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Hate Speech, Gender and Ethnicity:

Intersectional Discrimination Toward Indigenous Women
in Guatemala

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Introduction

During the period of colonization hierarchical patterns based on heritage were established in Guatemala. Thereby, a dichotomy between ladino (non-indigenous or mixed heritage) and indigenous people was created. Nowadays 41,7% of the Guatemalan population is self-defined as indigenous (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, 2018).

Due to the intersectionality of their position, indigenous women tend to be the most marginalized by hegemonic speech, based on gender, ethnicity and socio-economic position (Van Dijk, 2005; Pisquiy, 2007; Cumes, 2009; Vuorisalo-Tiitinen, 2016). In Guatemala, indigenous women have a low participation in decision-making, low access to economic power (Pisquiy, 2007; Destrooper, 2015) and are depicted mainly in household chores or in the rural area (Pisquiy, 2007). In order to understand the actual situation, it seems vital to study how hate speech directed against indigenous women is characterized and to identify the major aggressors that are reproducing this discriminatory speech that continues to marginalize the social position of indigenous women.

By means of hate speech, hegemony maintains the social structures of power (Van Dijk, 1994; Calvert, 1997; Van Dijk, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005), as language is a relevant factor of social interaction. Hence, the relevance of studying hate speech lies on the importance of comprehending that offensive language not only communicates ideas, but itself is a form of conduct (Butler, 1997), which in the case of Guatemala represents discriminatory and racist social practices toward indigenous women.

Previous scholars have identified the government (Butler, 1997; Tsesis, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005) and the media (Van Dijk, 1984; UNESCO, 2015; Alakali et. Al, 2017) as relevant actors regarding production and reproduction of hate speech, therefore it seems crucial to analyse their role in the situation of Guatemalan indigenous women. Considering the social power that both institutions have, hate speech represents an efficient tool to maintain the system of domination in

Guatemala.

Due to the lack of studies in the Guatemalan context regarding this issue, there is a strong need to analyse and characterize this phenomenon. To alter the social structures, it seems mandatory to redefine harmful discourse in order to break the discriminatory interactions that have been created through time (Paniagua 2007).

Thus, this study aims to explore how the systematic machinery of hate speech toward indigenous women operates in Guatemala and to reflect the effects of discrimination and racism on their life based on gender, ethnicity and social status.

State of the Art

Prejudice, Offensive Speech & Discrimination

The Speech Act Theory was proposed by Austin (1975), which states that the use of language implicates a direct behavior. An utterance is not simply “saying something”, the message itself is *performing* an action (Austin, 1975). Many scholars used this approach to investigate discourse and communication and have pointed the implications in social relations, prejudice and discrimination out (Austin, 1975; Van Dijk, 1994; Butler, 1997; Calvert, 1997; Van Dijk, 2002; Kimotho, 2016).

Van Dijk (1994) conducted a study to analyze the effects of everyday conversation on prejudices toward migrants and revealed that racist thinking and discriminatory actions are mainly acquired through discourse. Prejudice speech promotes negative attitudes and behaviors toward minority groups, it creates a social reality of discrimination and preserves power structures (Calvert, 1997).

Likewise, the learned discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are legitimated through communication itself, by reproducing these expressions and by defending the statements (Van Dijk,

2002). The discourse tends to be shared within the dominant groups, they reproduce their ideology, which contains opinions, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes and prejudice (Van Dijk, 1987).

Social interaction is mostly determinate by discourse, because it can promote certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviors toward other individuals. According to Van Dijk (1984) through discourse the social cognitions become “articulated” and portrays the relation of the person with the outgroup and the ingroup. To alter social relations, it seems crucial to re-signify language expressions that have become harmful and have created usual discrimination interactions (Paniagua 2007).

Regarding the aim of offensive speech, many scholars propose that hegemony imposes and promotes those speeches to create and maintain social structures of power (Van Dijk, 1994; Calvert, 1997; Van Dijk, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005). This elites, as Van Dijk (2002) defines it, is a group that leads the ideology of society. They tend to have more access to the “minds” of the population and thus, define common values, common sense and consensus. From his perspective, the elites control the main conduits for symbolic production, hence they can control public discourse.

