate much higher than their peers have. The findings are particularly interesting as the 20 orphan participants had the additional distress of being orphaned and having had to grow up in a permanent residential home away from their families and natal communities. It is possible that orphans’ significant posttraumatic growth reflects the fact that they experienced a higher rate and severity of childhood trauma than their peers, constituting more potential for posttraumatic growth (i.e., those who suffer greater trauma necessarily have a longer way to go to return to a “normal” state of psychological wellbeing, etc.).

The correlation between greater trauma and consequently, greater post-traumatic growth has been noted as a potential limitation to the scale (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). However, it is difficult to conclusively determine how rates and severity of childhood trauma currently factor into the PTGI results presented here. What is particularly interesting regarding the PTGI results, however, is that they demonstrate that orphans appear to have overcome such intense childhood adversity and now actually perceive themselves as having benefitted significantly from those experiences. While the potentially greater rate and severity of childhood trauma and general psychological
distress experienced by orphans may factor into how they now perceive greater benefits and growth from those experiences than their peers, the findings do corroborate with orphans’ perceptions of their abilities to overcome childhood trauma as presented in the qualitative data culled from the ethnographic interviews as presented above.

**Interpreting the Findings Revealed in the Quantitative Assessment Measures**

The findings revealed in the psychological assessment instruments provide further insight into both orphans’ and peers’ personal experiences with and perceptions of childhood trauma and general psychological distress caused by the genocide both during and following the brutal period of *la violencia*. The Spanish versions of the RCMS and SCL-90-R demonstrate that both orphans and peers continue to experience or feel long-term psychological effects of their childhood trauma and distress, but the degree to which they report experiencing trauma or other general psychological symptoms today is not significantly different in any way between the orphan and peer groups. This suggests that although there may be some differences in how these two groups of child survivors experience the long-term effects of childhood trauma and distress, the differences are not large enough to denote a major distinction in how the effects are currently being experienced by either group (i.e., orphans as a group are not necessarily more traumatized or distressed today than the peers overall). The only statistically significant difference between orphan and peer experiences with childhood trauma and distress is the degree of perceived posttraumatic growth self-reported in the PTGI-Spanish version. The PTGI-Spanish version revealed significantly higher overall posttraumatic growth for the orphan group on all three factors and the total PTGI score when compared to the peer participant
group, indicating that orphans perceive having benefitted more significantly following the trauma and adversity they faced as children than their peers do.

From the quantitative findings presented above, it is evident that using an interdisciplinary approach of combining qualitative and quantitative measures is helpful in understanding and conveying child survivors’ experiences with childhood trauma and distress caused by genocide. While the warnings scholars across disciplines have issued regarding using Western concepts to categorize and assess distress in various population groups around the world are valid and important, I found that the psychological measures I used in my research project to assess orphan and peer experiences with trauma and general psychological distress both corroborate and expand upon the findings revealed in my ethnographic methods rather than countering them.

In addition, I found that in the case of the PTGI, the quantitative measures actually helped expand and more fully encapsulate the experiences of both orphan and peer participants. In fact, the findings revealed in the PTGI factored greatly in shifting the focus of my entire dissertation. Originally, I aimed to present the horrors of la violencia and the negative, debilitating effects it has had on war orphans. After first analyzing the PTGI data at the start of my research analysis for this project, however, I realized just how strong and seemingly resilient the 20 orphan participants have become as adults despite surviving the horrors of genocide. The strength, perseverance and constructive responses orphans exude regarding the economic and identity-related challenges they have faced because of the genocide—that are the focus of the following two chapters of this dissertation—further corroborate the findings presented in this chapter and influenced my decision to focus on orphans’ creative and constructive responses to the
long-term consequences of la violencia instead, which more accurately reflects participants’ experiences.

I also found that using the quantitative measures further validated orphans’ and peers’ earlier experiences with childhood trauma and general psychological distress. During one assessment, Juana (orphan, age 28) stopped me and said, “Shirley, no one has ever asked me these questions before. It feels good that you are asking them.” Thus, having orphans and peers formally rate their various experiences and symptoms gave them the opportunity to explicitly assess and express their own experiences in a format that they felt legitimized what they had been through as child survivors of genocide.

Finally, rather than hindering or counteracting the content of the qualitative findings, culled from the ethnographic interviews using psychological measures actually stimulated further dialogue about orphan and peer experiences. In various instances, participants would ask me if I had come up with the assessment questions. When I told them that I had not, several of the 20 orphans and 20 peers responded, “Really? It’s like the person who made these knew what we went through.” The participants would then go on to relate stories from their childhoods or experiences that the particular item on the assessment form had brought to mind. In many instances, my interviews with participants lasted well beyond an hour because of these important expanded discussions. Thus, using both qualitative and quantitative methodology in my research project has not only proven to be useful in validating child survivors’ experiences but also in more accurately understanding child survivors’ experiences with and responses to the long-term consequences of genocide.
While the psychological assessment instruments used in my research project validate participants’ experiences and provide additional insight, it is also important to recognize some of the limitations of the instruments. First, instruments such as the SCL-90-R commonly use norm groups for comparison in order to assess levels of symptomatology. However, because most norm groups consist of U.S. adult and adolescent populations, there is no current appropriate norm group for comparison with Guatemalan genocide survivors who are now adults. Instead, I compared orphans as a group to their peers in place of using a norm group. Therefore, the results culled from my research project provide insight into the differences between orphan and peer participants’ experiences with trauma and distress, but do not necessarily generalize to broader populations.

Second, some of the questions on the assessment instruments ask participants to rate their experiences with fear of public transportation or their ability to trust others. It is difficult to distinguish whether participants’ responses are explicitly tied to their childhood trauma experiences or if they reflect their reactions to the current drug-related violence and culture of fear that persists in Guatemala today. For example, orphans and peers relate that gang members with drug-trafficking affiliations often target public transport and passengers in order to extort money or send a message that they dominate a particular territory. According to my research participants, public transportation in the country is even more dangerous today than it has been in the past as a result. Thus, when asked whether they are fearful of taking public transportation, most participants respond affirmatively, which does not necessarily denote phobic anxiety (the symptom that the question is meant to probe on the SCL-90-R) as related to childhood trauma, but rather reflects the current state of violence in the country today.
Third, although I asked participants to focus on the trauma and distress they experienced in childhood, there is no way of knowing if trauma or distress caused by events in adulthood were somehow being considered when they responded to the questions on the psychological assessment instruments. Trauma and distress caused by current events in adulthood certainly can affect the way in which participants respond to questions about current symptoms and emotional states associated with childhood events.

Fourth, when administering the assessment instruments, I asked participants to think about their childhood experiences with la violencia when responding to the questions. Answering questions retrospectively certainly yields different responses than what participants may have stated had the questions been asked in childhood at the time of la violencia. A longitudinal study of participants’ responses in childhood and now in adulthood would have been much more insightful regarding their experiences with childhood trauma and how it may or may not affect them today in adulthood. However, my intention is to continue this research with these particular participants on a longitudinal basis into the future, which will hopefully extend the scope of understanding their experiences and provide greater insight into how childhood trauma may or may not affect them later in life.

**Understanding Orphan Experiences with Genocide-Related Trauma**

There is much to learn from Guatemalan child survivors about overcoming the tragedy and trauma caused by genocide. Both orphans and their peers were forced to endure childhood hardships, distress and loss that many people cannot even begin to fathom. Orphans, in particular, faced even greater adversity because they lost one or both of their parents and were brought to live in a permanent residential home for orphaned children
located in an unfamiliar environment far away from surviving family members and their natal communities. Orphans and peers recognize that growing up amidst the chaos of genocide, terror and a persistent culture of fear brought about complex challenges that were further exacerbated for orphans because of their orphan status. Yet, as both the ethnographic and quantitative data above reveal, orphans and their peers have managed to face childhood trauma in a way that seems to have prevented them from suffering extreme levels of debilitation or psychopathology in adulthood. This is especially apparent and poignant for war orphans as they have not only overcome the trauma of their childhoods both in the short- and long-term but also perceive those experiences as having contributed to their own personal growth and adaptability to life challenges now in adulthood. The ability to overcome such horrendous experiences with childhood trauma and to become positive, well-adjusted adults despite having lost their parents, homes, families and community ties—which is demonstrated in the ethnographic data presented above—is a remarkable testament to orphans’ internal strength and resiliency.

In Chapter 3, I defined resiliency based on the work of Bonanno (2004) as the ability to return to and maintain psychological and physical equilibrium following a traumatic event or events. However, orphan participants’ experiences with childhood trauma presented in this present chapter and their abilities to generally overcome that trauma in adulthood necessitate expanding the definition of resiliency to further reflect these orphans’ particular life experiences. Thus, for Guatemala’s war orphans, their abilities to effectively engage in resilient behaviors means that they have the “capacity for adapting successfully and functioning competently despite experiencing chronic adversity or following exposure to prolonged or severe trauma” (Cicchetti 2010:524; see also Masten,
Best and Garmezy 1990). This definition of trauma reflects more than just a “return to equilibrium” by recognizing that individuals respond to traumatic circumstances and events often by establishing positive, creative and constructive ways in which to adapt and function. The orphans’ capacity to adapt and function competently is evident in their ability to simultaneously recognize the childhood trauma they faced and to put the associated memories aside in order to move forward in life in a positive, constructive manner. This sentiment is reflected in Sheni’s response presented above in which she states that she and her fellow orphans are not “erasing” what happened in their early childhoods, but rather are “setting it aside.” Sheni’s statement demonstrates that orphan participants’ general aim is not to forget or to erase what has happened in their earlier childhoods, but rather to focus on their potential and on their abilities to mobilize their resilient capacities in constructive ways in order to become well-adapted adults despite their traumatic and distressing pasts.

Guatemala’s war orphans are not alone in their remarkable ability to not only overcome the effects of severe childhood trauma associated with the terror of genocide but also to grow in positive, constructive ways from it. This underlying theme of resiliency strongly resonates with other anthropological research conducted with Guatemalan victims and survivors of the genocide as well. For example, anthropologist Ricardo Falla’s early 1980s work with Mayan survivors living in refugee camps in Mexico and in resistance groups in hiding in Guatemala highlights the debilitating effects of the terror of the genocide on these communities and individual members, while simultaneously demonstrating that survivors are also “psychologically resourceful agents” who cannot be portrayed as mere victims (1994:192). Falla notes,
Although the scars from the experience of mass terror will not fade from the collective memory soon, Indian communities displayed a remarkable resilience, finding ways not only to survive but to actively resist, escape, and readjust. The military remains dominant, operating with impunity; the Indians remain vulnerable, living in fear, but the survival and internal strength of Indian communities itself represents a triumph [1994:192].

In a similar vein, anthropologist Victor Montejo, himself a Jakaltek Maya survivor from Guatemala, found resilience and hope among the Jakaltek refugees he worked with in Mexico. Having experienced la violencia first-hand and similarly forced to live in exile, Montejo shows that despite the devastating and persistent negative effects of la violencia and of living in the harsh conditions of exile in refugee camps, the refugees he worked with managed to adapt to their situations and to develop a strong sense of community that is testament to their resilience. Montejo reflects,

Throughout my research I have been heartened and fortified by the persistence and courage of the refugees. Their determination and endurance are a testimony to the strength of our culture. Their adaptation under conditions of unutterable hardship and their transformation of that culture under duress give me hope for our future [1999:25].

Anthropological research conducted with war widows in Guatemala similarly elucidates encouraging signs of hope and resilience among a particular population of survivors who were especially devastated during la violencia and in the aftermath that followed. Judith Zur used anthropological methods in her work with Maya widows in order to explore how they talked about and explained their experiences with violence and the persistent culture of fear that has infiltrated their daily lives. Zur found that widows have utilized creative survival strategies in order to reconstruct their lives on both a physical and psychological level. Despite ongoing physical and psychological suffering, the widows in Chajul have actively formed social groups and cooperatives within their communities in order to construct a sense of themselves as widows, daughters, and
mothers of the dead and disappeared (Zur 1998:179). By sharing their painful memories of the violence and “remembering” in these social groups and cooperatives, the women have found new possibilities for action, for reworking their identities and for asserting new positions in society. Thus, through their participation in development projects and community organizing with other widows, war widows have taken an active and public stance in dealing with the negative consequences of the genocide, in forming strong social ties with other widows and in calling for justice by prosecuting the brutal crimes committed against them, their families and their communities. The war widows’ participation in the social groups and cooperatives demonstrates their abilities to actively engage in resilient behaviors that address the horrific events and conditions in which they have been forced to live (Zur 1998). Highlighting the widows’ resilience, Zur contends,

Yet surviving widows should not be seen as passive beings, completely controlled and moulded by the various institution and symbolic processes of revictimization, whilst vulnerable, they are not so defenseless. They have learnt to adapt, to survive; some have begun to ‘work’ for justice...[1998: 30].

Anthropologist Linda Green also found resilient practices among a group of Maya war widows. Working with indigenous war widows in an undisclosed area of the Highlands, Green revealed that the women similarly used the creative practice of coming together under the auspices of development projects in order to share experiences and raise their awareness of the ways in which their suffering had been shaped by gender, class and ethnicity. Finding a niche within development projects, the widows came to rework their identities in order to incorporate their experiences as widows and Maya women, and to forge new identities that have allowed them to call greater attention to and in some cases, confront their marginal positions as Maya indigenous women in post-war Guatemalan society (Green 1999:108). Green’s research demonstrates that despite living on the
economic and social margins of their impoverished communities while continuing to experience trauma engendered by *la violencia*, the widows have come together in new ways to creatively rework their sense of identity and community. They have also found much needed emotional respite from the “culture of fear” that continues to plague Guatemala even today. Identifying and recognizing the underlying sense of resiliency found among even the most physically, psychologically and economically devastated of survivors, Green reflects,

Within a climate of fear and militarization some widows reworked spaces to reaffirm social relations and cultural values in which they regarded survival as a collective enterprise, even as the development projects there to assist them ignored their knowledge and creativity. Some widows of X’e’caj constructed alternative forms of community in the midst of their suffering that speak powerfully to the resiliency of the human spirit. They used the space of development projects, their own bodies, and those of evangelical worship to reinvigorate community and kin networks by pushing the limits of permissible spaces in a militarized society. As such, Mayan widows have rewoven their ‘traditions’ – their ‘Mayaness’-out of the fabric of violence [1999:171].

Resilience has become so evident an underlying theme in the life experiences of survivors of *la violencia* that it has also been highlighted in the recent truth reports. Both the REMHI (1998) and CEH (1999) reports fully explore the negative consequences and suffering caused by *la violencia*, but they also explicitly underscore survivors’ own creative and resilient responses to the terror of the genocide. Both reports emphasize that survivors have actively participated in forms of resistance to and coping with the terror that has infused their daily lives. For example, the REMHI report states, “The strategies people have used to cope with the effects of violence are an important facet of their experience. Many individuals and groups assumed a very active posture despite the risk involved” (1999:51). According to the testimonies collected in both reports, the primarily indigenous Highlands populations made bold moves by creating and participating in
organizations, movements and activities designed to legally denounce human rights violations, to search for the disappeared, to report massacres and other acts of violence, and to create support networks for survivors. Therefore, the rural activist organizations and the activities conducted by survivors of la violencia demonstrate that Highland inhabitants were not just passive, vulnerable victims of the genocide who have been left to wither away and disintegrate into the backdrop of the horrid aftermath of la violencia. Instead, survivors have become active, resilient and well-adapted individuals who continue to work diligently to reconstruct their lives, to restore their dignity and human rights, and to repair the social fabrics that have bound their families and communities together for centuries. This is not to say that the genocide has not left indelible emotional and physical scars in the lives of survivors. Rather, the REMHI and CEH reports further corroborate that the creative, resilient ways in which survivors have responded to trauma and distress must be brought to light in order to more fully understand the complexities of survivors’ life experiences with and responses to the genocide and state-sponsored terror (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998).

While war orphans who participated in my research project were too young to engage in activist organizations and community activities in their early childhoods, they nonetheless formed a strong sense of resiliency that has allowed them to adapt to life as orphans and to function competently despite living without the moral and social support of one or both parents. Most orphans I interviewed acknowledge having experienced childhood trauma and yet, not one of them identifies their childhood trauma as causing life-long debilitating or pathological effects in their life experiences. Consistent with the life experiences of the five orphans featured in Chapter 3, the remaining 15 orphans also
focus primarily on positive events and aspects in their lives rather than solely on the
negative, long-term consequences of la violencia or its equally challenging aftermath.
This is particularly evident in the PTGI results, which indicate that orphans view
themselves as having benefitted and subsequently grown emotionally from their
experiences with childhood trauma in a way that is significantly greater than that of their
peers. As a result, orphans tend to concentrate on their personal growth and their resilient
capabilities to adapt in life instead of portraying their lives as permanently devastated and
destroyed by their early traumatic experiences. Thus, instead of hopelessness and
permanent debilitation, orphans assert mobilizing both internal and external
sources to help them deal with the long-term effects of childhood trauma—effects that are not
forgotten but are essentially “set aside” so that orphans can live healthy, well-adapted
lives. I believe the combination of occasional psychological support offered at the
Hogares and the emotional support orphans enrolled in the home offered each other at the
time helped facilitate orphans’ overall resilience and abilities to overcome genocide-
related childhood trauma, which I hope to explore more fully in future research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that children, as a social group, comprised a major
portion of the victims and survivors of la violencia in Guatemala. For war orphans, in
particular, the genocide has left emotional and psychological scars that will remain with
them for the rest of their lives. Having witnessed their parents’ deaths and
disappearances, their villages obliterated and their daily lives turned into chaotic
instability, war orphans have faced some of the most challenging emotional and
psychological circumstances imaginable. Those too young to recall such traumatic events
faced equally traumatizing situations by being raised in a violent culture of fear in which remaining parents desperately struggled to keep them alive. Transitioning to living at a permanent residential home for orphaned children also had its emotional challenges for the overwhelming majority of orphans who participated in my research project. Leaving their familial homes and their surviving family members and instead to grow up in a new environment was not easy for most of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project. Yet, despite all of the emotionally difficult situations that this group of orphans faced, they have become resilient adults. Orphans’ abilities to not only adapt but also to grow emotionally despite facing extremely harsh childhood hardships, distress and struggles is remarkable and clearly demonstrates the orphans’ keen abilities to respond to their life challenges in creative, constructive ways. In the following chapter, I expand upon this theme of resiliency and growth by next examining the overwhelming economic loss orphan participants have experienced and continue to face as a consequence of their orphan status and by revealing how orphans’ dedication to formal and higher education, among other creative strategies, has become another constructive means by which this group of orphans has begun to positively overcome the long-term consequences of la violencia in adulthood.
CHAPTER 5

Economic Loss and Education

“With economic self-sufficiency and appropriate higher education, indigenous people can shatter the ethnic tension and prejudice against them” (Montejo 2005:xiii).

Guatemalan war orphans and their families experienced major economic loss as a consequence of la violencia. As demonstrated in the Chapter 3, the destruction of material property, lost access to subsistence agricultural land, and severed ties with families and communities resulting from the genocide had severe economic repercussions that made survival even more precarious by forcing orphans and their surviving family members deeper into extreme poverty. Orphans who participated in my research project are well aware of the economic losses that their surviving family members had to endure because of the genocide and recognize that it was the economic devastation that ultimately led to their enrollment in the Hogares. At the same time, however, orphans realize that their enrollment in the home meant an immediate reprieve from the economic destitution in which they had been living. Yet, the consequences of the economic loss wrought by la violencia soon resurfaced in orphans’ lives once they left the Hogares and transitioned into early adulthood. With no familial support, no familial homes to which to return and no community connections to help economically support them, orphans faced adulthood on their own financially with nothing more than the education they received via the Hogares and their desire to make something of their lives.

In this chapter, I explore the long-term economic consequences of the genocide on the lives of war orphans. My aim is to show that orphan participants have not only
confronted the long-term economic consequences in positive, constructive ways but also have begun to overcome them altogether at this stage of adulthood. To achieve this aim, I begin this chapter by summarizing the economic precursors that led up to la violencia and that had placed the majority indigenous population in an already precarious economic position amidst a backdrop of increasing poverty and deteriorating national economic conditions. I next discuss the general economic loss and devastation that resulted directly from la violencia and illustrate how subsequent economic destitution persisted for the masses for years to follow. I continue by exploring the specific long-term economic consequences of la violencia on the particular lives of orphans who participated in my research project and compare their experiences with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia. I then demonstrate how this group of orphans has not only confronted but also has have begun to overcome the economic consequences in adulthood, using their peers’ current experiences and situations as a further point of reference. I conclude this chapter by presenting orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of the long-term negative economic consequences of la violencia and discuss how they view the economic future for themselves, their families and the Guatemalan nation-state.

**Economic Precursors Leading up to la violencia**

The economic consequences of la violencia were preceded by two decades of intensifying poverty and government corruption that drastically widened the income disparity between a small group of extremely wealthy elite and the majority (primarily indigenous) poor population. Despite unprecedented national economic growth and the expanding international trade of the 1950s and early 1960s, the rapidly increasing majority population found itself in disproportionately deteriorating economic conditions
well before *la violencia* began (Barry 1992; Davis 1988; Frank and Wheaton 1984; Handy 1984; Manz 1988). In fact, by 1970 an estimated 46.5 percent of the total national income went to the wealthiest fifth of the population, while a minute 4.8 percent went to the nation’s poorest fifth, which resulted in 70% of rural households falling well below the poverty line¹ (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010:139; Graber 1980:16).

Making matters worse, rapid population growth, proliferating landlessness and a drastic shift from agricultural subsistence farming to dependence on a capitalist market made daily life an increasingly difficult economic struggle for the majority of Guatemalans. At the same time, improvements in the area of public health produced a population growth of over three percent annually from 1950 to 1970, causing the population to nearly double in less than 25 years (Dirección General de Estadística 1973, 1950; Garrard-Burnett 2010). Rapid population growth coupled with already limited access to land meant that by the 1970s exponentially fewer people had access to agricultural land, forcing most subsistence farmers into wage-labor (Booth, Wade and Walker 2010; Calvert 1985; Manz 1988; May 2001). The major shift from subsistence farming to wage-labor signified that by the 1970s, all *campesino* (or rural farmer) households were at least partially connected to the capitalist market (May 2001). Thus, scores of Guatemalans were forced to shift to wage-labor employment; yet, there were not enough jobs available to satisfy the burgeoning demand for employment and for the few jobs that did exist, wages were simply too low to sustain workers’ families. Handy notes that by 1971, “well over 660,000 people were unemployed while over one million more of the economically active population was chronically underemployed” (1984:210).

¹ The Guatemalan government defines falling below the poverty line as earning insufficient income to satisfy the most basic basket of goods and services needed to survive (Graber 1980:16).
The economic situation for Guatemala’s majority population continued to rapidly deteriorate and by mid-1970s due to the 1973 national economic recession and the 1976 earthquake. The severe 1973 economic recession was driven by the international oil crisis and virulent, reactionary national inflation (Barry 1992; World Bank 1978). The recession resulted in weakened international trade, escalating national rates of inflation, skyrocketing prices of consumer goods and drastically declining wages, which placed most Guatemalans in an even more precarious economic position (Ayau Cordón 1989; González del Valle and Porras 1976:26-27; OFDA1981). The 1973 economic crisis and ensuing decline of the national economy were also particularly devastating for the majority population living in the interior of the country, making their already bleak economic conditions even more severe (Arias 1990; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Soto, Sevilla and Frank 1982).

The 1976 earthquake—the worst earthquake in national recorded history and that registered 7.5 on the Richter scale—disproportionately devastated the poor (mostly indigenous) residents of the interior rural Highlands as well (Arias 1990:243; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Johnston and Low 1995:15). Such grave destruction and homelessness mostly among the poor resulted in what scholars term a “class earthquake” (Morrison and May 1994:118). While international aid poured into the country to help the victims of the earthquake, the army immediately monopolized all of it and resold what that they did not keep for themselves to others for a profit (Arias 1990; Saavedra 2001; Woodward 2008). Consequently, the army quickly amassed great wealth, while the majority poor were left with no access to any aid whatsoever to help them deal with the aftermath of the severe natural disaster (Garrard-Burnett 2010; Woodward 2008; Soto, Sevilla and Frank 1982).
Growing awareness among the masses regarding the massive and enlarging national income gap in the face of unprecedented national economic growth and the army’s monopolization of international aid intended for earthquake victims became fertile ground for burgeoning class-consciousness and popular organization by the mid-1970s (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Popular organization, however, was perceived as a direct threat against the powerful, wealthy elite. Therefore, the military was determined to subjugate the masses in order to prevent an uprising and to disable growing popular organization altogether. The military aimed to achieve these goals by intensifying its ruthless counterinsurgency campaign in 1978, which initiated the brutal period of la violencia. La violencia not only attached popular organization at its roots but also led to even more severe economic loss and unprecedented economic destruction for the majority indigenous population (Arias 1990; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Manz 1988).

**Economic Loss and Devastation Resulting from la violencia**

On the heels of the 1976 earthquake and amid a plummeting national economy, the economic loss and devastation wrought by la violencia plunged most rural Highland families even deeper into extreme poverty. Countless material losses, lost access to land, unemployment, and lost sources of economic sustenance destroyed families and communities (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). Economic devastation was, indeed, one of the Guatemalan military’s counter-insurgency deliberate strategies designed to destroy and permanently subjugate the “water” (the rural Maya population) (CEH 1999; Green 1999; Manz 1988; Molina Mejia 1984; Montejo 1999; REMHI 1998; Warren 1993). Unfortunately, the military strategies specifically aimed at economic devastation not only had immediate economic repercussions but also have had long-term economic
consequences that persist in the lives of survivors to this day and will likely continue to challenge their livelihoods well into the future. In both of the recently published truth reports, survivors of *la violencia* frequently state that they fear not being able to recoup, even in the future, what was lost economically during the genocide (CEH 1999; REMHI 1998). The REMHI report specifically asserts,

> Many people feel that their economic sacrifices, the struggles and work of generations, have been lost, and that these losses are not only detrimental to them personally but also affect future generations. For example, it will not be easy to continue the traditional system of inheritance in indigenous communities [1999:41].

To further understand both the immediate and long-term economic consequences that have persisted in the lives of Guatemala’s genocide survivors in general and war orphans in particular, I now examine the general magnitude of economic loss and devastation caused by *la violencia* and the desolation it brought to the already impoverished and economically devastated indigenous majority population. In particular, I discuss survivors’ loss of property, familial land, primary household wage-earner, community ties and the ability to economically sustain one’s family during and following *la violencia* as the primary long-term economic consequences reported by survivors.

The most immediate and visible economic loss that occurred during *la violencia* was the destruction of property such as homes and material goods. Military soldiers and civil patrollers commonly burned down civilians’ homes as a means of destroying whole communities and eliminating any potential for a guerrilla support base in the Highlands (Arias 1990; CEH 1999; Green 1999; Manz 1988; May 2001; REMHI 1998). Material property contained within the homes was also destroyed or, more commonly, was looted by soldiers and civil patrollers. Household goods, small foodstuffs, clothing and domestic
tools were just some of the items commonly plundered by soldiers and civil patrollers (Green 1999; May 2001; Zur 1998). Often the looting would take place in already depopulated villages that had been abandoned by residents who were forced to flee. Other times it would precede or follow military incursions and mass killings (May 2001:66; REMHI 1999:124). May describes one such example of looting that followed a massacre,

The army entered San Francisco at about eleven o’clock on a Saturday morning. They called a meeting of all the inhabitants in the main plaza. After the campesinos had peacefully assembled, the soldiers separated them into groups, according to gender and age. The army then looted the homes of the detained inhabitants. After the looting, the military officials isolated the campesinos in smaller groups; they raped the women and systematically killed the campesinos, one by one [2001:66].

In addition to homes and material possessions, soldiers and civil patrollers also frequently destroyed or stole villagers’ livestock and crops. Domestic livestock were commonly slaughtered during raids and massacres as a deliberate means of exacerbating villagers’ economic devastation (Arias 1990; CEH 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998). Larger, more valuable livestock such as cattle, however, were routinely pilfered by soldiers who transported them to army bases or to their own personal agricultural land (REMHI 1999:41). Planted crops and recently stored harvests were similarly destroyed by fire or were simply looted by soldiers and civil patrollers for their own consumption or to sell to others for profit (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1999). The destruction and looting of both livestock and crops left thousands of villagers in the Highlands devoid of even the most basic nutritional resources needed for daily survival (CEH 1998; Green 1999; Manz 1988; May 2001; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

The extent of the economic loss and devastation of homes, material possessions, livestock and crops via burning and looting was detrimental to massive numbers of
Highland villagers. Many testimonies and eye-witness accounts of events that occurred during the genocide frequently include the recounting of the loss of property. In fact, the REMHI report notes that many survivors can still itemize today the items that were destroyed or plundered during *la violencia* (1999:41). Already suffering from a plummeting national economy, years of widening income disparity and the devastating effects of the 1976 earthquake, the economic loss of survivors’ properties and material goods during the period of *la violencia* not only further impoverished families but also left them with a defeating sense of disrepair (REMHI 1998a). Replacing what was lost during this period would prove to be difficult if not impossible for many Guatemalans and was only made more difficult by the added economic devastation caused by the loss of familial land (CEH 1999a-c; Green 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a-d; Zur 1998).

Access to sufficient land for housing and agriculture has long been a central issue in Guatemala, particularly in the 20th century. In fact, it is the land issue that sparked such major political upheavals as the counterrevolution of 1954 and mass popular organization in the 1970s (Barry 1992; Manz 1988; Reyes Illescas 1984; Stern 2005). Rapid national population growth since the 1950s also intensified the land issue as there were more people living per square kilometer, causing the landholdings for the average person to dramatically decline by the 1970s and ushered in an era of even greater land scarcity.

It was the mounting land scarcity and issue of legal titles to land that ultimately fueled the 1978 uprising in Panzós, which marked the beginning of *la violencia* (Calvert 1985; Carlsen 1997; CEH 1999; Davis 1988; Ekern 2008; Falla 2001; Manz 2004; REMHI 1998; Sanford 2008; Smith 1984). Facing an already dramatic decline in access to land because of continuous population growth and skewed ownership—with the large majority
of landholdings disproportionately in the hands of the small group of wealthy elite—
Guatemala’s majority population suffered serious economic repercussions and
consequences during the genocide because of the additional loss of land that ensued.
Land was lost during the genocide primarily through forced abandonment, severance of
inheritance rights and pressure to sell land in order to move to urban centers in search of
desperately needed wage-labor employment.

Thousands of individuals and families in the Highlands lost land during la violencia
that had been in their families for generations. Land was lost because many rural
Highland residents were forced to flee and therefore, had to abandon their familial plots
on either a short- or long-term basis. Some families fled their homes and land during
military raids and massacres, attempting to return months or even a year or two later
when it was deemed safe to return. Others left individually for their own safety when they
received word that they were on the military “black list” but also tried to return to their
land some time later. However, as many as 500,000 Guatemalans were forced to flee the
country altogether, while scores of others were among the one million people who had
been internally displaced during la violencia (CEH 1999; Davis 1988; Jonas 2009;
REMHI 1998; Smith and Boyer 1987).

The countless numbers of people forced to abandon their land, whether for a short or
long period, had little recourse for re-obtaining rights to their land once they did return.
In many cases, the land is still abandoned today (CEH 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998).
However, most individuals who attempted to recoup their land simply could not recover
it because the military had immediately repopulated their land with families from other
regions when the original residents were forced out. The individuals currently living on
the land refuse to return it. In many other instances, community members or relatives simply took over the land of those who fled, claiming the land was *prestado* (loaned) to them in the interim. However, many of these individuals refused to cede the land back to the original occupants once they had returned to the community (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Stolen 2007).

Compounding the land situation is the fact that many families did not have legal title or recourse to recover their land. Scores of families simply had no legal titles to their land because land had simply been passed down through the generations without legal recognition of the land transference or inheritance (Barry 1992; Manz 1988). Others were given legal titles through the National Agrarian Transformation Institute (*INTA*), but the titles were often contested and ultimately were ineffective in helping individuals reclaim their land (Barry 1992:208). Lastly, many other families did have legitimate legal titles to their land; however, records of those titles were often destroyed when the military burned or bombed government buildings (Manz 1988:55). Thus, the loss of land due to abandonment and the inability to recover it due to lack of legal title or records signified that hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans no longer had access to even the tiny parcels of land on which they had previously subsisted.

Land loss also occurred during *la violencia* when inheritance rights were severed following the kidnapping and murder of many male heads-of-household in the Highlands. The severance of land inheritance rights was particularly detrimental to women who were widowed during the genocide. Traditional rules of inheritance in the Highlands stipulate that land is passed down predominantly to male children from one generation to the next. In some areas, only male children inherit their fathers’ land (Fundación Arias 1993;
Hawkins 1984; Wagley 1957; Zur 1998). In other communities, female children may inherit land, but the parcels they receive are typically much smaller and less desirable than the parcels given to their male siblings (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003). Given the patrilineal system of inheritance, patterns of residence in the majority indigenous Highlands are patrilocal in that women move to their husbands’ familial land when they marry. The newly-wed couple then lives in the home of the husband’s parents (if the husband is the eldest son) or they construct a simple home of their own on a portion of the land belonging to the husband’s parents (Brintnall 1979:83). In this pattern of male-privileged inheritance and residence, both the house and the land are considered property solely of the husband, and the wife is merely a dependent (Barry 1992; Brintnall 1979; Fundación Arias 1993; Green 1999; Wagley 1957).

With the death and disappearance of vast numbers of indigenous men in the Highlands throughout the genocide, many newly-widowed women often immediately lost their property rights to their home and land because only their husbands were considered entitled to the property. As a result, widows were commonly forced off their husbands’ lands by their husbands’ families. Garrard-Burnett explains,

In making the transition from wife to widow, women lost their status vis-à-vis that of their husbands. They often also lost their places within the local hierarchies of kinship, which complicated issues of patrilineal land inheritance and exacerbated legal difficulties tied to women’s ownership of land titles [2010:105].

With no legal title and no surviving husbands to stake a claim on the land for their wives and children, countless widows were forced out of their homes and off their land with no recourse whatsoever with which to recover the land or home they had worked hard to establish with their husbands (Brintnall 1979; CEH 1999; Fundación Arias 1993; REMHI 1998; Stern 2005; Zur 1999).
Many other widows were forced to abandon their land because of military raids, massacres or death threats to the family. Unfortunately, most widows who had abandoned their land were unlikely to reclaim it upon return to their village. Lack of legal title altogether or the inability to prove ownership because titles are registered in the husbands’ names kept numerous widows from recouping their husbands’ land. Widows were also frequently unable to prove that their husbands were dead because the bodies were never recovered. Therefore, widows could not process a change in the deed for the land without legal proof of their husbands’ deaths (CEH 1999; Stern 2005; Zur 1998). Being forced off their familial land and having no legal recourse to recover it, thousands of families in the Highlands (consisting mainly of indigenous widows and their children) suffered increased economic insecurity and destitution that unfortunately became all too commonplace both during and in the wake of la violencia (Brintnall 1979; Fundación Arias 1993; REMHI 1998; Stern 2005). With no resources or property, thousands of war widows joined the mass number of survivors who were pressured to move to urban centers in search of wage-labor opportunities.

The final manner in which genocide survivors lost access to valuable agricultural land was by being forced to sell their small parcels of land—parcels that were just too small to provide sufficient food for their families—in order to move to urban centers in search of wage-labor employment. The major shift from subsistence to wage-labor subsequently spurred the massive migration of rural campesinos to urban centers. Consequently, many campesinos sold their land to finance the move and their new urban housing arrangements, only to find that the profit they earned was insufficient to meet the exceedingly high costs of urban living (Barry 1992; Fundación Arias 1993; Manz 1988;
Zur 1998). Yet, the dramatic shift to wage-labor and resulting sale of land to support urban migration was most abrupt and challenging for women widow during la violencia.

Without the physical labor of their husbands and other male relatives who had been murdered or disappeared in the genocide, many widows and their children who were able to maintain rights to their familial lands were left to work their fields alone. The amount of time, labor and resources (e.g., money needed to purchase seeds or fertilizer, etc.) proved too demanding for many women who simultaneously had to balance their new agricultural responsibilities with their traditional household duties. Unable to continue to support their children off of subsistence alone, many widows who remained living on their deceased husbands’ lands also were pressured to sell their small parcels in order to move to urban centers in search of wage-earning opportunities that they desperately needed in order to ensure the survival of their children (Arias 1990; CEH 1999; Fundación Arias 1993; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998; Zur).

The murder and disappearance of so many men who were the sole primary household wage-earners had detrimental economic consequences for hundreds of thousands of rural (mostly indigenous) families in the Highlands during and following la violencia. Female headed households had rarely existed in the Highlands before the genocide, but they quickly became commonplace throughout the region after 1978 (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). Zur reports that women widowed during the genocide, on average, outnumber widowers four to one and that this ratio is even higher in areas of heavier military counterinsurgency strikes (1998:141). The loss of such large portions of men meant that the mostly poor, indigenous war widows were left to provide for their families on their own and as mentioned above, were forced to take on a new role
as the primary household wage-earner—a role that traditionally belonged to the male heads-of-household only (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

Most widows found the sudden, unforeseen task of looking for wage-earning employment or finding a way to get involved in other income-generating economic activities (such as selling artisan goods) to be onerous and discouraging. Many of the widows who had been left to fend for themselves and their children had little if any formal education, spoke little if any Spanish, and had few marketable skills with which to obtain even the most meager wage-earning jobs (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; Green 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998). With fewer marketable skills than their male counterparts and thus, even lower earning potential overall, most widows were relegated to working in lower-paid, agricultural positions that did not generate enough income to support their families at the most basic level (Barry 1992; Green 1999; Zur 1999). The bleak economic situation of most widows’ families, therefore, required that their oldest children (especially males) enter the labor-market as well. Most children who sought wage-labor opportunities were also relegated to working in the fields and were commonly exploited. The low wages paid to children, as well as to widows, were often only a small portion of what was paid to male laborers who worked in the same positions even though the work required the same amount of skills, time and effort (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Zur 1999).

Despite their best efforts to take on the new role of primary wage-earner and sole provider for their families—with the added help of the wages earned by their oldest children in some cases—war widows and their families became even more deeply
entrenched in economic hardship and extreme poverty as a direct consequence of the genocide. Data collected from the Highlands frequently report that the poorest families in the region during and following *la violencia* were headed by widows who simply did not have the resources or marketable skills to single-handedly pull their families out of the economic devastation that had been exacerbated by the murders and disappearances of their husbands (Carlsen 1997; CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

The precarious economic position of widows and their children was further compounded by the fact that widows could not count on the additional economic support or labor of extended family or other community members (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). Zur notes that male family members, in particular, often refused to help their widowed kin for fear of being associated with a “wife of the guerrilla” (1998:134). Community members were similarly skeptical of helping someone identified by the military or civil patrollers as a potential “subversive,” which could bring increased danger to their own families. The most common reason for the lack of support from family and community members, however, was the fact that many women were forced to relocate to urban centers in search of employment (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). The upheaval and consequent migration of women and children (as well as thousands of other survivors) out of their communities caused many survivors to lose important social and economic ties to their communities, which constitutes another major area of economic loss and devastation caused by *la violencia*.

The loss of communal ties also had serious economic repercussions for survivors during and well after the period of *la violencia*. For generations, subsistence farming communities in the Highlands have played an important role in the lives of indigenous
peoples in particular. Highland communities have long served as a locus of social and economic support for its members, as well as a source of influence on the formation of identity and sense of place (Little 2004; Offit 2008; Zur 1998). Highland communities “can serve multiple functions, such as a place of refuge from the dominant society, a base for some types of collective identity, a vantage point from which one can understand the world…” (Little 2004:202). Therefore, communities in Highland Guatemala—based on long-standing Maya indigenous principles of reciprocity and obligation—are primary centers of socialization and enculturation that influence its members’ perceptions of identity, belonging and survival.

Survivors of the genocide who had to abandon their land, who were run off of their dead husbands’ land or who were forced to sell their land in order to move to urban centers in search of wage-labor opportunities immediately lost ties to their communities the moment they moved away from them. The lost community ties had devastating social and economic consequences that persist even today (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; REMHI1998; Zur 1998). In his work with Kaqchikel Maya vendors, Little validates the importance of Highland community ties and how fragile these ties are when one does not remain living in the community. He asserts, “If a person does not maintain his or her connection to the place and the people who live in the place on a regular basis, then that person is not a member of the community” (2004:188). Survivors who were forced to leave their communities no longer had a natal community on which to rely for their social and economic support. Even those survivors who eventually returned to their land and communities found themselves estranged from other villagers and family members who had remained in the community during the survivors’ absences. Severed
community ties and the disintegration of whole communities themselves meant that survivors no longer had access to key social and economic support from their communities, which had been vital to their general existence prior to la violencia (CEH 1999; Green 1999; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). Without the support of their communities, survivors of Guatemala’s genocide were left to fend for themselves and consequently, found themselves and their families in dire economic conditions that seriously eroded their abilities to economically maintain their families not only during la violencia but also in the years that followed. The lost ability to economically sustain one’s family is the final major area of economic loss wrought by la violencia.

The severe economic loss and devastation that occurred during the genocide further compounded the majority population’s dire economic conditions and resulted in soaring rates of abject poverty. By 1980, 79% of the national population was classified as living in poverty (i.e., they were barely able to satisfy the most basic nutritional and material needs of their families), while 52% of the population was considered living in “extreme poverty” (i.e., they were not even able to meet their families most basic daily nutritional requirements) (CEG 1995:13; CEPAL 1982:20-21; CITGUA 1987a:44; Reyes Illescas 1984:35-36). The climbing rates of both general and extreme poverty during the early 1980s gave rise to mass malnutrition, especially in rural areas. More than 80% of rural children five years and younger at the time suffered from malnutrition and 81 of every 1,000 children born during the same period died in their first year of life (Reyes Illescas 1984:35-36). The majority of those deaths were caused by digestive tract and respiratory problems that normally would not cause death in a healthy child, which demonstrates just how horrific the economic conditions were for most rural families at the time.
Unfortunately, children and their families continued to suffer economic destitution as the levels of poverty continued to increase at an average annual rate of 2.8 percent throughout the 1980s (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Tierney 1997).

Persistent population growth, increased numbers of unskilled women in the workforce and a drastic decline in the national economy in the early 1980s further intensified families’ economic destitution. Wage-earning jobs became scarce and the subsequent soaring rates of unemployment seriously undermined families’ remaining abilities to economically sustain themselves. Guatemala’s population grew at over three percent per year at the start of the 1980s, with urban population increasing by over 8 percent annually due to massive rural migration to urban centers (Calvert 1985; Tierney 1997). The massive numbers of people migrating to the urban centers in search of employment during this period placed unprecedented pressure on an already declining job market that had been directly affected by yet another economic downturn in the early 1980s.

Large scores of women entering the work force also contributed to Guatemala’s growing job scarcity in this period (Barry 1992; Garrard-Burnett 2010). Women who were widowed during la violencia and were suddenly the primary household wage-earners for their families sought wage-labor opportunities in growing numbers. Other women who were not widowed also moved to urban centers with their families in search of wage-earning employment in order to financially contribute to their families. Thus, the number of women in the work force nearly doubled between in the 1980s, with one in every four workers a woman by 1989 (Barry 1992:166). In Guatemala City alone, 38 percent of the economically active population was female by the end of the 1980s (Barry 1992:166). Proliferating numbers of women entering the labor market for the first time in
the nation’s history exacerbated the already plummeting job market because there were simply too few jobs in proportion to the massive increase in the number of job seekers. With so few jobs available to meet the escalating demand for wage-earning positions, scores of survivors were unemployed and unable to adequately provide for their families.

A weak national economy and the counterinsurgency campaign contributed to a sharp economic downturn by 1980 that further atrophied the national labor market (Barry 1992; Calvert 1985; Green 1999; Menéndez 2002; Tierney 1997). Guatemala’s Social Security Institute (Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social, or IGSS) estimated that 220,000 jobs were lost in the country between 1981 and 1985 alone due to the national economic recession (Inforpress Centroamericano 1987:33). In addition to job loss, wages continued to decline by over 15 percent during this period, leaving agricultural workers to earn in 1986 only 57 percent of the minimum salary they received in 1980 (Tierney 1997:7-8). The massive influx of people entering the urban labor market, the major job loss due to the plummeting economy and the drastic drop in wages left thousands of survivors unemployed or underemployed at best (Menéndez 2002; Tierney 1997). Neither able to continue subsistence agriculture nor to secure gainful employment, many adult survivors found that they had altogether lost the ability to sustain their families at even the most basic level required to survive (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; Tierney 1997; REMHI 1998).

The economic loss and devastation caused by la violencia was vast and far-reaching for hundreds of thousands of survivors (Barry 1992; CEH 1999; REMHI 1998; Tierney 1997; Zur 1998). Those who did not perish in the counterinsurgency campaign were forced to live in unfathomable economic misery while simultaneously having to deal with the trauma and psychological pain of the loss of murdered and disappeared loved ones.
The loss of property, land, primary wage-laborers, community ties and the ability to economically sustain their families persistently placed survivors in a precarious and onerous economic position within an already faltering national economy. The implications of such enormous economic loss and devastation would prove to be long-lasting for survivors whose economic hardships were not eased when *la violencia* ended in 1983. Instead, the end of *la violencia* coincided with an even worse national economic crisis than had occurred during the late 1970s (Green 1999; Jonas 1991; Manz 1988).