Therefore, elites set the public discussion by means of media, institutions, government, education and culture. They control spaces where dominant discourse is produced and the access to social power, in contrast to powerless groups that are not included in active participation and only have access to personal conversation (Van Dijk, 1994). Regarding this, findings of a study of everyday conversation conducted by Van Dijk (1987) revealed that prejudice talk is not spontaneous, it has been learned through media, education, social relations and public discourse.

Communication process goes beyond the act of expressing ideas, it also enacts the message itself, it is a form of behavior (Butler, 1997). The repetition of prejudices through discourse can produce an extended harm on the targeted minorities, it increases their feelings of inferiority and decreases the welfare of society and enables social unequal treatment (Calvert, 1997; Tthesis, 2002). Nevertheless, these utterances can contribute to the recognition of marginalization structures and

empower minority groups, to challenge the power structures (Vuorisalo-Tiitinen, 2016). In order to achieve resistance, minorities need to gain power (e.g. economic or political) to be a real opposition toward elites and don't be suppressed again (Van Dijk, 1994).

Hate Speech and Society - Global Perspective

Hate speech is considered a hostile discourse that uses expressions that advocate incitement to harm. It is designed to promote hatred toward a group of people, based on some innate characteristics, like religion, ethnicity, race, national origin (Rosenfeld, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005; UNESCO, 2015; Alam et. al, 2016) or gender. This concept can be identified in literature with various terminologies, e.g. harmful speech or offensive discourse.

Furthermore, these prejudicial expressions can be disseminated by non-verbal communication, like gestures, conduct or writing (Kimotho & Nyaga, 2016; Alakali et. al, 2017). Utterances that promote a climate of intolerance and prejudice, that consequently leads to discrimination, hostility and violent attacks (UNESCO, 2015), can also be considered hate speech. The information that promotes hatred and despise in a non-explicit manner was identified by Rosenfeld (2005) as hate speech in substance. Hate speech is a complex and broad construct, it's delimitation and definition may include different variables depending on the approach.

According to previous studies, harmful speech can provoke inequality and isolation (Van Dijk, 1984; Tsesis, 2002; Hernández, 2011; Alakali et. al, 2017), hence fosters fear and discourages minority groups to express opinions and participate in the community (Alakali et. al, 2017). The social climate is also affected by hate speech because it encourages denigration and normalizes discriminatory treatment of certain groups of people (Hernández, 2011). Tsesis (2002) analyzes this type of discourses as contrary to the principles of an egalitarian society and as a threat to harmonious democracy.

Government is identified as a relevant factor concerning this issue (Butler, 1997; Tsesis, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005). On the one hand, through the influence of politicians and government institutions the line between acceptable and harmful discourse can be regulated (Butler, 1997); and on the other hand, it can be used function as a way to enhance and propagate certain offensive speech (Tsesis, 2002). Moreover, the discourse from a political leader or a government official tends to have more legitimacy and impact, in comparison to a speech coming from a member of a marginalized group (Van Dijk, 1994; Rosenfeld, 2005).

Another meaningful factor established in the literature has to do with the role that media play concerning hate speech. In a study by Alakali et. al (2017), they pointed out that people in Nigeria identified journalists as the responsible to set the agenda for discussion, therefore, the usage of offensive discourse against certain group may cause that the public accepts or rejects this groups. Taking this into account, media can also function as a vehicle to counteract hate speech (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, Van Dijk (1984) criticizes the low media participation of journalists that are part of a minority, due to the negative attitudes toward their abilities, which leads to a biased coverage. Hence, citizen journalism could become a counterpart of mainstream media outlets, by highlighting the voices from marginalized groups. (Kimotho, 2016)

From previous research we know that the reactions toward hate messages may vary, depending on the context and the nature of the observer - ethnicity, gender, education or age. Cowan & Hodge (1996) found out that there is a difference between the perception of offensive discourse by dominant and non-dominant groups because minorities can identify themselves. From the receiver perspective, hate speech produces negative feelings toward themselves, which impacts individual identity and self-confidence (Kimotho, 2016). Nevertheless, the effects of hate speech on the recipient are still uncertain in literature.

Research Questions

The present research project seeks to investigate this phenomenon based on the following questions:

- Research Question:
 - How is discriminatory speech & hate speech toward indigenous women characterized in Guatemala?
- Sub-questions:
 - Which impacts has hate speech on indigenous women?
 - Which role do media play in the construction of prejudices?
 - Which actor is identified as the greatest aggressor?

Methodology

In order to have an in-depth understanding of hate speech toward indigenous Guatemalan women, this study employs a qualitative approach. The methodology consists of semi-structured interviews.

In regard to this study, semi-structured interviews methodology gives the possibility to have an in-depth understanding of the problematic. According to Longhurst (2016), it can be defined as a verbal interchange between the interviewer and the subject of interest, where the interviewer expects to obtain certain information from the interviewee by asking questions. Semi-structured interviews tend to have an open-ended questions guideline, with the topics that need to be addressed (Bernard, 2017), although during the interview it is not mandatory to follow this guide because the interview should develop as a conversation (Longhurst, 2016). An advantage of this method is the versatility to obtain and produce knowledge since the interviewer can focus the conversation on

topics of interest for the study (Brinkman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are useful to gather people's experiences, likewise, when studying topics that involve emotions and affects, opinions or complex behaviours (Longhurst, 2016).

For this study, 12 in-depth semi structured interviews to scientists, journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of social organizations were conducted. The interviewees were selected according to their experience concerning gender and indigenous topics, they are prominent figures in Guatemalan landscape on different areas, like academia, the media, as human rights advocates. They were contacted via email and social media, and the interviews were developed via Skype in a period from February to May 2019, approximately with a duration of 30 - 60 minutes. Due that Spanish is the mother tongue in Guatemala, the interviews were conducted in this language.

Following this, the transcription of each interview was made. Regarding the analysis process, first each transcript was examined in detail, highlighting the most relevant elements for the aims of the study, then, categories were established according to each topic of interest. Since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, some specific quotes of the interviewees were translated to English language. Afterwards, each category was analysed profoundly in order to find patterns and elements in common.

Hate Speech and Social Context

Hate Speech and Social Context - Latin American Perspective

The situation of hate speech in Latin America is still very much uncertain in literature, due to the lack of research and the absence of this topic in public debate. Scholars emphasize that the debate is mainly developed in Europe and the United States, and needs to be more broaden (Hernández, 2011; Roshani, 2016).

As mentioned before, hate speech is identified by different terminologies, likewise to studies in Spanish language (e.g. discriminatory speech, racist discourse, prejudice discourse). Studies regarding this topic are focused upon racial and ethnic discrimination in the Latin American context (Lee Van Cott, 2005; Van Dijk, 2005; Hernández Castillo, 2010; Hernández, 2011; Poncela, 2011; Roshani, 2016; Pineda, 2017).

Many scholars have pointed out that the background of the current situation of discrimination and social exclusion was established since the period of colonization (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005; Pineda, 2017). During this period, hierarchical patterns with social and cultural distinctions that built a social pyramid that placed indigenous people and afro-descendants on the bottom were constituted (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005). Pineda (2007) analyzes how the usage of discriminatory discourse was employed to transmit and reproduce racism, concluding that it was a vital factor to establish this system of ethnic-racial dominance, in addition, to legitimize inequality.

Miscegenation aggravated social relations in Latin America. The dominant structures were no longer a dichotomy between Europeans (conquerors, immigrants, criollos) and non-Europeans (indigenous and afro-descendants), they also included mestizos and mulattos (Van Dijk, 2005). Nonetheless, mixed heritage individuals can be represented in various manners and status, like in powerful positions or as victims of racism (Van Dijk, 2005).

Furthermore, miscegenation started to raise the “purity of race” issue between individuals, which according to Hopenhayn and Bello (2001) constituted the negation of others. This refers to the differentiation between social categories, which leads to devaluing the others and placing them hierarchically as inferiors. Thus, the *categoría indio* (indigenous category) was subordinated and devaluated due to biological (racist) and cultural aspects, consequently they were subjected to rupture and destruction of their way of life, culture and language (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001).