**Persistence of Economic Destitution in the Wake of *la violencia***

A slump in the world market in the late 1970s brought about a worldwide economic recession that by the early 1980s had severely weakened the national economy, which continued to erode throughout the remainder of the decade. Guatemala was especially hard hit by the worldwide recession because of its dependence on world market commodity prices for its agricultural export crops, especially coffee, sugar and cotton (Barry 1992; Green 1999; Handy 1984). Low prices and slumping demand for export crops resulted in a drastic drop in exports. Fewer exports, along with poor governmental structure, little internal investment and persistent civil unrest, led Guatemala into its worst economic depression since the 1930s (Manz 1988). Handy explains,

> During the early 1980s the worldwide recession had reduced the demand for and price of Guatemala’s exports….The Guatemalan economy was particularly hard hit because of an archaic tax structure that was completely inadequate to meet the needs of the government, an elite that invested large amounts of wealth outside of the country and so deprived Guatemala of much-needed investment capital, and political unrest that had virtually destroyed the important tourist industry and damaged many other productive sectors. Most importantly, the international recession hit Guatemala especially hard because the poverty of the majority of the populace meant that there was very little internal market, and Guatemala had remained entirely dependent on sales of its agricultural products on the world market [1984:267].
The worldwide recession in the early 1980s had devastating consequences for the national economy. From 1980 to 1986, the country experienced negative economic growth nearly every year. Manz points out, “In 1986 gross domestic product per capita slid back to the level of 1971, eroding half of the growth achieved since 1950” (1988:47). Prices of consumer goods (especially the most basic items) more than quadrupled since the mid-1970s, while wages dropped significantly (Barry 1992:97; Jonas 1991:179). The disparity between the rising costs of basic goods and the declining level of wages seriously eroded individual purchasing power, further weakening the national economy. Making matters worse, some estimate that by 1984 unemployment had reached 45% and underemployment was over 34% (CEG 1995:63). Soaring levels of unemployment and underemployment caused even greater numbers of people to slide deeper into relentless poverty during the 1980s. Jonas asserts, “The percentage of the population living below the poverty line jumped from 79 percent in 1980 to 87 percent in 1987” (1991:177). These figures indicate that more than four of every five Guatemalans were living below the poverty line at the time. With even more people living in poverty after than during la violencia, the years immediately following the end of the most brutal period of the genocide brought no economic relief to survivors.

The genocide and the economic crisis of the 1980s disrupted survivors’ families, communities and lifeways in ways that would prove to have long-term negative economic consequences not only for the survivors themselves but also for their children well into the future (CEH 1999; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; INE 1989; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998). Both truth reports on the genocide recognize that the economic hardships and overload of responsibilities placed on survivors because of the human and
economic losses the genocide brought about have persisted in the lives of survivors even to this day (CEH 1999, v.1: 80; REMHI 1999:6). The REMHI report, in particular, asserts, “For every two testimonies that described a responsibility overload and economic hardship at the time of the events, one reports that these problems persist…” (1999:6).

Orphans who participated in my research project and their families were among the hundreds of thousands of survivors who were most devastated by la violencia and by the economic recession of the 1980s. Having lost family members, homes, property, land and the ability to survive off of subsistence agriculture as many rural (primarily indigenous) Highland families did, surviving family members found themselves in extreme poverty and were no longer able to sustain their orphaned children. The inability to economically provide for orphaned children following the genocide became the primary reason that orphans were brought to and enrolled in the Hogares despite the hardships that the separation would have on both the children and their family members. While the Hogares would provide orphans with much more than just their basic nutritional needs throughout their remaining childhoods, the negative economic consequences of la violencia would prove to be pervasive in their lives, especially when orphans entered adulthood and were living on their own. In order to more fully understand the economic repercussions of la violencia that war orphans in my project have had to face not only in childhood but also in adulthood, I now discuss the long-term negative economic consequences la violencia has had on the particular lives of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project.

The Long-Term Negative Economic Consequences of la violencia for War Orphans

War orphans are fully aware of the prolonged economic devastation wrought by the military’s overt strategies of economic destruction carried out during la violencia.
Orphans and their surviving family members were among those most economically devastated by la violencia as they lost their most valuable and often only resources such as their homes, land, primary wage-earners and community ties. These losses brought about negative economic consequences that were not only experienced immediately by war orphans and their families but also developed into long-lasting economic challenges that orphans continue to face even today as adults. In the following section, I present an overview of these long-term negative economic consequences and how they have affected the war orphans throughout their lives by comparing their particular experiences with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia.

**Economic Loss and Devastation Experienced Prior to Living in the Hogares**

War orphans often witnessed and experienced immediate economic destruction during the genocide when the soldiers and civil patrollers burned their homes and destroyed their belongings. The majority of orphans who participated in my research project lost their familial homes and the material items contained within them during their early childhoods. Consequently, orphans experienced continuous housing instability prior to enrollment in the Hogares. Not only did orphans’ families lose their familial homes but the majority also lost the land upon which the homes were built. Loss of land was even more detrimental. It meant that the families would have no claim to property on which to rebuild their homes. With the land shortage that existed at the time of and immediately following the genocide, purchasing land was a near financial impossibility (Arias 1990; Calvert 1985; Herbenar Bossen 1984; Tierney 1997). As a result, landless families desperately searched for some other place to live such as with relatives or on property of an employer or benefactor (e.g., the case of Juana’s family presented in the Chapter 3).
However, the extreme poverty that permeated the Highlands during the genocide made it difficult for family members or others to take in landless relatives, frequently forcing families to live in make-shift camps in the mountains or in the streets of larger villages (e.g., the case of Debora’s family presented in Chapter 3). The majority of orphans also lost their primary household wage-earners (mainly their fathers) in la violencia, leaving them to live with a single parent. In most cases, this parent was their biological mother who had neither the formal education nor the vocational skills necessary to secure gainful employment. This resulted in substandard living conditions that severely compromised their children’s physical health and prohibited access to formal education. With few economic options, many war widows and other surviving family members had no choice but to seek an alternative form of care for their orphaned children.

The plight of orphans in my research project differs markedly from that of their peers, the majority of whom experienced little economic loss as a result of la violencia. Whereas the majority of orphans lost their homes, land and primary household wage-earners, virtually none of the peers from Santa Apolonia experienced economic loss as a result of the genocide. For the peers, their families’ abilities to maintain familial homes, land and primary wage-earners meant that they were in a better position to economically maintain and provide for their children both during and following la violencia. Consequently, none of the 20 peers were subject to the extreme poverty experienced by orphans. Therefore, peers neither suffered from poor physical health nor lack of access to formal education in the way that orphans did, placing them at a greater advantage both educationally and economically early on in their childhoods. In the following sections, I
present data that clearly demonstrate the marked disparity in economic loss experienced by orphans when compared to their peers.

Of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, 13 report experiencing the immediate destruction or loss of their familial home and material goods as a result of the military’s counter-insurgency campaign. In eight of these 13 cases, the military or civil patrollers ransacked and burned their familial homes. In the case of Debora (presented in Chapter 3), her surviving father lost their home (which was subsequently taken over by other villagers) because they were forced to flee and could not return to their familial home for fear of her father being kidnapped and murdered. In four of the 13 cases, relatives simply took over the family home after one or both parents were either murdered or died of illnesses (e.g., the case of Esteban presented in Chapter 3) and refused to return it to orphans’ surviving parent or siblings. In addition to these 13 orphans, one (Lina) was abandoned by her parents, rendering her home situation unknown. However, the Catholic sisters at the Hogares believe that Lina’s parents likely lost everything and were under threat, pressuring them to abandon Lina at a local hospital in order to save her life. The remaining six orphans who did not lose their homes and material possessions were able to continue living in their familial homes throughout la violencia up until the time they were enrolled in the Hogares.

In contrast, 14 of the 20 peers who participated in my research project lived without interruption in their original familial homes during and following the period of la violencia. Of the remaining six peers, four relocated to the town of Santa Apolonia in order to live in what their parents deemed a safer environment. Only two of the 20 peers actually lost their familial home when it was burned down by local civil patrollers during
la violencia. In the case of these two peers (who are brothers), their family moved to a plot of land more centrally-located within the town of Santa Apolonia for safety reasons and constructed a new home there. While their housing was disrupted, these two peers were able to live in new familial homes within a short period of time and consequently, experienced less disruption and instability in housing than the majority of orphans.

Of the 20 orphans, the same 13 who had lost familial homes had also lost familial land. In eight of the 13 cases, the orphans’ mothers were widowed during la violencia and with their homes destroyed, they were no longer entitled either legally or informally to their husbands’ inherited lands. In four of the 13 cases, the relatives of orphans’ parents permanently took over the familial land when the orphans’ parents had died, abandoned their children or fled with their children from their home. In the final case, both of the orphan’s parents died, leaving her (especially as a female) with no inheritance rights to her father’s familial land. In addition to these 13 orphans, one (Lina) has no knowledge of whether her parents had land or whether it was lost. The remaining six orphans did not experience immediate loss of familial land during or shortly following la violencia, which allowed them and their surviving family members to remain living on their familial land without disruption. In contrast, none of 20 peers reported losing familial land during or immediately following la violencia. The six (30%) whose families chose to relocate to Santa Apolonia simply relocated and did not lose land in the process, although two did report having their home destroyed by the military or civil patrollers.

The status of surviving caregivers also has factored into the disparity in economic loss experienced by orphans when compared to their peers. Table 3 provides a summary of the adults who were the primary caregivers for orphans in my research project at the time...
just prior to their enrollment in the *Hogares* compared to the primary caregivers of their peers during that same general time period in the early to mid-1980s,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult(s) Responsible</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th># of Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed Mother</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned Mother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned Father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family Members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster/Adoptive Mother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Agency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reveals that none of the 20 orphans were being cared for and financially supported by both parents prior to their enrollment in the *Hogares*. In fact, 11 were being cared for by a single adult woman (either their widowed, abandoned or foster mothers). The majority of these widowed, abandoned and adoptive women were Maya indigenous women with limited to no formal education, little to no access to land and no family members who were in a financial position to economically support them and their children during this period. In contrast, 14 of the 20 peers were still living with and were economically supported by both parents in this time period. The remaining six peers continued to live with a surviving single or adoptive parent.

Furthermore, nine of the 20 orphans in my research project had older siblings who were not enrolled with them in the *Hogares* because their older siblings remained with the surviving caregivers in order to engage in wage-earning labor to help financially support their families. This was evidenced in the cases of Mario and Juliana as presented in Chapter 3. Both had older siblings who remained at home because they were old.
enough to work. For the remaining orphans, nine were enrolled with all of their siblings (none of whom were yet old enough to work) and two have no information on whether or not they had any siblings whatsoever prior to their enrollment. In contrast, all 20 peers remained living with their biological or adoptive parents and their siblings, leaving their families mostly intact during this period of the early to mid-1980s.

The more precarious conditions that orphans were living in with surviving family members prior to living in the Hogares was evident in their physical conditions at the time of enrollment. While many inconsistencies in early recordkeeping of the Hogares make it more challenging to determine the exact physical condition of each orphan upon enrollment in the first five years the home was operating, two of the initial files specifically state that the children were malnourished and had open sores at the time of their arrival. However, the Catholic sisters confirm that parasites, amoebas, worms, infected sores, chronic diarrhea and low body weight were common among orphans at the time of enrollment. In contrast, none of the 20 peers reported being in poor physical health during their early childhood years or recalled their families suffering physically from extreme levels of poverty.

Formal education was another factor that reflects the disparity in economic loss between orphans and peers. Of the 20 orphans, 12 had absolutely no formal education prior to their enrollment at the Hogares even though they were school-age at the time—they ranged in age from 5 to 13 years. The Guatemalan educational system begins formally educating children as early as the age of 5 in what is termed “párвulos” or preschool. Two additional orphans only completed the first grade of elementary school, but had to quit school because their families could no longer afford to pay for the enrollment
fees and basic school supplies. Accessing formal education proved to be difficult even for the remaining eight orphans who were formally enrolled in school. The growing cost of education and increasing poverty experienced by orphans’ families made providing orphans with formal education a near impossibility. Concerned that they could not send their children to school, surviving family members sought help from the Hogares where they would be assured that orphans would receive food, clothing and formal education.

In contrast, 18 of the 20 peers were enrolled in elementary school as soon as they became school age—eight were enrolled as early as párvulos and 10 started school in the first grade\(^2\). These 18 remained in school through at least the sixth grade, thereby completing elementary school by the average age of 12. Only two peers were not enrolled in school because of family financial constraints or because their families did not value educating the girls in the family, which was not uncommon among poor, rural Highland families at the time. Figure 7 compares the total number of orphans (prior to their enrollment in the Hogares) and the number of peers who were formally enrolled in school by their families or caregivers when they first became school-aged.

\(^{2}\) According to orphan and peer participants in my research project, Guatemalan children during the 1970s and 1980s could officially begin formal education as early as 5 years of age. However, it was common for parents in the Highlands and in rural areas, in particular, to wait to enroll their children in school until the first grade in order to reduce their overall family educational costs as they typically had more than one child enrolled in school at the time.
Guatemala’s war orphans not only experienced the long-term negative economic consequences of the genocide first-hand but they are also intimately aware that it was their surviving family members’ economic loss and devastation that ultimately led to their enrollment in the Hogares. This is evidenced in Chapter 3 in which Mario speaks of his older brother’s limited economic resources to provide him with a formal education, Juliana reflects on how much her mother struggled to work and maintain her children, Debora and Esteban recall living in the streets, and Juana recounts her mother’s distress in trying to financially support her children as an underemployed war widow. The five orphans featured in the Chapter 3 are not alone in recognizing that economic devastation and extreme poverty were the primary factors leading to their enrollment in the Hogares. Of the 20 orphans who participated in my project, 19 openly state that they were enrolled in the Hogares because of economic devastation and extreme poverty, which they perceive as a direct consequence of the genocide. For example, when explicitly asked why they were enrolled in the Hogares, three orphans explain,
We lived in poverty. My grandma always had to go out looking for work and when we came home from school, there was nothing to eat and no one to prepare it (Nidia, age 27).

It was because of the economic [situation]. We were living with my mom’s family…and they were poor too (Sheni, age 28)! 

Well, for my dad it was supposedly very difficult to care for us. So, it was because of financial resources [that we were enrolled]. Also, my grandparents couldn’t maintain us either because of the lack of financial resources (Medelin, age 28).

Most orphans indicate that they understand that their families simply did not have the financial means to provide them with adequate food, housing, clothing or formal education in their early childhoods. The only orphan participant in this study who did not state that she was enrolled in the Hogares because of economic loss and devastation was Lina (age 28), who was abandoned and has no information regarding her parents’ economic backgrounds, situations or reasons for abandoning her. For all orphans, however, the shift to living at the Hogares provided an immediate reprieve from living in extreme poverty and afforded instant access to a multitude of resources and opportunities that surviving family members simply could not offer them.

**Mitigating Negative Economic Consequences by Enrolling in the Hogares**

As demonstrated in the two previous chapters, the transition to living at the Hogares was emotionally difficult for most of the children who were enrolled. While three of the 20 orphans interviewed report the transition as being a happy one, the remaining 17 orphans state that leaving their natal communities to live in a strange place far from their familial homes without their surviving adult family members was extremely distressing. Yet despite the emotional distress of transitioning to life at the Hogares, all 20 orphans recognize the instant economic advantages that life at the Hogares entailed such as: food,
clothing and shelter; healthcare services; key religious and cultural traditions; and vocational and formal education.

Having come from extremely impoverished families, the 20 orphans’ enrollment in the Hogares signified that they would have immediate access to sufficient food, clothing and shelter. At the home, orphans received three nutritionally-balanced meals each day. Meals included common staple food items such as black beans, thick corn tortillas and rice, as well as items orphans had never seen before they came to live at the Hogares such as lentils and pasta. For example, Nidia (age 27) reflects, “Yes, I remember perfectly the first day I arrived. I had lentils for lunch…I had never eaten lentils before and I liked them very much. I also remember that the other children didn’t like them.” Juana (age 27) similarly notes that on her first day of living at the home she found the food fascinating. Juana shares, “[W]ell, the food—I liked the food because it was all so different.” In addition to new foods, orphans also were given access to a wide array of fruits and vegetables at mealtimes and often during morning and afternoon snacks. Many of the vegetables were grown on the Hogares’ agricultural land or purchased from the weekly market in the nearby town of Tecpán. Fruits and meat were also purchased at the weekly market. While fruit was provided daily, meat (a more expensive food item) was provided only three times a week for lunch and consisted primarily of beef or chicken. For many orphans, the consistent weekly consumption of meat was a first-time occurrence as their families simply could not afford to raise animals for consumption or purchase meat in the market. Subsequently, many orphans recall merely subsisting off of a basic diet of beans and corn tortillas before living in the Hogares.
Having more than one set of tattered clothing was also an immediate economic advantage of enrolling in the *Hogares*. Most of the children arrived with only the clothes they were wearing at the time. Poverty and in particular, increased prices of traditional *traje* mainly used by girls and women, made attaining a second set of clothing financially impossible for orphans and their family members. Once at the *Hogares*, however, the children received new shoes, sandals, undergarments, a set of pajamas, sweaters, a coat, socks, pants, shirts, skirts and blouses. A second set of *traje* was also given to the indigenous girls who still used *traje* at the time. The Catholic sisters who founded the home made deliberate efforts to purchase *traje* from the various natal villages of the indigenous orphan girls since each village and hamlet has a specific *traje* design. Therefore, in order to maintain the girls’ tradition of utilizing their natal village designs, special trips were made to purchase the girls’ village-specific *traje* whenever possible. None of the orphan boys were using traditional *traje* at the time that they arrived at the *Hogares*, which was not uncommon for most boys and young men in the Highlands in the 1980s (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003). Because they did not use traditional *traje*, the boys received several sets of pants and shirts that were either donated or sewn at the *Hogares* itself. Receiving new clothing and shoes from the home upon enrollment (as well as throughout their enrollment at the *Hogares*) was considered a tremendous economic benefit by many of orphans and their family members who simply did not have the resources to provide even the most basic clothing for their children. Figure 8 shows three orphans on the day they arrived at the *Hogares* with nothing more than just the clothes they were wearing at the time.
Another immediate economic advantage for orphans enrolled in the Hogares was access to secure, comfortable housing. The eight small homes that constituted the Hogares were made of adobe floors, tin roofs and solid walls made with a 3-foot cement block foundation and a remaining span of wooden planks. Each home was heated with a fireplace and the central pollo (or kitchen cooking hearth) that is pictured in Figure 9.
Many orphans grew up in simple family homes consisting of dirt floors, walls of corn stalks tied together and palm-thatched roofs. Other than a rustic central pollo, most of the homes in the rural Highlands had no fireplace or heating and lacked any form of plumbing whatsoever. For several orphans, even these types of simple homes were nonexistent in their early childhoods as they were forced to live in the streets with no consistent form of shelter as was demonstrated in the cases of both Esteban and Debora in Chapter 3. Hence, living in the warm, secure homes of the Hogares where orphans had their own bunk bed and dresser for clothing was considered an incredible luxury by orphans and their families.

With their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter met as soon as they arrived, orphans continued to benefit from the economic advantages of living at the Hogares by immediately receiving access to healthcare, which had been nearly absent in most of their early childhoods. Within days of enrolling, each orphan was brought to a local doctor for a formal medical examination. For many orphans, this was the first time they had ever been to a doctor. In addition to the visit with a local doctor, one of the six Catholic sisters working at the homes was a nurse by training and provided daily healthcare services such as: dispensing vitamins and medication when prescribed to orphans with particular health conditions; taking monthly height and weight measurements for orphans’ medical records; and offering first aid for things such as bruises, cuts, scrapes and slivers when necessary. Orphans also received occasional health checkups from visiting medical groups that arrived from the United States once a year to provide free medical care to both the Hogares staff and children, as well as to the residents of the town of Santa Apolonia. Therefore, because of their enrollment at the Hogares, orphans received some
of the best and most consistent medical care available in the rural Highlands at the time, which was still in the wake of the genocide.

In addition to medical care, orphans also received immediate dental care. For all orphans, dental care was an economic impossibility when they lived with their surviving family members because the levels of extreme poverty they experienced left no resources for non-critical services such as dental care. In addition, dental services were not commonly available in the more rural and remote areas at the time (Antonarakis 2011; Beltrán and Gillespie 1977; Hunter 1995; Lee 2007). Thus, the transition to living at the Hogares allowed each orphan to access regular dental care that was unheard of for most Highland residents at the time.

In the early years of the Hogares, the children had to be taken to various dentists in larger nearby towns for bi-annual dental checkups and for any additional dental procedures. In 1994, however, a benefactor from the United States (who is a dentist himself) donated dental equipment to set up a small on-site dental clinic located right at the Hogares. The dental clinic has been staffed by a permanent dental assistant, Carmen, who has worked for the home nearly since the dental clinic’s inception and by rotating dental students from the University of San Carlos who are assigned for a one-year period at the Hogares dental clinic in order to satisfy their dentistry practicum requirements before receiving their licenses to practice. Thus, the dental practicum program at the Hogares has offered university dental students hands-on experience, while concurrently
providing patients from both the home and town of Santa Apolonia\textsuperscript{3} with free or reduced-rate dental care for the past 17 years.

The last form of healthcare that became an immediate benefit and thus, economic advantage for orphans enrolled in the Hogares was psychological counseling offered on-site by University of San Carlos psychology intern students. Similar to the dental practicum program, the Hogares also became a practicum site for university psychology students who were required to complete a one-year practicum before receiving a license in counseling. Each student lived at the home and provided psychological counseling Monday through Friday from February through October (the approximate length of the university’s academic year in Guatemala). The psychology interns worked both individually and in groups with orphans to discuss issues of self-esteem, childhood trauma, grieving the loss of family members and feelings of abandonment, among many other topics orphans identified as important to them at the time. While the counseling services the student interns offered were not considered intensive psychological therapy, they did allow orphans, at the very least, to discuss their problems and to work with an adult on developing further coping skills and solutions to overcoming the emotional distress and problems they faced. Accessing mental healthcare in the rural Guatemala Highlands was not even an option for most people living in the region at that time because that type of health service hardly existed and most people simply could not afford the limited services that did exist (Godoy-Paiz 2005; Rodriguez et al. 2007; WHO 2005). Consequently, orphans’ access to mental health services located directly at the

\textsuperscript{3} The Hogares dental clinic was established to serve both orphans and all staff of the homes, as well as offering dental services on a sliding-fee scale for the residents of the town of Santa Apolonia and its adjoining hamlets.
*Hogares* itself was an exceptional benefit that orphans probably would never have received had they remained living with their surviving family members.

The economic advantage of living at the *Hogares* also meant that orphans could participate in and celebrate what the Catholic sisters deemed key religious and cultural traditions. Because the *Hogares* was a project established and operated by Catholic sisters, all orphans were raised as practicing Catholics and participated in traditional Catholic customs and rites such as receiving the sacraments of baptism, first communion and confirmation. The majority of orphans came from families who were practicing Catholics; however, their families’ impoverished status typically prevented orphans from participating in sacramental rites such as first communion or confirmation before living in the *Hogares* because family members simply could not afford to buy the required clothing and materials for the rites or typical food prepared for the *fiestas* (or parties) that typically followed. When orphans were enrolled in the *Hogares*, however, they were often immediately placed in a religious formation class according to the stage they were in for receiving the various sacraments. For example, older orphans who had not yet been baptized in the Catholic Church began preparations for baptism, while older orphans who had already been baptized and received their first communion were placed in confirmation preparation classes. Once orphans were prepared to receive the various sacraments, the *Hogares* provided the materials and appropriate clothing (e.g., special candles, first communion dresses and veils, first communion suits for the boys, etc.) required for the event. The photographs presented in Figure 10 show some of the special clothing and candles the *Hogares* provided for orphans celebrating their First Communion.
The Hogares also provided special food and desserts for the fiestas that followed each Catholic mass in which the sacraments were received. These celebrations occurred at various times throughout each year in accordance with the Catholic Church annual schedule. Surviving family members were always invited to attend these special events over the years and were encouraged to stay overnight at the Hogares in order to facilitate their participation with their orphaned children in these types of special events.

In addition to the various religious sacraments and celebrations, the Hogares also had the economic resources to celebrate the Quinceañera (or 15th birthday coming of age celebration) of each orphan girl. Rather than holding a single, independent event for each girl on the day they turned 15, the home staff organized an annual Quinceañera celebration for all of the girls turning 15 in a given year. The Hogares provided the girls with either a beautiful dress sewn at the home itself (for the girls who self-identified as ladina) or with more elaborate traditional traje trimmed with lace that was purchased at the local market (for the girls who self-identified as indigenous). Each annual
Quinceañera celebration included a Catholic mass honoring the girls, which was followed by a special lunch at the Hogares that often included traditional foods and birthday cake. The celebration typically continued with various activities such as skits, a talent show and a dance to either traditional marimba music or to music played on a sound system. Figure 11 presents images from a past Quinceañera celebration at the Hogares in 1993.

![Figure 11: Celebrating quinceañeras. (Left) Quinceañera celebration of two of the orphan girls (second and fourth from the left) in 1993 pictured with two of the tías (or caretakers) from the homes and a relative (on the far right). (Right) The party following this Quinceañera Catholic mass in 1993 with some orphan boys enjoying cake and fruit punch.](image)

Of all the economic advantages the Hogares afforded, however, orphans identify the vocational and formal education they received while enrolled as the greatest economic advantage of all. Shortly after founding the home, the Catholic sisters initiated a vocational educational program that still operates today. The aim of this program has been to develop orphans’ skills in a particular vocational trade in order to help them secure gainful employment once they leave the home at the age of 18 or after completing high school (for those who are still in high school at the age of 18 because of a delayed start to their formal education). In the vocational program, orphans around the age of 12
choose from one of three vocational skills: tailoring/sewing, carpentry or shoemaking. Each vocational area has an on-site workshop in which students attend classes provided by a skilled instructor and practice their trade either in the mornings or afternoons, depending on the local public school schedule. Figure 12 presents images from some of the vocational class sessions that took place at the Hogares in 1994.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 12: Vocational Instruction. (Left) Instructor don Faustino and students in the tailoring/sewing vocational training workshop in 1994. (Right) Instructor don Edgar (second from right) in the carpentry vocational training workshop with students in 1994.

Working closely with the vocational education instructors, orphans who participated in my research project developed strong and employable vocational skills, while simultaneously helping sustain the Hogares by producing many of the items used at the home itself such as: beds, dressers, tables, chairs, shoes, school backpacks, school uniforms, pants, shirts, blouses, sheets, pillowcases and blankets. In addition to learning either tailoring/sewing, carpentry or shoemaking, orphans also worked in the Hogares’ agricultural fields in order to develop farming skills that they could use as adults should they eventually attain land of their own on which to grow traditional crops to supplement

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4 The local public schools in the town of Santa Apolonia have alternating schedules. The public elementary school holds classes from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., while the junior high holds classes from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday during the school year (approximately January through October).
family food supplies. The goal of training orphans in a vocational trade while concurrently reducing operational costs of the *Hogares* through the production of the goods used by orphans and staff has had lasting effects. All 20 orphans who participated in my research project learned at least one vocational trade along with agricultural skills that they continue to use to some degree today. Table 4 reveals that over half of the 20 orphans still use the vocational skill they learned at the *Hogares* in some capacity today as adults and five specifically use those vocational skills in their current employment positions (many orphans have secured other forms of professional employment not requiring a vocational trade skill).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational Skill Learned</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th>Still Use Skill Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tailoring/Sewing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpentry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemaking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vocational skill training offered by the *Hogares* gave orphans an economic advantage over their peers as their peers never had formal vocational training in their childhood years. However, the most valuable and important economic advantage afforded by the *Hogares* was the formal education it provided for every orphan who was enrolled, regardless of age or previous formal education experience. The 20 orphans who

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5 All 12 of the female orphans who participated in this research project were enrolled in the tailoring/sewing vocational program during their enrollment at the *Hogares*. When the vocational program began, all of the female orphans tended to select tailoring/sewing as their vocational skill area because the employment of females in a carpentry or shoemaking position was almost unheard of in the Highlands at that time as these trades were viewed as “men’s” work. Today, several female orphans are studying in either the carpentry or shoemaking workshops because they are more interested in learning the trade than in actually becoming employed in either area following their enrollment at the home and because they will most likely continue their formal education so that they can secure more professional and gainful employment when they are adults. Thus, their desire to learn carpentry or shoemaking is more of a reflection of their general interests than in their aim to increase their employability in a particular trade when they become adults.
participated in my research project were immediately enrolled in the local public school upon their arrival at the Hogares, depending on whether school was in session at the time (the school year runs from mid-January to roughly late October). Older children who had no previous formal education before enrolling in the Hogares were placed in the first grade of the local public elementary school in Santa Apolonia, while older children with some prior education previous to arriving were enrolled in the grade level at which they had stopped attending school. Younger children who had just turned school-age were placed in the appropriate pre-school program that included párvulos for 5-year-olds and kindergarten for 6-year-olds. Pre-school and kindergarten took place at the local elementary school in Santa Apolonia and thus, adhered to the same schedule as the elementary school in general.

All of the school-age children who were enrolled in the Hogares were also required to participate in the home’s own reforzamiento escolar (scholastic reinforcement) program. The program consisted of group and individual educational tutoring that took place on-site. Group tutoring occurred one hour every day, Monday through Friday, throughout the school year for each grade level of orphans attending the local public schools. The tutoring took place in one of the two Hogares onsite classrooms with an adult instructor who supervised their homework and provided tailored group tutoring across all subject areas including: math, social studies, Spanish language, English, reading, music and science. The instructors included a full-time certified teacher employed as staff (who remains employed at the Hogares even today), one of the Catholic sisters who also had a teaching certificate and a team of international volunteers with a wide range of educational backgrounds who offered their services for a period of one-month up to three
years or longer. The instructors utilized both their own educational backgrounds, local school materials and various resources provided by the home (such as a small on-site library) to help orphans succeed in school and to advance their educations.

Individual tutoring, also part of the reforzamiento escolar program, occurred daily or intermittently throughout the school year, depending on the individual needs of each student. Individual tutoring was designed to help orphans who had undiagnosed learning disabilities keep academic pace with their classmates in all of the school subjects. It was also created to help older students who had no formal education prior to enrolling in the Hogares to advance their education at a quicker pace and potentially skip a grade or two in order to catch up academically with their peers of the same age. Individual tutoring sessions were conducted by members of the instruction team and took place in one of the on-site classrooms or in the dining area of one of the eight homes Monday through Friday, usually in the evenings. Individual tutoring sessions were paramount in helping orphans to utilize tailored educational assistance in order to progress in school.

The reforzamiento escolar program at the Hogares also provided additional educational services such as: exam preparation, exam recovery preparation and a nursery school class for the youngest orphans. Throughout the school year, the instructors at the home held additional study sessions in order to prepare orphans for their cumulative final exams held at the end of each trimester. In addition to exam preparation, sessions were held for orphans who failed their final exams and were required to re-take them. The exam recovery preparation sessions were often individually-based, as most orphans on average were likely to pass their exams. Lastly, a guardería (or nursery school) class was held every morning for two hours in the nursery school room at the Hogares throughout
the school year to help the youngest orphaned children, ages 2 to 4 years, prepare for preschool. The guardería class was conducted by one of the Hogares’ instructors who had experience working with early childhood education and consisted of teaching basic concepts such as numbers, counting, shapes, colors, children’s songs, how to color and learning to identify basic words. The guardería sessions were an effective way to prepare the youngest orphans for school, and it was not uncommon for the public school teachers from Santa Apolonia to comment on how well-prepared the youngest orphans were, both academically and socially, for formal pre-school at the local elementary school.

The combination of formal education at the local public schools in Santa Apolonia, and the additional on-site tutoring and educational services at the Hogares created a positive atmosphere of learning for orphans during their enrollment in the home. Because of the encouragement and educational services they received, orphans were generally successful in achieving at least an elementary school education at the minimum. Consequently, all 20 orphans who participated in my research project successfully completed all six grades of elementary school. In contrast, 16 of the 20 peer participants completed all six grades of elementary school in Santa Apolonia. Three of the peers began elementary school, but quit before completing the 6th grade. In addition, one peer had no formal education whatsoever regardless of continued family economic support because her parents simply decided not to formally enroll her in school.6

All 20 orphans also continued on to junior high school. In the Guatemalan educational system, junior high (called básico) consists of three grades (first through third) and involves general subjects such as math, science, social studies, Spanish, English, art and

6 Families often viewed sending their sons to school as more important than sending girls as boys would be expected to be the primary wage-earner for their families in adulthood.
music. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the junior high school in Santa Apolonia in the early 1990s was not yet large enough to handle the enrollment of all of the children from town plus all orphans from the Hogares. As a result, the group of junior high school students from the Hogares was divided and sent to three different junior high schools: the public junior high school in Santa Apolonia, the cooperative Experimental junior high school in the neighboring town of Tecpán and San Vicente, a private Catholic junior high school located in Tecpán as well.

With continued support from the reforzamiento escolar program, orphans experienced overall success in junior high school as well. Of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, all but one completed junior high school. One orphan (who most likely has an undiagnosed learning disability) worked for years with one of the on-site instructors at the Hogares to pass the first grade level of junior high school. However, she was unsuccessful and after several years of trying, gave up on formal education altogether, concentrating more fully on her vocational skills training instead. Among the 19 orphans who completed junior high school, 17 did so with the economic support of the Catholic sisters who ran the home. Two of the 19 orphans left the home before completing junior high school, but continued their formal education on their own either immediately following or within a year of leaving the Hogares. Oscar decided to leave the Hogares at the age of 18 in order to have greater independence and paid for his third year of básico on his own while working part-time. Esteban (featured in Chapter 3) was kicked out of the home for poor behavioral conduct, but began his third year of junior high school a year after leaving the Hogares, paying his educational fees on his own. As a result, both Oscar and Esteban also completed junior high school. In contrast to the 19
orphans who completed junior high school, only 11 of the 20 peers who participated in this research project completed all three years of junior high. Two additional peers began junior high, but did not make it past either the first or second years of junior high school.

The next step in the Guatemalan educational process is high school and it is the most expensive phase of formal education in the country. High school programs are career-focused, which requires students to choose a specific career to study such as accounting, elementary education, tourism, secretarial training or computer technology. Within the area of career training, high school students also continue to learn general subjects such as math, science, reading and language. The high school level of education in Guatemala is the most expensive of all educational levels (including college in most cases) because high schools are generally private schools that charge tuition and fees, and are located only in urban centers that have significantly higher costs of living.

Orphans who successfully completed junior high school were given the opportunity to continue their formal education through high school with the financial support of the Catholic sisters. Three orphans who had a delayed start to their formal education either chose to leave the home at the age of 18 without continuing on to high school even though they could have received the Catholic sisters’ economic support or were forced to leave the home for various reasons (e.g., Juliana’s unexpected pregnancy, etc.). The majority of orphans, however, elected to continue their education through high school because they would be able to attain vital financial assistance from the Catholic sisters. For several orphans, this meant continuing their formal enrollment at the Hogares beyond the legal adult age of 18. Consequently, the majority of orphans recognized the value and
importance of receiving a high school education, which they perceived as offsetting the freedom of being able to strike out on their own as adults at the age of 18.

Of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, 14 completed their high school education with the financial assistance of the Catholic sisters. Two additional orphans completed their high school educations; however, they paid for their high school tuition on their own either by choice or because they were asked to leave the *Hogares* before they entered high school (e.g., the case of Esteban, etc.). Thus, a total of 16 of the 20 orphans completed high school. Among the four orphans who did not complete high school, Lina was not able to successfully complete junior high, Juliana was kicked out of the home because of pregnancy after finishing the final year of junior high school and was not able to continue her education, and Sofia and Carlos simply decided to leave the *Hogares* and did not continue their formal education afterwards. Thus, while four orphans did not go on to high school, the overwhelming majority did. In contrast, only 10 peer participants completed high school even though all of the peers had the full financial support of their family members at the time. Table 5 provides a summary of the various career certification areas completed by orphans and peers who finished high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Area</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th># of Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Secretary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality and Tourism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Education Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Education Instructor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Mechanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The *Hogares* provision of formal education from elementary through high school was a significant economic benefit for orphans because it allowed them to achieve a higher level of education overall than their peers. With both the financial assistance and academic support offered early on in the *reforzamiento escolar* program at the *Hogares*, a larger number of orphans than peers completed high school even though the peers had continuous family financial support. The fact that 16 orphans completed high school is particularly noteworthy as 12 of the 20 orphans who participated in this research project had a delayed start to their formal education and were initially behind their peers of the same age in formal education. Figure 13 presents a comparative summary of the level of formal education attained by orphans compared with that of their peers.

![Figure 13: Level of Education Attained through High School](image)

It is interesting to note that in comparison to orphans, one peer had no formal education whatsoever and six of the peers only completed some or all of elementary school in contrast to only one orphan who did not extend her formal education beyond elementary school due to a likely undiagnosed learning disability. The completion of high school, therefore, was a significant achievement for orphans and one that the Catholic
sisters hoped would increase orphans’ employability once they left the Hogares and began to live on their own as adults. Therefore, having access to not only food, clothing and shelter but also to vocational training and formal education was a major economic benefit of growing up in the Hogares and was something for which orphans have been most appreciative. For example, when asked what they perceived as general benefits of growing up in the Hogares, some orphans share,

The advantages were economic in that we had everything at the time. We had balanced meals and everyone had the same. We had food, clothing and education…and everything (Nidia, age 27)!

The advantages were that I could prepare myself better, have a greater knowledge, a better preparation for life and a way to survive in the future (Noemi, age 34).

The advantage that I had there was that I had everything with some limitations, but I had it. I had my studies, my clothing, my food. I had the option to learn a vocational skill in addition to my studies. So, that was one of the advantages. For me, this was my home. It was—how shall I say?—the best experience of my life…(Yohanna, age 29)!

With dramatically improved access to food, clothing, shelter, vocational skills training and formal education, orphans enrolled at the Hogares were able to prepare themselves for adulthood despite having lost family members during la violencia and being enrolled in a residential home. Formal education, in particular, was key in helping orphans prepare to support themselves as adults. Yet their orphan status still presented them with prolonged economic challenges that resurfaced in adulthood and that made the transition into adulthood much more economically difficult for orphans than for their peers from Santa Apolonia despite the greater economic benefits orphans enjoyed at the Hogares.

**Negative Economic Consequences Resurface as Orphans Enter Adulthood**

The vocational training and formal education orphans received while enrolled in the Hogares were designed to help orphans attain gainful employment once they left the
home and were no longer financially supported by the Catholic sisters. With over 100 children enrolled by the mid-1990s, it was impossible for the Catholic sisters to continue financially supporting orphans once they became adults, completed high school (for the majority) and were no longer officially enrolled in the home. As a result, all orphans left the Hogares with nothing more than their educations, vocational training and a few personal belongings (e.g., clothing, books, school supplies, etc.). Subsequently, orphans had to independently establish themselves as adults and the process of leaving the home was particularly onerous for orphans because of the loss of one or both of their parents during la violencia, which presented them with several long-term economic constraints.

The overwhelming majority of orphans literally had no home to return to and therefore, had to find their own form of housing once they left the Hogares. Similarly, nearly all 20 orphans had no inheritance rights or access to familial land. Access to land would have at least provided orphans with valuable land on which to build a home or with a tangible asset that they could have sold to help support themselves financially. The lack of general family financial support also burdened orphans’ transition to adulthood. Surviving family members, who had been too poor to support orphans economically in their childhoods, were not in a financial position to provide economic support for orphans once they left the Hogares. With no other source of economic support, orphans had to frantically search for gainful employment immediately after leaving the Hogares in order to support themselves against a backdrop of increasing poverty, underemployment and the rapidly rising cost of living in Guatemala during the late 1990s and early 2000s (CITGUA 1987a; Reyes Illescas 1984; Stern 2005; Tierney 1997; Woodward 2008).
The majority of orphans also lost ties to their natal communities and consequently, lost access to the economic support commonly found between natal community members. Natal communities in the Highlands of Guatemala have served not only as a locus of connection to a particular physical place but also as a tie to an extensive social network consisting of extended kin (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, first cousins, etc.), distant relatives (e.g., third, fourth and fifth cousins, etc.) and other community members who often serve as fictive kin (such as godparents) who are not necessarily related through kinship. This social network allows individual community members to attain various forms of social, moral and economic support. For example, in natal communities individuals often seek economic assistance from other members through activities such as planting fields, harvesting crops, building homes, providing food for events and offering to help with childcare. Individuals within the community also benefit from having connections with fellow community members who may know about and have influence in accessing economic opportunities such as employment positions, bargains on products, inexpensive forms of transportation and access to land. It also is not uncommon in Highland communities for members to offer economic assistance in the form of free housing, employment, harvest surpluses or cash loans to individual community members who are struggling financially to make ends meet (Adams and Hawkins 2007; Eber 2000; Watanabe 1990; Zur 1998). Orphans’ lost connections to natal communities left them without a natal community social network that they could access once they left the Hogares and were on their own. This is not to say that orphans did not feel like they were part of community life in Santa Apolonia during their enrollment. However, orphans’ participation in community life in Santa Apolonia was considered secondary because the
community members did not view orphans as having kinship ties in the community in the way that individuals born into or who adopted Santa Apolonia as a community did, adding yet another layer of economic loss and challenge to orphans’ already arduous transition into early adulthood.

Unlike orphans, nearly all of the peers benefitted from the stability of being able to continue living in their familial homes or the homes of their extended relatives and on their familial land in early adulthood without worrying about how to find and financially afford a place to live. The peers also overwhelmingly had the financial support of family members, which helped ease their transition into adulthood because economic survival was not as pressing and as immediate of a concern in the way that it was for orphans. Lastly, the peers could utilize their social network in Santa Apolonia to find gainful employment and to provide economic resources to help them transition smoothly into early adulthood. In this way, the peers had a “safety net” (or a backup source of financial support) from their fellow community members that was unavailable to orphans.

Examining the long-term economic disparities between orphans and peers, I found that of the 20 orphans in my research project, only two had either a living parent or sibling who had maintained their familial home. Among the six orphans whose families initially had not lost familial homes during or immediately following la violencia, four of their families lost their homes shortly after orphans were enrolled in the Hogares. The remaining two orphans with access to familial homes simply could not return “home” for financial reasons (i.e., familial homes were located in an area too remote from any form of gainful employment or commuting options). Thus, 18 orphans had no surviving parent or sibling with a home in which they could live immediately after leaving the Hogares.
In contrast, 18 of the 20 peer participants were able to continue living with their parents and siblings in their familial homes once they turned 18 years of age. Only two of the peers did not have direct access to their parents’ home because one of their parents was murdered during the genocide and thus, inheritance rights to the familial home were severed. However, both of these individuals grew up living with extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.) and continued living with those same extended family members as they transitioned into adulthood. Figure 14 presents a comparison of orphans’ and peers’ access to familial homes in early adulthood.

![Figure 14: Orphan and Peer Access to Familial Homes in Early Adulthood](image)

Of the 20 orphans, 18 also had no titles to or access to familial land holdings. In most cases, orphans’ surviving mothers lost their inheritance rights to their land at the moment that their husbands were murdered or died from illness because the land was initially the property of their husbands’ families. The same two orphans presented above who had access to a familial home similarly had the only access to familial land among the group of orphan participants. Because they were able to maintain their familial inheritance
rights, the parcels of land on which the original familial homes were constructed remained in the hands of their surviving family members and by extension, of these two orphans themselves. Similar to their familial homes, however, the location of the land was far too remote to accommodate their employment locations and lacked any viable access to public transport for commuting. Thus, the two orphans could not feasibly build a house on their familial land.

In contrast, 19 of the 20 peers maintained their inheritance rights to their familial land on which they could build their own homes in the future. Only one of the peers lost all inheritance rights to familial land because her father was murdered during la violencia. As with many orphans, this particular peer (especially as a female) lost inheritance rights to the land at the moment her father was murdered. Figure 15 presents a comparative summary of orphans’ and peers’ levels of access to familial land in early adulthood.

![Figure 15: Orphan and Peer Access to Familial Land in Early Adulthood](image)

All but one orphan report not having had any financial support whatsoever from family members at the time that they left the Hogares. The only orphan with family financial support in early adulthood reports that while she did have the financial support
of her mother, her mother’s meager wages offered just a small amount of financial assistance. In contrast, 19 peers report having ample access to family financial support in early childhood. The only peer who did not have family financial support at that time shares that her parents both died of natural causes by the time she entered adulthood. Figure 16 presents a comparative summary of access to family financial support of orphans compared to their peers at the time that they entered early adulthood.

![Bar chart showing access to familial financial support for orphans and peers in early adulthood.](image)

**Figure 16: Orphan and Peer Access to Familial Financial Support in Early Adulthood**

In contrast to access to familial homes and land, all 20 orphans lost most of their connections to their natal communities and the economic support those communities could offer. Even the two orphans who report having access to a familial home and land in their natal communities recognize that they have lost their connections to the social network of their natal communities and thus, to the reciprocal obligations commonly found in such communities. Because these two orphans grew up in the *Hogares*, they believe that natal community members generally do not know or trust them and consequently, do not recognize them as fellow community members with whom they still have communal ties.
All 20 peers, on the other hand, maintained strong ties to both the physical place and social network of Santa Apolonia. Even the four peers whose families relocated to Santa Apolonia report feeling strongly connected and committed to community ties in Santa Apolonia. Figure 17 provides a comparative summary of orphans’ and peers’ access to community ties.

![Figure 17: Orphan and Peer Access to Community Ties](image)

**Confronting Long-Term Economic Consequences of la violencia in Early Adulthood**

Upon leaving the Hogares, with no familial home or land to return to and no family or community financial support, all 20 orphans immediately recognized that the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia* quickly resurfaced in their lives. Rather than succumb to these consequences, however, orphans actively worked to confront them. They confronted them by choosing to relocate to urban centers, seek housing on their own, secure gainful fulltime employment, pursue college education, establish a Hogares alumni social network and start families of their own. I now discuss each of these efforts that orphans have undertaken to confront and to work to overcome the serious long-term economic consequences wrought by *la violencia*. 
Of the 20 orphan participants, 14 moved to larger urban centers once they left the *Hogares* in order to access increased housing and employment opportunities. Eight of these 14 orphans moved to the national capital of Guatemala City. Four of the eight moved there to attend high school and initially lived with friends or acquaintances as roommates or housemates. The remaining four previously lived in a small home—which was supervised by one of the *tías* on *Hogares*’ staff—that the Catholic sisters began to rent for the orphans attending high school in the capital in the late 1990s. As more and more orphans completed junior high and chose to attend high school, the Catholic sisters recognized the need for more centralized housing in the capital in order to reduce both the daily transportation costs and exposure to the increasing danger of gang-driven theft and assaults carried out on passengers on daily rural bus transport. By living in a small rented house during high school, the four orphans who made Guatemala City their home in early adulthood had the opportunity to transition more smoothly into urban living. As a result of both independent living arrangements and the Catholic sisters’ rental house, the eight orphans who moved to Guatemala City permanently as adults all had previous experience living in the capital prior to living on their own and consequently, chose to establish themselves independently in the capital once they were adults.

In addition to the eight orphans, six of the 14 orphans who moved to urban centers relocated in the cities of Chimaltenango or Tecpán. Four of the six orphans moved to the city of Chimaltenango, which has a population of over 74,000 inhabitants (INE 2002). The larger size of Chimaltenango offered the four orphans increased housing and job opportunities, while permitting them to remain in the central, majority Maya indigenous Highlands rather than in the metropolitan capital. The two remaining orphans relocated to
the nearby town of Tecpán (located just 4 kilometers southwest of Santa Apolonia), which has a population size of approximately 23,000 people (INE 2002). Unlike orphans who established themselves in Guatemala City, those who moved to Chimaltenango and Tecpán had not previously lived in these areas. Therefore, the move to these urban centers meant a transition to a new residential setting, especially for those who moved to Chimaltenango in particular.

Of orphans who did not relocate to a larger urban center, only five remained in Santa Apolonia. Two of the five married local residents and lived with their spouses’ families who own homes and land in town, one found a place to rent, another moved to her brother’s newly constructed home (Juana presented in Chapter 3) where she paid basic utilities and one moved in with a former tía who had started working at the Hogares when this orphan was just a small child. Lastly, one of the 20 orphans, Yohanna, moved to the neighboring town of San José Poaquil—located 15 kilometers northeast of Santa Apolonia with a population of 9,622 (INE 2002)—where she was hired to teach in the local elementary school.

Unlike the majority of orphans, all 20 peers continued living with their families in Santa Apolonia as they transitioned into adulthood. Therefore, location of residence for the peers remained stable and uninterrupted throughout early adulthood. Figure 18 provides a visual representation of the comparison of the initial residential locations of orphans (indicated by the lighter colored dots) and their peers (indicated by the darker colored dot) as they transitioned into adulthood.
The peers’ abilities to continue living in Santa Apolonia with family was cost effective. Not only were the peers able to share the general costs of living with their family members but they were also able to continue living in a smaller village in which prices of food and supplies remained relatively low compared to urban centers. The majority of orphans, however, had to uproot from Santa Apolonia and move to areas that offered increased housing and employment opportunities but at the cost of much higher urban consumer prices.
Relocating to urban centers forced most orphans to seek and secure housing on their own. Eight of the 20 orphans found small, simple homes to rent primarily in Guatemala City or Chimaltenango—areas that have more small homes available to rent in general. Seven of the 20 orphans rented a single room within other people’s homes that were located in Guatemala City (three orphans), Santa Apolonia (three orphans) and Tecpán (one orphan). Renting a single room was often the most affordable and most accessible form of housing. Orphans were able to rent rooms because more Guatemalan families in urban and even rural municipal centers such as Santa Apolonia began renting space as a means of earning additional income. Only one orphan started out renting an actual independent apartment because, according to this orphan, apartments were not as commonplace in the Highlands in the late 1990s. Lastly, four of the 20 orphans either married or formed a civil union with a partner and moved into their in-laws’ familial homes, which are located in Santa Apolonia (two orphans) or Tecpán (two orphans).

In contrast, the peers mostly remained living in local familial homes. Sixteen of the 20 lived with their parents, two lived with a brother or uncle and two lived in the home of their spouses’ parents. At this point in early adulthood, none of the 20 orphans or their 20 peers yet owned their own homes. Table 6 presents a comparative summary of the types of housing secured by orphans and peers as they transitioned into early adulthood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th># of Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own a House</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Other Relatives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Spouse’s Parents’ Home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent a House</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent an Apartment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent a Single Room</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences in the types of housing secured in early adulthood by orphans and their peers is considerable given that 16 orphans had to pay rent for their own housing without the financial help of family members or the Hogares, while 16 of their peers were able to continue living with their parents with little to no housing expenses and the remaining four lived with other relatives or in-laws who did not charge them for housing costs. During their participation in my research project, orphans often commented on how leaving the Hogares was especially difficult precisely because of the sudden financial responsibilities that they faced such as housing costs. Consequently, the majority of orphans sought to secure full-time employment simultaneously with finding housing in order to meet their new, onerous financial obligations on their own.

Among the 20 orphans, 18 secured a fulltime job within the first few months after leaving the Hogares and two united with a partner and became the primary caregivers for their newborns. In a similar fashion, 18 of the peers secured formal full-time employment as they transitioned into adulthood, while only two became stay-at-home moms. Table 7 presents a comparative summary of the type of employment orphans and their peers initially secured in early adulthood.
Table 7: Initial Type of Employment of Orphans and Peers in Early Adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>Number of Orphans</th>
<th>Number of Peers</th>
<th>Professional Training or Certification Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/Secretary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Mechanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Sacristan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Training or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RestaurantServers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certification Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Helper</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck Operator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker/Maid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-Home Mom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 18 orphans who sought fulltime employment immediately after leaving the *Hogares*, 13 were able to secure a position that required professional training or certification. By completing a career-focused high school program, the majority of the 20 orphans left the *Hogares* with the professional training or certification required for attaining better-paid fulltime jobs. Among the 18 peers, however, only five were able to secure a higher-paid job that required professional training or certification. The remaining 13 found work only in minimum-wage positions that required less formal education and training. The disparity between orphans’ abilities to secure gainful employment in better-paid fulltime employment positions and the abilities of their peers meant that orphans not only were able to keep pace with their peers in attaining better-paid jobs but also began to outpace them overall. With initial fulltime employment secured, many orphans next began to research and determine other ways to advance their future earning potential.
Having participated in the positive learning environment established at the *Hogares* and with general success in both junior and high school, some orphans investigated the option of higher education as a means of increasing their earning potential and their ability to support themselves and a family in the future. With little or no prior knowledge of how the national college system works, however, orphans had to take the initiative to determine how and where to enroll in college, as well as how to pay for their college education on their own.

Among the 20 orphans who participated in my research project, eight figured out how to navigate the national college system and enrolled in college classes within the first 2-3 years after officially leaving the *Hogares*. All eight of these orphans continued to work full-time while attending college classes in the evenings and on the weekends (as was demonstrated in three of the five orphan profiles presented in Chapter 3). Four of the eight orphans did receive some type of financial assistance from a U.S. family that has a long-standing relationship with the *Hogares* and orphans themselves. However, this financial assistance covered the minimum costs of tuition and books only, and did not pay for daily living expenses. In addition to the eight orphans who enrolled in college, five of the 20 orphans enrolled in certification programs (e.g., firefighting, auto mechanics, etc.) and in other coursework that would either help secure an increase in pay from their current employers or advance their general marketable employment skills (e.g., English classes, cooking classes, etc.). The remaining seven orphans did not pursue higher education either due to family responsibilities (e.g., raising young children, etc.) or in the case of Lina, due to limited academic skills.
For the peers who participated in my project, higher education was not as critical for advancing their economic situations as they already had relatively secure financial support from their families. Only three of the 20 peers enrolled in college after completing high school. Figure 19 provides a comparative summary of the highest levels of education attained by orphans and their peers from Santa Apolonia in early adulthood.

![Figure 19: Highest Level of Education Attained by Orphans and Peers in Early Adulthood](image)

Orphans’ pursuit of higher education at a rate nearly triple that of their peers is impressive. For many of the peers, a college education was neither as pressing nor as necessary in order to economically establish themselves in early adulthood since they had the sustained financial support of their families. Orphans, however, intentionally accessed higher education in order to confront and ultimately to overcome the long-term economic consequences of la violencia affecting their adult lives. Another tool orphans actively pursued to help them in adulthood was establishing a social network of Hogares alumni.

Establishing themselves as independent adults in both work and college, while lacking ties to their extended family members and natal communities, orphans worked to establish their own social network as a viable resource of information and connections for
each other. Older alumni of the *Hogares* began to help each other once they were living on their own. This group then began to help the next group of orphans newly transitioning into adulthood. In fact, it was not uncommon for several of the *Hogares* alumni not related through kinship to share housing in early adulthood, becoming either roommates or housemates in order to afford the higher cost of living in urban centers. Older alumni also commonly helped each other secure gainful employment, often working at the same establishment such as Burger King (considered a good-paying job in Guatemala) or at national museums in Guatemala City. Furthermore, the *Hogares* alumni helped each other navigate living in urban centers and to enroll in college and shared college textbooks, as well as other useful items such as old cell phones, printers and computers in order to further support each other.

While the *Hogares* alumni social network will likely never directly replace the lost ties with family and community social networks that are common in the Highlands, it became a way for orphans to help each other minimize the burden of the often dramatic transition into adulthood after leaving the home. The alumni social network is a vital tool that continues to serve orphans today even in the midst of many orphan starting families, which is yet another means orphans use to confront the long-term economic consequences of *la violencia* in early adulthood.

Orphans began to establish families of their own in early adulthood. While there was one case of a teenage pregnancy among the 20 orphans who participated in this research project (Juliana presented in Chapter 3), the majority waited at least two years after leaving the *Hogares* before either marrying or uniting with a partner and having children of their own. Among the 20 orphans, only four married and one united with a partner,
starting a family of their own within the first two years of leaving the Hogares. Among the peers, seven married and two united with a partner. All nine then began having children in the same period (or before the age of 21). However, this difference began to diminish to the point of becoming the inverse by the time orphans and peers were in their mid-20s. Table 8 presents a comparative summary of the family status of orphans and their peers in early adulthood when they were in their mid-20s.

Table 8: Family Status of Orphans and Peers in Early Adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Partnership</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th># of Peers</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of peers who remained single by the time they were in their mid-20s was double that of the 20 orphans. While this doubling (6 peers versus 3 orphans) seems relatively small, it does demonstrate that orphans established families of their own at a slightly more abbreviated pace when compared to their peers. Orphans’ desires to establish partnerships and families became a way of not only creating their own families in order to formulate and fortify their sense of belonging but of also developing a social, moral and economic support network with their partners and their partners’ family members.

The initial years after leaving the Hogares were difficult both emotionally and economically for orphans; however, through hard work and self-motivation they were able to keep pace economically with their peers from Santa Apolonia and in some cases, surpassed their peers in economic factors such as securing gainful employment and

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accessing higher education. In the following section, I present the current economic status of orphans and their peers as reported at the time of their participation in my research project. I use this comparison to demonstrate how orphans have begun to overcome the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia* and outpace their peers on several key economic factors when comparing orphan and peer experiences.

**Beginning to Overcome the Long-Term Economic Consequences of *la violencia***

In the years following their transition into early adulthood, all but one of the 20 orphans and all of the 20 peers remained living where they initially established themselves as young adults. The one orphan (Debora, who was featured in Chapter 3) who changed locations left Guatemala City to return to Santa Apolonia in order to marry her fiancé and live with his parents in their familial home. While the geographical locations of residence remained nearly identical as those in early adulthood, the current type of residence, employment status, individual and family income, educational levels, social network, and general family status changed markedly by the time orphans and their peers participated in my research project in 2007-2008.

Table 9 presents a comparative summary of the previous and current types of residence secured by orphans and their peers as reported at the time of their participation in my research project.
Table 9: Type of Housing Secured by Orphans and Peers in Adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th>Number of Orphans in Early Adulthood</th>
<th>Number of Orphans at Interview</th>
<th>Number of Peers in Early Adulthood</th>
<th>Number of Peers at Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own a House</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Other Relatives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse’s Parents’ Home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent a House</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent an Apartment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent a Single Room</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 9 reveals, four of the 20 orphans built their own homes by the time they participated in my research project, paying for all construction materials out-of-pocket as mortgage loans are uncommon for the majority of Guatemala’s population. In two of the four cases, orphans are males who, having lost access to familial land during the genocide, first had to purchase a small parcel of land as their wives (who are not formally employed) stayed at home to raise their children. The remaining two orphans are women. Yohana (age 29) works fulltime as an elementary school teacher. Her additional income helped her husband purchase a parcel of land, allowing them to build their own home a few years later. Sofia (age 29) stayed at home to care for her two young children while her husband continued to work fulltime. Of the four orphans who constructed homes, only Sofia had the fortune of having a husband who had inherited land from his father, which was centrally located in Santa Apolonia where the value of small parcels of land have skyrocketed over the past 15 years.

Among the 20 peers, seven constructed their own homes by the time they participated in my research project. Four of the seven peers are men who worked fulltime while living with their parents in order to save enough money to build their own home on a portion of
land that they inherited from their fathers. The remaining three peers are women who either inherited land from their parents (in two of the cases) or had access to land via their husbands’ land inheritance (one case). Two of the women worked fulltime and one stayed at home with her small children while just her husband worked fulltime.

The ability of at least four orphans to build their own homes is a notable achievement given that three of them did not have access to familial land or to land inherited by a spouse. While not at the same pace as their peers, orphans are constructing homes of their own nonetheless and at least five more orphans had recently purchased small plots of land just prior to participating in my research project. These five orphans hope to begin construction of their own houses within the next five years or so, depending on the economy and their earnings. It is also important to note that 11 of the 20 orphans continue to rent a home, an apartment or a single room and therefore, independently support themselves and their families. In contrast, eight of the 20 peers continue to live with their parents and continue to receive their parents’ financial support, which greatly mitigates the economic pressures they face relative to orphan participants. Only one peer pays rent for his home because his parents’ home became too small to accommodate all of their children’s growing families and he wanted his own independent space.

Despite the weakening national economy and rising unemployment in Guatemala (Banco de Guatemala 2011; CEPAL 2011; INE 2011; Little 2004; Woodward 2008; World Bank 2011), none of the 20 orphans and none of their 20 peers were involuntarily unemployed at the time that they participated in my research project. Sixteen orphans and 17 peers were employed fulltime in 2007-2008. The four orphans and three peers who were not formally employed at the time are all stay-at-home moms. These comparable
numbers suggest that both groups are on pace with each other regarding employment status. However, it is at the level of professional training required in their current employment positions that a difference in economic pace emerges. Table 10 presents a comparative summary of orphans’ and peers’ current types of employment and whether professional training or certification is required for their type of work.

**Table 10: Current Type of Employment of Orphans and Peers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>Number of Orphans at Interview</th>
<th>Number of Peers at Interview</th>
<th>Professional Training or Certification Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Social Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Professional Training or Certification Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Notary/Lawyer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Government</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto Mechanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Professional Training or Certification Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality Position</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Service Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Servers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professional Training or Certification Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck Operator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional Training or Certification Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse Distribution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker/Maid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-Home Mom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**                  | **24**                         | **20**                       |                                               |

*Four of the 20 orphans were working in at least two fulltime employment positions at the time that they participated in my research project and therefore, are counted twice (once for each fulltime position).*

As Table 10 reveals, half of the 20 orphans currently work in an employment position that requires professional training (e.g., social work, banking, national government positions, administration, etc.) or certification (e.g., teaching, social work, etc.). This constitutes a reduction from the 13 orphans who were working in professional positions.
when they first transitioned into early adulthood. The three who no longer work in a professional position either quit work to become stay-at-home moms (two orphans) or moved to a position in restaurant services (one orphan) because of the greater availability of restaurant jobs in the midst of a weakening economy and job cuts. The remaining seven orphans continue to work in employment positions that currently do not require professional training or certification, or are stay-at-home moms.

In contrast, none of the 20 peers currently work in employment positions that require professional training or certification even though five previously had been working in a professional position in early adulthood. Two of these five peers had been teachers who chose, instead, to work in independent trucking services to earn slightly more income. Two more quit their jobs to raise their children and have since found part-time work in nonprofessional positions around Santa Apolonia where employment more scarce than in urban settings. The last peer quit his job as a bookkeeper with a local grocer in order to run his parents’ general merchandise store in Santa Apolonia. The difference between the number of orphans and peers working in professional-level employment is dramatic and greatly affects current individual and family income for both participant groups.

Based on the demographic information that I collected during my fieldwork, the average individual income for the 20 orphans was Q1,430 (or US $188.16\(^7\)). The average monthly individual income for the peers was Q1,200 (or US $157.90), yielding a difference between the groups of Q230 (or US $30.26). This difference may seem relatively small in US dollars, yet it is significant in Guatemalan Quetzales as it is nearly five times the 2007 national average daily wage of Q45 (Ministerio de Trabajo y

\(^7\) In 2007-2008 when I was conducting fieldwork, the average currency exchange rate between Guatemalan Quetzales and U.S. dollars was approximately Q7.5999 per US$1.00 (Banco de Guatemala 2012).
Previsión Social 2011). Figure 20 presents a comparative summary of individual income for both orphans and their peers at the time of participation in my research project.

**Figure 20: Current Monthly Individual Income of Orphans and Peers**

Overall, orphans as a group are now earning slightly more than their peers. Much of the difference between orphans’ and peers’ individual salaries has to do with the higher level of education and professional training attained by orphans when compared to their peers. The peers mainly work in jobs that do not require professional training or certification and consequently, earn lower salaries. While it is likely that urban versus rural location of employment may influence the level of pay when compared to their peers (i.e., urban salaries tend to be higher as does the cost of living), orphans and peers report that the level of professionalism, education and training required for the employment positions and the commensurate salary levels are what primarily account for the differences between their current individual income levels.

Orphans and peers also differ in the level of household (or family) income they are currently earning. On average, the total monthly family income the 20 orphans now earn
is Q2,530 (or US $332.89). The current average total family income for the 20 peers is Q1,655 (or US $217.76), yielding a difference of Q725 (or US $95.39). This difference is significant as it is equivalent to over half of the average monthly salary of both orphans and their peers. Figure 21 presents a comparative summary of the current family income of orphans and their peers as reported at the time of their participation in my research project.

Figure 21 clearly demonstrates that orphans are beginning to outpace their peers on various economic factors such as current family income. Despite the economic challenges orphans faced as they transitioned into adulthood, they have not fallen behind their peers economically. Instead, they have worked hard to secure gainful employment and together with their spouses and partners, have begun to advance their earnings at a greater rate than their peers. Orphans’ increased level of current individual and family income is noteworthy and derives from the priority they assign to higher education in particular,
which has helped them confront and to ultimately begin overcoming the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia*.

By the time orphans participated in my research project in 2007-2008, four who had initially started college in early adulthood had completed their undergraduate degrees. The remaining four were still in the process of finishing their college degrees as they continued to work fulltime. In addition to these eight, however, three more orphans had enrolled in college and expect to finish their undergraduate degrees in the next few years. In contrast, two of the three peers who enrolled in college shortly after high school completed their degrees by the time they participated in my research project and the remaining peer quit college in order to immigrate illegally to the United States in search of better wage-earning opportunities with which to support his family. Figure 22 presents a comparative summary of the current highest level of education attained by orphans and their peers.

![Figure 22: Current Highest Level of Education Attained by Orphans and Peers](image)

Nearly four times as many orphans attained or are working on a college degree when compared to their peers from Santa Apolonia. Unlike their peers, orphans have had to
navigate, pay for and complete college on their own with only a small exception of some general tuition funds provided by international supporters of the *Hogares*. Orphans’ drive for higher education has been vital to their livelihoods, as has the social network they developed and continue to expand with *Hogares* alumni and others.

Both orphans and their peers continue to maintain their primary social networks and have created new networks as well. Overall, orphans maintain and continue to expand the social network that they established in early adulthood with other *Hogares* alumni. The alumni help each other secure employment where they currently work or have contacts. They also share housing—although not to the same degree as in early adulthood as most orphans now have started families of their own. Orphans also pass on to each other used college textbooks and technological items (e.g., old computers, old cell phones, etc.) in order to support other alumni’s pursuit of higher education. In addition to the *Hogares* alumni social network, many orphans now have also established social networks with coworkers and fellow college students that help provide the moral and emotional support that they do not have from their natal communities as a consequence of *la violencia*.

The peers, on the other hand, continue to primarily participate in the social network of Santa Apolonia. As the natal community for most of the peers, Santa Apolonia is a relatively constant locus of social, moral and economic support. Because all of the peers remain living and working in Santa Apolonia, their social networks with coworkers tend to consist of fellow community members who are most likely kin as well. Thus, while orphans have created their own social networks with fellow alumni, coworkers and students, the peers continue to participate mainly in their natal community social network. Orphans may not have the same type of community network as their peers, but
they have developed a social network of their own that continues to offer them the social, moral and economic support that they lost when their ties to their natal communities were severed because of la violencia. In addition to their social network, the majority of orphans now also have continued built a steady support system by establishing their own growing families with their partners and spouses.

Nearly all of the 20 orphans maintained the same partnership status at the time of their participation in my research project interviews as they had in early adulthood. Only one orphan’s status changed from married to separated. Similarly, the peers from Santa Apolonia maintained their general partnership status at the time of their participation. Three of the peers (all women) changed their status from married to separated, divorced or widowed. Table 11 provides a comparative summary of the current family status of orphans and their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Status</th>
<th># of Orphans</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th># of Peers</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 11 illustrates, from initial transition into early adulthood to participation in my research project, the most significant shift in family status for orphans and their peers occurred in the number of children born to them. Overall, orphans had 12 additional children by 2007-2008, whereas their peers had an additional nine children. The greater number of offspring of orphans is most likely a reflection of the fewer number of orphans who are single and the fact that 16 of the 20 orphans remained in a committed
relationship (e.g., united or legally married) from early adulthood through the time of their participation in my research interviews. In contrast, 11 of the 20 peers remained in a committed relationship at the time. The current family status of orphans and peers reveals that, similar to the other economic factors presented above, orphans are on pace with their peers in establishing families of their own. There are no major differences, therefore, in family status despite the greater economic challenges orphans have faced as a consequence of *la violencia*.

While the data presented above reveal that orphans, in fact, have now surpassed their peers in many economic respects, these statistics alone are insufficient to understand the full scope of orphans’ economic achievements. To grasp just how far orphans have come economically at this point their lives, it is also equally important to solicit the perceptions of orphans and their peers regarding the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia*, which are consequences that orphans continue to experience and confront in some form yet today.

**Perceptions of the Long-Term Negative Economic Consequences in the Present**

In this section, I explore orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of the long-term negative economic consequences of *la violencia* by explicitly examining their perceptions of the economic status of war orphans in general, as well as their perceptions of their own current individual and family economic status when compared to each other. I continue by exploring orphans’ and peers’ views of their experiences with securing gainful employment and of accessing higher education as a means to improve one’s ability to secure a better-paying job. I conclude by comparing orphans’ and peers’ perspectives on general access to economic opportunities and on who they view as benefitting from
Guatemala’s economy today. By soliciting orphans’ and peers’ own perceptions, I demonstrate that both groups believe that war orphans have had to contend with greater long-term negative economic consequences wrought by la violencia than other child survivors. I also show that orphans who participated in my research project recognize that they have not only kept pace with their peers economically but have also begun to outpace them in some economic factors even amidst a sluggish national economy.

To analyze orphans’ and peers’ own perceptions of the long-term economic consequences of la violencia, I first asked both groups whether they thought that life was more economically difficult for people who had been orphaned in their childhood as a result of the genocide. Orphans were split in their responses in that ten of them state that life, indeed, is more economically difficult for orphans than for those who grew up in their familial homes. Three of the ten explain,

Well, it’s more difficult, as you know. If I hadn’t been left an orphan, perhaps my dad would have helped me build a house. Instead, I was left with nothing (Juana, age 27).

Yes. For example, those who are not orphans, they have family to help them. Their family helps them get ahead, whereas I have to struggle alone (Medelin, age 28).

The truth is that it is very difficult. One who has their parents cannot even compare themselves to the situation of an orphan because a person who does not have parents doesn’t have the moral support and also doesn’t have economic support. Imagine that! Not having [parental] moral and economic support is so tough. Imagine it, seriously. It is so tough! Perhaps, I don’t know, maybe I can’t say that it is double or triple [the difficulty], but it is so painful to compare, truthfully, because I realize that here in Guatemala, even the really bad people always support their children. They always support their children financially, yes and we have nothing (Oscar, age 29).

The remaining ten orphans respond that they do not believe that war orphans generally have experienced more difficulties economically in life because of their orphan status.
These 10 orphans state that either everyone, regardless of orphan status, is in the same difficult position economically or that it simply depends on one’s own motivation to work and study. For example, three of the ten orphans share,

No, because it depends on me to [get ahead]. If I get frustrated because I am an orphan and I say, “I can’t do it,” well, that is my problem. I have a head, hands, feet, a heart, a brain and everything, and so you can’t just demean someone because of [their orphan status] (Jacki, age 30).

This is where I differ from my peers. I could speak about my peers as some have differed in their circumstances because that is what they wanted in life. To be an orphan or to be indigenous is not a pretext for not getting ahead in life. It is will. It is wanting to do things and not just for the orphans, this is how it is generally for everyone. They have the capacity, they have the means and they shouldn’t waste the opportunity to use them [to get ahead in life] (Mario, age 29).

Well, the majority of the orphans…I would say that nearly the majority has overcome it and the majority are now university graduates. So, I don’t think so. Some are even better off than those who grew up with their parents…because it is the advantage, as I was saying, that the orphans have more opportunities because of having arrived at the Hogares. I have an education, otherwise perhaps I would have been married at the age of 15 and would not have even completed the sixth grade maybe. I would have remained at that point, but as orphans, we had the fortune of having someone to help us, organizations or scholarships, things like that. The majority of the orphans have been able to get scholarships (Nidia, age 27).

The group of 20 peers was similarly split in their responses to the question of whether war orphans, in general, were economically worse off than others their age because of their orphan status. Nine peers responded that orphans’ economic experiences in adulthood have, indeed, been more difficult than their own, citing the lack of parents as the primary reason. Several of the nine peers respond,

Yes, it’s more difficult. Parents can support their children, but [the orphans] have to work to support themselves (Manuel, age 30).

Yes, it is also very difficult because they have no parents. They have to grow up faster because they have to struggle to find work and to get ahead. If they want to study, they have to pay for their studies so that they can get better-paid jobs...
because many people are not going to give them what they need, yes (Sheny, age 29).

Well, it is a difficult situation because they are not going to offer them a job very easily in any random place. They are not going to offer them work if they don’t have people they know who can help them…(Olivia, age 33).

The remaining 11 peers believe that whether or not someone was orphaned during childhood no longer comes to bear on their economic status today. This group of peers believes that self-motivation in finding work and studying is important for anyone who wants to get ahead in life regardless of their orphan status. They also indicate that increasing consumer prices and a gloomy economy have made life difficult in Guatemala for everyone. Finally, several of the 11 peers note that orphans’ access to learning vocational skills at the Hogares and how to work, in particular, has given orphans an advantage in securing gainful employment. Three of these 11 peers respond,

It’s the same for everyone, Shirley. Whether someone is an orphan is not like saying that someone cut off their hands or that they are a disabled person. And furthermore, when they are looking for work, nobody is asking, “Are you an orphan?” Right? They have the same opportunities as a normal person has (Marco, age 32).

I believe that it is the same for everyone because, as I told you, [the orphans] come out learning a vocational skill and there are many that I have seen who leave the Hogares and they know how to work. Some I know are tailors or carpenters, so they come out working in some kind of vocation. They are in the same situation because many of us who studied in school have not learned carpentry or tailoring. So, all of that helps (Dario, age 31).

It depends on how they were in the Hogares…Some leave as professionals. They bring with them vocational skills. Some are tailors and they learned how to make cortes and have learned how to work (Andrea, age 36).

Many orphans and their peers clearly recognize that war orphans, in general, who have lost one or both of their parents during la violencia have faced greater economic challenges in adulthood as they have no lifelong familial financial support or access to
assets such as familial homes or property. However, half of the 20 orphans and half of their 20 peers believe that the majority of the national population is faced with the same difficult economic challenges regardless of one’s orphan status. In addition, both groups specifically point to orphans’ access to vocational training and formal education while enrolled in the *Hogares* as a means of somewhat “neutralizing” the negative economic effects of not having parental economic support. They note that orphans’ professional training increases their access to better-paying jobs. To further investigate these differences in perceptions regarding whether orphans have had more economic challenges in adulthood, I next asked orphans to reflect on their own current economic status and to compare their status with that of their peers.

During the ethnographic interviews, I explicitly asked orphans if they thought that they are currently in a more difficult economic position than their peers because of their orphan status. Seven of the 20 orphans responded that they felt that they are. For example, 29-year-old Oscar relates,

> Well, I feel like I am still not in the same condition as the majority of the population of Santa Apolonia or more like the surrounding municipal area. Why? Because I realize that many people have resources that they haven’t learned how to take advantage of, but yes, they have the resources. Simply put, they just have to take advantage of them and I think, “If only I had that,” right? “I would take advantage of it.”

The remaining thirteen orphans responded that they do not believe that they are in a more difficult economic position than their peers. Instead, this group of orphans contends that they are in the same economic position as everyone else and that one’s economic status depends on each person’s drive and desire to better him or herself and not on one’s orphan status. They also emphasize the importance of taking advantage of the education
offered via the *Hogares* and of working hard, even if that means starting in the lowest entry-level employment positions. Three of the thirteen reflect,

No. Well, compared to the wealthy, we are worse off. Compared to the medium-wealthy too, but with the average people, we are the same (Juliana, age 30).

Well, I don’t say that I am so well off, but I have tried to live in the best way possible. It depends on each person and how they choose to live. If I would not have at least taken advantage of the help or of what they taught me at the *Hogares*, I would have been a street kid. So, I would have lived a very difficult life, but since I put in all my effort there to try to get ahead in life and to be someone in the future, to be someone in the sense of obtaining a profession, then, I think I’m not doing so badly (Yohana, age 29).

[Orphan status] doesn’t matter. I believe that what matters here is the ability that one has to open doors…if a person gets a job opportunity, let’s say in an office, well, it is difficult to get to this point. To get to this point in this type of position, you have to start from the bottom. You have to start with the lowest positions, right, but this is not what many people think about. So, you have to work your way up to a higher position, but that is going to depend a lot on each person and their desires to want to make things happen (Mario, age 29).

With the majority of orphans perceiving their economic status as average or at least no more worse off than that of their peers, I also solicited the peers’ perception of their own economic status when they compare themselves with how they view orphans’ current economic status. By comparing orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of their own current economic status, I found that differences in perception that do exist are based more on education and individual hard work rather than on an individual’s orphan status.

Among the 20 peers, only four responded that they feel that they are currently in a worse economic position than orphans who were enrolled in the *Hogares*. Two of these four peers completed just some or all of elementary school; one made it partially through junior high school; and the fourth peer completed high school and is currently trained as an elementary teacher. Interestingly, the range of education attained by the four peers suggests that lack of sufficient education likely accounts for their negative appraisal of
their current economic status. Two of the four peers elaborate on their perceptions of their current economic status,

Much worse! Yes! I work. I am working up at the Andrea Café and all, but there is a lot of exploitation. They exploit people. They take advantage of people (Olivia, age 33).

Well, I think my situation is getting worse. Oh, yes, it is more difficult than [the orphans’ situation] (Sheny, age 29).

The remaining 16 peers perceive their current economic status as equal (13 peers) or better off (three peers) than that of orphan alumni of the Hogares. The 16 peers also perceive themselves as sharing a similar or slightly better economic status than the majority of the nation’s population, recognizing that there are people who are economically worse off than they are today. Two of the 16 peers reflect,

There are people worse off. I feel that I am slightly below the average in comparison because there are more people who can’t even educate their children. We are talking about Q200 weekly or Q190 [to educate them], so to pay for food and education, well, the situation with education is bad. There are people even poorer (Tulio, age 33).

Because of the government, the economic situation is very difficult right now in Guatemala. It is very tough. Everything is so expensive, but the answer or the way out for Guatemalans is to work for yourself. One can overcome the economic crisis because if one works as an employee, they pay you the minimum wage, but if you work for your own business, what an employee can earn in a month, you can earn in your own business in one week (Josue, age 29).

The majority of orphans and their peers from Santa Apolonia perceive themselves as sharing an average economic status in Guatemala today, although a small number in both groups do believe that they are currently in a more difficult economic position when compared to each other. The fact that that there is more similarity than difference in how orphans and peers perceive their own current economic status reveals that orphans have been able to begin to overcome the long-term economic consequences of la violencia.
despite having entered adulthood at a greater economic disadvantage when compared to their peers. To further gauge orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of how they are now situated economically in Guatemala society, I next asked them how they view their families’ overall economic status, which takes into account the added salaries of spouses, partners or other contributing family members such as siblings.

When asked whether orphans thought that their own families (e.g., spouse/partner and children, etc.) are currently in a more difficult economic position than their peers’ families, few orphans responded affirmatively. In fact, only two orphans do believe that their family currently is economically worse off than their peers’ families. One of these two orphans is Lina, who only completed elementary school. Lina’s husband is a day laborer who earns less than minimum wage, while Lina stays at home to care for their four children. The other is Kike, a single man who studying at the university. He is also the sole financial supporter of his war widow mother and siblings (who were not enrolled in the Hogares). He currently works at a seminary as an administrator. Lina and Kike further explain their perceptions of their current, more difficult family economic status,

> It is more difficult for us. We only have this [room]. The house is very tiny for them, very tiny for our four [children] (Lina, age 28).

> We are worse off. My siblings do not have a university-level education and so, it is difficult to support them and my mom (Kike, age 28).

The remaining 18 orphans describe their current family economic status as being either equal (17 orphans) or better (one orphan) than their peers’ current family economic status. Three of the 18 peers elaborate,

> Well, we are not living in the ravine (laughter), so we are not worse-off. We are not doing badly because realistically, although we don’t have a lot, I consider that yes, we have employment and yes, we have a way to be able to get ahead. I believe that for that reason, we are fortunate, yes, in comparison to many people...
who cannot get a job because of their lack of qualifications because they haven’t even completed half of the education requirements that are requested. I consider myself to have advantages. We have few advantages, but having completed a high school degree, thank God, has helped us so much (Esteban, age 28).

Equal, but for the same reason in that we have struggled to get ahead. Yes, we have had a more difficult situation and we have fought hard to get ahead and that is why we are doing well, more or less (Juana, age 27).

Perhaps a little better off, but at the same time, it is difficult because it is tough to find that little extra money that exists. That’s what I have come to realize…our business is running, but it is costly to maintain it (Cris, age 26).

When compared to orphans, the peers’ perceptions of their own current family economic status are nearly identical. Asked whether they felt that their current family economic status was better, equal or worse than orphans’ current family economic status, three peers responded that they do feel that their families are financially worse off today. Two of these three peers only completed elementary school when they were children and the third peer only completed the third grade. The limited education that these three peers attained has meant that they have even fewer opportunities to secure gainful employment than the rest of the peers and nearly all 20 orphans. Two peers respond,

A little worse off. We don’t have much income or education. We work in the fields (Diego, age 31).

We are worse off because we can’t even have what little we desire (Elena, age 37).

The remaining 17 peers perceive their families as either being in the same (13 peers) or a better (four peers) current economic position than orphans. Most of the 17 peers agree that the cost of living in Guatemala has risen precipitously and that salaries remain low, but at the same time, work does exist for those who try to secure employment. The peers recognize that there are people who are worse off financially than they are; however, the peers perceive their families as being able to at least provide for the basic
needs of family members as a result of the hard work and education they have attained even though the average level of education for the peers as a group is much lower than that of orphans as a whole. Thus, despite the national economic downslide that currently persists, the families of the 17 peers have been able to economically sustain themselves even in an economically volatile atmosphere. Three of the 17 share,

The same…we are the bottom of everything and the prices keep going up. The basic goods rise in price and the salaries go down, but we are all equal in this sense (Tulio, age 33).

Equal…if you don’t work, you don’t have anything (Dario, age 31).

We are in a similar position because there are people here who are suffering and those who are fine. For example, in my family we have the luxury of being able to vacation even though it is just one time a year. Yes, we still have this luxury. There are people who don’t and also, for example, when someone in the family gets sick, we still have the means to take them to a private hospital, whereas there are some people who can only afford the national public hospital….We also have a bit of an advantage because almost all of my family members have professional training, and even my sister and brother are studying at the university even though it is difficult to pay tuition. We have this small advantage. We are not living much more comfortably than everyone else. The difference is small (Josue, age 29).

Orphans and their peers from Santa Apolonia do not differ much in how they perceive their families’ current economic status. This is interesting given that orphans, as a group, have had to deal with more severe economic challenges than their peers as a consequence of la violencia. Orphans have countered these economic challenges, however, by attaining a higher level of education and professional training than their peers and consequently now view themselves on equal economic pace financially with their peers. Both groups note that the sluggish national economy has caused earnings to decline, while consumer prices have soared. Thus, orphans and their peers view themselves as sharing a similar economic status not only with each other but also with the majority of the national population. They perceive their families as not living in extreme poverty but
also not having much discretionary income (or income left over after covering one’s basic needs). Unlike the perceptions of their current family economic status, however, orphans and peers do differ dramatically in how they perceive the difficulty of securing gainful employment in Guatemala today.

Among orphans, only five perceive securing gainful employment as difficult today. These five orphans find that their lack of advanced education, competition for jobs and low wages factor into the difficulty to secure gainful employment. Three explain,

Yes, sometimes it is difficult because of the lack of university education and also, perhaps, because I am a single mother (Noemi, age 34).

Yes, so many people are looking for work because there is a lot of unemployment…a lot of unemployment (Juliana, age 30)!

Yes, partly because of the economy and the need to earn your bread. So, an employer finds you and then wants someone else who is better and he never wants to pay more for that person. Work exists, but they don’t pay much (Brandon, age 28).

While five orphans find it difficult to secure gainful employment, the overwhelming majority (15 orphans) report that they do not perceive securing gainful employment as difficult. Most orphans posit that their professional career training in high school—paid for mainly by the Hogares—has allowed them to attain relatively constant employment from the day that they left the Hogares up to the present. They simultaneously note that the wages in Guatemala are generally too low even for professional work—covering not much more than one’s basic needs—and that having one’s own business and working hard in whatever employment position one has are vital for securing a gainful employment position. Two of the 15 orphans elaborate,

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8 I use the term “advanced education” to denote education from the high school level and beyond in Guatemala, which includes professional training and undergraduate and graduate education.
Thank God, I have had employment since I graduated [from high school]. That same year that I graduated, I began [teaching] in the two schools where I work now. I have had only these two jobs since I graduated. So, I have worked in those two schools for over eight years. So, that’s why I say that it is the capacity that a person has or other opportunities that count. They haven’t let me go in these schools and sometimes, they even offer to pay me more for my job. Thank God, I don’t earn really low wages and they told me from the beginning that I wouldn’t be earning a poverty wage and I appreciated that… (Mario, age 29).

For me, it wasn’t difficult finding work because in my worklife, I have had five different jobs and the only time that I did not have work only lasted two months maximum. So, it wasn’t much time then. Two months is relatively normal, I believe. What is happening in Guatemala now is that there is work, but the standard of living is so low. We cannot earn enough money to build a house and I don’t know… The majority of people in Guatemala, I believe, always think of the future, of a home and a house is the most difficult [to obtain]. The cost of land is high in Guatemala. So, you have to look at your options. I tell you that if I continue [living] in Guatemala, I won’t likely ever be able to build a house…I don’t know, but it’s difficult to build a home. Work exists, but they don’t pay much (Esteban, age 28).

The experiences and perceptions of the peers regarding the difficulty in securing gainful employment are completely reversed when compared to orphans. Fifteen of the 20 peers respond that they do, indeed, find it difficult to secure gainful employment. The peers note that the diminishing number of jobs, increased education requirements for existing positions and low pay are some of the primary reasons that securing gainful employment in Guatemala is so difficult today. They also recognize that the growing fear of working in urban centers where violence has skyrocketed and general corruption persists has become an even larger barrier to securing gainful employment today. Four of the 15 peers detail,

Yes! The truth is that I have already submitted my paperwork to be a social worker and everything, but it hasn’t become a possibility. There aren’t many opportunities (Nina, age 37).

I want to say that it is very complicated to think about because we don’t have an education and when you arrive at a place, they ask for your degree or they ask...
what grade level you have and if you say you finished elementary school only, they give you the hardest work. So, it has affected me a little (Tulio, age 33).

Yes. I have gone out to look for work and well, sadly I haven’t found anything. You have to know someone to get a job…so much corruption now exists everywhere. These are the difficulties. So, I don’t get considered for a job because simply put, he who has connections and the resources can buy his way into a position (Manuel, age 30).

Yes. In Guatemala there is work right now, but now you have to work at home because there is so much fear. You have to trust the people you work with. Now when someone looks for work in Guate, there are bad people there. In Santa Apolonia, there is no work. Here there’s very little because you need to have an education or your own business (Sonia, age 33).

The remaining five peers do not perceive securing employment today as difficult. These individuals either work in a small family business or have the educational qualifications (e.g., professional training, a college degree, etc.) for securing a gainful employment position. Three of these five peers share,

I really haven’t had to go out to work. I say that it’s most likely difficult to find a job because that’s what my friends tell me, that it is difficult to find work now, but the real truth is that I have never had to find a job because I work with my dad…but yes, they have told me that yes, it is very difficult (Melvin, age 33).

Well, no, because ever since I graduated from high school, I have had my job at the library since then. I have been working there six years already. It wasn’t difficult for me there, but I imagine that when I have to leave the library job that yes, it will be a bit difficult to find work (Elias, age 26).

I have been working for a while. More than anything, you have to prepare yourself and prepare yourself. I believe there is work, but in parenthesis, let’s say, you have to update your skills. You have to update your skills and that is to say that you have to enroll in the university and keep on studying. So, I say the people who go to the United States [as immigrants] are lazy. What they all want is to have it all easily and here, that’s not possible (Otto, age 33).

Orphans and their peers all recognize the difficulties that the current sluggish national economy presents. Both groups note that the number of jobs available continues to diminish, while the jobs that do exist barely pay enough wages to cover the most basic
needs of an individual or family. The difficulty in securing employment, however, has been much greater for the peers than for orphans. Both groups recognize that professional training (i.e., completing a high school career program) and even more so, higher education play a pivotal part in securing a steady, gainful employment position today even though the wages for such positions continue to barely cover essential living expenses. With education as such a focal topic of discussion regarding employability (or having the education and training that makes a person more qualified for employment), I next specifically asked orphans and their peers about their perceptions regarding higher education as an effective way for adults to secure gainful employment today.

Orphans, overall, recognize the importance of higher education as a means of securing gainful employment. As a result, they are appreciative of the education they received via the Hogares, especially those who completed high school with the economic support of the Catholic sisters. Orphans also acknowledge that their high school training in a particular career area has helped them substantially in securing gainful employment in adulthood. At the same time, they realize that high school diplomas are now becoming much more commonplace across the country and therefore, carry less weight for securing a good-paying job. When I asked orphans if they believe that a high school level education helps a person obtain a better-paying job today, 15 responded affirmatively. However, they simultaneously report that it is even more common for employers to require university degrees. Three of the 15 orphans elaborate,

Yes, it helps. Yes, the truth is that here in Guatemala the people work, but with others, there simply aren’t a lot of opportunities because there aren’t many companies. So, the people who offer work are looking for those with more education (Juana, age 27).
Yes, but right now we are at a starting level of high school diplomas—that is the educational base—but many people are now completing the university. There aren’t many opportunities. So, the people coming out of the universities now are taking part in the work that required less education before (Brandon, age 28).

The majority of the time, yes, but it’s almost no longer the case. Now in the majority of places, they are demanding university degrees. Even just having one semester in the university, that opens more doors (Nidia, age 27).

The remaining five orphans share the other 15 orphans’ sentiment that employers are now more likely to require a university degree; however, these five orphans perceive high school level education as just not sufficient enough for securing gainful employment today. Three of the five orphans have or are currently completing college degrees in communications, business administration and law. The fourth orphan is a teacher and completed her high school training in elementary education. The fifth orphan was only able to complete junior high school and has been a stay-at-home mom ever since leaving the Hogares. Despite the wide range of education levels that these five orphans have attained, they all agree that a high school diploma simply is no longer sufficient for securing a good-paying job. Two of these five orphans explain,

It is a bit more difficult for this reason, if you cannot get a permanent position, then it is preferable to continue studying something such as technology at an advanced level. So, now it is no longer sufficient to have only a high school diploma. Now it is more valuable to have more experience and have a bit more education (Yohana, age 29).