In Latin America, the social structure is still mainly determinate by lineage, where dominant groups are European descendants and mestizos, and the powerless social strata are composed by indigenous population and afro-descendants (Espinosa & Cueto, 2014). This reflects the unequal distribution of power resources (material and symbolic) that operates under a social, economic and cultural discriminatory system (Van Dijk, 2005).

Recent studies showed the current situation of indigenous people (Ashdown et al., 2017) and afro-descendants (Pineda, 2017) in Latin America. They continue to be victims of racism, stereotypes and discrimination, which is highly reproduced through prejudice discourses and presents an obstacle to achieve social justice (Ashdown et al., 2017; Pineda, 2017); besides the consequences in terms of access to education, job, information, knowledge, capital, and land (Van Dijk, 2005; Pineda, 2017)

In contrast, Van Dijk (2005) states that the situation of inequality is also affected by everyday practices in many countries of Latin America, which impact the life of indigenous and afro-descendants and shape the socio-political structure. Many scholars have also identified the media (Van Dijk, 2005; Pineda, 2017), education (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001) and everyday conversation (Poncela, 2011; Pineda, 2017) as reproducers of prejudice and discrimination in this region.

The role of social relations and every day discussion in Latin America can be analyzed from common phrases that in a non-explicit manner transmits and fosters discrimination. Jokes and popular proverbs have been identified as common forms of prejudice speech, which are expressed daily and normalizes through language (and symbols) negative attitudes toward minorities, (Poncela, 2011; Pineda, 2017).

Previous studies emphasize the relevance of analyzing hate speech and discrimination in Latin America from the *intersectionality* perspective (Ghanea, 2013; Roshani, 2016). Ghanea

(2013) proposes that hate speech and the spectrum of hatred works in different dimensions, it may be based on ethnicity, national origin, race or gender, but these can be overlaid or compounded by other categories (e.g. gender-ethnicity).

Moreover, the denial of discrimination and racism in Latin America is an issue identified in previous literature. The constant negation of inequality and racial and ethnic differences impede the recognition of discriminated minorities and silences the voices and demands of these excluded groups (Lee Van Cott, 2005). In terms of legislation, hate speech has been gradually entering the public and political agenda (Lee Van Cott (2005), although in some countries law enforcement can be selective.

The necessity to find solutions beyond the legal framework has been identified (Hernandez, 2011; Roshani, 2016), stressing that the issue must be addressed from grassroots levels (Hernandez, 2011). Scholars stand out that in Latin America there is a need for more research regarding this topic, to identify, recognize and show the discursive forms that reproduce systematic discrimination, inequality and prejudice (Van Dijk, 2005; Pineda, 2017). Thus, seems crucial to recognize minorities and rebuild these offensive discourses (Paniagua 2007; Pineda, 2017).

Guatemalan Indigenous Population

As mentioned before, literature regarding Guatemala also pointed out conquest and colonization as origin of the current situation of inequality, discrimination and prejudice toward indigenous population. The hierarchical patterns were based on lineage and blood to oppress indigenous people and justify forced labor (Gibbons & Ashdown, 2010). Suárez Navaz (2013), states that this pyramid strategy was used by the conquerors to gain domain and legitimize power.

In Guatemalan society, there is a clear distinction between ladinos (non-indigenous or mixed heritage with European) and Mayan indigenous population. This ethnic identification is fluid

(Little, 2004, as cited in Ashdown, et al. 2011), due to the simple transition from one group to another, e.g. just by changing from the indigenous language to Spanish or by taking off the traditional clothing. Furthermore, here the *negation of others* can also be noted (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001), when the ladino, feeling identified as European in this context, denying other indigenous individuals, although both have the same national origin.

This segregation continues to reproduce discrimination, like in the colonization period. Nowadays the Guatemalan population is self-defined as 56% ladinos and 41,7% indigenous (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, 2019), representing the two largest groups of population. Although, these population numbers are not representative for the division of power (government, education, capital; Ashdown, et al. 2011).

Paniagua (2007) states that this discourse, established since the conquest, has affected the ethnic relations and the definition of identity. With the aim to demonstrate superiority, offensive discourses toward the indigenous people were developed, from which some remain used, as normalized sentences. Due to discrimination and stereotyped image of indigenous people, these speeches added obstacles to achieve social justice (Ashdown et al., 2017).