The labor market in Guatemala is very competitive. So yes, even with a university degree there is still a lot of unemployment. Even so, there are many university graduates who go out looking for work as if they only have a high school diploma in a career area, I say, because many work in the bank. I have an acquaintance who is a psychologist and she is working as a secretary. So, that’s what makes it so hard to find a job. It is so difficult and even more difficult to get paid a decent wage. Now with a junior high school diploma, you can’t do anything. So, it’s the same if you are a university graduate because when you go for an interview, there are so many candidates applying for the job. So, the truth is that it is difficult. Truthfully, it is so difficult even with a university degree, although that has its advantages (Esteban, age 28).
In contrast to the 20 orphans, the group of peers is nearly divided in half regarding their responses. Eleven of the 20 peers respond affirmatively to the question of whether a high school education is helpful in securing gainful employment today. However, even these 11 recognize that the requirements are rapidly changing and that the majority of employers are now requiring university degrees for even the most basic, entry-level positions. As a result, the employment positions that now require only a high school diploma pay meager and declining wages. Two of these 11 peers reflect,

Yes, it helps a little…it depends on the place where you are seeking work, yes. Junior high is not sufficient. Now in Guatemala in whatever kind of job, they require a university degree. High school is now barely enough. You have to have a university degree already for a better job (Fatima, age 32).

Yes, it helps, but you can only get a job that pays very, very little in wages, whereas having university studies, you have a much larger salary. You can get wonderful work…good work (Elias, age 26).

The remaining 9 peers respond that they do not perceive high school as sufficient enough for obtaining a better-paying job today. These nine peers similarly observe that most employers now require a university degree and that people with university degrees still are often paid low wages because of the job scarcity that currently exists. Three of these 9 peers share,

With what I have seen now is that they ask you for a university diploma. I have one of my nieces who has a good job, but they now required her to continue her studies and without that, there is no work. Right now she is studying at the university (Melvin, age 33).

No, not even those with university degrees have jobs. The people I have known who have university degrees can’t get a job and if they do, it’s with a very low salary. A person now who doesn’t know how to read or write can no longer get work so easily (Dario, age 31).
You have to ensure that you make it to the university level. Junior high and high school educations are no longer valued...not anymore. They want university graduates everywhere. That’s what I see, that if you study now, you have to go on to the university because things are changing. Typewriters are now computers. Today there is internet and all of that. With the internet and all, if you don’t know how to use computers, you are nobody (Olivia, age 33).

The combination of a surge in the general population and growing job scarcity due to the sluggish national economy has made securing a good-paying job difficult for both orphans and their peers. At the same time, the decreased supply of jobs has made the educational requirements rise rather quickly in the past ten years across the country. Orphans and their peers recognize this rapid change in educational requirements for employment. Both groups purport that most employers now require a university degree as the minimum educational qualification for most employment positions. Orphans and peers note that this drastic shift in educational requirements has consequently forced many adults to go back to school in order to attain college degrees. However, while the general population is becoming more educated overall, orphans and peers have observed that the wages that employers are currently willing to pay university graduates is disproportionately low. Therefore, it is clear that both groups find themselves in the difficult and complicated position of working hard and feeling forced economically to get a college degree that, in the end, will likely result in receiving only meager wages. In an attempt to further explore orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of the difficulties and challenges of the current job market, I next asked both participant groups about their perceptions of their general level of access to economic opportunities as adults in Guatemala today.

Despite the long-term consequences of la violencia and the challenging economic environment currently present in Guatemala, the majority of orphans (14 total) perceive
themselves as having equal access to general economic opportunities when compared to their peers from Santa Apolonia. Two of these 14 elaborate,

From my point of view, it’s not that we have more [opportunities]. It is what one makes of it. You have what you have by sacrificing. If others don’t want to [sacrifice], it’s because they don’t want it bad enough (Cris, age 26).

The truth is that we are all like this...(laughter). Sometimes at the end of the month, I don’t even have any wages left over and I realize through the type of work I have at night at the bank, I call clients and in reality, I say they are worse off. Some are worse off because they can’t even pay Q300 of their credit card debt. I say, “Wow! How did they get themselves into such huge debt?” So… the majority that I call are generally employees who work in jobs like mine perhaps and they have a salary like mine. So, I say that I am in the same condition as they are…..It’s just that economically this country is bad off. So, we can’t say that we are all living in luxury and those who do, well, good for them (Esteban, age 28).

Six orphans do not perceive themselves as having the same economic opportunities as everyone else. These six orphans believe they are at a disadvantage because they do not have the financial support of family, have not yet attended or completed college, and do not have the familial connections necessary to help them secure a job that pays reasonable wages. Three of the six orphans explain,

No. It’s because others have family members who can help them or they don’t have to study because they are families from Guatemala City and they have other luxuries. So, compared to them, no (Kike, age 28).

No, because if you don’t have more education and you are not the right age, they won’t give you a job anywhere….I hope to study more or take some college courses or write a thesis or something (Sheni, age 28).

I don’t think so because the businessmen all know each other or they know each other’s people and so they give each other’s children, cousins or siblings the positions. So, they don’t suffer at all (Brandon, age 28).

Mirroring orphans, 14 of the 20 peers responded affirmatively to the question of having equal access to economic opportunities. The peers note that access to a family business, the possibility of entrepreneurship and simply working hard are some of the
primary factors that make general access to economic opportunities equally available to
most Guatemalans. Three of these 14 peers reflect,

I have a little more. Why? Because in this case as I’m going to tell you, in the
case of the [family] business, ever since I was born, the business was here. So,
one grows up and there are resources. What you have to do is improve it. So,
that’s why I believe I have more opportunities because, thanks to my dad, here we
are. What must be done now is to improve [the business] (Otto, age 33).

Yes. Yes, one has the same opportunities because here in Guatemala, they don’t
let other companies enter the market. For example, some companies such as
McDonald’s and Burger King, which are not from here, have been able to enter
the country, but the store Wal-Mart\(^9\) doesn’t exist here in Guatemala because the
companies here don’t permit it. So with that, you have more opportunities to start
your own business and that’s why so many tiny stores exist here where you can
go and buy what you need to maintain your family (Josue, age 29).

The remaining six peers perceive themselves as not having the same general access to
economic opportunities in the country today. One of the six peers has a college education,
two have high school diplomas and the remaining three only completed elementary
school. These six peers generally recognize that differences in access to economic
opportunities are commonly the result of the level of education that one has. However,
they also argue that differences exist because people simply have different opportunities
and resources. Two of the six peers further,

I imagine there are many people who, yes, they are earning more than one does
because, I say, they have a degree. So, they earn more than anyone else can
because others just don’t have what is necessary (Sheny, age 29).

No, because there are always differences. There are differences because let’s say
someone looks for a job, but when they arrive someone else who is better than
them is there and so, they want that person instead (Elena, age 37).

The majority of orphans and their peers agree that they share the same general access
to economic opportunities in Guatemala today. Based on their perceptions, orphans’

\(^9\) In actuality, Wal-Mart had already bought up all of the primary grocery store chains in Guatemala by
2006 and was quickly expanding its control of the Guatemalan market by the time of this interview (The
San Diego Union-Tribune 2006).
advantage of having generally higher levels of education somewhat offsets the peers’ advantages of having access to familial businesses and financial support. Orphans and peers suggest that the advantages each group has are further equalized by the sluggishness of the national economy. Both groups believe that the overwhelming majority of the population finds itself in similar financial conditions in that they earn low wages that are barely enough to cover basic living expenses. While both groups observe that there are some people who are worse off economically than they are, they also recognize that someone, despite the poor economy, is benefitting from the economic situation today. Identifying who benefits from Guatemala’s economy was the last in a series of questions I posed regarding participants’ economic status and perceptions.

Orphans and their peers are clearly aware of how the economic system in Guatemala works and who benefits from it. When orphans were asked who they think benefits the most from the economic situation in the country today, they answer: the rich elite, the wealthy businessmen, politicians and those who work in the government. Most often, orphans consider the wealthy elite, the elite businessmen and the politicians to be one-in-the-same. One orphan also identified ladinos, in general, as benefiting more from the economy than indigenous peoples. Several orphans share,

The wealthy people, they influence the organizations that have the legal authority to make demands (Carlos, age 28).

The people of the upper class because if we are talking about Zona 10\textsuperscript{10} of the capital, it’s only people with money (Yohana, age 29).

The wealthiest businessmen…they are the ones who benefit most from this economy, I believe (Esteban, age 28).

\textsuperscript{10} Zona 10 (or Zone 10) of Guatemala City is one of the wealthiest areas of the city in which the most expensive restaurants, hotels and businesses of the country are mainly located.
The *ladinos*. Many of them take advantage of the labor of indigenous people who are paid low wages and are left without money to eat or without work (Juana, age 27).

As with orphans, all 20 peers identify the wealthy elite, the powerful businessmen, politicians and others involved in the government as benefitting the most. Similarly, these various groups of people who benefit are also often considered to be one-in-the-same.

Several of the peers explain,

Those who benefit from the economic situation in Guatemala are the same wealthy elite. It is for the same reason...if someone tries to improve their situation and starts their own business and makes connections with foreigners and suddenly becomes wealthier than the other, what happens to those people? As Ricardo Arjona\textsuperscript{11} says, “They are already three meters below the ground.” Right? That is what has happened. The wealthy elite do not want other people becoming wealthy (Marco, age 32).

The wealthy elite….and why? Because they are the ones who produce all the products and so they can raise prices as they wish and since we have no other options of where to buy sugar, what can we do? It’s not quite a monopoly, but they are taking advantage of the free trade and everything (Otto, age 33).

The businessmen…or the people who have the big businesses, such as the owners of those businesses. Also, those who work in the government take home all the money. They head to Mexico\textsuperscript{12} (laughter) (Melvin, age 33).

Always the government. They receive the greatest benefit and those of CACIF\textsuperscript{13} because they are the ones who make the decisions about taxes and they decide the value of food and all that one purchases to eat, to wear…they decide the prices and the rest of us don’t have enough money to get by. They say that the price of an egg is going to go up five cents or two cents...just two cents, but for them, that means millions (Josue, age 29).

\textsuperscript{11}Ricardo Arjona is an internationally recognized Latin pop music singer who was born in Guatemala and currently lives in Argentina.

\textsuperscript{12}Melvin is referring to former Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo who fled to Mexico in 2004 and was charged with embezzling US$15 million from public funds during his presidential term between 2000 and 2004. Portillo was arrested in Guatemala in 2009, but was released on bail. He has also been issued a warrant by the U.S. Federal Court under an extradition treaty on charges of money laundering and embezzlement of charity donations (Latin Daily Financial News 2011).

\textsuperscript{13}The CACIF (Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras) is a conservative association of businesses that consists of Guatemala’s most wealthy and business elite who claim to work to promote general business interests, but actually represent the interest of the elite and have powerful ties to the government (Adams 1973; Taylor 1998).
Orphans and their peers agree that the majority of Guatemala’s population is currently benefitting little from the national economy in proportion to the wealthy elite, the businessmen, the politicians and government bureaucrats. Low wages, increasing job scarcity and rapidly rising costs of consumer goods have made the current economic situation for most Guatemalans—following over 30 years of economic downturns and sluggishness—increasingly more difficult. Orphans and peers recognize the current economic conditions and have responded to the slumping job market by actively pursuing advanced education, starting their own businesses and simply working hard to try to get ahead. As a result, orphans have been able keep economic pace with and in some cases, have even begun to economically outpace their peers on several key economic factors despite the greater economic challenges they have faced as adults because of the long-term economic consequences of la violencia. While the current state of the national economy has made daily life financially challenging overall for orphans and their peers, the perceptions of both groups regarding the economic future is surprisingly optimistic.

**Orphan and Peer Perceptions Regarding the Economic Future**

Despite the economic consequences of *la violencia* on the lives of orphans and the general economic challenges faced by both orphans and their peers in adulthood, both groups share that they have hope that the future will improve economically for themselves and their families. I next present their responses regarding how they perceive their economic futures, as well as how they perceive the economic futures of their children and the Guatemalan nation-state.

The overwhelming majority of orphans (15 of the 20) relate that they believe that the economic future will be better for themselves and their families. These 15 orphans
identify higher education, hard work and entrepreneurship as some of the most prominent ways in which they will improve the economic future for themselves and their families.

Three of the 15 orphans explain,

Yes, perhaps because I hope to provide my children with better preparation and my siblings are now studying at the university (Noemi, age 34).

Yes, I think so. Yes, it’s going to improve because when I graduate, there are going to be better opportunities. I would like to establish some kind of factory, office and service center. Yes, I think about working for myself in a profession and I think that yes, it’s going to get better (Juana, age 27).

Well then, I feel that we, for example, are planning our future or what have you. Well, I, for example, am thinking of getting married, starting my own business and doing something for ourselves. I hope to stop renting, find someone to watch my son [when I’m working] and in that way, we can help ourselves a lot and God willing, it is going to get better (Jacki, age 30).

Only two orphans do not share an optimistic view of their economic futures. These two orphans reference the drastic rise in the cost of basic foodstuffs and of the general cost of living as evidence that costs will only continue to rise, making the future economy equally or possibly even more challenging. These two orphans state,

No, not anymore…like right now, the price of noodles increased Q3. Can you believe that (Juliana, age 30)?!

No, because if the salaries increase, the price of basic foodstuffs increases. Everything increases. So, it is going to continue to be the same (Sheni, age 28).

The remaining three orphans express that they are not sure whether the future will be better for themselves and their families. These three orphans respond that either they have no idea what the future holds or simply state that only God knows what the future holds.

Similar to orphans, the majority of the peers (12 of 20) are optimistic about the economic future for themselves and their families. These peers identified higher education, hard work, good planning, proper money management and entrepreneurship as
some key ways in which they will improve their future economic conditions. Four of the 12 peers answer,

Perhaps, yes…depending on one’s education. As long as children have much more education than their parents [do now], then yes, it will get better (Manuel, age 30).

I believe that we are going to prosper. Well, one has to develop plans in order to get ahead. We have to focus on all aspects and what is most economic. I believe that yes, we have to overcome (Otto, age 33).

If we plan well and we save [money] then yes, because sometimes you make your own economy. So, sometimes you don’t save and you do things to lose your money. I say that yes, with good money management even with little [money], you can improve [your situation] (Fatima, age 32).

It is going to get better, thank God, because our business, although it only runs six months a year, is functioning well. It’s functioning and right now we are going to get together, since we are four male [siblings], and we are going to start an even larger business with my dad. So, with the help of God, the business will function and we’ll achieve more. Right now we are thinking of launching a hardware store, but we are still planning it right now. Perhaps in a year or two, we’ll have the money together because it requires a lot of money (Josue, age 29).

While 12 peers view the economic future as improving, five believe otherwise. These five peers note that inadequate wages, job scarcity and the ever-rising cost of living will likely continue indefinitely, making the future equally or even more economically challenging for themselves and their families. Four of the five peers respond,

No, I don’t believe so. It will be the same situation in that we will not have better salaries and we will not have better jobs (Elias, age 26).

No. No, because everything is going up [in price], go figure, and one earns so little (Julietta, age 32).

Oh! Only God knows, but it is going to be more difficult. It is difficult. Only a miracle from God will bring better times (Olivia, age 33).

No. Every day it gets more difficult. Everything is more expensive…the food, the meat…everything is going up [in price] (Dario, age 31).
The last three peers note that they are uncertain regarding what the future holds because, similar to the three orphans who share their ambiguity, they assert that either only God knows or they simply have no idea of what will happen.

Orphans and their peers recognize that Guatemala’s sluggish economy over the past ten years, on top of 30 years of weak national economic performance, has spurred growing job scarcity, declining wages and soaring costs of consumer goods, making daily life an increasingly difficult economic challenge for the majority of the population. Despite the growing economic struggles, however, both groups continue to have a relatively optimistic view of their economic futures for both themselves and their families. Both groups believe that hard work, education, better preparation, careful money management and entrepreneurship are some of the ways in which they will be able to improve their economic status and the economic conditions for their families in the near future. While orphans and peers are hopeful that their economic conditions will improve in the next 10-15 years, both groups of participants are slightly less optimistic regarding what they think the economic future holds for their children and the nation in general once their children are grown and have families of their own.

Among the 20 orphans, 11 state that they do, indeed, believe the economic future will improve for their children, but that it will most likely depend on what they, as parents, provide for their children in the forms of education and financial resources. Some of the 11 orphans explain,
It depends on [my children]. I think, and also the future that we, as parents, provide for them because if we give them an education and all that they need right now, I think that the future can be very good for them, but it always depends on the [children] taking advantage of [the opportunities] because there are families where the children don’t want to study. So, that’s why they live like they live. Sometimes they live poorly and don’t prosper because those same children are the ones who didn’t know how to take advantage of it (Yohana, age 29).

It depends on the president. That’s what I commented about a little while ago. For us, or rather for our children, they are going to work and do everything they can do so that they can have a decent future, I think. I think that yes, because we can give our children an education in a way that our parents couldn’t give us. Also, [our children] have to take advantage of what they have in order to get ahead because if they don’t, they won’t, but they already have a different life because their parents work and everything. Not like us. We had to do it on our own and by our own effort. However, they will do their part, but not as much [as we did] because they have the support of their parents (Cris, age 26).

It is an uncertain economy. You couldn’t possibly know what it’s going to be like. It is going to depend a lot on the new generations or it will continue to be uncertain….With the free trade agreement of CAFTA, that is going to help. There is going to be more competition. That’s what happened with the [telephone] lines. Who doesn’t have a cell phone now (Mario, age 29)?

The remaining nine orphans are either unsure of what the future holds (two orphans), think that the economy will remain the same as it is now (two orphans) or are relatively certain that the economic future will be even worse (five orphans) for their children and the nation when their children are grown up and have families of their own. This group of orphans notes that the mounting cost of living and declining wages will persist, making the economic conditions in Guatemala even more challenging for its citizens. Orphans also mention that only through higher education and increased investment in Guatemala will their children and the nation be able to improve future economic conditions. Two orphans reflect,

More difficult, perhaps, because with more time…when more years pass, things are going to cost more still. It’s going to get worse. Yes, the truth is that only just a dozen tortillas now cost Q6 and a pound of rice costs Q3.50. You see (Debora, age 27)!!
Well, that would depend a lot on the basic foodstuffs. I believe it could become even worse because when the salaries increase, product prices increase. The basic foodstuffs always, always increase every time that there is a salary increase of the minimum wage…realistically, one could acquire more with an increase in salary, but one can’t do anything. [The economy] could improve if there was more investment in Guatemala, more foreign investment, more people who really want to invest in Guatemala. There would be better jobs, better employment opportunities, better opportunities to get ahead and to become a professional (Esteban, age 28).

The peers, as a group, are even less optimistic about the economic future for their children and the nation in Guatemala than are orphans. Only six of the 20 peers state that they feel that the economic future for their children and the nation, as a whole, will most likely improve. The six peers identify higher education, future presidencies and having faith in God as some of the potential factors that may help turn around today’s flailing economy so that their children and the nation will have better economic conditions and opportunities. Three of the six peers comment,

That’s what I hope for. [My children] have to study. With education, yes, they will be better off (Diego, age 31).

Well, I have faith that it will change, but it all depends on the president and the opportunities he can give to the nation (Nina, age 37).

Well, that is what I want. I have hope in God that they will have a better life (Laya, age 27).

Fourteen peers express greater uncertainty over the future economic conditions for their children and the nation. Six of the 14 believe that economic conditions might improve, but such improvement depends on various unknown contingencies. Two peers assert that the economy will stay the same and the remaining six believe that the economy will become even more challenging in the distant future. All 14 peers note that the future economy will depend greatly on what parents leave to their children, the future
direction of politics, their children’s attainment of higher education, the national debt and the rising cost of living. With much less certainty and optimism for the future, three of these 14 peers further assert,

I think—I’m going to frank with you—I am going to vote for the *Patriota*\(^\text{14}\) party. I figure that [the presidential candidate] is going to enter office and there will be a little more ease in the economy that will allow it to improve. That’s what I figure… I think that those who are involved in the middle class and above…they are always going to be there. It’s certain that the CACIF influences much, but with the free trade, I think the problem is more when there are people entering politics who are from a lower class or who have fewer resources like [former president] Portillo. He didn’t have much money and everyone who worked with him didn’t have much either…..If they get together and they stay in office, they are going to be benefitting too much, taking all the money and taking advantage of the people living in extreme poverty (Otto, age 33).

It’s going to continue. The hole that we are in, no one is going to get us out of it. Economically, Guatemala is in debt that will last until the time of our great-grandchildren (Elias, age 26).

It is going to be more difficult. Each day is more difficult. If there isn’t any work now, imagine it later. The more people there are in the towns, the fewer opportunities. Here in Santa Apolonia, there isn’t any work. You have to leave the town or go to the capital or to other towns to work because there aren’t any jobs here. There isn’t a place that is a source of employment (Dario, age 31).

Orphans and their peers are hopeful that they will be able to improve their own economic status and the economic conditions of their families in the near future. However, they are less optimistic regarding what economic conditions hold for their children and the nation in the distant future. Both groups recognize that a college education is quickly becoming a minimum requirement for many of the few jobs that do exist in the country today and consequently, they view higher education as a necessity now for their children if they hope to get ahead when they enter adulthood. Orphans and

\(^{14}\) Otto is referring to the 2007 presidential elections and the candidate Otto Perez Molino, who is a former general and who founded the *Patriota* political party in 2001. Perez Molino lost the 2007 presidential election to Alvaro Colom of the UNE (Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza) political party, but won the 2011 presidential elections. Former General Otto Perez Molino was inaugurated as President of Guatemala in January of 2012.
peers also realize that the rapidly increasing costs of living and the declining wages make it difficult for the majority of the population to meet even the most basic daily needs, and they are certain that prices will continue to skyrocket disproportionately to wages well into the future. As a result, many orphans and their peers are more hesitant to contend that the economic future will improve for their children and the nation when their children are adults with families of their own. Instead, both groups view the distant economic future as contingent upon a myriad of factors such as: how well parents prepare their children educationally for the future, what parents leave to their children in the form of resources, increased foreign investment, future presidencies and the proper management of the national debt.

**Understanding Orphan Experiences with the Long-Term Economic Consequences**

There is no doubt that orphans who participated in my research project have had to face serious long-term economic consequences because of *la violencia*. The immediate loss of property, primary household wage-earners, and familial and community ties forced orphans and their families to live in even more extreme poverty against a backdrop of intensifying national economic crisis and turmoil. In desperate need of economic assistance, surviving family members brought their orphaned children to the *Hogares* in the hopes that the home would be able to provide their children with basic resources that they as family members simply could no longer provide.

At the *Hogares*, orphans not only experienced immediate relief from abject poverty by instantly receiving food, clothing and shelter but they also gained unprecedented access to other important resources such as healthcare, vocational training and formal education. Most orphans had no access to these types of resources whatsoever while living with their
surviving family members because of their families’ impoverished status, which had been further exacerbated by *la violencia*. The *Hogares* also offered the children the opportunity to participate in what the Catholic sisters termed key religious and cultural traditions that required particular material goods and celebrations too expensive for their families to afford. While enrolling their orphaned children in a permanent residential home was a distressing decision for both the families and orphans, the immediate access to economic resources was extraordinary and allowed orphans to have not only a reprieve from the dramatic economic loss and further destitution brought about by *la violencia* but also to access other resources financially out of reach for their families.

Orphans’ reprieve was short-lived, however, as economic hardship resurfaced for orphans the moment they left the *Hogares* and struck out on their own as young adults. Because of the serious economic losses incurred during the genocide, the vast majority of orphans did not have access to vital familial property or to the financial support of surviving family members. Orphans also lost their ties to their natal communities and subsequently, had no access to community resources that could economically ease their transition into adulthood. Thus, orphans had no choice but to independently establish their own economic base on which to construct their adult lives.

On their own as young adults, orphans did not fall victim to the destitution of their economic past but rather began working hard to establish themselves financially as adults. Most orphans relocated to urban centers where they found housing and secured gainful employment. Many orphans also pursued professional training certification programs and higher education. Through sheer hard work and dedication to education, orphans took control of their life paths and forged ahead as hardworking, educated adults.
who were determined to come out from under the long-term negative economic consequences of the genocide once and for all.

The hard work and educational pursuits of orphans has paid off. Orphans have not only kept pace economically with their peers from Santa Apolonia but have also begun to outpace their peers on several key economic factors. Overall, orphans have attained a higher level of education with nearly four times as many orphans as peers attending college even though orphans have not had the family financial support that their peers have had. Half of the 20 orphans currently work in professional positions, while none of their peers are currently employed in positions that require professional certification. Orphans also earn more individual and family monthly income than their peers do, which reflects both the higher levels of education attained by orphans and thus, their abilities to secure more professional employment based on their educational qualifications.

Orphans’ economic success is also reflected in their attitudes regarding their current economic status in life. Most orphans express that they no longer consider themselves economically worse off than their peers and they see themselves as having equal access to gainful job opportunities. Orphans also assert that they now have the same access to general economic opportunities as anyone else in Guatemala today, even though the national economy continues to weaken. In line with the data revealed in this chapter, orphans’ perceptions demonstrate that they view themselves as having begun to overcome the long-term economic consequences of la violencia and they attribute their abilities to overcome them primarily to formal education.

Enrollment in the Hogares gave orphans immediate and often unprecedented access to formal education, which is something that their surviving family members likely would
never have been able to offer them. In the Hogares, orphans were able to begin their formal education and continue on, in most cases, throughout high school. With the concerted efforts of the Catholic sisters, staff and volunteers of the Hogares, orphans progressed in school and developed an appreciation for education that is less evident among their peers. I believe that the combination of the progress orphans experienced in school early on and the ongoing supportive educational environment of the home cultivated orphans’ confidence in their academic abilities, which fostered their drive and confidence to further their education once they left the Hogares. As a result, 11 of the 20 orphans ultimately have pursued higher education on their own as adults, while only three of their peers have pursued higher education with only one of the three fully completing an undergraduate degree. The eleven orphans who have completed or are currently pursuing a college degree through their own economic resources state they are fully aware that higher education is a valuable tool for securing gainful employment both now and well into the future.

Orphans who participated in my research project are not alone in their appreciation for and recognition of formal education as a constructive means of confronting the long-term economic consequences of la violencia. In his work with Guatemalan Maya Jakaltek refugees in Mexico, anthropologist Victor Montejo also found both a strong appreciation and drive for educating refugee children. Montejo notes that the refugees utilized the time in the refugee camps to make education a priority and consequently, established simple communal schools. The make-shift schools were staffed by trained teachers who were among the refugees and by refugees who received educational promoter training from aid organizations and the Catholic Church once they were already in the refugee camps. In
addition to the schools in the camps, some of the refugee children were later sent to Mexican schools to access additional educational opportunities despite virulent protests from the parents of the local Mexican schoolchildren. Thus, with only the most basic of materials, adult refugees worked hard to educate their children in the refugee camps in the hope that formal education would ultimately provide the children with the tools and skills necessary to help them overcome their impoverished status and to access greater opportunities in the future. Montejo further observes,

The violence that disrupted the refugee’s lives also made them aware of the importance of education for their children. It became a valued tool in the struggle for survival in an ever-changing world. Mayas want their children to acquire what had before been the sole property of the privileged ladinos, a good education. In this way the indigenous people can avoid being excluded, deceived, and abused in almost all aspects of Guatemalan national life as has been the case until now [2005:174].

Anthropologist Beatriz Manz found a similar deep appreciation and drive for education among Guatemalan refugees who returned to their village of Santa María Tzejá in the Ixil rainforest after having lived in refugee camps in Mexico. The refugees, along with community members who remained in the village throughout la violencia, placed primary emphasis on rebuilding their village school upon the refugees’ return. Manz notes, “The aspirations of the village flowed through its school, which the villagers rebuilt with long-lasting cement and considerable care, investing their dreams in the project” (2004:193). The school was initially rebuilt to offer elementary school only; however, it eventually expanded to provide high school education as well. The villagers’ dedication to providing their children with a formal education has had tremendous success. Manz explains,
The villagers, many of the elders themselves illiterate, have developed a deep reverence for learning in general and a dedication to the school in particular. They view it as the village’s finest achievement and therefore hold accountable everyone associated with it—teachers, students, and themselves….The school has been so successful that now one hundred students are studying on scholarship at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City, in Quetzaltenango, in Antigua, and other places. One student received a scholarship to study agronomy in Honduras at one of the best agricultural schools in Central America and another to study medicine in Cuba [2004:194].

The ethnographic work of Montejo and Manz provide further evidence that Guatemalan genocide survivors view education as a valuable tool with which to construct viable futures and supplant the long-term economic consequences that they still have to endure because of la violencia. Their work also reveals how increasing numbers of genocide survivors (most of whom are indigenous) are now seeking higher education, which is a remarkable feat in Guatemala where the educational system has privileged mainly non-indigenous citizens for centuries. While access to higher education for all citizens still has much room for improvement, the influx of rural indigenous students in Guatemalan universities in the past ten years—as demonstrated in the work of Montejo Manz, and my own research as well—certainly will have interesting implications in the future. Montejo observes,

With economic self-sufficiency and appropriate higher education, indigenous people can shatter the ethnic tension and prejudice against them. Education is one major tool to move toward a genuine ethnic reaffirmation and to obtain access to economic and political power in our country, but achieving this is difficult while the Maya majority remains mired in poverty in the most remote rural areas of the country [2005:xi].

**Conclusion**

Consistent with the life experiences of the five orphans featured in Chapter 3, all 20 orphans I interviewed acknowledge the economic loss they and their families have had to endure because of la violencia. They also recognize how the consequences of those losses
resurfaced in orphans’ transition to early adulthood once they left the Hogares. However, none of the 20 orphans identifies the long-term economic consequences as having permanently debilitating effects on their adult lives today. Instead, orphans focus their attention on their hard work and educational achievements as meaningful ways in which they have confronted and ultimately have begun to overcome the long-term economic consequences of the genocide. Orphans’ abilities to carve out their own successful futures despite the great economic disadvantages they have faced and continue to face as orphaned survivors is remarkable and further highlights their abilities to respond to their life challenges in creative and constructive ways. In the following chapter, I further highlight orphans’ abilities to respond to the long-term consequences of la violencia in creative and constructive ways by examining the challenges caused by severed familial and natal community ties, and how they relate to identity. I show that despite those severed ties, orphans in my research project have developed a strong sense of identity that is forged upon concurrent notions of continuity and creativity, which are transforming what it means for them to be mainly indigenous Guatemalans today.
CHAPTER 6

Severed Ties and Identity

“We need to be able to call ourselves Maya and Guatemalan at the same time, without fear of repression or discrimination” (Montejo 2005:xxii).

In addition to trauma and economic loss, orphan participants in my research project also have had to face long-term consequences stemming from severed ties with families and natal communities caused by la violencia. Severed ties with families and natal communities meant that orphans experienced major shifts and disruption in centers of early influence related to identity formation in childhood. Families and natal communities serve as primary sources of socialization and enculturation, particularly for children in the Highlands where the majority of residents identify as indigenous. As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary scholars recognize that communities (or mainly municipios) are especially central to indigenous identity formation.

The Guatemalan state also recognized the importance of community (as well as family) ties in indigenous identity formation. During la violencia, the military explicitly sought to eradicate these ties through brutal annihilation and assimilation policies and practices as yet another means of wiping out indigenous identity altogether under the guise of the nationalist identity-making project. Yet the brutal annihilation and assimilation policies and practices of the genocide were largely unsuccessful as indigenous peoples continued to perceive and express identity in their own dynamic and complex ways (Green 1994, Falla 1994, Montejo 1999). Furthermore, Hale (2006) suggests that new openings in indigenous and ladino relations in the aftermath of la
violencia have spurred a shift in ladino political sensibilities with most ladinos now cautiously advocating multicultural equality, while holding on to the desire to maintain their continued privilege in the social hierarchy.

While persistence regarding indigenous identity and shifts in ladino political sensibilities have contributed to a more “multicultural” (though still discriminatory) social context, the orphans in my research project continue to experience long-term consequences of the state’s assimilationist agenda regarding identity. Having lost one or both of their parents in the genocide, these orphans were taken to live in a permanent residential home for orphaned children instead of remaining with their surviving family members in their natal communities. It would stand to reason that this group of orphans likely has experienced major shifts and perhaps an overarching sense of loss regarding how they perceive and express identity today as a result. However, orphans neither display nor report any sense of overarching “identity loss” or “identity crisis” whatsoever in their own personal experiences even though they do recognize that they have lost certain aspects that they themselves associate with identity (e.g., Mayan language skills, indigenous traditions or costumbres, the use of traditional clothing, etc.).

Despite having lost certain aspects they associate with identity, orphans who participated in my research project perceive themselves as maintaining a strong sense of identity continuity and are adamant about asserting that continuity. At the same time, they also recognize that they engage in creative and transformative practices regarding identity in order to adapt in positive, constructive ways to the long-term consequences that their severed familial and natal community ties still present them even in adulthood. These practices—relatively novel compared to the typical experience of indigenous
peoples in Guatemala—include becoming college-educated, working in professional careers, becoming entrepreneurs and working as lawyers to help litigate for human rights issues in the country, to name a few.

In this chapter, I explore orphans’ experiences with and perceptions of identity. My aim is to demonstrate that despite severed familial and natal community ties, the orphans in my project have formed a strong and prevailing sense of identity and belonging. Enacting a more fluid sense of identity than their peers, the orphans remain strongly rooted in their sense of indigenous ancestry and origins, while also transforming what it means to be indigenous Guatemalans today. To achieve this aim, I begin this chapter by discussing the state’s attempts at eradicating indigenous identity via the violent coercion of genocide in order to underscore the state’s intense and deliberate efforts to annihilate or assimilate the “Indians” as a way to force its nationalist ideology on the majority population. I next highlight how adult survivors responded in constructive and transformative ways to the state’s brutal assimilationist agenda in the immediate wake of la violencia by stepping up their efforts in popular organizing and politico-scholarly activism surrounding issues of indigenous rights, identity and citizenship. I continue by discussing the particular experiences with identity formation in childhood and adolescence of orphan in my research project—paying special attention to the efforts made at the Hogares to facilitate a sense of continuity regarding identity—and by comparing their experiences with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia. I then compare orphan and peer participants’ perceptions of identity now in adulthood and details orphans’ particular views regarding their sense of overarching identity loss. I follow with a discussion of the orphans’ and peers’ perceptions of current indigenous and
ladino relations, focusing on the ways in which they personally experience contemporary intergroup relations. I conclude with a discussion of how to understand orphans’ overall experiences with perceiving and expressing identity, as well as how they view themselves belonging to the Guatemalan nation-state today.

**Eradicating Indigenous Identities via Genocide**

The Guatemalan state persistently has worked to impose its nationalist identity-making project on the whole of its heterogeneous populations by exercising hegemony—Gramsci’s notion of spontaneous consent given by the masses to the social life that is directed by a fundamental ruling class—for the specific benefit of the small group of oligarchic elite. As part of its hegemonic endeavors, the state enacted explicit assimilationist policies and practices such as prohibiting men’s use of traditional dress while in public office and forcing Spanish as the only permitted language in public schools (Becker Richards and Richards 1996; Otzoy 1996). Through these efforts, the Guatemalan state sought to replace indigenous identities with a unified national ladino identity in order to achieve the homogenous nation-state it long desired. However, the ladino identity-making project continued to fail as ideological hegemony. Recognizing its failed hegemony, along with the burgeoning public discontent and popular organizing taking place throughout the country in the 1970s, the Guatemalan state turned to violent coercion to force its nationalist project once and for all.

Assimilation to the Guatemalan state’s nationalist ideology via violent coercion was a central goal of the counterinsurgency campaign, especially during the period of la violencia (CEH 1999d; Green 1999; REMHI 1998a-d; Schirmer 1998; Smith 1988). The state, through its forced assimilation policy, characterized indigenous identity in
essentialist terms via a list of static, autochthonous traits (e.g., language, dress, beliefs, religious practices, traditional customs, etc.), thereby targeting and destroying the various traits and institutions that it perceived as central to indigenous identity in Guatemala (Fischer 2004b, 2001; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Green 1999; Hale 2006; Watanabe 1992). Schirmer confirms the state’s explicit goal of forced assimilation established in the counterinsurgency campaign by presenting the content of military documents published during *la violencia*. In the documents, the state explicitly calls for the *ladinization* of the indigenous population by ordering the military to force indigenous peoples to abandon their language and traditions, and to repress the use of indigenous dress and other forms of external displays that would continue to differentiate indigenous citizens from *ladinos* more generally (Schirmer 1998:104).

The REMHI (1998) and CEH (1999) truth reports also conclude that the state—through its brutal military operations—sought to strategically eliminate indigenous identity by explicitly destroying and disrupting indigenous communities, autonomous systems of governance, social customs, traditional lifeways, belief systems, language and traditional dress use. Military operations specifically aimed at destroying indigenous communities consisted of massacring and razing entire villages, forcing entire populations to abandon their communities altogether, and causing major upheaval in the social fabric of communities by implementing civil patrols, which instilled fear and hostility among community members as I discussed in Chapter 4 (CEH 1999a-d, Green 1999, REMHI 1998a; Smith 1990b; Zur 1998). The physical destruction of indigenous communities and the erosion of the social networks within them were deliberate acts carried out by the state to decimate indigenous identity overall. The REMHI report
reflects both the frequency and intensity of community destruction by revealing that community destruction was one of the most commonly identified effects of *la violencia* reported in survivor testimonies, with one out of five testimonies mentioning it (1999:40).

Along with both physical community annihilation and the destruction of the social fabric of communities, the military also carried out orders by the state to eliminate traditional autonomous systems of governance common in indigenous communities throughout the Highlands (CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a; Zur 1998). The military achieved this goal by killing local community leaders and authorities, and in their place, imposing external military authority over all aspects of community governance. Consequently, traditional community governance based on long-standing indigenous beliefs, ethics, moral principles and convictions used to regulate social life and resolve conflicts were decimated, allowing the military to exercise full and unjust authoritarian control over indigenous community members (CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a). The REMHI report further states,

> Community leaders were lost or changed, replaced, or subordinated to the military authorities. Besides imposing values and customs foreign to the community, this led to abuses of authority [1999:43].

Military strategies to wipe out indigenous identity also involved eroding social customs. Considered dangerous by the state, social customs such as marriages, kinship systems and obligations and extended social relationships within and among indigenous communities were interrupted, discouraged and deemed as direct threats to the state. Constant surveillance of community and social life by military soldiers and civil patrollers made community members fear participating in their traditional social customs.
As a result, most social customs were downplayed or avoided altogether during la violencia (CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a).

The state considered traditional lifeways, such as subsistence farming, another form of direct threat to its nationalist identity-making project and its coercive assimilationist policies. The counterinsurgency campaign (along with the persistent economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s) made subsistence farming no longer economically viable for most indigenous families. Subsistence farming had been the primary lifeway for most Highland indigenous families for centuries and as a result, was considered a marker of indigenous identity by the state. In order to erode and eradicate indigenous identity, therefore, the state explicitly worked to undermine subsistence farming during la violencia. The state achieved this aim by forcing families off their lands, prohibiting the cultivation of traditional crops (e.g., maize, black beans, etc.), burning planted crops, killing and plundering livestock, destroying and stealing farming implements, and identifying subsistence farmers as potential communist subversives merely because of their occupation. Subsistence farming as a traditional lifeway subsequently decreased in considerable proportions during la violencia (CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a).

Indigenous belief systems were similarly identified as threats against the state and its assimilationist agenda during la violencia. Religious beliefs, perceived by the state as particularly central to indigenous identity, were deemed subversive doctrine and a major obstacle to nationalist ideology. The growing popularity of Liberation Theology and its tenets that called for societal transformation via empowerment of the poor and oppressed gave the state further justification to eliminate Catholicism among the masses (Garrard-Burnett 2010; Gutiérrez 1988; Jonas 1991; Schirmer 1998: Stolen 2007). To rid the
Highlands of indigenous belief systems such as religion, the state charged military personnel and civil patrollers with the task of prohibiting all traditional Maya and Catholic religious ceremonies and rites, as well as forbidding the sale of materials such as candles, incense and other religious accoutrements needed for such practices. The military and civil patrollers also destroyed religious and cultural symbols, objects and sites during la violencia. Symbols and objects were commonly shattered or were used in disturbing ways by soldiers and civil patrollers in order to pervert their meanings. Sacred sites and churches were frequently closed off, destroyed or desecrated by the military. Murders, torture and rape of indigenous victims were often carried out by the military on sacred sites or in churches where temporary military posts had been installed. Religious leaders were killed and tortured, pastoral work was banned and the public profession of traditional Maya or Catholic faith was strictly forbidden. In place of traditional Maya and Catholic beliefs, perceived as central to indigenous identity, the state instead sought to instill fundamental evangelical doctrine that espoused anti-communist sentiment, cultural assimilation and social control that directly supported the state’s nationalist identity-making project (CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998; Zur 1998).

Indigenous languages became another target of the state’s forced assimilationist practices during la violencia. With 21 different, mutually-unintelligible Mayan languages within its borders, the Guatemalan state perceived indigenous language use as not only a marker of indigenous identity but also as a major hindrance to its national assimilationist aims. Therefore, the military and civil patrollers worked to prohibit the use of Mayan languages among the indigenous populations. As a result, individuals heard speaking their native language were often instantly identified as guerrilla supporters and were
commonly shot and killed. Thus, the stigma the military created surrounding indigenous language use, in which speaking a Mayan language was considered an immediate signal that one was a guerilla, caused many native speakers to abandon the use of their Mayan languages altogether during la violencia. Warren notes that survivors often switched from speaking their Mayan language to Spanish so strangers and outsiders would understand that their conversations were nonpolitical in nature (1993:48).

Villagers who were displaced either internally or externally also had little choice but to learn Spanish in order to communicate with other refugees who came from other Mayan language-speaking communities and with citizens from host countries in which they sought refuge such as Mexico and Belize. Likewise, the military required that new soldiers (most of whom were young conscripted indigenous males) and civil patrollers speak only Spanish in their service to counterinsurgency operations with the intent, once again, to force Spanish as the unified language of the nationalist identity-making project. Thus, through military coercion, the state effectively prohibited and stigmatized the use of Mayan languages in its efforts to replace those languages with Spanish, working to further erode the indigenous cognitive framework that the state associated with indigenous language use (Adams 2001; CEH 1999c; Manz 1988; REMHI 1998a).

The final identity marker that the state sought to destroy in order to dismantle indigenous identity overall was the prohibition and stigmatization of indigenous dress (or traje). The colors, patterns and styles reflected in indigenous traje represent the wearer’s connection to his or her community of origin (Fischer 2001; Green 1999; Hendrickson 1995; Nelson 1999; Otzoy 1996; Zur 1998). Thus, the state perceived traje to symbolize not only community connections but also to represent indigenous identity and traditions.
more generally by constituting a visible marker that distinguishes and thus, separates indigenous citizens from their *ladino* counterparts. Because of the visible separation that the state believed *traje* evoked, it set out to discourage, prohibit and eliminate the use of *traje* in much the same way it did with Mayan languages during this period.

The use of *traje* was particularly forbidden in military resettlements and was outwardly stigmatized as soldiers and civil patrollers were trained to inexorably equate the use of *traje* with the identification of a “communist subversive” or guerrilla supporter. Fearful that they would be falsely denounced as a guerrilla or guerrilla supporter simply because of wearing *traje*, many indigenous peoples (particularly women) quit using *traje* altogether or used *traje* from some other random community in order to conceal their actual identity regarding their community of origin. Furthermore, displaced populations who were forced to abandon their homes fled with only the *traje* they were wearing at the time. Trying to find or purchase the materials necessary to weave new *traje* while in refugee camps was a near impossibility, especially given the poor economic conditions of life in the camps. Whether as a survival strategy or an economic consequence, the use of *traje* did wane during *la violencia*. The state hoped that eliminating *traje* use would help push its nationalist agenda and contribute to the effectiveness of its violent coercive efforts to assimilate its indigenous citizens into its desired single, unitary national *ladino* identity (Becker Richards and Richards 1996; CEH 1999c; Green 1999; Montejo 1999; Nelson 2009; REMHI 1998a; Zur 1998). However, these efforts would prove fruitless as indigenous survivors not only resisted forced assimilation but also responded to the state’s brutal and calculated assimilationist efforts in creative and transformative ways.
Survivor Responses to the State’s Brutal Assimilationist Agenda during la violencia

The Guatemalan state made concerted and brutal attempts during la violencia to force assimilation on the majority indigenous masses by destroying families and communities and by prohibiting and stigmatizing the use of various indigenous markers that the state considered central to indigenous identity. Yet the state’s attempt to eradicate indigenous identities overwhelmingly failed. As during most of Guatemala’s post-conquest history, Maya indigenous peoples continued to resist and reject the national assimilationist project even during the most extreme violence and coercion that constituted la violencia. By resisting and rejecting forced assimilation, indigenous peoples actively kept from becoming dissolved into the nationalist ideal of a singular ladino identity (Brown, Fischer and Raxche’ 1998; Fischer 2004a; Green 1999; May 2001; Montejo 2005; Raxche’ 1996; Smith 1990b). In fact, not only did indigenous citizens resist and reject the forced assimilationist strategies of the genocide but they also countered those strategies by stepping up their own efforts in popular organizing and politico-scholarly activism surrounding issues of indigenous rights, identities and citizenship in the Highlands and in urban centers in the aftermath of la violencia (Fischer and Brown 1996; Warren 1998).

By the mid-1980s, Maya indigenous activists began to engage in cultural revitalization, beginning with projects that addressed linguistic issues that were viewed as less political in nature and therefore, less dangerous to undertake at the time. As a result of these initial efforts, indigenous activists produced standardized Mayan language dictionaries and grammars (Brown 1996; Fischer 2004a; Lopez Raquec 1989; Montejo 2005). While these initial efforts have been characterized by Warren (1998) as constituting a form of nationalist essentialism that has the potential of overshadowing the
complex, dynamic processual nature of identity formation, activists soon expanded their activities beyond what were viewed as essentialist aims. For example, activists began to focus on a variety of issues that were bolder in scope and substance such as demanding “political reforms to promote ethnic equality within the Guatemalan society” (Fischer 2004a:89-90). These activists and organizations, under the guise of a new Pan-Maya movement, came together to form the Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (COPMAGUA) and were invited to participate in the negotiation of the 1996 Peace Accords in order to represent indigenous interests at the negotiating table (Fischer 2004a; Hale 2006; May 2001; Montejo 2005).

COPMAGUA played a key role in the peace negotiations by helping to develop the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Maya people, which was the first official document to ever formally recognize Guatemala as a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual nation-state. The accord was subsequently ratified by the government, military and guerrilla leaders in March of 1995 as part of the peace negotiations (Fischer 2004a; Green 1999; Hale 2006; Jonas 2000; Konefal 2010). While a popular referendum in 1999 failed to officially approve constitutional changes related to the accord and officially mandated by the 1996 Peace Accords—which was likely a result of the lack of an active grassroots support base—Pan-Maya groups came to wield what Fischer identifies as “a degree of political clout in Guatemala” (2004a:92). For example, Maya leaders, scholars and activists have since attained unprecedented electoral power from municipal to national levels. By the year 2000, there were 15 out of 113 self-identified indigenous congressional deputies and they have successfully secured several important ministerial positions within the national government as well (Fischer 2004a: 92; Montejo 2004).
Increased Maya involvement in politics began fostering indigenous unity and helped establish a base for political and economic power, as well as greater social equality within the state. This move to involve more indigenous people directly in politics is imperative in advancing postcolonial dialogues in Guatemala that will facilitate the conservation and resurrection of various Maya cultural elements, which Pan-Maya activists have identified as vital to cultural revitalization. The move is also imperative for formally and legally acknowledging indigenous peoples’ rights to form and express their own complex notions of identity in order to finally terminate the state’s self-serving national assimilationist identity-making project (Fischer 2004a, 2001; Jonas 2000; May 2001; Montejo 2004; Warren 1998; Watanabe and Fischer 2004).

For the most part, the majority Maya indigenous population of Guatemala has succeeded in resisting and rejecting the state’s far-reaching coercive assimilationist impositions, while persevering under some of the harshest conditions (CEH 1999c; Fischer 2004a; Montejo 2005; Nash 2004; REMHI 1998a; Smith 1990b,f). Instead of falling victim to brutal national assimilationist policies and practices, indigenous peoples have not only survived genocide but also have brought about a resurgence of indigenous pride, activism and participation in the very state apparatus that has tried to destroy them (CEH 1999a, c; Fischer 2006, 2004a; Montejo; REMHI 1998a; Warren 1993). Addressing the work of various pan-Mayanist groups following la violencia, Fischer observes,
Guatemala’s genocide sought not only to stamp out the supposed communist threat (reason enough to secure US funding of the war) but to obliterate the ground in which it presumably flourished, the traditional Maya communities. Yet, out of the ashes of this destruction has emerged a vibrant social movement working to revitalize Maya cultural forms, to promote Maya ethnic pride, and to create new spaces for Maya peoples in Guatemalan political, economic, and social networks [2004a:83].

The resurgence of indigenous activism and political participation among adult survivors of the genocide—evident in the multitude of historical and academic accounts presented over the past two decades—indicates a sense of perseverance and assertion of indigenous identity and belonging among adult survivors of Guatemala’s heinous genocide. However, little is known about the types of long-term effects that the brutal, coercive assimilationist agenda of the counterinsurgency campaign has had on the sense of identity and belonging experienced by survivors who were children during la violencia. Furthermore, little is known about how identity and belonging are subsequently perceived and expressed today by war orphans whose ties with their families and natal communities—the primary sources of socialization and enculturation in a child’s developmental experience—were permanently severed as a direct result of the genocide. In the following section, I address the lack of knowledge regarding orphaned child survivors’ with and responses to the long-term consequences of the state’s national assimilationist agenda by explicitly focusing on their experiences and perceptions of identity and belonging. I begin by discussing orphan participants’ own experiences with identity formation in childhood and adolescence, and then compare their experiences with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia.
Early Experiences with Identity Formation in Childhood and Adolescence

As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary scholars working in Guatemala—and even earlier anthropologists such as Tax (1937; 1941, 1942) and Wolf (1957)—recognize that indigenous identities are perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level in a much more complex manner than has been viewed by the state. Individuals do not perceive or express their indigenous identities as a simple reflection of the state-imposed identity framework that has long categorized the entire heterogeneous indigenous population as “Indian.” Indigenous peoples also do no perceive and express their identities merely in terms of a one-way dichotomous relationship with the state in which indigenous peoples are helpless victims unaware of the state’s intentions and unable to affect the state. Rather, indigenous peoples always have affected the state as well even from subjugated positions and as such, their relation with the state is but one of many relations brought to bear on how identity is perceived and expressed by individuals at the local level. Contemporary scholars working in Guatemala acknowledge the complex web of relations that surround identity and consequently argue that identity is formed, reworked, negotiated, reasserted, redefined and reconstituted in an ongoing, never-ending process within an ever-shifting web of social, economic and political relations at local, national and global levels (Hale 2006; Montejo 1999, 2004, 2005; Warren 1998).

Scholars such as Smith (1990a, d), Montejo (1999, 2004, 2005), Fischer (2001) and Little (2004) further assert that while identity is dynamic and never complete, individuals simultaneously experience a sense of continuity derived from long-standing family and community relations, as well as from core beliefs, ceremonial practices and traditions passed on through the generations that foster a strong connection with the past. I agree
with contemporary scholars that identity is a dynamic process that is never complete and that as an ongoing process, it consists of elements of both continuity and creativity. However, my research diverges from contemporary scholars in that the sense of continuity orphan participants relay regarding identity is not solely derived from and maintained via ongoing relations with families and natal communities because these relations cease to exist for most orphans. Yet, as I demonstrate below, orphans do not feel that they have “lost” their overarching sense of identity or are experiencing any sort of “identity crisis” whatsoever.

The orphans who participated in my research project lost ties to both their families and their natal communities in early childhood because of *la violencia*, which I have demonstrated in the three preceding chapters. Losing these primary connections that serve as central sources of socialization and enculturation and that are still considered by contemporary anthropologists as central to indigenous identity in Guatemala today certainly must have affected the orphans’ sense of identity and belonging in the nation-state in some way. Confounding the situation is the fact that this particular group of orphans spent the majority of their childhoods growing up in a permanent residential home for orphaned children located in a predominantly Maya Kaqchikel town that was unfamiliar to almost all of them. Estranged not only from their families and natal communities but in many cases also from their natal Mayan language groups, the 20 orphans who participated in my project continued to form their identities in a setting much different from that of their surviving family members and of their peers who grew up in familial homes in Santa Apolonia. In this section, I explore the long-term consequences of the genocide explicitly on identity formation among the orphans by
presenting an overview of the sources of early influence on identity formation for this particular group of orphans when compared to their peers. I then discuss the efforts made by the Catholic sisters to support and encourage continuity in identity formation for the orphans enrolled at the Hogares. Despite the Catholic sisters’ explicit efforts to support and provide a sense of continuity related to identity formation, however, I demonstrate that disjuncture between the ways in which orphans’ families identified themselves and orphans’ own perceptions and expression of identity sometimes dramatically emerged in orphans’ adolescence.

**Sources of Early Influence on Orphan and Peer Identity Formation**

Families are commonly a primary source of socialization and enculturation that directly influence early identity formation for children around the globe (Carey 2001; Corsaro and Rizzo 1988; Frie 2008; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain 1998; LeVine and Norman 2001; Mead 1934; Zur 1998). In my research project, orphan and peer participants similarly report that parents, siblings and extended relatives did, indeed, have the most immediate influence on their identity formation in early childhood. Thus, to gain a better sense of these sources of early influence and the settings in which the orphans and their peers initially were raised before la violencia ruptured the orphans’ familial and community ties, I asked both groups to identify their parents’ heritages, their own primary language or languages spoken in early childhood, and their natal communities in the period of early childhood before orphans arrived at the Hogares.

In an attempt to avoid skewing participants’ responses, I purposely did not provide a list of specific categories with which participants would respond to the question of how they believe their parents do or did (in the case of those who died during or following la
violencia) identify their heritages. Instead, I simply asked orphans and their peers to describe how they believe their parents’ identify or identified their familial heritage using whatever terms or categories the participants independently chose to use. While not using fixed categories has the potential of rendering responses either incomparable or too varied as to convey meaning, I found this approach useful for attaining heritage categories used by participants rather than ones imposed on them. Table 12 presents a summary of participant responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>ORPHANS</th>
<th>PEERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K’iche’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uspanteco</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladina(o)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mestiza(o)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 12 reveals, orphans use more varied categories to identify their parents’ heritages. Fourteen identify their parents’ heritages as one of three different categories associated with Mayan language groups: Kaqchikel, K’iche’ or Uspanteco. Four orphans respond using the categories of ladino and mestizo. The use of the term “mestizo” regarding their parents’ heritages is particularly noteworthy as the term “mestizo” (or a mixing of indigenous and Spanish heritages) is not and has not been a common form of identifying individuals or heritage in Guatemala. An explanation for why this term may have been selected is discussed below when I present the categories the orphans use to identify themselves.

The peers identify their parents’ heritages utilizing only two categories: Kaqchikel for 11 of the 20 peers or ladino for nine of them. It is interesting to note that for the orphans’
parents, intermarriage between particular Maya indigenous groups (e.g., K’iche’, Kaqchikel or Uspanteco) was not uncommon, yet intermarriage between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals was not found in the case of the families of the 20 orphans. The peers’ parents even more strictly married within their own heritage category with no intermarriages between any groups occurring at all. It is important to note that neither orphans nor their peers use the state-imposed category of “Indian” (or “indio”) to identify their parental heritage as this label is considered pejorative by participants.

Unlike their peers who all could easily report their parents’ heritages, two orphans were unable to categorize them whatsoever. Lina was abandoned by her parents and has no identifying information other than the fact that the initial group of Catholic sisters who founded the Hogares believed that her family likely originated from the Department of Sololá. While it is unclear how the Catholic sisters reached this conclusion, they subsequently recognized Lina as having a Kaqchikel familial heritage and subsequently, generally identified her as indigenous and provided her with traditional Kaqchikel-style traje from Sololá to wear instead of non-indigenous clothing. Lina continues to both identify herself as indigenous and to wear general indigenous traje today, although she no longer wears traje specific to Sololá or to a municipio or community in the Sololá region as she has no record of her particular natal community.

Yohana was born in the Petén, but also does not have any specific information regarding her parents’ heritages. The information received from her extended relatives when she was brought to the Hogares by the state police simply indicated “ladina” as her identity. Therefore, Yohana was identified as ladina while living at the Hogares and continues to use that category to describe her own identity today despite the lack of
specific information regarding her parents’ particular heritages. Interestingly, Yohana’s physical features (e.g., facial features, skin color, hair texture, etc.) allude to possible Garífuna (descendants of Carib, Arawak and West Africa peoples) ancestry as well; however, neither Yohana nor the Catholic sisters have ever spoken of that possibility.

After orphans and peers indicated their parents’ heritages, I next asked them to identify the primary language or languages they spoke while living with their parents and other family members during early childhood. For the orphans, this meant the period of time that they were living with their families prior to enrolling in the Hogares. Because language provides a cognitive framework that can contribute to the ways in which individuals interpret, understand and give meaning to their life experiences (Adams 2001; Carey 2001; Fischer 2001; Zur 1998), I felt that asking orphans and peers to identify the primary languages they spoke in early childhood was pertinent to understanding their early influences on identity formation. My aim was also to use the language information they provided to later determine how changes in language use brought about by lost ties to families and natal communities may have affected how orphans, in particular, perceive and identify themselves today in adulthood. Table 13 is a summary of the responses provided by orphans and peers regarding their primary language use in early childhood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language(s) Category</th>
<th>Orphans</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ixil only</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel only</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel and Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish, Uspanteca and K’iche’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish only</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to the varied responses regarding parents’ heritages, orphans and peers also differed in the variety of languages that they report speaking in early childhood. Overall, more orphans spoke mainly a Mayan indigenous language in early childhood than their peers did. Specifically, eight of 20 orphans spoke a Mayan language as their only language, while five spoke one or two Mayan languages along with Spanish. Only one orphan (Lina) was unable to identify which language or languages she spoke as a small child. In contrast, the majority of peers (12 of the 20) spoke only Spanish as their primary language in early childhood, while four spoke both Kaqchikel and Spanish. Only four peers spoke solely Kaqchikel in their early formative years. Not unexpectedly, the responses provided by orphans and their peers generally correspond to the categories they used to describe their parents’ heritages, demonstrating a strong correlation between heritage category of parents and primary Mayan language used. Given this strong correlation, a rupture both in family structure and in language use brought about by la violencia could factor dramatically into the ways in which orphans have formed their sense of identity and would later perceive those identities in adulthood.

Natal communities are another central source of socialization and enculturation for children in general and especially for indigenous children in Guatemala. Natal communities are of primary importance in the rural Highlands where the often tight-knit social fabric of indigenous communities has long been and continues to be recognized as central to indigenous identity in Guatemala by various scholars working there (Carey 2001; Fischer 2001; Hagan 1994; Little 2004; Manz 1988; Montejo 1999, 2004, 2005; Smith 1990d; Warren 1993; Zur 1998). Therefore, in order to further gauge whether severed community ties resulting from la violencia has influenced identity formation in
some way among orphans in my research project, I next asked both orphans and peers to identify their natal communities. Table 14 presents a summary of their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community, Municipality, Department</th>
<th>Orphans</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa Apolonia, Santa Apolonia, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aldea</em>, Santa Apolonia, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San José Poaquil, San José Poaquil, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aldea</em>, San José Poaquil, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Caserío</em>, San José Poaquil, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan Comalapa, Comalapa, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tecpán, Tecpán, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Martín Jilotepeque, San Martín Jil., Chimaltenango</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Caserío</em>, San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pueblo</em>, Santa Cruz del Quiché, Quiché</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aldea</em>, Nebaj, Quiché</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uspantán, Uspantán, Quiché</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pueblo</em>, Pueblo, Petén</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I substituted the general terms *pueblo*, *aldea* or *caserío* in places where identifying a specific place name of a small community could identify specific participants in my research project and thus, threaten their anonymity.

The natal communities identified by orphans and their peers differed in both size and geographical location. Half of the 20 orphans identified smaller *aldeas*\(^1\) (hamlets) or *caseríos* (tiny settlements) as their natal communities. Nine orphans responded that their natal communities were larger towns with seven of them born in a central municipal town (or *cabecera*). Only one orphan (Lina) is unable to identify her natal community as she has no access to official birth records. The vast majority of peers (16 of 20), on the other hand, were born in the central municipal town of Santa Apolonia or in one of its immediately adjoining *aldeas*. Only four peers were born outside of Santa Apolonia, but

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\(^1\) As noted in Chapter 1, Guatemala is divided into twenty-two *departamentos* (departments are similar to states in the United States), which are further divided into *municipios* (municipalities). Each municipality has a *cabecera* (central town) that is the seat of the municipal government. Surrounding the *cabecera* are *aldeas* (hamlets), which may have a church, school, cemetery and multiple dwellings. The *aldeas* are further surrounded by *caseríos* (tiny settlements) that consist of only a small scattering of dwellings. All of the *aldeas* and *caseríos* are governed by the mayor of the municipality (Hawkins 1984; Hendrickson 1995; Hill and Monaghan 1987; Moore 1973; Rodríguez Rouanet 1996; Wagley 1957).
all four identified their natal communities as larger central municipal towns in the
departments of either Chimaltenango or Quiché. Therefore, orphans’ natal communities
were smaller and more rural overall than those of their peers, which is consistent with
both truth report findings that verify that the military’s most brutal and heinous acts of *la
violencia* were carried out in some of the most rural and remote areas of the Highlands.

Geographically, the orphans originate from a wider range of locations covering a
greater span of distance than their peers as well. Orphans’ natal communities are spread
out over three different departments and eight municipalities with a maximum distance of
over 300 kilometers between the town of Santa Apolonia and the natal community
located furthest away in the Petén. Nearly all of the peers, in contrast, originate from the
municipality of Santa Apolonia or from municipal towns that are within a 15 kilometer
radius of the town of Santa Apolonia. Only one peer identified her natal community as a
cabecera located 40 kilometers northwest of the town of Santa Apolonia, yet it is still a
Highland regional town.

The responses provided by orphans and peers regarding their parents’ heritages,
éarly primary language use and natal communities reveal that orphans, as a whole,
originate from a more varied range of socialization and enculturation experiences in early
childhood than their peers. Families and natal communities were primary centers of
influence for both groups. However, while family and community influence on identity
formation remained steady for peers throughout the duration of their childhoods, orphans
came to find themselves (when they were enrolled in the *Hogares*) in an entirely new
environment with little connection to their earlier centers of socialization and
enculturation. Recognizing this dramatic shift for orphans, the Catholic sisters at the
*Hogares* made deliberate efforts to support and encourage continuity in orphans’ identity formation once they were enrolled in the home, which I now discuss below.

**Efforts to Support and Encourage Continuity in Identity Formation at the *Hogares***

Based on many conversations that I have had over the past 17 years with the Catholic sisters who founded and worked at the *Hogares*, it is apparent that they were fully aware that the rupture of familial and community ties brought about by *la violencia* meant a dramatic shift in the centers of socialization and enculturation for orphaned children who came under their care. Cognizant that this shift could potentially attenuate orphans’ sense of identity—initially formed amid earlier familial and community influences—the Catholic sisters made deliberate efforts to support and encourage continuity in orphans’ continued identity formation while they were enrolled in the *Hogares*. In the following section, I highlight some of these efforts as they have been described to me by orphans, tías, staff and Catholic sisters over the years, as well as through my own personal observations made since my first experience living and working in the *Hogares* as a volunteer in the period of 1994 to 1996 up through my most recent visit to the *Hogares* in December 2010. The Catholic sisters’ approach to supporting and encouraging continuity in identity formation reflects perhaps a more essentialist notion of identity (e.g., a list of static, autochthonous traits); however, when asked what was done to support and encourage continuity in identity formation at the *Hogares*, both the Catholic sisters and orphans identified the following efforts: primary language maintenance; traditional dress continuity; cultural activities; a positive multicultural environment; religious formation; agricultural training; and maintaining orphans’ connections with their family members. I now detail each of these efforts.
The Catholic sisters at the *Hogares* recognized the importance of maintaining orphans’ primary language skills while they were enrolled in the home, which was located in a town in which residents spoke primarily Spanish and Kaqchikel. The Catholic sisters were concerned that orphans would no longer be able to communicate with their surviving family members and would feel a loss of connection with their natal communities if they lost their abilities to speak their primary Mayan languages. The Catholic sisters—some of whom are also indigenous and speak a Mayan language as their own primary language as well—were also concerned about orphans losing the initial cognitive framework they had developed in early childhood if they no longer continued speaking their Mayan languages.

To help maintain continuity regarding primary language use, the Catholic sisters hired *tías*—the women on staff who provided primary care for the children—who spoke a Mayan language as their primary language (most spoke some Spanish as well). The Catholic sisters also hired women who spoke only Spanish as their primary language in order to facilitate and expand the Spanish language skills of non-indigenous orphans enrolled who only learned Spanish from their families. In the initial years after the *Hogares* was founded, the *tías* on staff spoke mainly Kaqchikel, K’iche’ and Spanish, reflecting the languages spoken by the children enrolled at the time. As more orphans from other regions were enrolled in the *Hogares*, the Catholic sisters hired additional *tías* with the particular language skills necessary to match and help maintain newly arrived orphans’ primary languages. For example, *tías* who spoke Q’eqchi’ and Tz’utujil were hired because new orphans arrived speaking those languages as their primary and often only languages. In addition to the *tías*, the Maya indigenous Catholic sisters and staff
working at the *Hogares* also spoke their primary indigenous languages—mostly Kaqchikel, K’iche’ and Q’eqchi’—in order to not only help maintain and develop orphans’ language skills but also to help sustain a multilingual environment that promoted and encouraged diversity and acceptance among all orphans, *tías*, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers. Figure 23 presents photos of some of the *tías* who were employed at the *Hogares* and who spoke Mayan languages as their primary languages.

![Figure 23: *Tíás* at the *Hogares*. (Left) Two of the Kaqchikel-speaking *tías* hired from *aldeas* in San José Poaquil in 1994. (Right) Two additional *tías* (a Kaqchikel speaker on the left and a Q’eqchi speaker on the right) prepare lunch for orphans in one of the eight homes at the *Hogares* in 1995.](image)

In addition to primary language maintenance, the Catholic sisters also intentionally worked to ensure that orphans would maintain the form of traditional dress that they had been accustomed to using prior to their enrollment in the *Hogares*. In particular, the orphaned girls who identified as indigenous and who had worn traditional *traje* in their natal communities before arriving at the home were provided with their community-specific *traje* throughout the remainder of their enrollment. As discussed in Chapter 5, orphaned boys had not used any sort of traditional *traje* prior to being enrolled, which was not uncommon in the Highlands at the time. Thus, in order to achieve continuity in
traditional dress mainly for the indigenous orphaned girls, the Catholic sisters purchased *traje* every year from each of the girls’ natal communities or from nearby communities that sold *traje* in the particular patterns and style of the girls’ natal communities\(^2\). The *Hogares* has received clothing donations from various international and national organizations since its inception. It certainly would have been cheaper and much easier to dress all orphans in donated non-indigenous clothing that came mostly from the United States. However, the Catholic sisters recognized that *traje*, in particular, was one important way in which they could provide some continuity in identity formation, especially for orphaned girls. Figure 24 presents two photos that demonstrate the varied use of *traje* and non-indigenous clothing among orphans enrolled in the *Hogares*.

![Figure 24: Traje at the Hogares. (Left) Three teenage orphan girls in 1995 wear their various styles of dress. The girl on the left identifies as ladina and the two on the right are wearing *traje* with the one on the far right wearing her traditional *traje* from her natal village. (Right) Some orphan girls and tías in their various styles of *traje* in 1995.](image)

The Catholic sisters at the *Hogares* also organized what they termed “cultural activities” (or *actividades culturales*) as part of their ongoing efforts to support and encourage continuity in identity formation among orphans. The Catholic sisters identified cultural activities as various events that consisted of traditional dances, skits, plays and

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\(^2\) For example, the primary market day in the nearby town of Tecpán was every Thursday and during the Thursday market, it was common to purchase various community-specific *traje* from regional vendors who came from other towns, hamlets and settlements in the region.
musical performances in which orphans, tías, staff, Catholic sisters and international volunteers all participated. The cultural activities at the Hogares took place throughout the year during holiday celebrations (such as Christmas and Easter) and for special events such as the Feast Day of Santa Apolonia (February 9), Valentine’s Day (or Día del Cariño), Quinceañera celebrations for girls at the Hogares, the Day of the Dead (November 1) and the Day of the Child (October 1). Cultural activities also occurred during visits from various volunteer work groups that arrived from the United States. The work groups typically stayed at the Hogares for a week, assisting with building and maintenance projects, as well as offering various classes to orphans such as English, crafts and art. Cultural activities were usually scheduled for the last night of each work group stay and served as what the Catholic sisters deemed a type of cultural exchange (intercambio cultural) between orphans, tías, staff and Catholic sisters of the Hogares, and the visiting group members. Figure 25 presents several photos of the events that orphans, tías, staff and Catholic sisters considered actividades culturales held at the Hogares in the mid-1990s.

Figure 25: Cultural Activities. (Left) Some of the teenage orphans and one of the Catholic sisters (third from the left) present a traditional dance from the Q’eqchi area of Alta Verapaz during a Christmas celebration in 1995. (Right) A group of small boys from the Hogares present a traditional Kaqchikel dance during one of the cultural activities conducted during a work group visit in 1996.
The largest cultural activity that took place during the year at the Hogares, however, was the Noche Cultural (Cultural Night) held during the anniversary celebration. Each year in early December, orphans, tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers begin a nine-day celebration of the founding of the Hogares that leads up to December 12, which is the Feast Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Hogares (officially recognized Hogares Santa María de Guadalupe) is named in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe and subsequently, celebrates its founding on December 12 each year in adoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The nine-day celebration leading up to December 12 includes activities such as a soccer tournament, the running of a torch from a distant location to Santa Apolonia, two basketball tournaments (one for boys and one for girls), an art contest, foot races and nightly prayer sessions as part of a novena (Catholic nine-day prayer devotion). The largest event next to the festive lunchtime meal prepared on December 12, however, is what the Catholic sisters call the Noche Cultural (Cultural Night) that is typically held on the night of December 11. The Noche Cultural activities include traditional dances, musical performance, skits, lip-syncing, dinámicas (group participation activities), poetry readings and the presentation of awards for the various anniversary events (e.g., soccer tournament, art contest, foot races, etc.) that took place leading up to the Noche Cultural. The Noche Cultural is designed to showcase the talent and the pride in the ethnic diversity of orphans, tías, Catholic sisters and staff of the Hogares. It also contributes to the supportive and encouraging multicultural environment that the Catholic sisters have worked hard to establish and maintain at the home. Figure 26 presents several photos taken during the Noche Cultural activities in 1994 when I was serving as a volunteer at the Hogares.
While the cultural activities at the Hogares provided orphans, tías, staff and Catholic sisters with ongoing opportunities to showcase their talents and their pride in their various heritages, the Catholic sisters also worked to promote pride in indigenous and non-indigenous heritages at the home on a daily basis by providing what the Catholic sisters termed “un ambiente multicultural” (or a multicultural environment). The Catholic sisters achieved this task by creating an environment that underscored the equal validity and importance of all groups of people in Guatemala, whether indigenous or non-indigenous. No particular population group was privileged over another and the Catholic sisters consistently reinforced the point that indigenous orphans were of equal status with ladino orphans enrolled. The messages of equality were relayed via the positive relationships cultivated between orphans, tías, staff, Catholic sisters and international volunteers, who were all of varied backgrounds and heritages themselves. The messages were also transmitted through an intentional focus on equal treatment of all of the children by tías, staff, Catholic sisters, and volunteers. Lastly, visual images displayed at the Hogares contained messages of equality and pride in orphans’ various heritages. One
example is a mural painted in the main administrative and classroom building at the *Hogares*. The mural consists of two small Kaqchikel children with the specific *traje* of the town of Santa Apolonia who are holding traditional incense and a cornstalk, both of which are important Maya indigenous symbols. The children painted in the mural are depicted as wearing *traje* from Santa Apolonia because it was a way of not privileging one orphan’s particular natal community over another as the *Hogares* is located in the town of Santa Apolonia. Figure 27 presents a photo of the mural and its image that is also used on a *Hogares* T-shirt to further support and promote what the Catholic sisters deemed multiculturalism.

![Figure 27: Un Ambiente Multicultural. (Left) The mural in the main building at the Hogares with a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of the homes, in the lower corner of the main stairwell. (Right) Associated imagery used on a T-shirt of the Hogares which shows Kaqchikel children from Santa Apolonia with a quote from the *Pop Wuj* (or *Popol Vuh*), which is the K’iche’ book of creation. (Photos taken by research assistant Brenda Avila Flores).](Image)

The Catholic sisters at the *Hogares*—representing the Catholic religious community of the School Sisters of Saint Francis—also used religious formation as a means of supporting and encouraging continuity in identity formation among orphans enrolled at the home. Most of the orphans’ families were practicing Catholics as centuries of Catholic proselytization in the Highlands had converted the majority of the population to
Catholicism generations ago. In keeping with orphans’ familial religious backgrounds and with the doctrine of Catholic Church as members of a religious order, the Catholic sisters at the *Hogares* provided religious formation for all orphans enrolled. Formation included religion classes held at the *Hogares* that were specifically tailored to each orphan’s age and to their positioning in receiving the sequential order of the sacraments (e.g., baptism, first communion, confirmation, etc.). The religious formation classes were designed to teach orphans basic religious doctrine and to prepare them for receiving the sacraments. Religious formation at the *Hogares* also included attending weekly Sunday Catholic mass, as well as additional masses held for Holy Days of Obligation throughout the year such as All Saints Day, Christmas and Easter. Novenas (nine-day prayer devotions), prayer services, rosaries, scripture readings and *posadas* (Christmas novenas) also took place directly at the *Hogares* throughout the year. Only on rare occasions, such as the blessing of the seeds before fields were planted, would elements of traditional Maya spirituality be included in the religious formation offered at the *Hogares*. However, the lack of regular inclusion of elements of traditional Maya spirituality had more to do with the exclusionary requirements of the Catholic Church and the Catholic sisters’ devotion to Catholicism than with discriminatory practices against indigenous peoples or heritages. Figure 28 presents photos of some of the activities that formed part of the religious formation offered at the *Hogares*. 
As discussed in Chapter 5, agriculture was one of the four vocational training areas offered to orphans enrolled in the *Hogares*. In addition to teaching orphans valuable agricultural vocational skills and to reducing overhead costs by growing half of the food consumed at the *Hogares* itself, the Catholic sisters contend that agricultural training was also another means of supporting and encouraging continuity in identity formation for orphans. All of the children enrolled at the *Hogares* (even those who were born in the northern Petén region) were initially raised in families that depended mainly, if not completely, on subsistence farming. Furthermore, orphans’ families generally came from generations of descendants who were subsistence farmers. Thus, subsistence farming was viewed as an important lifeway and therefore, was considered part of a family’s heritage. Subsequently, agriculture was identified as an important aspect of identity formation by the Catholic sisters (especially for those who identified as indigenous). In order to provide some sense of continuity with the lifeways and familial heritages that the orphans had before being enrolled in the *Hogares*, the Catholic sisters explicitly chose to involve all of the children in various aspects of agriculture during times that they were not in
school. Besides developing fundamental vocational skills, agricultural training was aimed at cultivating and maintaining orphans' connections with their familial backgrounds and lifeways even though it was likely that orphans would become wage-laborers working outside of the agricultural sector when they became adults. Agricultural training at the Hogares included planting, tending and harvesting crops, as well as animal husbandry with chickens, rabbits and pigs. Figure 29 presents photos of some of the early agricultural training offered at the Hogares.

![Figure 29: Agricultural Training. (Top left) Some orphans help prepare the soil for planting in 1987. (Top right) One orphan tends crops with a tía in 1992. (Bottom left) Some of the youngest orphans help sort the vegetable harvest in 1992. (Bottom right) Two orphan boys help hoe one of the Hogares' agricultural plots in Santa Apolonia in 1988. (Photos provided by the Hogares).](image)

The final deliberate effort that the Catholic sisters made to support and encourage continuity in identity formation for orphans involved maintaining orphans’ familial
connections. The Catholic sisters had an “open door” policy at the Hogares in that surviving family members could visit orphans any time and as frequently as they desired throughout the year. The Catholic sisters also personally invited orphans’ surviving family members to important events such as graduations, holiday celebrations, first communions, confirmations, Hogares anniversary celebrations, Quinceañeras and birthday parties. The Catholic sisters also encouraged surviving family members to come to the Hogares every mid-December (after the anniversary celebration) in order to take their orphaned children home with them so they could spend the Christmas holidays reconnecting with extended family members back in their natal communities if possible.

As was demonstrated in Chapter 3, not all surviving family members could afford the time off from work or the money needed to travel to the Hogares to visit their orphaned children. Even fewer could afford to take their orphaned children home for the holidays. However, those who could reunite and spend time with their children were encouraged by the Catholic sisters to do so whenever possible. For orphans who did not receive visits and could not spend the holidays with their family members, the Hogares tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers planned special activities and fieldtrips as a way of helping to make orphans feel special and recognized even though such activities and fieldtrips could never fully replace spending time with their own surviving family members. Encouraging and supporting ongoing connections with family members was an important way in which the Catholic sisters tried to maintain orphans’ ties with their familial and community backgrounds. Figure 30 presents photos of some of the family member visits that occurred early on at the Hogares.
Despite the deliberate efforts of the Catholic sisters to support and encourage continuity in identity formation for orphans, disjuncture between orphans’ familial and community backgrounds and their own perceptions of their identity began to appear in their teenage years. By the time that I arrived at the Hogares as a volunteer in 1994, the majority of the teenage orphans refused to speak their primary Mayan languages and only conversed in Spanish. Even when tías or the Catholic sisters spoke to the teen orphans in Kaqchikel or K’iche’, for example, orphans would only respond in Spanish and conveyed great annoyance at being spoken to in anything other than Spanish. Often when teens were scolded for not responding in their own Mayan languages, they would become further upset and would make underhand comments about how it was “estúpido” (stupid) to speak a Mayan language. In addition to refusing to speak their Mayan languages, many of the teen girls also refused to wear their traditional traje on a regular basis. Following the trends in clothing from their ladina counterparts from Santa Apolonia and the Hogares at the time, many of the indigenous girls decided to wear jeans or leggings with T-shirts or polo shirts instead, stating that traje was uncomfortable, old-fashioned or just plain “estúpido.”
Familial and natal community backgrounds became another source of curt rejection among the teen orphans. Most teens became much less open to talking about their families or natal communities, and often displayed emotions of shame or embarrassment if anyone asked about their backgrounds. Making matters more difficult, visits from family members had nearly stopped for most orphans by the time they were teenagers as the cost of travel had increased and surviving family members simply could not take time off from work to make the trek to Santa Apolonia (most wage-laborers worked Monday through Saturday schedules). As a result, orphans had little if any consistent contact with their surviving family members in adolescence, which further eroded their familial and natal community ties.

The disjuncture between familial and community backgrounds and orphans’ own sense of identity was apparent both in behavior and attitude during their teenage years and ultimately became the impetus behind my own decision to enroll in a graduate program in cultural anthropology in order to conduct research specifically examining this issue more fully. Originally, I believed that my research would demonstrate that one of the many long-term consequences of la violencia on the lives of war orphans was the loss of a strong sense of identity typically forged from familial and community influences. Based on my own observations as a volunteer at the Hogares during many of the orphans’ adolescence, I was certain that orphans (especially those who identified as indigenous) would report little connection today in adulthood with their heritages or earlier childhood identity formation. I was especially confident that I would find that as adults, the indigenous orphans would come to claim a ladino identity instead of an

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3 Even in the period of 1994 to 1996, there was only one telephone in the entire town of Santa Apolonia and rarely any telephones whatsoever in any of the rural areas. Thus, telecommunications also were not an option for maintaining regular contact with family members at the time.
indigenous one, demonstrating that they had *ladinized* (assimilated from an *indigenous* to *ladino* identity) as one of the many long-term consequences of the genocide.

Consequently, I set out to conduct dissertation research with the underlying assumption that the genocide had, indeed, destroyed orphans’ sense of connection with their family heritage and thus, their indigenous identities altogether. Fortunately, I was completely mistaken as orphans now in adulthood demonstrate and assert that not only have they not lost their overarching sense of identity (especially among those who identify as indigenous) or have experienced any sort of “identity crisis” but rather have formed a strong sense of identity and belonging that is forged upon simultaneous notions of continuity and creativity. The strong sense of identity perceived and expressed by orphans who participated in research project elucidate that in place of loss, they are actually transforming what it means to be mainly indigenous citizens in the Guatemalan nation-state today, which I now illustrate.

**Orphan and Peer Perceptions of Identity and Belonging in Adulthood**

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, orphans enrolled in the *Hogares* did experience dramatic disruption in the connections they had with their families and natal communities during early childhood. The disruption resulted in the loss of certain aspects that orphans, themselves, recognize as part of their indigenous identities such as language, traditional *traje* use and customs. For example, in Chapter 3, Mario states, “Language is part of an identity. I lost that. It was precisely because I left my family in order to better my life that I lost that, but in exchange for bettering my life, I wasn’t able to maintain that part of my identity.” Esteban similarly notes, “I don’t speak the language [well], I don’t practice Maya traditions…I don’t do any of this, but I am indigenous and I can’t change that.” Yet
while the five orphans presented in Chapter 3 all report losing some elements of what they consider part of their indigenous identities because of *la violencia*, each expresses tremendous connection with, as well as pride in, their indigenous heritages and identities. For example, Juliana identifies herself as “proudly Kaqchikel.” Debora states that she feels “happy to be indigenous.” Mario reports he still feels a strong connection with his natal region and indigenous heritage despite not having lived in his natal community since the day he left for the *Hogares*. Juana observes, “You can change the way you look, but you continue being indigenous from inside. You carry it inside…in your blood.” Esteban shares, “In no way am I going to forget my roots, my customs…well not customs but my culture. It is my culture….but you can’t stop being indigenous because you carry it in your blood.” These reflections on identity demonstrate that the five orphans clearly do not consider themselves as having “lost” their sense of identity or connection with their indigenous heritages. They also do not portray themselves as experiencing an “identity crisis” even though they report having lost certain aspects that they themselves associate with identity such as language or traditions. Instead, these five orphans express a deep, continuous internal sense of connection with their families and natal communities even though the ongoing relationships and physical connections with both no longer remain. Thus, the internal sense of continuous connection with their heritages and ancestry despite severed ties appear to figure prominently into orphans’ assertion of a strong, persistent sense of indigenous identity even today in adulthood.

In this section, I examine how orphan participants explicitly perceive their identities in adulthood and compare their perceptions with those of their peers from Santa Apolonia. To achieve this aim, I first present orphan and peer responses to a series of questions
focused specifically on their personal experiences regarding aspects of their own identity, as well as with identity more generally in Guatemala today. I conclude by discussing orphans’ opinions regarding overarching “identity loss” in their life experiences, and highlight their perspectives regarding “identity loss” more generally among war orphans in Guatemala. Based on the responses and perspectives of both orphan and peer participants, I demonstrate that contrary to what one would assume would be long-term overarching “identity loss” related to identity and as a consequence of genocide, war orphans in my project have instead developed a strong sense of continuity in the ways in which they perceive and express their mainly indigenous identities in adulthood.

At the outset of the ethnographic interviews conducted with each orphan and peer, I asked how they typically identify themselves and their parents (whether living or deceased) today. Similar to earlier questions regarding parental heritage, I did not use fixed categories when I posed the question. Instead, I ask participants to identify their own identities using whatever category or term each one deemed most reflective of the way in which each perceives and expresses her or his identity today, as well as how they categorize their parents’ identities. Table 15 presents a summary of the self-described identities of orphans and peers, as well as of their parents according to the participants.

<table>
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<th>Category/Term</th>
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<tr>
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Based on their responses, orphans tend to use a wider variety of categories or terms to identify themselves than they do to describe their parents’ identities. For example, when indicating their parents’ identities, the group of 15 indigenous orphans tends to use terms associated with various Mayan language groups such as Kaqchikel, K’iche’ and Uspanteco more than peers do, reflecting orphans’ more varied indigenous heritages and backgrounds. Furthermore, when asked to identify themselves, eight of 20 orphans use the general term *indígena* (indigenous). Three indigenous orphans use a combination of both general and language-specific terms such as *Maya Kaqchikel* or *indígena Kaqchikel*. For example, Brandon (age 28) uses the term *Maya Kaqchikel* to identify himself, but identifies his parents simply by using the terms “Kaqchikel” for his mother and “K’iche’” for his father. The remaining four indigenous orphans identify themselves solely by language group (e.g., simply Kaqchikel or K’iche’) and use the same categories to identify their parents’ identities. Lastly, most orphans use a wider variety of categories or terms to describe how they identify their parents versus the terms they use to describe their parents’ heritages presented above. It is important to note that none of the 14 indigenous orphans use the general category of “indigenous” to identify their parents’ heritages, but seven did use “indigenous” to describe their parents’ identities—an additional orphan identifies as “indigenous” but does not have any information about her parents’ identities. Two orphans use categories other than a specific Mayan language group to identify their parents, which differs from the way in which they described their parents’ heritages. Only six indigenous orphans identify their parents’ heritages and identities in the same manner, using specific Mayan language groups to describe both.
The five orphans who do not self-identify as indigenous either use the common term *ladino* (two orphans) or the term *mestizo* (three orphans) to describe their identities. Two of the orphans who use the term *mestizo* to identify themselves also use that term to classify their parents’ identities. Medelin (age 28) explains why she uses the term *mestiza*—a term not commonly used in Guatemala as an identity category—to describe both her own identity and that of her parents,

I say *mestiza* because realistically in Guatemala people who are 100% *ladinos* don’t exist because people are married to an indigenous man or woman and above all, all of our great-grandparents have done this, but go figure, my great-grandfather was German or something like that. So, I also have blood from another place.

Unlike Medelin, one of three orphans who uses the term *mestizo* to identify himself identifies his parents’ simply as *ladino*. When asked what he means by “*mestizo,*” Carlos (age 28) clarifies, “A *mestizo* person, perhaps, would come from a partnership between a *ladino* man and an indigenous woman or a *ladina* woman with an indigenous man. That would be what it is to be *mestizo*, to have indigenous roots and *ladino* roots.” It is intriguing that Carlos uses a different term to identify himself even though he identifies both of his parents as *ladino*. I would guess that Carlos’ response is likely a reflection of the fact that he is now bilingual in both Spanish and Kaqchikel as a result of growing up at the Hogares, whereas his parents speak only Spanish. The fact that Carlos was raised at the Hogares for the majority of his childhood in an environment where indigenous and non-indigenous children grew up together and where the adult caregivers did not privilege one group over the other likely factors into his choice to use *mestizo* to identify himself today. However, further clarification with Carlos is needed to ascertain the exact reason for the discrepancy in how he identifies himself and how he identifies his parents.
Among 20 orphans, there are only two who are not able to categorize their parents’ identities. Lina and Yohana have no specific information regarding their parents’ actual identities or heritages. However, both Lina and Yohana were identified as *indígena* and *ladina*, respectively, when enrolled in the *Hogares* based on sparse information that the Catholic sisters attained regarding their likely familial backgrounds. Subsequently, Lina continues to identify herself as *indígena* and Yohana still self-identifies as *ladina* today even though neither orphan has ever received confirmation or further information regarding their parents’ actual identities or heritages.

In contrast to orphans, peers are less varied in the categories or terms they use to identify themselves and their parents. Most of the indigenous peers identify themselves in the same way that they categorize their parents’ heritages, using Kaqchikel most frequently to describe both. Thus, among the 20 peers, seven identify themselves and their parents as Kaqchikel. However, one of the indigenous peers who identifies himself as *indígena* Kaqchikel identifies his parents as solely Kaqchikel. He offers no explanation for the difference. Three other indigenous peers use the general term *indígena* to describe themselves and their parents even though all three believe that their parents utilize the specific Mayan linguistic category of Kaqchikel to identify their heritages. Lastly, the same nine peers who identity their parents’ heritages as *ladino* also use the term *ladino* to identify themselves and their parents. Thus, none of the peers use the term *mestizo* to identify themselves or their parents.

After asking orphan and peer participants to indicate how they identify themselves and their parents, I next asked them to identify the language or languages they currently use in their daily lives and to indicate their level of understanding, speaking, writing and
reading in each of them. I only used the general category of Spanish (which is also sometimes referred to as Castellano by Guatemalans), but allowed participants to use whichever category or term for any Mayan language they currently use in order avoid skewing or limiting any potential responses. However, the terms orphans and their peers use to identify Mayan languages in this context are standard terms such as Ixil, Kaqchikel and K’iche’. Thus, no variation in the way in which Mayan languages were identified emerged within or between the two groups of participants in response to this question. Table 16 presents a summary of the primary language or languages spoken initially in early childhood and then today as adults as identified by orphans and their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Orphans Initially</th>
<th>Orphans Today</th>
<th>Peers Initially</th>
<th>Peers Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ixil only</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ixil, Kaqchikel &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel only</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaqchikel, Spanish &amp; English</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish, Uspanteca &amp; K’iche</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish only</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish &amp; some Kaqchikel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the range of languages spoken by orphans has narrowed in adulthood (i.e., there are fewer categories of Mayan languages currently spoken among the 20), orphans now speak more languages overall as adults than they did as children. Ten orphans currently consider themselves bilingual, which is more than triple the number of orphans who were bilingual in early childhood before arriving at the Hogares. Six of these ten orphans initially were solely Kaqchikel speakers who are now fluent in Spanish as well. Two of the ten were initially fluent in only Spanish, but learned Kaqchikel as a result of living in the Hogares, which is located in the majority Kaqchikel-speaking town of Santa
Apolonia. The remaining two bilingual orphans have continued to speak both Kaqchikel and Spanish throughout their life experiences thus far. In addition to ten bilingual speakers, two of the 20 orphans became trilingual through the course of their childhoods and early adulthoods. For example, Natalia (age 31) reports now being fluent in Spanish and Kaqchikel, as well as continuing to speak her primary Mayan language of Ixil.