Many scholars have pointed out how the historical development of this country has normalized discrimination and denigration, mainly toward indigenous people. One relevant factor were the military dictatorships (1954 - 1985) which promoted actions and policies that normalized ethnical discrimination (Garcés, 2007).

During the Guatemalan civil war (1960 – 1996) there was an upsurge of harm against indigenous, which reached such levels that a court has proved that there was a genocide toward Maya Ixil population (Estrada Tobar & Rodríguez Pellecer, 2018). According to Paniagua (2007), the end of the civil war brought hope to indigenous people, civil society organizations started a

process of re-signification of the term “*maya*” (instead of “*indio*”), which he categorizes as a discursive shift.

The “*mayanización*” refers to the process of recognition/self-identification with Mayan identity and ideology. Moreover, it implies a change in pluralist discourse that goes far beyond “politically correct” language (Dary, 2007). The recognition of multiculturalism must be an appreciation of multiple identities that converge together, rather than just pointing at cultural distinctions (Dary, 2007).

In general, the perception is that indigenous people belong in the countryside, which reveals the social distance between rural and urban areas (Dary, 2007). Likewise, ladinos inhabit mainly in the urban zones and when an indigenous comes into this environment, it is perceived as an “intruder” (Dary, 2007). These distinctions are hardly debated in the public sphere, it is an issue that is mainly avoided in socio-political environments. Moreover, this can be analyzed as a form of rejection toward the “*mayanización*” process.

The literature states that the reconfiguration of the relation between the State and indigenous population is vital. The construction of a strong democracy can be toughest due to the ethnic diversity (Lee Van Cott, 2005), but this can never be achieved until ethnocentrism and discrimination issue are diminished (Dary, 2007) and the distribution of power is equal. Nonetheless, the generational transition in terms of offensive discourse seems also relevant to stop the reproduction of these discriminatory social patterns (Garcés, 2007).

Guatemalan Indigenous Women

As a consequence of the intersectionality of discrimination in Guatemala, indigenous women tend to be the most affected ones. The social structures established since the colonization have made distinctions between indigenous and non-indigenous (Cumes, 2007).

The patterns of power are mainly male-dominant, with a high male representation in social structures where the discourse is produced (Van Dijk, 2005, Cumes, 2009). Thus, women tend to be marginalized by the hegemonic speech, and in the case of indigenous women, the marginalization encompasses various categories: gender, ethnic and socio-economic position (Van Dijk, 2005; Pisquiy, 2007; Cumes, 2009; Vuorisalo-Tiitinen, 2016).

Nowadays, being an indigenous woman is in a disadvantaged position in comparison to a ladino women and indigenous males, with low access and low participation in terms of politics, decision-making, economic power, civil society organizations and governmental institutions (Pisquiy, 2007; Destrooper, 2015). Their value is mainly recognized in the rural area, working for the community and the family. (Pisquiy, 2007).

According to Cumes (2009), Guatemalan indigenous women experience the patriarchy and discrimination in a different level that ladino women because ladino women have more privileges, due to their socio-economic position. It is crucial to recognize the conditions of dominance between ladino women and indigenous women, as well as, to discuss the dominant relation between indigenous males and indigenous women (Cumes, 2009).

Regarding indigenous feminist movements in Guatemala, the 80's were a relevant decade for their empowerment, as before this period women movements were ladino dominated. From this moment, a multiculturalist and heterogeneous perspective was added (Monzón, 2005; Hernández Castillo, 2010). The movement has condemned the oppressing system (gender-ethnicity), discrimination and exclusion in political and economic terms by creating an opposition toward hegemonic discourses of prejudice and discrimination (Cumes, 2009; Hernández Castillo, 2010). Moreover, the Government should re-significate the women-man relations, because they are mainly based on discrimination, patriarchy, and classism (Cumes, 2007). Destrooper (2015) criticizes that

public institutions with the purpose to promote women rights and policies have limited resources, which represents an obstacle to achieve their gender equality aim.

Findings and Analysis

Based on the findings gained from the interviews with scientists, journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of social organizations, the following section discusses the attributes of gendered hate speech and intersectional discrimination toward indigenous women in Guatemala.

The Nuances of Hate Speech

Although the discussion about this phenomenon is not yet highly developed in Guatemala, hate speech is an issue that is present. The interviewees identified attributes that previous literature has pointed out, albeit many referred to it as racist or discriminatory discourse.

Hate speech is understood as a discourse based on prejudice and stereotypes, rather than facts. It generates a negative public opinion about a specific group of people. Existing prejudices are strengthened through this speech, which influences social representations of a certain group (Tsesis, 2002, Van Dijk, 2002). It conceives a world where *difference* is despised and discarded, furthermore, denies the persons human rights.

Discrimination and racism are identified as constituent elements of hate speech. A social reality of racism can be created and maintained by constantly using racist expressions (Calvert, 1997). In Guatemala, these racist expressions reproduce stereotypes about the indigenous population, as for instance, assuming that indigenous women will always be maids (Chirix Garcia, 2019). This expressions and harmful words operate under maintained social conventions.

“It is the total rejection of certain groups of people. In this case, if we refer to indigenous people and women, it is hatred for being part of

this group. It can come in many forms, physical, face-to-face, through social imaginary.” – Ana Lucía Morales

“It is when ethnic identity or sexual identity or any characteristic of these two is used to foster violence and even murder and justifies that this behaviour is valid because they do not correspond to the normality established.” – Verónica Sajbín

“Underneath that discourse lies a practice loaded with symbols that are related to marginalizing differences. The difference is used to minoritized the other. This is a very old discourse.” – Carolina Escobar Sarti

“It is a pejorative, discriminatory, racist, xenophobic, fascist, and even authoritarian treatment. It comes from superiority and verticality.” – Ana Lucía Ixchiú

“It is a discourse that expresses discrimination, transphobia, homophobia or racism. It is directed against diversity and attacks the dignity of a person.” – Sandra Morán

The aftermaths of colonization

“It is not possible to affirm that colonization is the past and that we are in another historical stage; the truth is that colonization has only changed face.”
Chirix Garcia, 2019, p.13

Scholars have identified the colonization period as the setting which led to the current situation of exclusion and discrimination in Latin America (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005; Pineda, 2017). Understanding hate speech from a colonial logic, it seems important to remark how the colonization period established a social structure which placed indigenous people on the last step (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005). Guatemala is not an exception, colonial structures seem to be still well established and operate a system of domination based on heritage

and ethnicity. According to Chirix Garcia (2019), inequality provoked by certain biological or cultural characteristics can be determined as racism.

In Guatemala, hate speech underlines a structure of oppression and domination that incites to hate. By means of social imaginary the structure of power maintains the status quo, where the *indio permitido* (permitted indigenous) is submissive and accepts his/her subalternity. The figure of *el indio* (the indigenous) was created through discourse since colonization, it displayed a despicable and unworthy figure in order to establish the alleged superiority of the Spaniards (Paniagua 2007). In addition, the presence of sexism and male dominance in Latin-American affects women the most (Van Dijk, 2005), hence, patriarchy and machismo are also identified as features of hate speech toward Guatemalan indigenous women.

This system of domination and the hegemony are not used to hear indigenous women voices raised and when these “dissenting voices” go against the colonial logic, hate speech becomes a useful tool to maintain the social structure of power. As Butler stressed (1997, p.76), when hate speech is directed toward groups that have been historically subordinated, this discourse becomes a ratification of this structural subordination. Therefore, it is used to maintain the social position of indigenous population and to promote exclusion, discrimination and racism.

“The system of domination, coming from the colonization, incites hatred based on intolerance and power relations, to maintain the *status quo*. It sustains power structures that have been created from the imaginary to the action.”– Otilia Lux de Coti

“This has to do with the power relations in society (...) the reason is that we have not been accustomed, for a long time, to have voices. Neither in the field of justice, economy, legislation nor in education.”
– Carolina Escobar Sarti

“Yes, I believe that the problem lies there, since for the entire power elite and all the power structures, the *indito* was the subordinate, the one who was subjected, dominated (...) those who are grateful, those who accept subalternity.” – Martha Casaus

Functions and Impacts of Hate Speech

“Racism is a set of relationships, structures and social institutions that historically and currently subordinate racially the members of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala.”
Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj, 2004: 257 as cited in Casaus, 2019

According to the literature, harmful speech creates and maintains social structures of power (Van Dijk, 1994; Calvert, 1997; Van Dijk, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005). Likewise, in Guatemala hate speech is used by many conservatives to maintain the *status quo*. In order to keep the normativity, their discourse is used as an instrument to normalize asymmetrical relations of power and define the opinions that are allowed.