Esteban (featured in Chapter 3) now speaks Spanish, Kaqchikel and English. In addition, six orphans report speaking primarily Spanish now in adulthood, but along with some Kaqchikel as well. Five of these six were Spanish only speakers who learned Kaqchikel while living in the Hogares. They all report understanding most, if not all, Kaqchikel spoken to them; however, they state that they are not able to speak the language as fluently as they understand it. Lastly, only two orphans report continuing to speak only Spanish as their primary language today.

Based on orphans’ responses, only three orphans actually report any type of language loss whatsoever as occurring from early childhood to adulthood. Mario (also featured in Chapter 3) reports now speaking solely Spanish and while he still understands most Kaqchikel (his primary language in early childhood), he relates that he feels he has lost his ability to speak it. Noemi (age 34) can no longer speak either K’iche’ or Uspanteco, her early primary languages. As a result, she identifies Spanish as her only current language. Esteban (Noemi’s brother) added Kaqchikel and English to his language skills, but consequently lost his ability to communicate fluently in either K’iche’ or Uspanteco, the languages spoken by his parents. While Esteban lost his linguistic abilities in two Mayan languages, he has developed fluency in a third (Kaqchikel) and has learned English as well.
Peers continue speaking the same range of languages that they did in early childhood, which consists of mainly Kaqchikel and Spanish. However, the number of bilingual speakers of Kaqchikel and Spanish has nearly tripled between early childhood and now in adulthood. For example, eleven of 20 peers now speak both Kaqchikel and Spanish fluently as adults. Four of the eleven spoke only Kaqchikel as young children, but learned Spanish as a second language by attending public school in Santa Apolonia. Three of the eleven only spoke Spanish, but were able to learn Kaqchikel during their later-childhood and adolescent years. Two of these three are indigenous women who both identify themselves using the category of Kaqchikel. One of the three identifies herself as ladina, but has learned Kaqchikel simply by living in Santa Apolonia where Kaqchikel is a predominant language. The remaining four bilingual speakers were already bilingual in early childhood. In addition to bilingual speakers, five peers who only spoke Spanish as their primary language in early childhood now identify as speaking some Kaqchikel as well (although they do not classify themselves as bilingual). They attribute their limited Kaqchikel skills to living in Santa Apolonia and attending public school with other kids who had been primarily Kaqchikel speakers. Only four of 20 peers report speaking Spanish as their one and only language still today.

After asking orphan and peer participants to identify themselves and their parents, as well as which languages they report currently speaking, I next focused on ascertaining how they perceive identity in Guatemala today. In order to gain a better sense of what identity means for orphans and their peers, I specifically asked each participant what they believe distinguishes various members of the general population in the country and how those distinctions relate to identity more generally. Among 20 orphans, only eight
respond that different groups—which they categorize by using the general terms “indígenas” and “ladinos”—are differentiated by particular traits such as clothing, language and customs, which may reflect more of an essentialist view of distinction regarding identity. However, they also assert that origin has much to do with identity as well. For example, two orphans explain,

An indigenous person, those are the people who have lived here in Guatemala with their roots, their customs. I think one would be identified as an indigenous person by their clothing, their dialects (Carlos, age 28, identifies as mestizo).

Just by being able to speak two languages, by dressing a certain way better than the ladinos because…with the money that we use to buy one set of clothes, they can buy five outfits for the same price and with greater variety. So, all of this, this is a source of pride (Nidia, age 27, identifies as indígena).

I feel that for [indígenas] that which distinguishes them is their form of clothing, their language…their traditions or customs are different (Jacki, age 30, identifies as ladina).

Only one orphan, Esteban, explains that groups of people are distinguished in Guatemala today based typically on physical features and that those features are not just distinguishable between indigenous people and ladinos more generally, but between various groups of indigenous peoples as well. However, he also identifies surnames, customs and dialects as distinguishing individuals. Esteban details,

Physical features…by the surnames…by the customs one has and by the accent in one’s voice, no?....However, it is the physical features that we indigenous people have that stand out, the color of skin…stature is sometimes a factor [laughs], the physical description. I know how to distinguish between indigenous people because I am indígena….For example, I can identify, “Oh, he is from Cobán,” because he has different physical features from one region that aren’t the same as the others. In Chimaltenango, it’s different and if you look at someone from Cobán, the facial features are totally different and everything. It varies a lot (Esteban, age 28, identifies as K’iche’).

Over half of the 20 orphans, however, convey a non-essentialist view of what distinguishes groups of people within the national population today. These 11 orphans
specifically identify culture, the way of living, beliefs, morals, ways of thinking and personality traits as primary ways in which various groups—especially indigenous people as a whole and ladinos in general—are now differentiated in Guatemala. Three of the eleven orphans explain,

An indigenous person means that you are conscious of how your social group is viewed, your beliefs, the way in which you view the world, traditions. You identify yourself by having distinct beliefs. You ought to be conscious of all of your ancestors. The ladino is not distinct in their physical appearance. The majority are mestizos or a combination of indígena and Spanish. Now some use “mestizo” as a third class of identity, but the majority of ladinos, yes, they are mestizos (Oscar, age 29, identifies as indígena).

Well, the characteristics such as: have respect, don’t be arrogant, be humble, like to share…don’t be selfish. I think in this way because the ladinos, for them, Ah!, they don’t want to share, but the indígenas, we are not like that (Juana, age 27, identifies as indígena).

It is simply a form of thinking differently even though they have the same opportunities (Brandon, age 28, identifies as Maya Kaqchikel).

For the majority of orphans, identity is differentiated between the heterogeneous population groups in the country more by belief systems, world views and the ways in which people comport themselves than by physical characteristics, biological differentiation or essentialist traits. It is also interesting that Oscar (who identifies as indigenous) uses the term mestizo, which he defines as the mixing of Spanish and indigenous heritages and notes that mestizo is now being used as what he calls a “third class of identity.” In addition, it is important to note that Brandon references equal opportunities when speaking about identity differentiation, highlighting intergroup relations and potentially novel class distinctions as a component of how identity is perceived and expressed today.
As a group, peers use slightly different categories for describing how various groups of people that constitute the national population are distinguished today. They also place greater emphasis on essentialist traits as the primary factors of distinction. Among the 20 peers, 14 identify essentialist traits such as clothing, language and customs as ways in which the population is differentiated. However, they simultaneously focus more frequently on surnames as a source of overt distinction as well, which is not as evident in the responses provided by orphans. Several of the 14 elaborate,

Hmm…well perhaps in the form of expressing oneself, in the form of clothing and let’s say that also an indigenous person speaks more varieties of languages than others. They are always going to differentiate themselves from *ladinos* because if you look, they remain very traditional. They have very distinct *trajes* that other people don’t have, but you have to recognize that they are very intelligent because they are very meticulous in how they make their traditional *traje*. They have their language, their customs, their religion….The difference between *indígena* and *ladino* is that even if we learn their language, we will never be the same as them because they have their traditions and they are very different even if one learns them (Andrea, age 36, identifies as *ladina*).

Sometimes, go figure, it depends on the surname because there are Chonay⁴ and there are Buc [surnames], whereas there are *ladino* surnames. So, it is the surname that distinguishes the indigenous people such as the Chonay and Buc, and all. Yes, they differentiate themselves because of the surnames, but now they don’t differentiate as much because indigenous people marry *ladinos*, so there is no difference (Julietta, age 32, identifies as *indígena*).

It is interesting to note that the majority of peers use essentialist traits and surnames to differentiate groups of people. However, they simultaneously characterize *ladinos* as a mix of indigenous and Spanish peoples, noting that even surnames are becoming less differentiated and therefore, less indicative of identity because of marriages between *indígenas* and *ladinos*.

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⁴ The surnames Chonay and Buc are the most common surnames of indigenous families in the town of Santa Apolonia, along with the surname Martin.
Four of the 20 peers describe the differences between people and their identities in general as having less to do with essentialist traits and more to do with skill sets, ways of living, general morals and a mixing of traditional with modern technology. For example, Josue (age 29, who identifies as Kaqchikel) explains,

The Maya culture has maintained itself and is a beautiful culture and is conservative as well in a cultural aspect. It is very reserved because the customs, for example, in which I marry a woman, I am never going to separate from my wife although there are some places where they divorce, but here in Guatemala, divorce doesn’t exist. It just exists in a document as an act of separation, but it is not a total divorce. So, the majority of Maya women continue to conserve the culture in that they love their husbands and nobody is going to separate them. There is more respect. There is much respect. There is more respect and dignity. It is a culture that has persisted in certain ways because Maya people also recognize the importance of technology. So besides maintaining their culture, Maya people have their desires to learn technology as well because the current Maya people know that the Maya culture from hundreds of years ago when the Spaniards arrived was an advanced culture…very advanced! So, they are concerning themselves with [technology] now as well. Even to the point that there are Maya people that have things that are more technologically advanced than ladino people (Josue, age 29).

Only two peers reference “race” as a biological mixing of bloodlines as being the primary source of distinction between groups of people and categories of identities. However, these two peers differ in that just one explicitly references race as the primary distinction between the specific categories of indígena and ladino, while the other does not. The two peers share,

It’s a race, let’s say….Yes, it is a race. Ladinos have the same blood as the Spaniards (Diego, age 31).

Well, things come encased in what God gives us, which we cannot change. We cannot change being ladino or being indigenous. We cannot change because, well, this is how we are and how there came to be mestizos….They mixed, Spaniard with American with indígena with native. So, ladino and mestizo are practically the same thing (Olivia, age 33).
Orphans and their peers differ in their perceptions regarding what distinguishes various groups of Guatemalans today. Overall, the majority of orphans place greater emphasis on non-essentialist aspects such as ways of living, cognition and morals as differentiating various groups. Peers, in contrast, focus more on essentialist traits such as language, clothing and traditions as the distinguishing factors. Lastly, only one orphan and two peers believe that identities are distinguished based on biological features, “race” or the biological mixing of bloodlines via miscegenation. Thus, the vast majority of orphans and their peers do not hold a biologically-based racialized view of identity overall according to their responses to this question.

Once orphans and their peers shared what they thought distinguishes members of the national population more generally, I next asked whether they felt that they had to change any form, part or aspect of their identities in order to make a life for themselves as adults in the Guatemalan nation-state today. All 20 orphans responded that they did not feel they had to change anything about the way they perceive or express their identities today in order to get ahead in life. For example, two orphans respond,

I feel happy to be indígena, because the clothes don’t make the person…Since early on, I have known that I am indígena. It is a tradition that comes from long before and as such, even if I wear pants, a T-shirt, I still say, “I am indígena” (Debora, age 27, identifies as indígena).

I am not indígena, but I love the indigenous tradition. I find it interesting and because of it, I am proud to be born in Guatemala. There is no single requirement for being indigenous because you are simply born indígena and you die indígena (Medelin, age 28, identifies as indígenas).

While all 20 orphans relate that they feel that they have not had to change any portion of their identity whatsoever, several note that there are others in the country who may feel compelled to change aspects of their identity in order to make a life for themselves in
adulthood. Most orphans relate that changes are often a result of economic constraints.

Esteban (age 28, who identifies primarily as K’iche’) further explains,

Many people do it. Many women even change from using *traje* because perhaps in some way they feel discriminated against and in order to find a better job, they do it because the vast majority comes to the capital. They come here to the capital and don’t want to use *traje* because of shame or who knows what. For example, you could see clear examples of this in the case of people you know that yes, have quit using *traje*. My sister is one of them. She, in one instance, took off her *traje* and stopped using it altogether. Besides, it is also so much cheaper to wear [*ladino*-type] clothing (Esteban, age 28, identifies as K’iche’).

Similar to orphans, nearly all 20 peers agree that they feel that they personally do not have to change any portion or aspect of their identity in order to make a life for themselves now in adulthood. In fact, 19 peers report not having to change anything today about their identity whatsoever. Instead, peers believe that maintaining one’s indigenous identity even has benefits now over *ladino* identity because of international institutions. They also assert that it is not a change in aspects of identity but rather accessing higher education that now helps a person make a better life for oneself. Two of the 19 peers relate,

No. I feel proud to be Maya Kaqchikel. I am happy because I know my origins. My ancestors are Mayas and that’s what I am. I don’t have to change. And one of the advantages that I have come to realize is that institutions that are in the *aldeas* or in some towns, they belong to foreigners who are more interested in [helping] the Maya Kaqchikel people. So, it is an advantage that one should make use of (Josue, age 29, identifies as Kaqchikel).

You are as you are and nobody can change anybody else. You just have to get ahead in life, get to the university and yes, have other possibilities (Olivia, age 33, identifies as *ladina*).

Among the 19 peers, several also recognize that although they do not personally feel they have had to change any part or aspect of their own identity, there are others in Guatemala who do seem compelled to change certain aspects for various reasons.

Referencing *traje* and pottery-making in particular, one of the peers comments,
Well, unfortunately I believe that, yes, things have changed because if we realize it, well now we men, ourselves, don’t use *traje*. It’s rare now to see men with traditional *traje*. That’s all been left behind…sadly these are things they shouldn’t lose, but now this has been left to the side. Also [Santa Apolonia] was supposedly a place where they made clay pots. That no longer exists. The people have changed their way of life; they have changed their lifeways in order to find other ways to get ahead in life. But, the people, yes, have changed (Manuel, age 30, identifies as *indígena*).

Only one peer states that she feels that she has, indeed, had to change elements she considers part of her identity to make a life for herself in adulthood. She explicitly references changes in language use as a necessary means of improving one’s chances of getting ahead in life. Teresa further notes that shifts in language use often facilitate increasing one’s own economic opportunities. She elaborates,

Yes, I think that yes, I have had to change things because sometimes in times like today, many of us are *indígenas* and we no longer speak to our children in Kaqchikel, only in Spanish. Like with my daughter, she tells me, “I’m *ladina,*” because when I speak like this in Kaqchikel, she tells me, “Oh, you are *indígena,* I’m not.” So, it has a lot to do with the fact that if she goes to look for a job, it is much easier to get one because she knows how to speak [Spanish] and all of that. It is not going to be the same as was my childhood (Teresa, age 37, identifies as Kaqchikel).

Overall, orphan and peer participants reveal that they themselves have not felt forced to change any form, part or aspect of their identities in order to make a life for themselves as adults. At the same time, both groups recognize that others in the country today may feel forced to change certain elements they consider part of their identities such as language, clothing and traditional lifeways because of various economic reasons and opportunities. However, orphans and their peers convey greater continuity rather than change in their own personal experiences with how they perceive and express their identities today in adulthood.
To further explore the notion of continuity regarding the ways in which participants in my project perceive and express identity today, I next asked orphans and their peers whether they believe that certain aspects of identity that they had mentioned such as language, traditional dress, customs, religion or traditions are necessary for an individual to perceive and express their identity, especially indigenous identity, in Guatemala today. I was particularly interested in whether or not orphans and their peers perceived distinct overt markers as essential to expressing and therefore, maintaining indigenous identity in adulthood. Consistent with the responses to the previous questions focused on identity, only one orphan believes that aspects such as language and dress are, indeed, necessary for expressing identity. However, nearly all orphans (19 of 20) respond that these aspects—while they should be maintained whenever possible—are not essential to expressing indigenous identity in the country today. Rather, nearly all orphans assert that identity is perceived as being located within the individual and is outwardly expressed via connections with family origins and ancestry, participation in communities and individual worldviews. For example, three orphans share,

You just feel it (Sofia, age 38)!

The *traje* is not important, but language is. Perhaps *trajes* are important too, but that is not what is inside of you (Cris, age 29).

A person is *indígena* because of his [natal] community, for having indigenous parents and having no other culture. Being indigenous is inside of you (Mario, age 29).

The peers were more divided regarding their perceptions of whether aspects such as language, clothing and customs are necessary for expressing one’s identity today. Among the 20 peers, seven respond that basic overt markers of identity such as language and traditional dress are, in fact, vital for expressing identity and for claiming membership in
a particular group of people. However, they simultaneously recognize that these elements have, indeed, changed over time. Two of the seven note,

They are important, but now everything has changed because much of it doesn’t exist anymore. Not anymore. All the people from [Santa Apolonia], almost everybody dresses like ladinos because our people now wear pants and everything. It’s just not the same (Teresa, age 37, identifies as Kaqchikel).

Things like customs and language hardly exist anymore. Many people have turned to [speaking] Spanish. You don’t really hear Kaqchikel much anymore (Laya, age 27, identifies as Kaqchikel).

In contrast, thirteen peers state that aspects such as language, dress and customs are less important for expressing identity today. Rather, most of the 13 peers share similar conceptions with orphans regarding expressing identity in that the peers also relate that one’s identity comes from within the individual and therefore, is not found solely in expression of outward markers. At the same time, these 13 peers recognize that changes in language and dress are occurring, even to the point that some ladina women are now wearing traje as well. Three further elaborate,

I would say that while a mom may no longer dress her daughters in traje, they have to be indígenas because that is who they are (Otto, age 33, identifies as indígena).

Some still make their food like polik⁵…and their corn drinks. This still exists. It is important for us. There are some that speak only Spanish, but they are still indígena (Sonia, age 33, identifies as Kaqchikel)!

What I see, I repeat, is that there are a lot of [ladinas] who are now wearing the traje that we wear. Before it wasn’t like that, but now, as I say, we are already all equal (Tulio, age 33, identifies as ladino).

All but one orphan believe that overt markers and traits are not essential for expressing one’s identity in Guatemala today. The peers as a group, on the other hand, are split regarding their views on identity. While the majority of the peers believe that

⁵ Polik is a traditional Maya Kaqchikel chicken dish specific to the town of Santa Apolonia.
overt markers and traits are not necessary for expressing identity, seven of them do believe that they are indispensable. Thus, the responses provided by orphans overall reflect more of a non-essentialist perspective of identity than the responses offered by their peers. For the vast majority of orphans, identity subsequently appears to be more centrally experienced and located within the individual and is expressed outwardly through connections with family and community origins, as well as via the ways in which one views the world.

Extending the focus on how orphan and peer participants generally perceive identity and its relationship to particular overt markers or traits, I next asked each participant whether they felt that a young indigenous woman who no longer wears traje, does not speak a Mayan language and does not participate in any Maya customs is still considered an indigenous woman. Among 20 orphans, only two respond that they would no longer consider the woman to be indigenous. Both reflect that there are external influences compelling indigenous people to change how they perceive and express their identities and that an individual can change their identity simply by choosing to do so. The overwhelming majority of orphans (18 of 20), however, answer that they would consider the woman in the example to continue being an indigenous woman despite the changes that have occurred. These orphans reference one’s blood, human roots and communities of origin as the basic elements of one’s identity, which cannot be changed simply because an individual desires to change them. I believe that orphans’ responses further connote a notion of identity as being centrally located within the individual and particularly situated in one’s blood and in a sense of connection with ancestry. I believe this notion differs from both biological and social constructions of race in that it pertains to a sense or
essence of origin and non-physical connection with family and community rather than to biological or social differentiation among individuals in a heterogeneous population. For example, four orphans explain,

Yes, she is indígena. Yes, because even if you change your looks, you continue being indígena inside. You carry it inside, in the blood (Juana, age 27, identifies as Maya Kaqchikel).

She is indígena, but she can no longer say, “I am indígena from here” because she wears non-traditional clothing now (Brandon, age 38, identifies as Maya Kaqchikel).

Yes, because of the town she [originates] from, right...because even though she may try to not be indígena or speak some other way, she is indígena. You know that you originate from some determined place, you know that your parents are indígenas and you cannot appear to be from some other culture (Mario, age 29, identifies as indígena).

You never forget your roots, only that which grows above ground, but the root, no (Miguel, age 33, identifies as indígena)!

One orphan (Nidia) further explains her perception of identity and the sense of continuity she believes is persistent in indigenous identity even when changes in certain aspects or markers of expressing identity occur. Nidia tells a story of two young women she recently encountered in the central municipal building in the city of Chimaltenango,

It’s like when once I had to go to process some documents in the municipal building in Chimaltenango and there were two women dressed as ladinas, but they were indígenas. So, the time came for them to answer some questions. Well, ever since they were little girls, they had been using nontraditional clothing, right, regular skirts...but their grandparents and their parents before them are indígenas, including the fact that they came from indigenous aldeas. And so, they were asked, “ladina or indígena?” And they looked each other blankly in the face, right and so I...well, I got involved. I said to them, “Remember how your grandparents are, what they look like and if they speak a language or not. From that, you can answer the question.”

Well, they looked at me and said, “Indígena.”
“There it is!” I said. “Because you carry it in your blood regardless of your clothing that you have on, but you carry it in your blood. Do you speak two languages?”

They said, “Yes, we speak a little bit.”

“There it is! You are indígenas,” I responded.

Overall, the group of peers was more divided in their responses to the question of perception of indigenous identity and change. Among 20 peers, eight answer that they would no longer consider the woman in the example to be indigenous because she no longer wears traje or speaks her Mayan language. These eight peers explicitly reference the change in clothing, language and customs as directly connoting a change in one’s overall sense of identity. Several of them clarify,

I don’t think so because, as I have said, an indigenous person identifies herself by her language, her customs, her form of dress (Dario, age 31, identifies as ladino).

Um…I say not anymore. No, because she no longer has her customs. She is the same as everyone else (Fatima, age 32, identifies as ladina).

Not anymore because she became ladina. How awful because she no longer speaks as [indígenas] speak (Teresa, age 37, identifies as Kaqchikel).

In contrast, 12 peers answer that they do believe that the woman in the example still maintains her indigenous identity regardless of changes she has made in various overt identity markers and other aspects surrounding her expression of identity. Similar to the majority of orphans, these 12 peers reference an internalized sense of blood and family of origin as the central elements in one’s identity. However, these peers also tend to explicitly reference race (or raza) as a key element of identity as well. Several explain,

Yes, certainly…because, as I have said, she is from the same race. It is the blood, let’s say, it is an indigenous race, let’s say. Even though she wears a [nontraditional] skirt, she will always continue being indígena. It is because of the blood (Diego, age 31, identifies as Kaqchikel).
Yes, she continues being *indígena* because she was born of an indigenous race. Her roots are indigenous; they are Maya. So, even if she dresses in some other way, she doesn't lose her identity (Nina, age 37, identifies as *ladina*).

She is *indígena* because she comes from an indigenous family, right? That’s how it is…the family is what makes a person, that marks their ethnic identity, religion and politics as well (Marco, age 32, identifies as *ladino*).

Her origin is always the same even if she wants to look different like a *ladina*. The origin comes from your family. If your parents are *indígenas*, you are never going to pass as being a *ladina* even though, as they say, the white wants to be black, you can’t (Andrea, age 36, identifies as *ladina*).

It is interesting to note that the peers who reference race previously self-identify as either *indígena* or *ladina*. Therefore, race-related responses cannot be assumed to be just *ladino*-specific or to necessarily be a function of *ladino*-specific racial ideologies.

Similar to the responses to the previous question on identity, nearly all orphans believe that regardless of changes in various outward markers or aspects of expressing identity, an individual simply cannot change who they are or how they perceive their identities because identity is internally situated within one’s blood, human roots and families of origin, which are unchangeable. The peers, in contrast, were divided in their responses. Almost half of the 20 peers believe that changes in various external markers or aspects of expressing identity constitute a change in indigenous identity overall. Slightly more than half of the 20 peers, however, agree with orphans that identity cannot be changed simply by altering external markers or aspects of expressing identity. These peers also reference blood and families of origin (as well as race) as unchangeable factors of identity. Lastly, several peers explicitly reference race as a key element of identity, while none of the 20 orphans do.

The final question regarding identity that I posed to orphans and peer participants was whether or not they felt that the way in which people perceive and express their identities
today has changed overall in Guatemala when compared to the past several decades. Only four of 20 orphans respond that they do not feel that the way that individuals perceive and express identities in the country today has changed. These four orphans respond that it simply has not changed in their opinion. They point to the decrease in discrimination between groups of people—especially between indigenous and ladino groups in general—as primary factors facilitating Guatemalans’ abilities to maintain the ways in which they perceive and express their identities today. Sixteen orphans, however, believe that changes in overt markers such as dress, language and customs have certainly occurred. Consequently, they believe that these changes connote a change in how identity is expressed more generally. Seven of the 16 further assert that despite the changes in how identity is outwardly expressed, one consistently maintains her or his inward perception of identity despite those changes. Two explain,

It is already different because of the traje, for example. They don’t use their trajes from their communities. They lost their languages, but they continue being indigenous because they participate…in their communities. They don’t quit being indígenas, right, but they continue being indígenas because of their communities (Mario, age 29, identifies as indígena).

Yes, it has changed. Before, it was different, but from the beginning to the end, one continues being indígena (Lina, age 28, identifies as indígena).

Six of 16 orphans believe that changes in identity expression have occurred as a result of a shift in relations between indígena and ladino segments of the population. In particular, they note that economic factors such as higher costs of traje, increased access to resources and opportunities for indigenous peoples, and poverty among ladinos have shifted the ways in which identity is individually expressed, as well as perceived and accepted by others. The six orphans’ responses allude to a more class-focused rather than
ethnicity-focused perspective on changes in identity expression and intergroup relations among the heterogeneous national population today. Three orphans elaborate,

It is different. It is different because before, they discriminated. Many changed their dress instead of wearing *traje*. [Ladinos] looked at the people as if they were below them. But now today one feels proud and the people admire you and say so. Today people decide to change because they want to look different and others don’t. Also, it is because *traje* now costs so much. It is very expensive (Juana, age 27, identifies as Maya Kaqchikel).

It has changed a lot! It has changed a lot!...Now it is a problem of the factor of the economy. The economy is what makes a person accepted or not in our society. It doesn’t matter if someone is *indígena* or *ladino*...because there are people who are ladinos who are also poor and there are indigenous people that now actually have a lot of significant income and in reality, have increased their economic situation, their capital and everything (Oscar, age 29, identifies as *indígena*).

The group of 20 peers who participated in my research project was similarly divided in responses. Five peers do not believe that the way in which people (especially indigenous peoples) perceive and express their identities has changed. These five simply state that the ways in which one perceives and expresses identity are the same as they always have been. Similar to orphans, however, the vast majority of peers (15 of 20) do believe that the way in which a person expresses identity, in particular, certainly has changed over the past few decades. Eleven of the 15 specifically note that changes in overt markers such as language, traditional dress and customs account for the changes in how identity is now expressed more generally by indigenous peoples. Peers relate,

It has changed a lot for the same reason that I have just said. We [Kaqchikel men] should be wearing white pants,...that’s what we should have on...In Sololá, the men still maintain [their *traje*]. You see in Sololá that people still have *traje*. They don’t use regular pants. Or maybe they wear pants [under their traditional pants], but they always maintain their *traje*. So, they still maintain it and we no longer do maintain it and if we do, they look at us strangely when we go out (Otto, age 33, identifies as *indígena*).
It’s different….Before, when we [indígenas] would eat, and I lived like this just a bit…when we finished eating, we would look at the most senior person, the oldest, and tell them...for example, if the oldest is my dad, like this I, as the oldest [child] would [press my hands together] and say, “Thank you, dad. Thank you, mom” and “Thank you” all around the room to each person and then each sibling would do the same. Not anymore. Now one just says “Muchas Gracias” in Spanish to everyone [at once] and everyone responds, “Buen provecho.” (Josue, age 29, identifies as Kaqchikel).

Similar to orphans, seven peers who believe that the ways in which identity is expressed have changed also refer to relations between groups within the national population when talking about identity expression and change overall. In particular, these peers note that the shift in ethno-class relations between indígenas and ladinos has altered how indigenous and ladino peoples now relate. Two of the seven observe,

Yes, it is much different because in the past, my grandparents were very closed in. They didn’t know a lot of things like the ladinos or something like that, whereas today they know various things. It is much different in that there is no longer a lot of discrimination. Now it has decreased a bit. The [ladinos] don’t feel they are so high above us as in past times. Today for me, the ladino and indígena people are equal…that which a ladino can do, I can do and I can do it better (Diego, age 31, identifies as Kaqchikel).

For me, being ladino or being indígena has not influenced my life in that I don’t say, “Oh, because he is indígena…” No, simply put, if he is my friend, he is always going to be my friend, right? It isn’t important for me to know if he is ladino or indígena, right? But that’s why I say for our own mental health, we have to educate our children first of all so that in the future, maybe in 20 years or so, we no longer talk about racism. We no longer talk about being indígenas. We no longer talk about being ladinos. Rather, we talk about being Chapines6 or Guatemalans…(Marco, age 32, identifies as ladino).

Overall, the vast majority of orphans and their peers believe that the ways in which identity is expressed has generally changed in Guatemala when compared with the past. Both groups note that changes in overt markers or particular aspects of identity such as language, traditional dress and customs account for some of the primary changes in how identity is now expressed. Orphans as a group, however, are more adamant that the ways

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6 “Chapines” is the colloquial term for “Guatemalans.”
in which one inwardly perceives identity remain constant and unchangeable regardless of changes in how identity is currently expressed. Peers’ responses are less clear regarding whether or not they believe that the manner in which identity is inwardly perceived has changed in correlation to changes in identity expression.

Interestingly, both groups bring up the issue of intergroup relations (primarily between indígenas and ladinos groups) as either related to changes that are occurring in identity expression or associated with identity and change in general. Orphan and peer participants believe that relations between indígenas and ladinos have generally improved and contend that the improved relations are a result of better economic conditions and greater access to economic opportunities for the majority indigenous population. Thus, orphans and peers view Guatemala’s heterogeneous population as being on a more equal class footing with each other than in the past that, in turn, allows individuals to perceive and express their identities in an environment that is less discriminatory and less hostile to particular groups, especially indigenous peoples generally speaking. According to both orphans and their peers, therefore, it seems that increased acceptance and respect for and among members of the heterogeneous national population now place fewer constraints on how one perceives or expresses her or his identity in Guatemala today.

Based on the responses to the various questions that I posed to orphan and peer participants in the initial ethnographic interviews regarding identity, I realized that orphans had not conveyed a general sense of or personal experience with overarching loss regarding identity as a whole and certainly did not portray any sort of “identity crisis” because of having lost central familial and natal community ties in early childhood.
as a result of la violencia. Instead, their responses suggested a strong internalized sense of continuity in how they conceptualize and subsequently perceive their identities even now in adulthood. However, I was uncomfortable making such an assertion without further confirmation from orphans themselves regarding their specific experiences with any sort of “identity loss” or “identity crisis.” With the help of a Guatemalan research assistant (a former Hogares alumna), I conducted follow-up interviews with all 20 orphan participants in early 2010. In the follow-up interviews, I directly asked whether each orphan felt that they had experienced an overarching sense of “identity loss” or “identity crisis” and whether they attributed that loss or crisis to the long-term consequence of la violencia. To my surprise, all 20 orphans emphatically answered that they absolutely do not feel that they have any overarching sense of loss or crisis regarding identity whatsoever as a long-term consequence of the genocide. Instead, they assert a strong and profound sense of identity now in adulthood. Several of the orphans proclaim,

No! I continue being and will die an indígena (Nidia, age 27, identifies as indígena).

No, I have always been ladina and that is my identity and as such, I haven’t lost it (Yohana, age 29, identifies as ladina).

No, I believe that I have always known who I am and where I come from (Carlos, age 28, identifies as mestizo).

I am proud to be who I am and it is something that is in my blood and as such, I can’t just stop being who I am (Noemi, age 34, identifies as K’iche’).

No, I am very proud to be who I am and in whatever part of the world, I am who I am and I like my traje and I am proud of my people (Kike, age 28, identifies as Kaqchikel).

The last quote presented above is further emphasized by the fact that in 2009, Kike attended a worldwide conference in Rome on behalf of his employer, a Catholic seminary
in Guatemala City. Kike was sent to the conference to not only represent his area of work but also to represent Guatemala more generally. As part of his presentation on Guatemala and its Maya indigenous peoples more specifically, Kike (who identifies as Kaqchikel) wore traditional Kaqchikel traje that is no longer in use by young Kaqchikel men today. The pictures presented below in Figure 31 were posted on Kike’s Facebook page in 2010 with the caption in which he wrote, “Those days indígena and Guatemalan pride vibrated through my veins…”

The second question that I posed to all 20 orphan participants in the follow-up interviews focused on their perceptions regarding any overarching sense of “identity loss” or “identity crisis” among war orphans, in general, as a result of the long-term consequences of the genocide. Only four of 20 orphan participants share that they feel that war orphans, in general, have lost some of their overall sense of identity (especially indigenous identity) because of language loss, being distanced from family and having to adjust to a new way of living after the deaths of their parents. These four, however, reaffirm that they, themselves, do not feel they have lost any overarching sense of their

![Figure 31: Representing Maya Indigenous Guatemalans. (Left) Kike, wearing traditional Kaqchikel men’s traje, distributes information regarding Guatemala and Maya peoples to conference attendees in Rome in 2009. (Right) Kike, donning traditional ceremonial Kaqchikel men’s traje, is interviewed by the Italian press in Rome during the conference in 2009. The photographs are presented here with Kike’s permission.](image-url)
identities in any way. The remaining 16 orphans respond that they do not believe that generally speaking, war orphans have lost their overall sense of identity in any way whatsoever as a function of having been orphaned during la violencia. In fact, most of the 16 note that because war orphans generally have had their ties with their families and natal communities severed, they have worked even harder at maintaining their identities via an internalized sense of connection with their family and community origins. They also assert that they have worked harder at cultivating their pride in how they especially perceive and express their indigenous identities in adulthood. Four of the 16 explain,

I believe that we are all conscious of who we are and we are proud to have the identity that we have and it is something that we are born with and we are not going to lose (Lina, age 28, identifies as indígena).

[T]here are many people who have not suffered from problems with the war and things like that, and they live with their family and yet, they have less culture than most of us (Jacki, age 30, identifies as ladina).

On the contrary, we orphans have learned with great pain to not forget who we are or where we come from (Oscar, age 29, identifies as indígena).

I think that we, the victims of la violencia, are the people whose bodies and souls are tattooed with the mark of where we have come from and who we are and that tattoo we have made ourselves with dignity and with pride in being indígenas (Mario, age 29, identifies as indígena).

It is evident from both the initial ethnographic and follow-up interviews that the orphans do not feel a major sense of overarching “identity loss” or “identity crisis” because of being orphaned during la violencia. As they have so eloquently stated above, instead of loss, they view themselves as deliberately having worked harder than others at maintaining the ways in which they perceive and express their identities even in the face of extreme adversity. However, orphans concurrently agree that they certainly have lost some aspects that they themselves associate with identity such as Mayan language skills,
traditional dress use, religion, customs and other traditions. They also recognize that the early disconnect with their families and natal communities, which had been the primary sources of socialization and enculturation for them in early childhood, has challenged the continuity in their own identity formation through the remainder of their childhoods and even into adulthood. Yet orphans do not believe that the loss of particular aspects of identity and the change in early influences on identity formation are tantamount with overall “identity loss” or an “identity crisis.” Rather, identity for orphans entails a consistent thread of continuity passed down from generations before them and internally maintained by the individual even in the midst of a brutal counterinsurgency campaign explicitly designed to destroy it. Orphans’ notions of identity also convey a sense of fluidity in that they do not view identity in strictly essentialist terms as something that is confined by a rigid set of overt markers or traits. Instead, orphans perceive identity as encompassing a wider range of dynamic, non-essentialist aspects such as ways of living, cognition and moral values that are centrally located within the individual and that are deeply rooted in ancestry, as well as family and community origins. These simultaneous notions of continuity and fluidity regarding identity are further espoused in the responses to a final set of questions that I posed to orphan and peer participants in the initial ethnographic interviews regarding how they view and personally experience relations between indigenous and ladino peoples in Guatemala today.

**Orphan and Peer Perceptions of Indigenous and Ladino Relations Today**

Orphans express both continuity and fluidity regarding the ways in which they perceive and express identity in their own life experiences. While they recognize that certain aspects of identity are changing or have changed, orphans overwhelmingly
purport that identity also involves constancy even when centers of socialization and enculturation in early childhood are disrupted or severed altogether. The sense of continuity with regard to identity among orphans, in particular, is remarkable given that the genocide had such a strong assimilationist agenda designed to explicitly wipe out indigenous identity altogether. It is also interesting that the questions that I posed regarding how orphans and peers perceived their own personal experiences with identity commonly brought to surface how they viewed general relations between indigenous and ladino peoples in Guatemala today. Orphan and peer participants frequently stated that those intergroup relations already have improved substantially in their life experiences thus far. More specifically, both orphan and peer groups often related that relations between indígenas and lados are much better now and that discrimination does not exist to the same degree it once had. I decided that the strong association conveyed between views on identity and on improved relations between indigenous and ladino peoples necessitated posing several additional questions focused on these intergroup relations. Therefore, I specifically asked orphans and their peers whether they felt they have the same general rights as the rest of the population based on their identities, whether they believe discrimination based on identity continues to exist today and who they think now controls the government.

To gauge orphan and peer perceptions of indigenous and ladino relations in Guatemala today, I first asked each of them whether they felt that they had the same access to general rights (e.g. human, legal, etc.), given their various identities, as everyone else in the national population. Among 20 orphans, 12 answer that they do, indeed, feel that they have equal access to the same rights as everyone else. Two share,
We all have the same rights today, both indígena and ladino. It is the same (Lina, age 28, identifies as indígena).

Yes, these really are questions that I have analyzed regarding Guatemalan legislation. We have the same rights and it is a question worth asking, right? Maybe at some moment we are going to encounter one of those types of situations that I mentioned to you…the discrimination and all of that, but there are already other means and resources so that they no longer become obstacles to our own desires. I feel that we, as Guatemalan indígenas, yes, we are going to transform this Guatemala and we are going to change it completely (Oscar, age 29, identifies as indígena).

An additional five orphans agree that they do have the same rights as everyone else, but they state that although those rights are recognized legally on paper, they are not necessarily recognized in practice. Several orphans respond,

    Yes, we all have the same [rights]. It’s just that sometimes people don’t respect them. There are people who violate those rights (Yohana, age 29, identifies as ladina).

    Yes, I have the same rights, but nobody recognizes them. They just require us to pay taxes and then pay us poorly for our work (Medelin, age 28, identifies as mestiza).

    We have the same rights according to the law. According to what’s written, yes, we all have the same rights and the same obligations. That’s it theoretically, but in practice, no (Mario, age 29, identifies as indígena).

Only three orphans express that they do not feel they have the same rights as everyone else given the way they perceive and express their identities. These three primarily reference continued discrimination against indigenous peoples as preventing equal access to rights for all of the country’s citizens. For example, Esteban (age 28, identifies as K’iche’) elaborates,
I don’t believe so, not yet. I believe that they are taking many aspects into consideration because they offer us [indígenas] opportunities. I consider us as still being in a country in which they still take into consideration whether or not you are indígena. For example, in my area of work, who can become the head of our company? It’s not going to be an indígena, clearly not. So, it is extreme racial discrimination in the area of labor. In the professional area, it’s the same in that we cannot say that we are exactly equal…because they still [discriminate] even though they say they don’t, but the companies still assess someone’s appearance and they always want to see [a person’s] surname.

The group of peers shares similar perceptions with orphans regarding access to general rights. Among 20 peers, 14 believe that they have equal access to the same rights as everyone else in the country today. Three peers share,

Yes, I have the same rights and I have the same obligations as well (Marco, age 32, identifies as ladino).

Yes, there almost isn’t any discrimination anymore like before (Sonia, age 33, identifies as indígena).

Yes, we all have the same rights and yes, they are equally recognized in practice (Olivia, age 33, identifies as ladina).

Four peers agree that everyone in Guatemala has the same rights; however, they simultaneously assert that those rights come with certain conditions. These four are aware that people have to know about their rights in order to demand them and in the end, there are going to be those (e.g., wealthy elite, government officials, etc.) who will manipulate those rights in order to come out on top of everyone else. Two of the four peers explain,

Yes, I believe we have them, but it depends on oneself as well. If you are educated, you can defend [your rights], but sometimes a person’s own ignorance becomes the reason those rights are not realized (Otto, age 33, identifies as indígena).

Well, in words and documents, you can say yes, but regrettably behind the words or the documents, there is someone manipulating them because in some cases…they leave someone out for whatever reason even though the law indicates otherwise. Someone is always manipulating [people’s rights]…but, in the documents, supposedly they say that we all have the same rights. But in the time to realize them, it is a different thing (Victor, age 29, identifies as ladino).
Only two peers share that they do not believe that they have access to the same rights as everyone else in the country today given the way in which they identify themselves. One of the two peers notes that having access to general rights all depends on one’s connections and the type of political position one has within the country. The second (Marisol, age 29, who identifies as Kaqchikel) shares that it depends on one’s education level in that those with education seem to have more rights than those who do not. However, Marisol also recognizes that even if a person does not have an education, they do have life experience and as such, they also deserve to have the same rights.

Orphans, as a group, do not differ dramatically from their peers in how they perceive their current access to general rights. The majority of both participant groups believe that they are able to access the same rights as everyone else in Guatemala. Both groups also believe that equality between indígenas and ladinos, in particular, has helped to improve and ultimately balance the access to rights for everyone in the country today. A smaller portion of both groups feels that rights are legally recognized; however, they do not think those rights are realized in practice. This smaller portion of orphans and peers identify people’s lack of exercising their access to rights and of having someone to help enforce their rights as contributing to the fact that rights are not equally realized in practice. Lastly, only a small number of orphans (three) and peers (two) do not believe that they have the same access to general rights as everyone else given their identities. The three orphans state that social divides persist even today and that indigenous people still generally have less access to their rights as a result. On the other hand, the two peers who do not believe they have the same access to general rights assert that a person’s social
position and education level rather than identity are what account for limited access to the same general rights as everyone else in Guatemala today.

To further understand how orphan and peer participants perceive indigenous and ladino relations within the country today, I next asked whether they felt that discrimination between the two groups in general continues to exist. All 20 orphans agree that discrimination between indígenas and ladinos generally persists. However, they differ in their perceptions regarding the degree to which discrimination continues to exist. Among 20 orphans, nine share that they believe that discrimination continues at the same level it always has, especially within workplaces and schools. Yohana (age 29, who identifies as ladina) explains,

Yes, sure, a lot of discrimination still exists because I see it in my job, so I think that it continues to affect people a lot because [school administrators] have told us that we [teachers] should encourage the children to not discriminate, but it continues to exist because even though you try to teach them from early on, they always have the attitude that they are not going to play with certain kids….So, sometimes…let’s say among the girls more than anything, there is a girl who comes [to school] with the same clothes on and there is another child who comes to school well-dressed, well, she doesn’t want to play with that other girl because she’ll say, “No, I don’t want to play with her because she doesn’t bathe.” So, I think from early on, they have come with this [attitude], but also, we as parents or adults have to keep teaching the children that this should not exist. There shouldn’t been discrimination and that doing something like that is called discrimination, so you should get to know someone first because in front of God, we are all one in the same and He has no preferences. So, this is how you should be with [children], but yes, [discrimination] still exists and it exists among both the old and the young.

In contrast, the majority of orphans feel the relations between indigenous and ladino peoples certainly have improved. Specifically, eleven orphans state that they believe that discrimination continues, but that it does not persist at the same level it had in the past. Three of the 11 share,
It has improved a lot. Now *indígenas* can travel in a bus, and they don’t have to get up and give their seat to a *ladino*. It’s similar to what happened in the United States with the blacks. It hasn’t been more than 40 years since that type of racism stopped and yet, you can still see a lot of it (Brandon, age 28, identifies as Maya Kaqchikel).

Yes, but it has changed a lot because, as I say, there have been many changes here, but it has not been completely eliminated. So, at least there is a percentage of people in our society who have accepted that various cultures exist, but I repeat, it has not been completely erased…(Oscar, age 29, identifies as *indígena*).

A little bit, but not like before. Perhaps people are more accepting. Yes, it still exists, as I say, but it is at a much lower level. It’s very little. They accept other cultures more than ever before. They accept them because of the laws. The division has been erased a little bit, but there are traces of it from the past. For example, I see women and men—I don’t know about the interior [of the country]—who are intermixing a lot more. So, they are already mixed together. Therefore, the division between *indígenas* and *ladinos*, just like between men and women, still exists even though it has diminished a little bit (Mario, age 29, identifies as *indígena*).

The peers have a slightly different view of indigenous and *ladino* relations today.

Among 20 peers, only four state they believe that discrimination does continue today as it has in the past. They indicate that the persistence of discrimination has more to do with money and employment than with solely differences based on identity, indicating a more class-based than ethnic-based position. Two peers respond,

Yes, it exists, but now it is already the reverse, let’s say, in that they discriminate against the *ladino*, but they also do it among themselves between the same *indígenas*. They discriminate against each other because one has money and the other doesn’t (Marco, age 32, identifies as *ladino*).

Yes, there is a lot! Yes, such as one time [my spouse] had a boss where he was working whom he asked permission to take time off from work to go to see his parents and they wouldn’t let him. That is a form of discrimination because they don’t let you go even if you want to. You can’t go because the bosses don’t let you (Marisol, age 29, identifies as Kaqchikel).
Similar to orphans, 11 peers believe that discrimination continues today, but to a lesser degree than it has in the past. Several of the 11 also adamantly assert that while discrimination persists, it no longer exists in Santa Apolonia. Three peers further,

In the past, they treated us as dumb. They treated us like Indians, but now you don’t really hear that much anymore (Laya, age 27, identifies as Kaqchikel).