Moreover, hate speech encompasses racism and discrimination toward the indigenous population, which motivates a feeling of superiority toward them. Hate speech can cause many effects, it can harm the social fabric and can cause irreparable damages on people's life's, affecting their individual decisions. On a societal level, this discourse provokes a normalization of exclusion and criminalization, and even justifies violence against indigenous women. Furthermore, it enhances the polarization between indigenous people and ladinos, a binary logic that reinforces and institutionalizes the asymmetric power relation (Macleod, 2014).

Regarding to indigenous women, hate speech can cause a feeling of oppression and powerlessness that might lead to the acceptance of their marginalized position in the social structure. According to the findings, it clearly affects the dignity of the person and their self-esteem. Alakali et al. (2017), argued that hate speech creates a feeling of fear and dissuade the person from

an active participation in society.

“It promotes the relations of power, superiority, arrogance, racism and patriarchy. The function is to subordinate, silence, undermine and even eliminate. It is also a manifesto to the contempt of life.” – Otilia Lux de Coti

“Well, this has been a structural historical element, it is not new. The way in which we have expressed ourselves towards indigenous women has always been with contempt, with hatred, with humiliation.” – Martha Casaús

“It causes quite damage on the individuals, it causes submission since the person thinks he or she is strange or weird because society indicates so. A lack of self-esteem. Also causes isolation and negates the individual and their identity” – Verónica Sajbín

“The most concrete effect socially is the normalization of discrimination and criminalization (...) the problem is that it is systematic, it is all the time, with images and narrative that in the end you get used to it and you do not recognize it anymore, it doesn't seem like a strange thing to you.” – Silvia Trujillo

“Hate speech is a starting point that has led to the practice of genocide actions against women. Hate speech becomes action, and becomes a reality for us” – Ana Lucía Ixchiú

“They are hurtful messages that affect individually and collectively. We are talking about a group of women who feel powerless, who feel without rights, but they do not only feel it, they are excluded.” – Sandra Morán

Since it is a systematic issue, indigenous women can find hate speech in commonplaces: in the university, in public transportation, at work or on the streets. Everyday conversations reproduce

traditional racist discourses that reinforces a relation of power and superiority. For instance, calling every indigenous women “*María*” is very normalized pejoratively expression that overrides their individual identity, as well as the constant reproduction of jokes that mock the situation of indigenous people. As Velásquez Nimatuj (as cited on Casaús, 2019: 89) stated, in Guatemala, discrimination and exclusion operate on daily bases as if it would be legal and socially accepted.

The silence of Guatemalan society is also a form of hate speech, expressed through not taking actions to change the situation of indigenous people, reflecting an acceptance of the established power structure. This acceptance is caused by the normalization of discrimination and racism and the invisibility of this issue. Moreover, this structure generates a personal benefit for the ones in power, which decreases their desire to change the situation.

Violence against indigenous women has been present for centuries, from colonial times until the present. According to *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (Commission for Historical Clarification), during the armed internal conflict 88 percent of individuals affected by violence were indigenous women (as cited in Girard, 2014).

Regarding the findings of the study, hate speech can also appear as physical violence, understanding this discourse as a verbal aggression that can rise until the physical level. From the point of view of Girard (2014), hate speech and hate crimes represent a continuum of violence. The damage of violence goes beyond the physical harm, it also damages thinking and disables the potential to create and be creative (Chirix Garcia, 2019). Moreover, symbolic violence is also recognized as a shape of hate speech. In the case of Guatemala, advertising and entertainment reproduce white hegemony and exclude indigenous population. Indigenous women are only represented as a folklore element to promote Guatemalan diversity, which on every day practices is despised and ignored.