Well, here in Santa, I don’t feel that discrimination exists because we all get along as a community, so it doesn’t matter if one is ladino or indígena. At a national level, yes, discrimination still exists against both ladinos and indígenas, not just against indígenas, no (Nina, age 37, identifies as ladina).

Perhaps it exists in other places, but since I am from Santa Apolonia, no, there is no longer discrimination. No, I have never seen it here. And where discrimination exists, it is practically the reverse in that the Maya people do not care for the ladino, but not here. I have never seen that here. In other places up along [the Highlands], perhaps, such as Sololá, there yes, but here no. I have never suffered from discrimination, including there are ladino people who speak Kaqchikel [in Santa Apolonia] (Josue, age 29, identifies as Kaqchikel).

Unlike orphan participants, five peers believe that discrimination, especially between indigenous and ladino peoples does not exist today. These five peers simply state that discrimination no longer exists because they no longer hear people speaking poorly of or discriminating against someone based on their identity. This position differs dramatically from orphans as not one single orphan responds that discrimination has completely ceased to exist in contemporary Guatemala.

Overall, orphans as a group believe that discrimination between indigenous and ladino peoples persists in Guatemala today. However, orphans differ in the degree to which they perceive discrimination continuing. Less than half of the 20 orphans believe discrimination still occurs to a similar degree than it did in the past, while over half assert that is has declined somewhat as relations between indígenas and ladinos generally have improved. The peers vary more widely on their perceptions of the level of discrimination.
that currently exists. Several peers believe that the level of discrimination persists as it has in the past, while over half purport that it continues at a much lower level than before. However, what is most distinct between orphan and peer perceptions of discrimination is that five of the peers—all women and three who identify as either Kaqchikel or indigenous—actually believe that discrimination based on identity simply no longer exists. Regardless of the various perceptions regarding whether or not discrimination exists and to what degree, orphan and peer participants reveal an interesting undercurrent of class concerns. The reoccurring and subtle theme of class issues as now creating as much if not more differentiation between Guatemala’s citizens than identity today led to the final question that I posed related to general politics and the locus of contemporary political and economic power in the country.

The final question that I posed to orphan and peer participants regarding relations among individuals in the country’s heterogeneous population focused on centers of political and economic power by asking who participants thought controls the Guatemalan government today. I was curious whether identity differences, especially between indígenas and ladinos in general, would come into play regarding how orphans and peers perceive their government and who benefits most from it. One of the 20 orphans answers that she is simply uncertain of who is behind it all and five note that politicians, in general, are the ones running everything. However, the overwhelming majority of orphans (14 of 20) respond that it is the wealthy elite who control the government for their own economic gains and they specifically identify the CACIF organization (consisting of the country’s wealthiest and most powerful businessmen) as especially controlling the presidency and thus, the government. Two orphans explain,
Well, in my opinion we could say that in general, the government is influenced by the CACIF. They are the ones who practically make and unmake the presidency. Today it is the CACIF that is behind the government. So, the government cannot make a single decision that [the CACIF] is not in agreement with because according to them, they are affected the most, but those who are affected most is the general population because the CACIF is a small group and what they do affects everyone. They are the businessmen, the owners of factories. They are the most wealthy (Esteban, age 28, identifies as K’iche’).

It begins with the CACIF….the wealthy who have so much money are the ones the [government] consults with when they are deciding whether there will be a salary increase or if they are going to reduce consumer costs. They always consult with [the CACIF] so that they won’t lose re-election. We have lived through this with all the previous governments that have all consulted with the CACIF on everything and I have heard from many people that the government has to ask the CACIF before it does anything…Now it is the CACIF that determines everything and they are the wealthy. Before, it was almost only ladinos who were rich, but not anymore (Carlos, age 28, identifies as mestizo).

Peer participants share the same general sentiment as the majority of orphans regarding who they believe controls the government and thus, constitutes the primary center of political and economic power within the country today. While six of the 20 peers note that politicians, in general, are running things and one peer identifies ladinos as generally controlling the government, the majority (13 of 20) assert that it is the wealthy elite who run it all. As with orphans, some of the peers also explicitly identify the CACIF as the economic power behind the government today. Two peers relate,

It’s the famous organization called CACIF, which consists of the 15 most wealthy families of Guatemala who often unite together to back a presidential candidate and they support him and give him money. They finance him so that when these people win the presidency, [CACIF] can even control the presidency. They say, “We want you to do this with the taxes,” because it’s most convenient for them because they are the owners of, for example, Pollo Campero, the brewery. The owner of Pollo Campero is the same owner of the Praderas (Josue, age 29, identifies as Kaqchikel).

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7 *Pollo Campero* is a Guatemalan chain of fast food restaurants that specializes in fried chicken, similar to Kentucky Fried Chicken in the United States.

8 The *Praderas* are a series of shopping malls in the major urban centers of Guatemala such as Guatemala City and Chimaltenango.
The wealthiest people, they are the ones who have the power because they, themselves, manipulate the government through the political parties. When it comes time for the elections, it’s in those moments that the rich manipulate who is going to be president. When the [candidate] comes into power, the wealthy control him (Dario, age 31, identifies as ladino).

Similar to orphans, peers perceive Guatemala’s most wealthy businessmen as those who continue to control the government and therefore, constitute the primary centers of political and economic power. Only one peer referenced ladinos, in general, as driving the Guatemalan government. Thus, nearly all orphans and their peers perceive the wealthy elite (with no particular reference to identity at all) as ultimately controlling the national government, the economy and all of the country’s major resources for their own economic gains. In essence, the issue at hand for orphan and peer participants, politically-speaking, is not one solely of identity and “inter-ethnic” group relations. Rather, it is a socioeconomic class issue that transcends the long-standing indígena versus ladino dichotomous social hierarchy and is becoming even more challenging in the increasingly atrophied national economic environment today.

Orphan and peer participants differ in how they conceptualize the way in which they perceive and express identity in Guatemala in the post-war era. Orphans, who identify as representing a more varied range of identity categories overall, view identity in more non-essentialist terms. They talk about identity as something that is inside of the individual and is expressed outwardly via connections with others and with one’s family and community origins or ancestry. The peers, nearly half of whom identify as ladino, conceptualize identity more in terms of autochthonous essentialist traits such as language, traditional dress, customs and surnames that can be changed, resulting in a change in identity overall. Examining the differences in the conceptualization of identity among
orphan and peer participants demonstrates that orphans’ understanding of identity is more fluid in that their notions of what constitutes identity are wider-ranging and are not bound by rigid overt markers or traits in the way that it is for peers. Thus, orphans perceive identity as a more dynamic, fluid process that simultaneously fosters a sense of continuity or “rooted-ness” regarding identity that was initially forged in the context of their familial and natal community settings in early childhood. Given both the continuity and fluidity with which the orphans view identity today, it makes sense that they do not see themselves as having experienced any sort of overarching “identity loss” or “identity crisis” in response to the long-term consequence of la violencia. Instead, orphans purport that lost aspects such as language, traditional clothing and customs—along with more general severed connections with their families and natal communities—have compelled them to develop and assert an even stronger sense of identity despite the adversities they have been forced to face as orphaned survivors of genocide.

While orphan and peer participants differ in the ways in which they personally perceive and express identity, they share similar sentiments regarding how they view relations between indigenous and ladino peoples within the Guatemalan nation-state today. Over half of orphan and peer participants believe that while discrimination based on identity persists, it does so at a lower level than it had in the past several decades. Yet both groups are cautiously optimistic and reference general acceptance, new laws, intermarriage and shifts in class position as some of the factors contributing to the decrease in identity-focused discrimination. Furthermore, nearly all orphan and peer participants believe that, regardless of the way in which they identify themselves, they currently have the same access to legally recognized legal and human rights as everyone
else in the country despite the fact that those rights simply were not accessible for the majority indigenous populations that preceded them. The only question that remains regarding access to rights for some orphans and their peers is whether those rights are actually realized in practice. Lastly, both the orphans and their peers agree that the political and economic center of power in Guatemala is not one based merely on identity (i.e., power is not necessarily associated with the general ladino category of identity) but rather on wealth. Only one of the 40 total participants in my research project explicitly and generally identifies “ladinos” as centrally controlling the country and its politics. The remaining 39 identify the wealthy oligarchic elite (especially those who are members of the CACIF) and politicians, more generally, as those currently possessing the most political and economic power within the country. The distinction made by orphan and peer participants that the center of power is monopolized by the country’s small percentage of extremely wealthy elite and the fact that they do not reference identity categories whatsoever in categorizing the wealthy elite highlights the importance of recognizing that socioeconomic class issues continue to play a prominent and even increasing role in social relations in the country today. Therefore, including examinations of the shifts in class issues both independent of “ethnic” relations and in relation to them are now even more vital for analyzing and understanding what it means to be a Guatemalan citizen in the post-war era today and beyond.

Understanding Orphan Experiences with Identity and Belonging in Guatemala

The Guatemalan military sought to destroy indigenous identities, once and for all, under the guise of its national assimilationist identity-making project via violent coercion, which was executed as one of the chief military strategies carried out during la violencia.
Operating under essentialist assumptions regarding indigenous identities, the military worked to brutally annihilate indigenous citizens or assimilate them by prohibiting and stigmatizing the use of overt markers associated with indigenous identities such as Mayan languages and traditional clothing. The military also destroyed families and communities in an attempt to demolish primary centers of socialization and enculturation were viewed as especially central to identity formation among indigenous children. Yet despite the state’s intentional and brutal efforts during the genocide to destroy and erase indigenous populations and identities within its territorial boundaries, its coercive national assimilationist identity-making project largely failed. Far from being assimilated, indigenous adult survivors launched a major resurgence of Maya revitalization, activism, organizing and political participation. Multiple accounts and scholarly works examining indigenous survivors’ experiences during and following the genocide corroborate that rather than falling victims to assimilation, survivors engaged in creative and constructive practices that helped them to maintain a strong sense of identity, to actively promote diversity and to demand equal rights for Guatemala’s heterogeneous national population, fortifying their sense of belonging as citizens in the aftermath of la violencia (e.g., CEH 1999; Fischer 2001; Jonas 1991; Montejo 1999, 2004, 2005; Warren 1998, etc.).

While there is clear evidence of the failed national assimilationist identity-making project among adult survivors of the genocide, little has been examined regarding how child survivors, especially those who were orphaned during la violencia, have responded to the long-term consequences of the military’s violent assimilationist strategies. My research with individuals who were orphaned in childhood as a result of the genocide helps fill this gap in research and demonstrates that similar to other survivor groups,
orphans in my research project have maintained a strong sense of identity and belonging in the Guatemalan nation-state today. Their abilities to maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging are particularly intriguing because their ties with families and natal communities were abruptly severed during their most formative years of child development. Having experienced such severe disruption in early centers of socialization and enculturation and having been enrolled in a permanent residential home for the remainder of their childhoods in a community with which most were not familiar, these children could have easily experienced sustained disruption and a sense of overarching loss in how they would come to perceive and express their identities in adulthood. However, for the 20 orphans who participated in my project, this was simply not the case.

Orphans in my project assert that they have maintained a strong sense of primarily indigenous identity even today in adulthood. They recognize that they have lost aspects that they themselves associate with identity such as Mayan language skills, the use of traditional traje and their participation in traditional customs. However, lost aspects do not automatically connote an overarching sense of “identity loss” or “identity crisis” for these 20 orphans. Instead, orphan participants emphatically declare that they have worked harder than most of their peers at maintaining their sense of identity. Consequently, they also argue that they have great pride in who they are and where they come from despite the assimilationist agenda of the genocide, which is demonstrated in Oscar’s response, “On the contrary, we orphans have learned with great pain to not forget who we are or where we come from.”

Orphan participants’ strong sense of identity is forged upon simultaneous notions of continuity and creativity that demonstrate the complexity of indigenous identities as
perceived and expressed at the local level within ever-dynamic webs of local, national and global relations. The notion of continuity regarding identity is reflected in orphan statements such as “I was born indigenous and I will die indigenous” or “Even if you change your looks, you continue being indigenous inside.” I believe that this notion of continuity is an important element in how indigenous identities in Guatemala are perceived, which is further corroborated by anthropological research conducted by scholars such as Montejo (1999), Fischer (2001) and Little (2004).

Montejo demonstrates that Maya refugees living in exile in Mexico also have a strong sense of continuity related to identity. He argues that Maya refugees reaffirm their sense of continuity in identity by referencing their strong connections with the past and by working to maintain their traditions and revival of certain aspects of Maya culture despite the changing conditions of exile in another nation-state (1999:198). Fischer (2001) likewise asserts that indigenous peoples in Tecpán maintain a sense of continuity in identity and that it is maintained by sharing cultural logics that unite them. He furthers that cultural logics are dynamic, shared predispositions derived from shared cultural patterns received by the individual through processes of socialization and ongoing social interaction. Little (2004) contends that the notion of continuity in identity is important for Maya Kaqchikel vendors as well and that it derives from their community connections. He specifically states that “place and identity, localized specifically as community, continues to be one of the more prominent ways that Mayas conceive of their identities” (2004:1890). Similar to the work of scholars such as Montejo (1999), Fischer (2001) and Little (2004) who work in Guatemala, I too found that orphan participants perceive the notion of continuity as an important element of identity. However, I differ from
contemporary scholars regarding from where I believe orphans derive their sense of continuity in identity.

Family and natal community relations were severed for orphans in my research project because of la violencia. In place of living with their surviving family members in the consistent surround of their natal communities, orphans were enrolled in a permanent residential home in an unfamiliar community. While the Catholic sisters at the Hogares made a concerted effort to try to maintain continuity in identity formation for orphans while enrolled in the home, orphans report that various aspects they themselves associate with identity (e.g., Mayan language, dress, customs, etc.) were, indeed, lost. Even in adulthood, orphans share that they have not maintained other aspects they associate with identity due to various reason such as higher costs of traje, time constraints or conditions of urban living. Orphans also do not report or demonstrate that they participate in reviving certain aspects of their heritages in the way that refugees in Montejo’s research have. Orphans have not been able to maintain ongoing social interaction with their primary centers of socialization from early childhood. Social interaction and socialization are processes that are central to identity according to Fischer’s concept of cultural logics and yet, he does not offer a suggestion for what happens when a major shift and rupture in these processes occur. Lastly, Little emphasizes the centrality of community connections in indigenous identity, which he believes must be sustained via ongoing social relations with the place and people of one’s community of origins. As I have stated above, he notes that people who have left their communities of origin “are not considered part of the home community if they do not maintain regular social relations” (Little 2004:188). Little’s assessment is no doubt reflective of the particular experiences of the
group of Maya Kaqchikel vendors with which he worked, but his theory does not help elucidate why orphans who had their family and natal community connections abruptly severed and subsequently no longer maintain ongoing social relations with extended family, communities of origin or natal community members still feel a profound sense of continuity in identity.

I believe that the continuity in identity as perceived and asserted by orphans in my research project is an internalized sense or feeling of connectedness with non-physical notions and memories of family and natal community origins and heritage. By sensing or feeling an ongoing internalized connection with these various past relations that no longer physically remain, orphans perceive their identities as deeply rooted within their being. The deep roots internally located within where others cannot harm, erase or destroy them allow orphans to not only sustain their sense of continuity in identity but also to basically view them as indestructible.

Orphans further assert that their sense of indestructible continuity regarding identity is centrally located within their blood. The internal localization of continuity within blood does not seem to reflect a race-as-biology conceptualization of identity as they do not refer to blood as an actual physical distinction that separates people based on biological features or the physical mixing of bloodlines. It also does not seem that their internalized sense of continuity inextricably conveys a race-as-social construction conceptualization either. When talking about continuity in identity as being located in one’s blood, orphans are most frequently referencing their individual, internalized and indestructible feeling and experience of indigenous identity without referencing social hierarchies, ethnic differences or other forms of external relations. Continuity is simply their personal
internal feeling of connectedness. This is not to say that social constructions of race do not factor into how orphans perceive their identities today; social constructions of race have long influenced notions of identity in Guatemala. Rather, I contend that the internalized sense of continuity perceived and asserted by orphans provides a perspective on indigenous identities that deserves much further investigation, especially in an era when increasing numbers of indigenous Guatemalan peoples are relocating to urban centers and foreign countries. Certainly the massive movement of people out of rural communities and Highland living will make familial and community relations that scholars have long argued are central to indigenous identities much more difficult to maintain and yet, it will not necessarily result in “identity loss” or “identity crisis,” as the experiences of orphans in my research project illustrate.

In addition to continuity in identity, the strong sense of identity perceived and asserted by orphan participants in my research project is simultaneously forged upon the notion of creativity. As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary scholars such as Smith (1990a, d), Warren (1998), Fischer (2001) and Little (2004) clearly demonstrate that identity is continually formed, reworked, negotiated, reasserted, redefined and reconstituted in an ongoing and never complete process within a multitude of overlapping local, regional, national and global systems. Orphan participants’ perceptions and expressions of identity further support contemporary scholars’ assertion.

Rather than perceiving and expressing identity—particularly indigenous identity—within a fixed set of static, autochthonous essentialist traits (e.g., clothing, language, customs, etc.), orphan responses presented above demonstrate that they perceive identity and identity expression in wider, more fluid terms than their peers. For example, the
majority of orphan participants state that they perceive identity in terms such as culture, beliefs systems, world views, behavior, morals and personality traits, whereas the overwhelming majority of peer participants view identity in terms of essentialist traits. Furthermore, all but one orphan believe that essentialist traits are not necessarily vital for identity expression, while seven peers think that these traits are critical for identity and without them, they would no longer consider a person indigenous. Lastly, orphans are much more likely to identify themselves using a wider variety of categories than their peers. Orphans self-identify as indigenous, Maya indigenous, Kaqchikel, Maya Kaqchikel, K’iche’, mestizo or ladino, while peers primarily identify as simply indigenous, Kaqchikel or ladino. Only one peer uses a different term—indigenous Kaqchikel—to self-identify. It is especially interesting that even the majority of non-indigenous orphans use more than just the term “ladino” to identify themselves, further demonstrating greater fluidity with which orphans perceive and express their identities.

The ways in which orphans perceive and express their identities in more fluid terms also incorporate more creative processes and practices than are utilized by their peers. As discussed in Chapter 5, eleven orphans—ten who identify themselves using a category of indigenous identity such as indigenous, Kaqchikel or Maya Kaqchikel—are now or soon will be college educated with several also attaining a Master’s degree or becoming lawyers. Only one peer (who identifies as ladina) completed a college education. In addition, ten orphans work in professional careers, while none of the peers currently do. Five orphans (and six of their peers) are also entrepreneurs with new and growing businesses, and 13 orphans continue to live in urban centers, while all 20 peers remain living with their families in Santa Apolonia. Yet, in none of the interviews did any of the
20 orphan participants discuss their participation in higher education, professional careers, entrepreneurship or urban living as connoting a major shift in how they perceive their identities. This is particularly interesting as none of the orphans’ parents were or are college educated, work or worked in professional careers, were entrepreneurs or had established themselves in urban centers when the 20 orphan participants were small children. Thus, orphans have independently established their own novel or innovative academic, professional, entrepreneurial and living patterns in adulthood that they view as part and parcel of their lived experiences and strong sense of identity rather than connoting a major shift in or detraction from their sense of identity overall.

Orphans believe that their participation in creative processes and practices has allowed them to actively and creatively adapt to their situations and contexts, while simultaneously permitting them to participate in new educational, economic and social arenas that are opening new spaces in Guatemala’s social hierarchy. For example, orphans earn more income overall than their peers, revealing that the majority of orphan participants now live somewhat comfortably in a more middle-class position than their peers and are subsequently becoming upwardly mobile in the social hierarchy according to economic class. The upward mobility of indigenous peoples is a common theme that permeates orphan and peer ethnographic interviews. Both groups frequently comment and point out that there are now wealthy indigenous people (indicating upward mobility) and poor ladinos (signifying downward mobility).

The overwhelming majority of orphans further state that they believe they have equal access to the same economic resources and general rights as everyone else in the country today even though they had been in a major economic disadvantaged position in early
adulthood because of their orphan status. Their views of equal access indicate that major
class shifts are, indeed, occurring in the Guatemalan social hierarchy, which is
transforming what it means to be indigenous citizens—as well as ladino citizens—in the
Orphans’ perceptions of shifts in the old social hierarchy that had been based on an
ethno-class conflation are further fortified by the fact that several of them are now
working in law and human rights litigation to explicitly and directly challenge the old
social hierarchy that was crafted by the oligarchic elite for their own benefit. Thus,
orphans’ participation not only in creative practices regarding their own identities but
also in the litigation of rights for indigenous peoples in the country is transforming what
it means for orphans and others to be indigenous Guatemalan citizens today.

Orphans who participated in my research project are not alone in their concurrent sense
of continuity and creativity regarding identity, and their participation in transformity
related to belonging in today’s nation-state. Other ethnographic research with adult
survivors of Guatemala’s genocide similarly demonstrates continuity and creativity, as
well as transformity in the post-war era. For example, anthropologist Linda Green (1999)
works with war widows and observes that they perceive and express their indigenous
identities in similar terms. Green states,
To understand the consequences of sociopolitical violence and the meanings of survival in the Mayan case requires rethinking intellectual notions of cultural continuity and transformation as dialectical rather than dichotomous processes. Cultural continuity is often thought of as a linear replication of traits and traditions. The Mayas’ experience might encourage us to see cultural survival as analogous to the woven cloth for which the Mayas are renowned. The shared history passed on to and reworked with each subsequent generation through memory and myth can be viewed as the warp (or vertical) threads that constitute the basis of the fabric, while the meaning constructed out of the present and the possible can be seen as the weft (or horizontal) threads from which the weaver creates her designs [1999:19].

Anthropologist and Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla also encountered evidence of continuity, creativity and transformity in the ways in which Guatemalan genocide survivors perceive and express identity and view belonging in the aftermath of la violencia. Working primarily with indigenous Guatemalans from the Ixil area who were forced to either move to Mexican Lacandón refugee camps or to establish their own Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (Communities of Population in Resistance) during la violencia, Falla determined that refugees had to expand their perceptions and definitions of identity as a result of their new status as refugees; however, that expansion was not tantamount to a sense of loss regarding identity overall. Falla observes,

The consciousness of their nationality as Guatemalans, from the perspective of their new identity as refugees, is also a manifestation of life. Indigenous localism is lost, as the refugees realize that it is more important to be from Guatemala than from a certain village. But the links between people with the same background are not broken, nor is the ethnic identity of the different indigenous groups lost in the camps that bring together so many languages and regional clothing, which heighten the consciousness of the refugees’ nationality [1994: 189-190].

Ethnographic research conducted by Green and Falla, as well as others such as Jonas (1991), Hendrickson (1995) and Zur (1998), further validate that the simultaneously-occurring processes of continuity, creativity and transformity regarding identity and belonging are a common theme for Guatemalan genocide survivors. What makes the case
of the 20 orphans who participated in my research project particularly interesting, however, is that they were in their most formative years of childhood during the most brutal period of la violencia. Experiencing such abrupt shifts in core centers of socialization and enculturation brought about by severed ties with families and natal communities certainly could have resulted in an overwhelming general sense of loss or crisis regarding identity and belonging. Yet for orphan participants as I demonstrate in this chapter that was simply not the case.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed how the Guatemalan military used deliberate annihilation and assimilation policies and practices during la violencia in their attempt to ultimately wipe out indigenous identity within the nation-state under the guise of its nationalist identity-making project. While the state’s attempt to eradicate indigenous identity largely failed, it did result in long-term consequences especially for the indigenous majority population. For orphans who participated in my research project, severed ties that resulted from the military’s intentional destruction of indigenous families and natal communities caused the most abrupt and long-term consequences that could have forever changed the ways in which they perceive and express identity today. However, despite such severe upheaval during their most formative years of development, these 20 orphans have maintained a strong internalized sense of connection with their families, natal communities and heritages, while simultaneously incorporating new elements of identity that have helped them actively and positively adapt to their circumstances as orphaned survivors of genocide. Consequently, this group of orphans has formed a strong sense of identity based on a more fluid conceptualization of
concurrent continuity and creativity when compared with their peers from Santa Apolonia. Orphans’ profound sense of continuity and active participation in creative practices regarding identity have led to transformity in what it means for them to be primarily indigenous Guatemalan citizens today. In the following chapter, I draw several main conclusions regarding orphans’ overall experiences with the long-term consequences of *la violencia*, highlighting the factors I believe contributed to orphans’ abilities to respond to their challenges as orphans in creative and constructive ways and to forge such a strong sense of identity and belonging that persists now in adulthood.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

“Most importantly, what I learned about La Violencia was taught to me by survivors. They taught me of their human agency” (Sanford 2003:22).

Orphans who participated in my dissertation research project have experienced some of the most tragic events and abrupt disruptions imaginable in childhood. Having lost one or both parents either directly (e.g., via murder or disappearance) or indirectly (e.g., as a consequence of genocide-related illness or suicide), orphans have lived through more hardships, distress and struggle in their early childhoods than most individuals do in a lifetime. Making matters even more difficult, orphans continue to face challenges caused by the long-term consequences of la violencia well into adulthood. Trauma, economic loss, and severed ties with families and natal communities are among the most difficult challenges orphans have had and continue to face.

Instead of confronting the challenges caused by the long-term consequences of the genocide in negative or ill-adaptive ways, orphans have actively engaged in creative and constructive practices that have allowed them to develop resiliency, to establish themselves economically and to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging as adults in the Guatemalan nation-state today. In this chapter, I conclude my dissertation by underscoring the primary conclusions drawn from my research project. I then highlight two central sources of influence that I believe have helped facilitate orphans’ abilities to confront and ultimately to begin to overcome the long-term consequence of la violencia. I continue by discussing the implications of my research and by proposing future research
based on the findings culled from my dissertation research project. I conclude with some final remarks regarding orphans’ experiences and finding hope in the extended aftermath of genocide.

**Primary Conclusions Drawn from My Research Project**

The primary conclusions that I draw from my dissertation research project with Guatemalan war orphans who are now adults correspond with the three central research questions that I initially posed for this project. The first question was: *What are the long-term consequences of la violencia that continue to affect orphans today in adulthood?*

Orphans who participated in my research project have, indeed, faced long-term consequences of *la violencia* that continue to affect them even today in adulthood. As I have demonstrated in the four previous chapters, the long-term consequences that orphans most commonly identify and discuss are trauma, economic loss, and severed familial and natal community ties.

Overall, orphans report suffering more genocide-related childhood trauma than their peers did. Because of the prolonged childhood trauma they endured, orphans recognize that *la violencia* has left indelible emotional and psychological scars that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. Orphans also report facing greater economic challenges than their peers because of the sustained economic loss brought about by *la violencia.* Unlike their peers from Santa Apolonia, orphans have had no financial “safety-net” or other source of financial support to help them transition into and sustain themselves in adulthood, making adulthood much more economically challenging for orphans than for their peers. Without the financial support of family or natal communities, orphans have had to confront the long-term economic consequences of the genocide solely on their
own. Lastly, the severed familial and natal community ties that resulted from the military’s deliberate efforts to wipe out indigenous peoples and identity caused some of the most abrupt and long-term consequences for orphans. By destroying families and communities, the military severed orphans’ ties with their primary centers of socialization and enculturation in their most formative years of childhood. These centers of socialization and enculturation typically play a central role in influencing how individuals perceive and express identity. Dramatically uprooted from their families and natal communities, orphans found themselves in an entirely different social context in which to continue their identity formation.

The long-term consequences of la violencia certainly could have resulted in orphans occupying a much more disadvantaged emotional, economic and social position than their peers in adulthood. However, that is simply not the case with orphans who participated in my research project. Despite the long-term consequences of la violencia, orphans have not succumbed to the challenges of those consequences in negative or maladaptive ways. This leads to a second primary conclusion that I draw from my project, which answers the second research question: How have orphans responded to the challenges that the long-term consequences have presented in their life experiences? Rather than remaining in a much greater emotionally, economically and socially disadvantaged position than their peers from Santa Apolonia, orphans have responded to the challenges of the long-term consequences of genocide in creative and constructive ways. In particular, orphans have responded to the challenge of childhood trauma by engaging in positive, thriving behaviors that have allowed them to become resilient, emotionally well-adapted adults who even report growing emotionally from their
extremely harsh childhood trauma and hardships. Orphans have responded to the challenge of sustained economic loss by building their own financially viable lives through various creative and constructive practices such as pursuing higher education at a much greater rate than their peers. Lastly, orphans have responded to the challenge of severed familial and natal community ties and the subsequent compromised relation those severed ties have had in their own identity formation by maintaining a strong internalized sense of connection and thus, continuity with their familial and community origins and ancestry. They also have simultaneously incorporated creative perceptions and expressions of identity that have helped them actively and positively adapt to their circumstances as orphanded survivors of genocide, which contributes to the final conclusion drawn from my research project.

The third and final research question that I posed was: How have the long-term consequences of la violencia and the ways in which orphans have responded to the resulting challenges influenced orphans’ own sense of identity and belonging in the Guatemalan nation-state today? Orphans both report and demonstrate that despite the long-term consequences of genocide—especially the severed ties with their families and natal communities—they do not feel that they have lost their overall sense of identity or their sense of belonging as primarily indigenous citizens in the Guatemalan nation-state today. On the contrary, orphans perceive and express a strong sense of identity that is based on a more fluid conceptualization of concurrent continuity and active participation in creative practices regarding identity. The fluid manner in which orphans perceive and express their identities allows them to maintain a sense of profound rootedness that cannot be destroyed by any external force, while simultaneously fostering their abilities
to actively and creatively adapt to their situations and contexts. Orphans’ simultaneous sense of continuity and active participation in creative practices regarding identity in no way reflects orphans as merely “passing” (or becoming ladino) or being molded into the “ideal citizen” according to the state. Rather, orphans have and continue to engage in continuous, creative and transformative practices regarding identity in their own right, which has expanded what it means for them to be primarily indigenous Guatemalans today. Orphans’ abilities to form such a strong sense of identity and belonging, while continuing to face difficult challenges brought about by the long-term consequences of la violencia in creative and constructive ways are remarkable and leave one to wonder what ultimately helped orphans develop such positive, well-adaptive abilities. There are likely many factors that have contributed to orphans’ positive, well-adaptive abilities; however, I believe that there are two central sources of influence that likely have contributed the most to helping orphans, which I now discuss below.

**Central Sources of Influence for Orphans**

Based on both my dissertation research and on my observations of the life experiences of orphans over the past 17 years, I believe that one central source of influence that has helped orphans develop such positive, well-adaptive abilities in the face of extreme adversity and the long-term consequences of genocide is the Hogares itself. The Hogares programming was designed to meet more than just the basic needs of orphaned children. While food and housing were the most immediate of concerns regarding orphans, the provision of formal education and educational support, along with vocational skills training, allowed orphans to access skill-building resources that they most likely would never have been able to access had they remained living with surviving
family members. The majority of orphans had no access to formal education prior to arriving at the Hogares, and vocational training was not common in the rural highlands at the time. At the Hogares, the tías, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers worked with orphans to develop their educational and vocational skills at the time of enrollment with a constant eye toward the future. The aim was to help orphans develop lifelong skills that would strengthen their abilities to respond to adversity and challenges in positive, well-adaptive ways not only at the time of childhood and adolescence but also in adulthood when they no longer had the financial support of the home. As the various participant quotes presented throughout this dissertation demonstrate, orphans are grateful for the educational and vocational skills training and support they received while living at the Hogares, and they clearly recognize just how influential the training and support has been in helping to develop their abilities to support themselves and achieve their desired goals in adulthood.

Another aspect of the Hogares programming that I believe helped orphans develop their positive, well-adaptive abilities was the fact that orphans were living together as children who shared similar childhood experiences with trauma, economic loss and severed familial and natal community ties. Living together with other children who experienced similar loss and devastation likely helped mitigate the pain and struggle orphans suffered. In Chapter 3, Debora states that she made friends with the other girls at the Hogares because “they understood my struggles and loneliness better than the rest.” In casual conversations I have had with orphans over the years, they commonly talk about how living with other orphans was helpful, and they are all quite cognizant of each other’s stories. When I was interviewing orphans for my research project, they would
often say that I should interview so-and-so because that person really had a traumatic and brutal experience during *la violencia*. The orphans’ knowledge of the experiences and circumstances they all faced prior to arriving at the *Hogares* demonstrates that they are keenly aware of what happened to each other during *la violencia* and of what led to their enrollment in the home. It would be difficult to gauge just how much growing up with other children who had experienced similar trauma and loss had helped orphans positively adjust to their circumstances as orphaned survivors growing up in a permanent residential home. However, there is no doubt that it has played a major role in their childhood experiences given the detailed information which orphans frequently provided about each other’s stories.

I believe that the relationships that orphans established with the adults at the *Hogares*—the *tías*, staff, Catholic sisters and volunteers—also allowed orphans to develop strong relational skills that have helped them become positive, well-adapted adults today. The *tías* and vocational training teachers, in particular, developed close relationships with most orphans during their time at the home. Many orphans still return to the *Hogares* on a regular basis today to visit their former *tías* and teachers because they recognize them as having been important role models in their childhood and adolescence. The male vocational training teachers were especially important role models for orphans as most of the adults working at the home consisted of women at the time the first groups of orphans were enrolled, which remains the case even today. By developing positive relationships with the adults working at the *Hogares*, orphans were able to establish strong attachments with positive, supportive adults in the absence of their surviving family members. These positive relationships have contributed to orphans’
social skills in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships that further contribute to their positive, well-adaptive abilities in adulthood.

Lastly, I believe that the Hogares’ focus on integrating orphans into the local community of Santa Apolonia instead of keeping them apart also helped orphans develop their social skills, which also would later contribute to their abilities to adapt to new communities and social circumstances in positive ways. The Hogares was intentionally designed to be part of the community instead of serving as an inward-facing, self-contained institution. In order to integrate Hogares orphans into the local community, the Catholic sisters had Hogares orphans enroll in the local schools with other children from the community, attend Sunday mass at the Catholic church in town and participate in community activities such as the annual feast day celebration of Santa Apolonia held in early February each year. Orphans also were involved with local sports teams, often joining their friends from town in area soccer or basketball tournaments and commonly went to the homes of friends from town to work on projects for school or community events. As orphans and their peers demonstrate via various quotes presented throughout the previous chapters of this dissertation, friendships were common between orphans and children from town. Many orphans also had godparents and sponsors for the Catholic rites of baptism, first communion and confirmation who were local townspeople committed to supporting orphans and the Hogares. The deliberate efforts to include orphans in the daily life of the community helped them to establish important relationships with other children their age, as well as with other adults who served as positive role models. I believe these relationships further contributed to orphans’ social skills and thus, their positive, well-adaptive abilities.
The second central source of influence that I believe has helped orphans become positive, well-adapted adults despite having lived through dramatically disrupted and traumatic childhoods is their own ambition and drive to make something positive of themselves and their lives. While enrolled in the Hogares, orphans had a consistent and wide range of emotional, educational, spiritual and social support from adult mentors who were mostly focused on serving the best interests of orphans. Once on their own in adulthood and without the primary support of the Hogares, however, orphans easily could have lost sight of their future aspirations and lost their drive to make something of themselves and their lives as they struggled just to get by in the first few difficult years of transitioning into adulthood. It certainly would not have been surprising had orphans come to live in abject poverty, to be part of street gangs, to be involved in violent relationships or to be dealing with substance abuse or addiction in adulthood. Yet, this dissertation clearly demonstrates that this was not the case.

Orphans, on their own accord, made life goals such as higher education and entrepreneurship, and actively engaged in creative and constructive practices to achieve these goals in adulthood. Completely on their own and without family members to support and encourage them, orphans figured out how to access the higher education system, worked hard in their professional fields and established businesses of their own. It would be a great injustice to not recognize that orphans, themselves, have been one of their own greatest assets in becoming positive, well-adapted adults. Although their abilities and skills, indeed, were expanded and strengthened while living at the Hogares, their initiative in adulthood is their own and is truly remarkable given the circumstances they were unjustly forced to face when the long-term consequences of la violencia
resurfaced in adulthood, often in the most challenging ways. Given orphans’ experiences and their noteworthy abilities to confront and ultimately begin to overcome the challenges of the long-term consequences of the genocide as revealed in this dissertation, my research yields several important implications.

**Implications of Research**

The first implication derived from my research with Guatemalan war orphans is that research focused exclusively on the experiences of war orphans is both necessary for validating the particular experiences and challenges of those orphaned in childhood during the country’s genocide and is essential for contributing to the construction of an accurate historical account of the genocide based on first-hand, eye-witness accounts collected from survivors. Orphans’ experiences presented in this dissertation demonstrate that children who lost one or both parents as a result of *la violencia* have faced their own set of challenges and circumstances not only in childhood or in the immediate aftermath of the genocide but also well into adulthood. Elements of traumatic memories, economic loss, and severed familial and natal community ties remain and likely will persist in some form in orphans’ lived experiences for the remainder of their lives. Even though orphans who participated in my research project are now ultimately beginning to overcome the long-term consequences of genocide, persistent elements of those consequences must be recognized as part of the experiences of children orphaned during the genocide in order to validate the hardships, distress and struggles they were forced to face. This is not to say that other Guatemalan genocide survivor groups have not experienced similar and even graver suffering because of *la violencia*. Rather, I contend that orphaned children’s particular experiences warrant attention because this group of individuals constitutes such
a large segment of genocide survivors, and they have had their own set of experiences as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation.

Collecting, recording and analyzing war orphans’ experiences is also vital for the construction of an accurate historical account of the genocide, which has been underway in various forms especially after the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords in Guatemala. The REMHI (1998) and CEH (1999) truth commission reports have been instrumental in collecting, recording and analyzing survivor testimonies. Some of the testimonies have even come from individuals who were children orphaned during the genocide, and both reports dedicate a small section to child survivors’ experiences more generally. Recent anthropological scholarship has also examined the particular experiences of women who were widowed during the genocide in Guatemala (Green 1999; Zur 1998). The first-hand, eye-witness accounts collected in these studies with widows have elucidated the distinct hardships, distress and struggles widowed women have had to endure. Work with refugees both resettled in-country and outside of the country has also contributed to the construction of an accurate historical account of the genocide (e.g., Falla 1994; Manz 1988; Montejo 1999; Stolen 2007; Taylor 1998). In addition, research detailing the general events, historical forces and perpetrators of the genocide in Guatemala has been prolific in the past 30 years (e.g., Carmack 1988; Jonas 1991; May 2001; Nelson 1999; Perera 1993; Sanford 2003; Schirmer 1998; Stoll 1993).

While important research conducted with distinct survivor groups and on la violencia in general has increasingly emerged in contemporary scholarship, little research has been carried out solely with survivors who were orphaned in childhood during the genocide. With estimates of the number of children orphaned during the 36-year civil war and
subsequent genocide as high as 200,000\textsuperscript{1} (CITGUA 1989; Gugelberger 1999; Hooks 1993; Simon 1987; Tierney 1997), it is evident that war orphans constitute a large segment of the survivor population, yet lacunae of research with this segment persist. To date, few publications exist that focus specifically on orphaned survivors of \textit{la violencia}. My research clearly demonstrates the importance of recognizing and examining orphaned survivors’ experiences in order to comprehend the full lengths to which the Guatemalan state went in order to eradicate indigenous peoples. Therefore, greater efforts to include war orphans’ experiences must be made in the construction of the historical account of the genocide if the accuracy necessary and desired by survivors is to be fully achieved.

A second implication of my research is that the ways in which identity in Guatemala is conceptualized and examined must continue to expand in order to include analyses of the internalized sense of continuity and the creative practices regarding identity demonstrated by orphans who participated in my research project. Contemporary scholars have moved well past the analytical confines of a dichotomous identity construct when examining identity in Guatemala today. They also recognize the complexity of both indigenous and \textit{ladino} identities. However, many scholars working in Guatemala continue to perceive indigenous identity, in particular, as inextricably linked with communities. \textit{Municipios} (local municipal centers) and small natal communities have been especially associated with indigenous identity even when individuals actually reside in other locations as

\textsuperscript{1} I believe the number of Guatemalan war orphans is much higher than estimated as the average number of children per family, according to the 1981 national census, was roughly three (INE 1981). If approximately 200,000 people were murdered and disappeared during the civil war and subsequent genocide, the number of orphaned children would be much higher than 200,000. For example, if we assume that couples were among the 200,000 murdered and disappeared, and thus, conservatively estimate that there were 120,000 total families among the 200,000 victims, then with an average of three children per family, the number of children who lost one or both parents would easily reach over 360,000 (120,000 x 3). Therefore, I believe that the 150,000-200,000 orphan estimates used in most literatures is actually quite low and the number of actual war orphans could reach as high as 500,000 since families in the Highlands often had 5 or more children per family as is demonstrated in the case of Mario, Juliana and Juana in Chapter 3.
illustrated in research conducted by anthropologist Walter Little (2004). For many survivors of *la violencia*, these connections no longer remain, yet the lost connections do not inevitably equate with a lost sense of identity or any sort of “identity crisis.” Orphans clearly show that they did not lose their sense of being indigenous simply because their familial and natal community ties were severed. They speak of indigenous identity as something permanently “in your blood” and as an internal sense of connection to family and ancestral origins that cannot be destroyed. Therefore, it is imperative that scholars consider the non-physical internalized sense of connection with family and community origins and ancestry when analyzing indigenous identity today, especially as increasingly large numbers of indigenous Guatemalan adults are now relocating to urban centers and to other countries where ties with natal communities and even with some family members will become difficult to maintain. Given the strong sense of identity orphans in my research project have maintained, scholars cannot dismissively assume that compromised familial and natal community ties unavoidably result in a lost sense of identity or “identity crises” for indigenous Guatemalans living in contexts either permanently or temporarily separate from families or natal communities.

Along with continuity, it is also important to recognize the creative practices that Guatemalan indigenous peoples engage in regarding identity, especially as they become increasingly involved in larger, dynamic relations and systems. I argue that one of the most powerful forms of resistance the indigenous peoples of Guatemala have had over the past five centuries is their use of creative practices to adapt to their changing circumstances and contexts brought about by external forces and the state. Past scholars often equated indigenous peoples’ participation in creative practices, such as formal
education or second language acquisition, as simply “passing” in that the indigenous person was unavoidably becoming a *ladino* because they now included what were viewed as “non-indigenous” practices in their lived experiences. The linear evolutionary notion that considers an indigenous person, on one end, as those for whom participating in or practicing anything that is not considered “traditional” is prohibited, contrasted with *ladinos*, who do not maintain any sorts of traditions whatsoever at the other end, is not only inherently erroneous but also is incredibly insulting to indigenous peoples who have a long history of engaging in complex, dynamic conceptualizations and practices regarding identity at the local level.

Dismantling the erroneous assumption that creative practices do not contribute to sustaining indigenous identities and thus, connotes a “de-indigenizing” process is especially important when examining indigenous peoples’ pursuit of higher education in Guatemala today. Following previous presentations or discussions that I have had regarding my research project, several individuals suggested that orphans’ pursuit of higher education means “they’re just becoming *ladinos*” or “they’re just becoming the kinds of citizens the state wants them to be.” Orphans are attending college because they perceive higher education as an asset to help them achieve the economic and career goals that they have set for themselves. They do not view higher education as withering away their indigenous identity in any way. Accessing higher education is but another example in the long history of the use of creative and constructive practices in perceiving and expressing indigenous identities. Pursuit of higher education in Guatemala had neither been as accessible financially nor as socially acceptable for indigenous young adults until more recently. With the dramatic shift in indigenous peoples accessing higher education
today, higher education and indigenous identity cannot be considered mutually exclusive for orphans and, I would argue, for indigenous peoples overall in the country today.

Based on orphans’ experiences and my research with them, I believe that contemporary scholars—most of whom are non-indigenous and occupy a more privileged socio-economic status than their research participants—must address their underlying assumption that higher education is the realm of non-indigenous people and therefore, entering this realm necessarily negates indigenous identities. I believe this is an elitist assumption that not only fails to recognize the perceptions and lived experiences of indigenous peoples but also turns a blind eye to the ways in which indigenous peoples are themselves transforming higher education in new and constructive ways through their participation in it.

The final implication stemming from my research with Guatemalan war orphans raised in a permanent residential home is that scholars and practitioners must reconsider the potential of in-country permanent residential care as a viable option for nurturing and caring for children who have been orphaned, even if that care is short-term until adoption can take place. There is a long-standing stigma in the United States and in many other nation-states around the world associated with permanent residential care for children, especially when the site of that care is called an “orphanage.” In the United States, the horrific conditions and treatment of Native American children in boarding schools at the turn of the last century, and the abysmal portrayals of orphanages, such as in Little Orphan Annie, have established extremely negative connotations for anything resembling an orphanage even when the program is called a “permanent residential home” for children (e.g., Adams 1997; Child 2000; Lomawaima and Child 2000). Some of the
stereotypes certainly are warranted given the atrocities that took place at Native American boarding schools in particular and in unregulated orphanages in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, some of the stigma and stereotypes are also products of sensationalized stories created to attract filmgoers and theatre audiences.

Internationally, horrifying accounts of abuse and maltreatment in Russian and Romanian orphanages also have fed international contempt for any type of permanent residential care that resembles what people generally perceive as an “orphanage” (e.g., Chisholm 1998; Fujimura, Stoecker and Sudakova 2005; Khlinovskaya Rockhill 2010; Philps and Lahutsky 2009). While people across the globe, especially those in industrialized nation-states, are quick to condemn programs they perceive as “orphanages,” much less attention has been paid to permanent residential homes that actually “work” in the sense that they provide a nurturing environment in which orphaned children grow and develop into positive, well-adapted adults. These types of programs also “work” because they allow children to remain in their home countries where their surviving family members can maintain relationships with them whenever possible.

In the United States, economic professor Richard McKenzie conducted one of the few studies of its kind with “orphanage” alumni to essentially examine the long-term effects that permanent residential care can have on children later in adulthood (1999). Working with alumni associations of nine homes for orphaned children in the South and Midwest of the United States, he recruited 1,589 participants who were enrolled at one of the nine homes during the 1960s. McKenzie, who also grew up at an “orphanage” in North Carolina in the 1950s, found that the alumni had outpaced their counterparts in the general population on several indicators by significant margins, especially in the areas of
education, income and attitude toward life (1999:293). Based on his personal experience and on his formal research, McKenzie argues that permanent residential care for orphaned children certainly can be an effective and viable means of caring for orphaned and other disadvantaged children. He further suggests that in light of the failing foster care system in the United States—a system that he deems little more than “permanent temporary care” for many foster children—a reconsideration of the assessments of prior “orphanage” studies and of the potential that well-developed permanent residential care programs can have in positively and effectively caring for orphaned and other disadvantaged children is much needed (McKenzie 1999).

There is no substitute for a loving, nurturing family for children. However, McKenzie’s research in the United States and my research in Guatemala offer interesting counterpoints to the stigma and stereotypes associated with permanent residential homes for children in childhood. In both of our studies, orphaned children grew up to be positive, well-adapted adults who have used creative and constructive practices to overcome the challenges of having been orphaned. Furthermore, both sets of research participants clearly demonstrate that they have not only grown up to be positive, well-adapted adults, but they also have outpaced their peers on various emotional, economic and social indicators. Therefore, our studies illustrate that permanent residential care for orphaned children can be a viable form of nurturing and caring for children. This does not mean that permanent residential care should replace all other care options such as adoption by loving families. On the contrary, I believe that loving families should always be the primary care option for orphaned and other disadvantaged children who deserve a permanent, nurturing home. However, in developing countries where there is little
regulation of adoption and local people simply do not have the financial resources to adopt, I argue that other locally-developed alternatives for caring for children, such as permanent residential care, should at least be considered as a potential options rather than instantly being dismissed because of the stigma or stereotypes associated with “orphanages” both locally and internationally.

Considering local care options is particularly crucial in developing countries such as Guatemala where international adoption of local children grew into a major money-making, unregulated industry that only recently came under pressure to reform. Following the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, the transnational adoption of Guatemalan children jumped from 731 children in 1996 to 1,278 in 1997 (Dubinsky 2010). By 2007, the number of Guatemalan children adopted annually by foreign families reached 4,844 and Guatemala became the third top source of internationally adopted children worldwide, behind only China and Russia. Consequently, Guatemala became the largest source of adopted children from the Americas (Rotabi, Morris and Weil 2008; Selman 2009). Out of all of the Guatemalan children adopted abroad, over 95% of them were adopted by families in the United States (Selman 2009). Guatemala’s close proximity to the United States, lack of regulations, lower relative adoption costs compared to other countries and availability of younger children are what made it one of the primary sources of adopted children for U.S. parents in the past decade (Dubinsky 2010; Gibbons, Wilson and Schnell 2009; Rotabi, Morris and Weil 2008; Selman 2009).

With no central adoption authority in Guatemala and little subsequent government regulation, the increasingly exorbitant adoption fees that reached as high as US$27,000 or more per child in 2008 handsomely benefitted private notaries (e.g., attorneys) and judges
who developed their own intricate, unregulated networks of notaries, international agencies, intermediaries and pre-adoption childcare providers to feed the burgeoning demand for Guatemalan babies by primarily U.S. families (Gibbons, Wilson and Schnell 2009; Rotabi 2007). Making matters worse, many of the children adopted out of Guatemala were not voluntarily relinquished by their biological parents. Instead, children were often “obtained” through illegitimate means such as abductions, kidnappings, coerced pregnancies and the selling of infants (Dubinsky 2010; Gresham, Nackerud and Risler 2003; McCreery Bunkers, Groza and Lauer 2009; Rotabi, Morris and Weil 2008; Selman 2009; Siegel 2011).

Under international pressure from entities such as the United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to address the growing issue of child trafficking related to intercountry adoption, the Guatemalan government finally established a central authority for adoption (called the Consejo Nacional de Adopciones or CNA) in December 2007 (Wilson and Gibbons 2005). The CNA was established in order to implement the international requirements set forth by the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (HCIA), which is designed to make sure that international adoptions—or what practitioners and scholars working with the Hague Convention term “intercountry adoptions”—are made in the best interest of children and with respect for their fundamental rights, while preventing the abduction, sale or trafficking of children (HCCH 2012; Rotabi 2007; Rotabi and Gibbons 2009). Along with the establishment of the CNA, the Guatemalan government allowed international adoptions that were already registered to be processed but allowed no new adoptions to be registered until the CNA could fully implement the
Hague Convention requirements, which meant that new intercountry adoptions of children from Guatemala were completely shut down as of January 2008 (Gibbons, Wilson and Schnell 2009).

After two years of intercountry adoption closure, the CNA opened a pilot adoption program in June 2010 that permitted limited adoptions under greater restrictions, with priority to adopt given to Guatemalan citizens over foreign families (Prensa Libre 2012). On October 5, 2010, the United States government withdrew its letter regarding participation in the pilot program because of concerns that future adoptions still would not meet the requirements of the Hague Convention (U.S. Department of State 2010). As of spring 2012, intercountry adoptions between Guatemala and the United States remain closed (U.S. Department of State 2010).

While the CNA is working to implement the full requirements of the Hague Convention and to completely overhaul the adoption system in Guatemala, the intercountry adoption debacle that has taken place over the past twenty years or more in Guatemala is an admonition against the attitude that intercountry adoptions are inherently and necessarily in the best interest of children born in developing countries. The Catholic sisters at the Hogares have been consistently wary of the intercountry adoption process in Guatemala and for that reason, orphans enrolled at the home were never put up for adoption either nationally or internationally. During the past 17 years of my relationship with the Hogares, the Catholic sisters frequently commented that the children “are our future” and that sending so many children out of the country would ultimately result in a much bleaker future for Guatemala. One sister posed a question during an informal conversation with me in 1995 in which she asked, “If so many of our children leave
Guatemala, how can we find hope in the future?” The Hogares was established by Guatemalans for Guatemalans to address the issue of orphans in their own country, and the results of their programming, as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, are impressive and noteworthy. Consequently, researchers and practitioners must consider local alternatives and programs, such as the Hogares, as potential solutions to the situation of orphaned children, especially following political violence (such as genocide) or natural disasters (e.g., the 2010 earthquake in Haiti), rather than summarily dismissing them. Again, I am not arguing that permanent residential care should be the primary form of care for orphaned children. What I do contend is that permanent residential care can be a viable option in some cases, whether in the short- or long-term, and at the very least, should be considered along with other various local solutions in order to truly meet the best interests of children and their surviving family members rather than focusing solely on foreign solutions to local problems regarding orphaned and disadvantaged children.

**Future Research**

My research with war orphans raised in a permanent residential home in the Highlands of Guatemala has illustrated the importance of working with the individuals who were orphaned in childhood during la violencia. I believe that future research must continue to extensively expand in order to focus not only on the experiences of war orphans raised in the Hogares but also on the experiences of the many other individuals who are among the estimated 200,000 or more children orphaned during the genocide. As I have stated above, inclusion of war orphans’ experiences in the construction of an accurate historical account of the genocide based on first-hand, eye-witness accounts is not only vital for the accuracy of the historical account, but also for validating the particular experiences of
such a large segment of survivors. I believe that without concentrated and expanded efforts to work with orphaned survivors in order to examine their experiences, the full scope and the long-term consequences of Guatemala’s genocide will not be entirely exposed and therefore, cannot be fully understood.

Continued scholarship on identity and the fluid conceptualization of indigenous identity, in particular, is also imperative for better understanding and validating the experiences of Guatemala’s indigenous citizens not only today but also in the past. Further analyses of the internalized sense of continuity is especially important as I argue that it is an aspect of indigenous identity that has not been fully recognized and explored by contemporary scholars. However, I contend that the most effective way to examine the internalized sense of continuity and the fluid conceptualization of indigenous identity more generally at the local level in Guatemala is by supporting indigenous peoples’ pursuit of higher and advanced education and their own scholarship so that they can undertake these analyses from a truly emic point of view. Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have been written “about” for centuries. It is now time that foreign scholars step back and support the research carried out by indigenous Guatemalan scholars (such as Jakaltek Maya anthropologist Victor Montejo) who can write “as” and “with” their own indigenous peoples.

A final area of future research that would contribute considerably to both anthropological literature and the work of practitioners is a comparative analysis of the experiences of war orphans who remained in Guatemala in permanent residential care (such as the Hogares) following la violencia and of individuals of corresponding ages who were adopted outside of the country by foreign families during that same period. The
comparative analysis of orphan and adoptee experiences would not only advance the knowledge of what happened to children who were orphaned or abandoned as a result of genocide but would also provide poignant insight into what types of care are genuinely in the best interest of orphaned and disadvantaged children, especially in the wake of state-perpetrated violence. A comparative analysis would also illuminate issues surrounding identity and continuity.

In 2000, I was working for a Latino nonprofit in Minneapolis when a young college student came to volunteer with our organization. The student, Emily, had been adopted from Guatemala by a family from the United States in 1981 at the height of la violencia. When Emily found out that I had lived in Guatemala and had worked as a volunteer with orphaned children at the Hogares, she began to share her experiences as a Guatemalan adoptee growing up in a primarily Caucasian mid-size city in Central Minnesota. She related that she was the only non-Caucasian in school and that a cross was once burned in her Caucasian adoptive parents’ yard because they had adopted her. Emily also recounted that in her adoptee support group of 11 Guatemalan adoptees, all but two had attempted suicide at least once in adolescence. She shared, “It’s just that we’re lost. We don’t know who we are. I love my parents, but I wish they would’ve left me in Guatemala!”

I believe that Emily’s experience is not unique, and consequently, there is much more to analyze and understand regarding Guatemalan adoptee experiences. A research project focused on comparing the experiences of orphans who remained in Guatemala in permanent residential care with those of Guatemalan adoptees who were sent to live with adoptive families abroad would provide ethnographically rich insight that would substantially advance scholar and practitioner understanding of orphaned child survivors’
experiences and of the viability of various care options for orphans. This type of comparative project would also establish an important gateway for exploring the sense of continuity regarding indigenous identity in Guatemalan children who remained in the country versus those who did not during early childhood. Such a project can greatly fortify anthropological literature, as well as advance child care policies and practices in meaningful and lasting ways.

**Final Remarks: Finding Hope**

In early December of 2010, I returned to Guatemala to participate in the 25th anniversary celebration of the Hogares. Alumni, past volunteers, townspeople, other supporters, Catholic sisters and former staff all joined the current Catholic sisters, staff, volunteers and orphans in a nine-day event-filled celebration that ended with a Catholic Mass and a festive lunch on December 12, the feast day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patroness of the Hogares. Picture-taking among the alumni abounded and Mario (featured in Chapter 3) composed a song for the Hogares, which he performed after the lunchtime meal. It was a festive day with a lot of heart-filled emotions and reminiscing. I was grateful that I could participate in such a moving event that celebrated not only the work of the Hogares and of all the adults, past and present, involved in meeting the needs of orphans but also the tremendous growth and perceived success of the orphan alumni.

While the anniversary celebration was deeply meaningful for me, there was something that I felt was still missing in this return trip.

The next day, I got into a rental car and stopped by Sofia’s house just three blocks away from the Hogares. I spoke with Sofia at the Hogares celebration just the day before and she agreed to call her mother, tía Chenta (featured at the beginning of this
dissertation), who could not make the long trip in from her home to Santa Apolonia for the anniversary event because of her worsening arthritis. Sofia told her mother during the phone call that we would be arriving the next day for a visit and tíá Chenta was elated. Thus, the next day I arrived at Sofia’s house as she was gathering up her three children (ages 12, 10 and 3) and some fresh produce to deliver to her mother. Loading everyone and everything into the car, we set out for the two-hour drive through the lush green mountainous backcountry of the municipalities of Santa Apolonia and San José Poaquil.

After bumping over the back dirt roads and strategically navigating several landslides and huge dips and ruts in the road, we eventually arrived in Sofia’s natal community. I parked the car at the bottom of the hill where the path to tíá Chenta’s house begins. Because of the rapid expansion of cellular phone towers constructed throughout the Highlands, Sofia actually called her mother just moments before we arrived at the bottom of the hill, allowing tíá Chenta to meet us the moment we arrived. When we all got out of the car, tíá Chenta’s grandchildren smothered her in hugs and kisses. I also gave tíá Chenta a big hug and told her how wonderful it was to see her again. She was excited that we were all visiting, and as her grandchildren ran ahead of us, we caught each other up on the latest happenings in our lives, strolling along the 75-yard length of path leading to her home.

I only had been to tíá Chenta’s home one other time. When I was a volunteer at the Hogares from 1994 to 1996, the civil war technically was still waging and travel in the backcountry where tíá Chenta’s hamlet is located was considered dangerous. On subsequent return trips to Guatemala, I simply did not have sufficient time or the means to travel the distance to tíá Chenta’s home. Therefore, it was not until I was conducting
fieldwork in 2007-2008 that I finally had the time and the means to visit tía Chenta’s home for the first time. It was during that first trip that I was profoundly moved by a tree that tía Chenta had planted in the outdoor patio area of her home. Tía Chenta explained to me that she had planted that tree in the spot where her husband was brutally murdered in 1980. Tía Chenta shared that she had planted the tree shortly after her husband’s murder as a way to honor him and to try to replace the horror that occurred in that spot with something positive and hopeful like a seedling.

On this second trip to tía Chenta’s home in 2010, I was taken aback the moment we finally walked up to her house. The tree in the center of the patio had grown and filled out dramatically since my last visit in 2007. Around the base of the tree, tía Chenta had planted annual flowers in various plastic receptacles, making the center patio look so colorful and vibrant. After finishing a delicious lunch of chicken stew and freshly made thick corn tortillas, tía Chenta and I sat outside on the perimeter of the patio under the shade provided by the tin awning of her tiny cement block house. We chatted for several hours and in the course of the conversation, I told her all about my dissertation research, what I had discovered in the process and how her story had forever changed my life trajectory and therefore, was the major influence in my career and dissertation choices. After some tears and some laughter, tía Chenta took a deep breath, motioned toward the tree planted in the middle of the patio and said to me, “Ah, Shirley, it’s just that you have to look for hope even in the most horrible situations!”

When I set out to conduct this dissertation research, I was not focused on looking for hope. Based on what I had witnessed first-hand as a volunteer at the Hogares during the orphan participants’ adolescence, I was certain that I would find persistent debilitating
trauma, despair and devastation persisting among them in adulthood. Consequently, I set out to gather information that would substantiate why this group of war orphans likely “fell through the cracks” and why they “never had a chance” at life. However, my research results clearly contradict what I had expected to find. In the place of ultimately succumbing to prolonged trauma, despair and devastation, I found orphans exuding resiliency, strength and growth. Orphans have suffered immensely because of la violencia, but in the place of devastation and destitution, they have rooted themselves in their family and community origins, and have grown and flourished into remarkable adults today. Much like tía Chenta’s tree (presented in Figure 32 below), orphans have replaced the horrors that they have had to endure in childhood with tremendous resiliency, strength and growth in adulthood. Thus, orphans’ experiences boldly illustrate that, as tía Chenta suggests, even in the long-term aftermath of the most brutal, inhumane treatment of humankind that is genocide, one must look for and can, indeed, find hope.
Figure 32: Tía Chenta’s Tree of Hope. The tree tía Chenta planted in her patio, along with potted flowers at the spot where her husband was brutally murdered in 1980 during la violencia.
APPENDICES

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Appendix A

Glossary of Spanish Terms and Acronyms
SPANISH TERMS:

Aldea (Hamlet): Aldeas are considered small hamlets that may have a church, school, cemetery and multiple dwellings.

Básico (Basic): Básico is the junior high level of education in Guatemala. Básico consists of three grades: first básico, second básico and third básico. Básico begins immediately following 6th grade in elementary school.

Cabecera (Central Town): A cabecera is the central municipal town that serves as the administrative seat of the municipal government. Each municipality has one cabecera.

Campesino (Rural Farmer): A primarily indigenous rural farmer in the Highlands of Guatemala who makes a living off of mainly subsistence farming and some low-paying wage-labor.

Caserío (Tiny Settlement): Caseríos typically surround aldeas and consist of only a small scattering of dwellings.

Castellanización (Castillianization): An introductory program for learning Spanish used in Highland public elementary schools.

Chapin/Chapina: The colloquial terms used by locals to denote a Guatemalan male (Chapin) or female (Chapina).

Comunidades de Poblacion en Resistencia (Communities of Population in Resistance). Resistance communities of Guatemalan refugees who fled their home communities during la violencia and set up makeshift camps hidden in the mountains and jungles in primarily the Ixil region of Guatemala.

Condenados a Muerte (Condemned to Death): This was the designation the military used for individuals whose names showed up on “black lists” during la violencia. Most of the individuals on the black lists became among the hundreds of thousands kidnapped and disappeared during the 36-year civil conflict and subsequent genocide.

Confianza (Mutual Trust): Confianza is a term commonly used in Guatemala to denote that an individual shares mutual trust or confidence with another.

Corte (Skirt): This is the traditional woven skirt used by Maya indigenous women. A traje is typically eight yards in length and is wrapped around a woman’s waist several times and held in place with a faja (or belt).

Cuxa: Cuxa is a local traditional corn alcohol.
Denuncias (Denunciations): Denuncias are reports of supposed insurgent participation that was commonly made by members of the Civil Patrols to the army. Civil Patrol and soldiers often turned in to army command the names of community members who the patrollers and soldiers suspected had ties with the guerrillas.

Departamento (Department): Guatemala is divided into twenty-two departamentos, which are similar to states in the United States.

Desaparecido (Disappeared): An individual who has been kidnapped and presumably murdered by the military or guerrilla and whose remains were likely never found.

don (Sir): A term of respect typically used for married and/or older men.

Diversificado: High school level of education that typically focuses on a particular career such as accounting, tourism or computer technology.

El Entronque (The Junction): Refers to the main exit off of the Pan-American Highway that leads to the municipal town of Santa Apolonia and further along to the town of San Jose Poaquil.

El Norte (The North): The colloquial term used to connote the United States.

El Pulpo (The Octopus): Nickname given to the United Fruit Company (a U.S. company) because it had many “tentacles” of influence wrapped around various business and political ventures within Guatemala.

Encomendero: The Spanish conqueror who held title to large tracts of land and the labor of the indigenous people living on that land under the Encomienda system.

Encomienda: A grant given by the Spanish Crown to the Spanish conquerors in Guatemala during the 1500s that gave the conquerors legal claim to the labor and tribute exacted from large plots of land in the newly conquered territory. The grants served as a reward for the conquerors’ service and loyalty to the Crown.

Finca: A large plantation-type farm typically owned by wealthy landowners who form part of the small elite social class of Guatemala.

Frijoles y Fusiles (Beans and Rifles): General Ríos Montt’s military strategy to eliminate individuals thought to be supportive of the guerrillas and destroy their fields, homes and possessions (fusiles) in order to place villagers in resettlement camps where their needs would be provided for (frijoles).

Guardería (Nursery School): The initial nursery school level of public education in Guatemala.
**Güiskil**: A gourd-type vegetable commonly grown and consumed in Guatemala, especially in the Highlands region.

**Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe** (*Guadalupe Homes*) – Refers to the permanent residential home for orphaned children that is the focus of this dissertation. The home is mostly called simply “Hogares” by locals.

**Huérfanos Parciales** (Partial Orphans) : A term used throughout the Guatemalan Highlands to identify children who had one parent who was murdered or disappeared during the civil war and genocide.

**Huipil** (Blouse): The traditional woven blouse used by Maya indigenous women and that in the past signified a woman’s natal community.

**Indígena** (Indigenous Person): An individual who identifies as an indigenous or native person of Mayan descent in Guatemala.

**Indio** (Indian): Considered a derogatory term for indigenous people by indigenous and non-indigenous people alike in Guatemala.

**Junta**: A military junta or committee that headed the Guatemalan government in place of a president during the times of the various military coups.

**La Primavera** (The Spring): The period of 1944 to 1954 that consisted of calm and positive reforms for the general population of Guatemala.

**La Reforma** (The Reform): The period of 1873 to 1885 when President Justo Rufino Barrios implemented political and economic strategies that fortified the powerful position of elite landowners over the Mayan indigenous populations.

**la violencia** (The Violence): The period of 1978 to 1983, which was the most brutal period of Guatemala’s 36-year civil war and has been deemed a period of genocide.

**Ladinization**: Considered the assimilationist and thus, homogenizing process of an indigenous person becoming *ladino* in Guatemala.

**Ladino**: Identity term specific to Guatemala that indicates a person who identifies as not indigenous but rather primarily of Spanish-descent.

**Latifundia**: A large estate typically owned by oligarchic elite in the country.

**Machismo**: Strong attitude of male chauvinism that is often portrayed in demonstrations of excessive masculinity.

**Mestizo** (Mixed): Mixed identity and culture that ultimately has led to the perceived absence or invisibility of indigenous populations.
Mestizaje (Mixing): A term that has come to include not the actual mixing of European and indigenous “blood” but rather a blending of social and cultural characteristics.

Municipio (Municipality): Central municipal center that serves as a governmental seat for a particular municipal area.

Nervios (Nerves): Commonly defined an idiom of distress used to express concerns about one’s physical and emotional state.

Orejas (Ears): Faced with such a choice, most male Highland inhabitants carried out surveillance on their neighbors. Soon community members came to fear the patrollers and their relatives who were perceived as orejas (ears), or spies.

Párvulos (Pre-school). Pre-School level of education in the Guatemalan educational system that begins formally educating children at 5 years of age.

Patio: Outdoor area adjacent to a home.

Patojo (Kid): Term specific to Guatemala that denotes a male child between the ages of 3 and 18 years. The term is interchangeable with muchacho (boy) or joven (youth). The feminine form is patoja and the plural form is patojos.

Polik: Traditional Maya Kaqchikel chicken dish specific to the town of Santa Apolonia.

Primaria (Primary): Elementary school level of education in Guatemala that consists of grades 1 through 6.

Quinceañera: 15th birthday coming of age ceremony for girls in Guatemala.

Ranchera: Genre of music that originates from Mexico and that is popular throughout Guatemala, especially in the rural areas.

Reducción/Congregación: Colonial system that allowed the Catholic Church to receive the assistance of civil authorities in helping to “reduce” the multitude of scattered indigenous settlements into larger, concentrated villages where denizens could be converted and controlled with greater ease.

Reforzamiento Escolar (Scholastic Reinforcement): The educational tutoring program offered at the Hogares for all children enrolled in the home in order to help supplement and support orphans’ academic progress.

Repartimiento: Colonial system in which colonial officials arbitrarily allotted indigenous laborers to petitioning landowners who offered the workers meager pay for their strenuous and grueling labor.

Revoso (Shawl): Traditional woven shawl used by Maya indigenous women as a jacket and also to carry babies and small children on their backs.
**Subversivo** (Subversive): Term used to indicate anyone who is a guerilla fighter or supporter and as a result, is in opposition to the Guatemalan government.

**Susto** (Shock): A term individuals use to describe feelings of distress and despair after a traumatic event.

**Temazcal** (Sweat Bath): A traditional Mayan sweatbath that locals use for bathing. It is typically a small, dome-like adobe structure located outside of the house that is warmed with heated stones.

**Testimonio** (Testimony): Testimonial narratives of lived experiences told in the first person by narrators who are testifying in a legal or religious sense.

**Tía** (Aunt): The informal title given to the women who serve as the primary caregivers at the Hogares. The plural form is tías.

**Tinaja** (Water Carrying Vessel): Traditional water carrying vessel fashioned out of clay and for which Santa Apolonia potters are best known for throughout the country.

**Traje** (Traditional Clothing): The general term to describe a set of traditional woven clothing used by Maya indigenous peoples in Guatemala.

**Unido** (United): A term used to denote a couple has joined together in a committed, marriage-type relationship, but without legally marrying, which requires a separate civil and legal ceremony in Guatemala, which is both costly and time-intensive.

**Víctima Indirecta** (Indirect Victim): Term used by orphan and peer participants in my research project to denote an individual who died as a result of illness, suicide or some other malady individuals believe was a result of one’s experiences connected with la violencia.

**Viga** (beam): Wooden beams used to support the roof of a house.

**Zona 10** (Zone 10): One of the 22 zones of Guatemala City that is also one of the wealthiest areas of the city in which the most expensive restaurants, hotels and businesses of the country are located.
ACRONYMS

CACIF (Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras): Coordinating Committee of the Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations. National committee that serves as a conservative association of businesses that consists of Guatemala’s most wealthy and business elite.

CEH (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico): Commission for Historical Clarification. United Nations supported truth commission project and report.

COPMAGUA (Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala): Coordination of Organization of Maya People of Guatemala. Organization of activists and other organizations that came together to participate in the negotiation of the 1996 Peace Accords in order to represent indigenous interests at the negotiating table.


CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina): Campesino Unity Committee. Rural peasant organization. Rigoberta Menchú and her father were members of CUC.

EGP (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres): The Guerilla Army of the Poor. One of three Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrilla groups that helped form the URNG.

FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes): Rebel Armed Forces. One of three Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrilla groups that helped form the URNG.

IGSS (Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social): Guatemala’s Social Security Institute. National institution that provides health and social security benefits to the population.


ORPA (Organización del Pueblo Armado): Organization of the Armed People. One of three Marxist-inspired Leftist guerrilla groups that helped form the URNG.

PAC (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil): Civil Defense Patrols, or simply “Civil Patrols.” Local civilian patrols consisting of conscripted men ages 15-60 that the military used as a first line of defense against guerrillas and other “subversives” in the Highlands.
**PGT (Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo):** Guatemalan Party of Workers. The national communist party that also helped form URNG.

**REMHI (Proyecto Interdiocesando de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica):** Interdiocesene Project for the Recuperation of Historical Memory. Truth commission report projected conducted by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala.

**CONAVIGUA (Coordinadora Nacional de la Viudas de Guatemala):** National Coordinator of Guatemalan Widows. Organization established to assist women widowed during the armed conflict and subsequent genocide.

**URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteco):** Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union. Leftist political party that consisted of the EGP, FAR and ORPA guerrilla groups and the PGT community party.
Appendix B

Juliana’s Award-Winning Essay
Family Hope

Once upon a time, in a small hamlet far away from the city, there was a family that consisted of four brothers and three sisters, the father and the mother. These said people were: Ana (20 years old), Francisco (16), Saby (12), Manuel (9), Alfredo (5) and Tonita (who was only 3 years old), Victor (the father) and Juana (the mother). In this family, everyone was very close and happy, the same with the inhabitants of the hamlet, until one day destiny separated them—the family of Victor as well as the hamlet.

One beautiful morning when Juana was at home with her two smallest children, because her eldest daughter, at age 20, had already married and Saby had gone to bring food to her father and brothers who were working in the village a distance away, a group of strange men arrived who threatened Juana, telling her that they would beat her if she did not tell of where her husband was. Obliged by the threats, she had to tell them where, why and with whom he was working. The men asked her over and over again if she was telling the truth saying, “You know what will happen to you if you do not tell the truth!” She answered, “I am telling the truth.”

The men left the house and took off. Juana and her two little children remained terrified of what had just happened. They were so scared when their father and his sons calmly arrived at the house without a worry, thinking of dining on some traditional food, tranquil. The father happily conversed with his family about beautiful topics.

Rather quickly, he realized that his wife was worrying about something and he asked her what had happened. She told him about everything that had happened. Victor, very frightened, spoke for a long time with her to figure out what they could do. They decided to leave the hamlet thinking they were the only ones this had happened to. Little by little they realized that the majority of families had encountered the same thing, every day it got even more difficult. Finally, they decided to go live with a sister of Juana’s. The family stayed there for a few days, but because it was close to their own hamlet, the strangers arrived at the house.

Since that day, the family began to live in different places. That evening they were sleeping in the mountains when they saw their home. At dawn, they went to look for a place to live and to be a little more tranquil. Walking and walking in the mountains, they saw many people praying beneath a tree; as they drew closer, they saw that the people were their own neighbors. They asked them:

“What is happening?”

Victor told them all that had happened. They then understood that everyone from the hamlet had encountered the same problem. Since that moment, they tried to remain together in their suffering in the mountains; when they came upon food, they shared it with everyone, even if that meant only two or three tortillas per family, but at least it was something.
They went from place to place, resting only at times. The parents always watched to make sure their families were accounted for during their journey because several of the youth, adults and children had gone missing. But at times, they could not go back because those strange men were behind them with the intention of killing them, kidnapping them, raping them.

Of Victor and Juana’s family, three children disappeared. They found one of them immediately, another reappeared some years later and the third had never reappeared. In this way, little by little, the families went disappearing. Some families separated until in the end, the families went their separate ways. The family of Victor began to live with friends, with them they lived happily for some time.

On day, the smallest daughter who was very pretty was playing on a hill that was behind the house. Suddenly, she saw some men in the distance; frightened, she ran to tell her parents about what she had seen. Her father said, “Come into the house and don’t make a sound!” They closed the doors, hiding while not making a sound. The men entered the hallway, they searched all around, they pushed in the door and didn’t hear a sound and left.

Coming out of hiding, no one opened the doors until it was early evening; they went to the banks of the river where there was an old house thinking that the men would not find them there.

When night fell they were surprised by the strange men who took Victor and Manuel prisoner, tying up their hands, beating them.

Victor, addressing the strangers, told them:

“Please, let my son go because he is so young and he does not know what he’s doing.

The strangers took pity on Manuel and let him go, but they took Victor away, saying to the rest of the family:

“Wait for him, one day he’ll return.”

After the stranger’s words, Victor said his final words to his wife:

“Take care of our children, keep them together, fight for their wellbeing, maybe I will return and if not, take care of them.”

With that said, they took him away. Juana and her children, thank God, were not harmed.

From that day forward Juana had to confront their situation alone with her children. She returned to the small hamlet of her daughter Ana, told her that she was now more calm and helped her daughter; however, Juana was very afraid, but she made the huge effort of
going to see her house. Upon arriving, she saw that everything was burned, even the surrounding vegetation.

Juana, sobbing a lot, gathered up some things and quickly returned to Ana’s house. On the pathways around the hamlet there was nobody around not even just walking by. All the happiness that had existed before had converted into sadness.

The family of Juana lived for some days in the house of her daughter; afterwards they repaired the house that had been burned. In time, they cleaned the house and sold fruit that they harvested from their homestead in order to buy food. Some days later, Juana found a job. With the little that she earned, she could sustain her youngest children, providing them with minimal food and clothing.

Saby, who was 14 years old at the time, seeing the needs of her family, went to work in order to help her mother. She was not able to continue her studies and ended up only having completed the sixth grade.

Juana worked harder and was able to pay for the education of her other children. Manuel began studying in the sixth grade; he was 12 years old. Alfredo, 7, began kindergarten and the smallest girl was not sent to school yet because there was not enough money and she was only five years old.

When Manuel completed elementary school, he didn’t study for a year but afterwards he began studying in junior high and afterwards, he worked to continue into high school.

The two smallest children went to live in a nearby village in order to attain a better education, food and possibilities to excel.

Juana was very sad because she was left alone at home. When she least expected it, good now came by way of a young man who worked in the capital who told her:

“One of your children that had disappeared is alive. He works in the capital and is looking for you.”

Juana, thanking the boy, cried from the emotion and quickly went to the capital to look for her son. When she found him, she hugged him and became filled with happiness. After several days, she arrived to visit her youngest children and told them what had happened.

Within time, Juana became a grandmother, her children were able to return home and they lived united as they had before; but the happiness of this family was not total because Victor and Francisco never returned. The happiness of Juana was much greater watching her grandchildren play and her children close and happy.

Although the family is not complete, the family continues to pray for the disappeared. As God says: “Pray for the living and for the dead.”
Appendix C

Psychological Assessment Instruments and DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
Revised Civilian Mississippi Scale (RCMS)

Versión Español


RCMS Assessment Form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Nada Cierto</th>
<th>Ligera-mente Cierto</th>
<th>Algo Cierto</th>
<th>Muy Cierto</th>
<th>Extremadamente Cierto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Antes del evento, yo tenía más amigos cercanos de los que tengo ahora.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Si algo sucede que me recuerde el evento, yo me pongo angustiada(o) y pertubada(o).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Me siento culpable de ciertas cosas que hice durante el tiempo del evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Desde el evento, si alguien me empuja demasiado, yo me pongo enojado(a), colérico(a).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Yo tengo pesadillas acerca del evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cuando pienso acerca de algunas de las cosas que hice cuando pasó el evento, me provoca morirme.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Desde el evento, parece que yo no tuviera sentimientos.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Me pregunto por qué todavía estoy viva(o) cuando otros murieron en el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cuando me hallo en ciertas situaciones me parece como si estuviera de nuevo en el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Desde el evento yo no río ni lloro por las mismas cosas por las que otras personas lo hacen.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Desde el evento, ruidos inesperados me hacen saltar.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Yo he usado alcohol u otras drogas para poder dormir o para olvidar el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Desde el evento, tengo miedo de dormirme por las noches.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Yo trato de alejarme de cualquier cosa que me Recuerde lo que pasó durante el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Me cuesta trabajo recordar algunas cosas que pasaran durante el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Si algo sucede que me recuerde el evento, me pongo ansiosa(o) y sobrecogida(o) de pánico.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Lo que veo u oigo a menudo me recuerda el evento.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. A menudo pienso acerca del evento, aún cuando no quiero hacerlo.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. Yo soy capaz de acercarme emocionalmente a otras personas. 1 2 3 4 5
20. Ultimamente, he sentido que quiero matarme. 1 2 3 4 5
21. Yo me duermo y continúo dormido(a) hasta que suena el despertador (alarma). 1 2 3 4 5
22. Mis sueños por la noche son tan reales que me despierto sudando frío y a la fuerza me mantengo despierta(o). 2 3 4 5
23. Siento que no puedo continuar así. 1 2 3 4 5
24. Todavía gozo haciendo muchas cosas con las que gozaba antes. 1 2 3 4 5
25. Tengo problemas concentrándome en lo que estoy haciendo. 1 2 3 4 5
26. Gozo de la compañía de otras personas. 1 2 3 4 5
27. Por las noches me duermo fácilmente. 1 2 3 4 5
28. Nadie entiende como me siento, ni siquiera mi familia. 1 2 3 4 5
29. Ultimamente, yo pierdo la calma y exploto por cosas comunes y corrientes. 1 2 3 4 5
30. La mayor parte del tiempo me siento como si estuviese en alerta o en guardia. 1 2 3 4 5
Para cada oración, por favor indique el grado en que los cambios en su vida ocurrieron como resultado de su experiencia como niño/a durante los años de la violencia:

Por favor use las siguientes medidas para sus respuestas:

0) No he experimentado este cambio como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.

1) He experimentado este cambio muy poco como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.

2) He experimentado poco cambio como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.

3) He experimentado este cambio en grado moderado como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.

4) He experimentado este cambio en alto grado como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.

5) He experimentado este cambio en muy alto grado como resultado de mi experiencia inmigratoria.
PTGI Assessment Instrument:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambió mis prioridades sobre lo que es importante en la vida.</th>
<th>No cambio</th>
<th>Muy poco cambio</th>
<th>Poco cambio</th>
<th>Cambio moderado</th>
<th>Alto grado de cambio</th>
<th>Muy alto grado de cambio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tengo mayor apreciación por el valor de mi propia vida.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>He desarrollado nuevos intereses.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Me siento más autosuficiente.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tengo mejor entendimiento de las cosas espirituales.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Puedo ver más claramente que puedo contar con otras personas en tiempos difíciles.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Me abrí un nuevo camino en mi vida.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Me siento más cercana, allegada, a otras personas.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Puedo expresar mis emociones con más facilidad.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sé que puedo enfrentar dificultades.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Estoy capacitada para mejorar mi vida.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Me siento mejor capacitada para aceptar las cosas como vengan.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Siento mayor apreciación por cada día de vida.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Se me han presentado nuevas oportunidades que no se me hubiesen presentado de otra forma.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Siento mayor compasión por los demás.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Me esfuerzo más en mis relaciones personales.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tengo mayor probabilidad de intentar cambiar las cosas que necesitan cambios.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tengo más fe en mi religión.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Descubrí que soy más fuerte de lo que pensaba.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Aprendí que la gente es maravillosa.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Se me hace más fácil aceptar que necesito de los demás.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Symptom Checklist 90 Revised (SLC-90-R)

Versión Español

ADMINISTRATOR:

BE SURE THE DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON PAGE 9 IS COMPLETED.

AFTER THE QUESTIONNAIRE IS COMPLETED, DETACH PAGE 9 BY CAREFULLY TEARING ALONG THE PERFORATED LINE. THEN DISCARD PAGES 1 THROUGH 8 AS YOU WOULD OTHER CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS.
INSTRUCCIONES:
La prueba SCL-90-R consiste de una lista de problemas que la gente algunas veces tiene. Por favor léelas cuidadosamente y enciérre en un círculo el número que mejor describa CUANTO HA ESTADO MOLESTO O HA SUFRIDO POR ESE PROBLEMA DURANTE LOS ULTIMOS 7 DIAS INCLUYENDO EL DIA DE HOY. Encierre en un círculo sólo un número por cada problema (0 1 2 3 4) y no se salte ninguno. Si decide cambiar su respuesta, ponga una X en su respuesta primera y encierre en un círculo su respuesta nueva (0 1 2 3 4). Antes de comenzar, lea el ejemplo y si tiene alguna pregunta por favor hágala.

EJEMPLO

0 = Nada  1 = Un poco  2 = Moderadamente  3 = Bastante  4 = Mucho

INDIQUE CUANTO SE HA SENTIDO MOLESTO POR:

Dolores en el cuerpo ................................................................. 0 1 2 3 4

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0 = Nada  1 = Un poco  2 = Moderadamente  3 = Bastante  4 = Mucho

**INDIQUE CUANTO SE HA SENTIDO MOLESTO POR:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N°</th>
<th>Indicación</th>
<th>Puntuación</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dolores de cabeza</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nerviosismo o temblor</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pensamientos desagradables, repetitivos, que no se apartan de su mente</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sensación de desmayo o mareos</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pérdida de interés o de placer sexual</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sentirse crítico hacia los demás</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>La idea de que otra persona puede controlar sus pensamientos</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>El sentimiento de que otros son culpables de la mayoría de sus problemas</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dificultad para recordar cosas</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Preocupación por el desorden o descuido</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Sentirse fácilmente molesto o irritado</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dolores en el corazón o en el pecho</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sentirse asustado en espacios abiertos o en la calle</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sentirse con poca energía o lento</td>
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<td>Pensamientos de poner fin a su vida</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Oír voces que otra gente no oye</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Temblores</td>
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<td>Sentir que no se puede confiar en la mayoría de la gente</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Falta de apetito</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Llorar fácilmente</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Sentirse tímido o incómodo con personas del sexo opuesto</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sentirse atrapado</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sustos repentinos y sin razón</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Explosiones de enojo que no puede controlar</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sentir miedo de salir solo de su casa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Culparse a sí mismo por cosas</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dolores en la espalda baja</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sentirse impedido de hacer las cosas</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Sentirse solo</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Sentimientos de tristeza</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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**INDIQUE CUANTO SE HA SENTIDO MOLESTO POR:**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
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<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Preocuparse demasiado por las cosas</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>No sentir interés por las cosas</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Sentirse con miedo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Sus sentimientos son fácilmente heridos</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Otras personas conocen sus pensamientos privados</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Sentir que otros no le comprenden o no le tienen simpatía</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Sentir que la gente no es amigable o que usted no le cae bien</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Tener que hacer las cosas muy despacio para asegurarse de que estén bien</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>El corazón le late fuerte o aceleradamente</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Náuseas o malestar en el estómago</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Sentirse inferior a los demás</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Dolores musculares</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Sentir que otros lo miran o hablan de usted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Dificultad para dormirse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Tener que revisar varias veces lo que hace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Dificultad para tomar decisiones</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Tener miedo de viajar en autobuses, trenes o subterráneos/metros</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Falta de aire</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Cambios repentinos de temperatura en el cuerpo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Evitar ciertas cosas, lugares o actividades porque le ocasionan miedo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Tener la mente en blanco</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>Adormecimiento u hormigueo en ciertas partes del cuerpo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Sentir como si tuviera un nudo en la garganta</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Sentirse sin esperanza en el futuro</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Dificultad para concentrarse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>Sentirse débil en partes del cuerpo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Sentirse tenso o alterado</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>Sensaciones de pesadez en sus brazos y piernas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Pensar en la muerte o en morirse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Comer demasiado</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pase a la página siguiente.
0 = Nada  1 = Un poco  2 = Moderadamente  3 = Bastante  4 = Mucho

INDIQUE CUANTO SE HA SENTIDO MOLESTO POR:

61. Sentirse incómodo cuando la gente lo mira o habla acerca de usted 0 1 2 3 4
62. Tener pensamientos que no son los suyos propios 0 1 2 3 4
63. Tener la necesidad de golpear, herir, o hacerle daño a alguien 0 1 2 3 4
64. Despertarse muy temprano por la mañana 0 1 2 3 4
65. Tener que repetir las mismas acciones tales como tocar, contar o lavar 0 1 2 3 4
66. Dormir inquieto o trastornado 0 1 2 3 4
67. Sentir la necesidad de romper o arrojar cosas 0 1 2 3 4
68. Tener ideas o creencias que otros no comparten 0 1 2 3 4
69. Sentirse muy consciente de sí mismo en presencia de otros 0 1 2 3 4
70. Sentirse incómodo al estar en grupos grandes, como cuando va de compras o en el cine 0 1 2 3 4
71. Sentir que todo lo que hace es un esfuerzo 0 1 2 3 4
72. Ataques de terror o pánico 0 1 2 3 4
73. Sentirse incómodo al comer o tomar algo en público 0 1 2 3 4
74. Entrar en frecuentes discusiones 0 1 2 3 4
75. Sentirse nervioso cuando lo dejan solo 0 1 2 3 4
76. Los demás no le reconocen adecuadamente sus logros 0 1 2 3 4
77. Sentirse solo aun cuando está acompañado de gente 0 1 2 3 4
78. Sentirse tan inquieto que no puede permanecer sentado 0 1 2 3 4
79. Sentir que usted no vale nada 0 1 2 3 4
80. Sentir que algo malo le va a pasar 0 1 2 3 4
81. Gritar o tirar cosas 0 1 2 3 4
82. Tener miedo de desmayarse en público 0 1 2 3 4
83. Sentir que la gente se aprovechará de usted si se lo permite 0 1 2 3 4
84. Tener pensamientos acerca del sexo que le molestan mucho 0 1 2 3 4
85. La idea de que usted debe ser castigado por sus pecados 0 1 2 3 4
86. Pensamientos e imágenes que le asustan 0 1 2 3 4
87. La idea de que algo grave le pasa a su cuerpo 0 1 2 3 4
88. Nunca sentirse cerca de otra persona 0 1 2 3 4
89. Sentimientos de culpabilidad 0 1 2 3 4
90. La idea de que algo anda mal con su mente 0 1 2 3 4

Pase a la página siguiente y siga las direcciones para completar la información adicional.
DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder


Criterion A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:

(1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.

(2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: in children, this may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.

Criterion B: The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in one (or more) of the following ways:

(1) recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions. Note: In young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.

(2) recurrent distressing dreams of the event. Note: In children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.

(3) acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated). Note: In children, trauma-specific reenactment may occur.

(4) intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

(5) physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

Criterion C: Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:

(1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma.

(2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma.
(3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma.

(4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.

(5) feeling of detachment or estrangement from others.

(6) restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings).

(7) sense of foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span).

**Criterion D:** Persistent symptoms of increasing arousal (not present before the trauma), indicated by two (or more) of the following:

(1) difficulty falling or staying asleep.

(2) irritability or outbursts of anger.

(3) difficulty concentrating.

(4) hyper-vigilance.

(5) exaggerated startle response.

**Criterion E:** Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D) is more than 1 month.

**Criterion F:** The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

*Specify if:*

**Acute:** if duration of symptoms is less than 3 months.

**Chronic:** if duration of symptoms is 3 months or more.

*Specify if:*

**With Delayed Onset:** if onset of symptoms is at least 6 months after the stressor.
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Américas Watch

Amnesty International

Anderson, Benedict

Arévalo Martínez, Rafael

Arias, Arturo


Bachrach Ehlers, Tracy

Banco de Guatemala
Bandura, Albert

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**Comité Pro Justicia y Paz de Guatemala**


**Consorcio Actoras de Cambio**


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**Costa, Gema and Francisco L. Gill**


**Crapanzano, Vincent**


**Cryder, Cheryl H., Ryan P. Kilmer, Richard G. Tedeschi, and Lawrence G. Calhoun**


**Davis, Shelton H.**

Davis, Shelton H. and Julie Hodson

Derogatis, Leonard R.


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Duany, Jorge

Dubinsky, Karen

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