“All the time there is the *mijito*, the *indito*, the suffix that indicates inferiority. This always speaks of a relationship of power established by the language.” – Carolina Escobar Sarti

“It occurs in everyday life, in any positions, in the markets, streets, buses, universities, work environments, public-state, private spaces. This rejection of the indigenous population is very strong in our country (...) The silence is very strong, not only among indigenous populations but in society in general.” – Ana Lucía Morales

“The concept of ‘María’ is not told to any Ladino woman, nor is it told to any man, it is a specific concept for indigenous women. It is a verbal - public expression of the way in which this country treats us and the place it intends to give us” – Aura Cumes

“Hate speech is found in everyday life, the levels of violence they experience, both discursive and physical, is very complex. There is the permanent threat, not only verbal, but the threat of violence.” – Silvia Trujillo

“I believe that there is an absolutely direct relationship between femicide and hate speech. (...) It can begin with mockery, jokes, then it rises to ethnic or gender discrimination, then to an expression of hatred where you already go up to murders until you reach genocide.”
– Martha Casaús

Intersectional Discrimination as an Element of Hate Speech

*“The fact of being an indigenous woman places them at a disadvantage situation in relation to women of other ethnicities and mainly, in relation to men due to the triple discrimination, because of their economic position, ethnicity and gender”
Lucrecia Pisquiy, 2007, p. 49*

In order to understand how discrimination, racism and harmful discourse operate, it seems crucial to study it from an intersectional perspective (Ghanea, 2013, Roshani, 2016, Vuorisalo-

Tiitinen, 2016). Hence, when analysing the situation of Guatemalan indigenous women and although it cannot be generalized, there is a triple discrimination where several categories are encompassed: ethnicity, gender and social class (Pisquiy, 2007, Cumes, 2009).

Analysing the level of active political participation, percentages of indigenous people in positions of power or the economic situation of most of the indigenous population and comparing it to the total percentage of indigenous people in Guatemala, the lack of indigenous representation in economic or political positions of power becomes visible. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2014), the 79.2% percent of indigenous individuals live in total poverty, in comparison with a 46.6% of ladino people.

The interviewees depicted that being an indigenous woman in Guatemala represents a defiance, as it means to go against a system of dominance, patriarchy, machismo, sexism and classism. They tend to be on the last link of the power structure in many public and private spaces, like family, education, society or politics. Thus, intersectional discrimination is operationalized in different manners and environments, as well as it is constituted by different actors, such as the society in general (micro level), the media and the state (macro level) (Van Dijk, 2002).

“The situation of indigenous women is a condition of deep structural inequalities and in addition, linked to a colonial logic.” – Silvia Trujillo

“I believe that the challenge of an indigenous woman is to be a woman, to be indigenous and to fight against a whole patriarchal system and a discriminatory society.” – Ana Lucía Morales

“The situation of women has always been precarious and, when analysing indigenous population, still has greater deficiencies.” – Claudia Hernández

“The way in which the colonial structure affects the life of indigenous women is different from the way the colonial structure impacts indigenous men.” - Aura Cumes

The Machinery of Hate Speech

According to the findings, the following section will discuss the main pieces of the machinery of hate speech toward indigenous women in Guatemala and how these elements work together.

Recognizing Hate on the Media

“The media, immersed in a system of representations that obey the ideology and interests of the dominant group, refracts the reality of the country (Guatemala) instead of reflecting it.”
Lucía Verdugo, 2007, p. 674

The mass media plays a relevant role in society, since it represents the eyes of reality for many individuals. It has the power to select the information that is “important” to communicate to the public and therefore, can influence public opinion, social imaginaries and stereotypes.

As Van Dijk (1994) stated, the elites can set the discussion via the media, since it opens the possibility to produce and reproduce their dominant discourse. Currently, the media landscape in Guatemala is dominated by mainstream private media corporations that control most of national television, radio, print media and digital media. Nevertheless, there are community and alternative media that are strongly emerging and opening the battle for more democratic media.

In the case of main Guatemalan media corporations, they are identified as a crucial piece of the machinery of hate speech toward indigenous women. Due to their vast penetration, they are an important element to maintain the system of domination through the reproduction of hate, prejudice and discrimination toward the indigenous population. Moreover, Guatemalan media coverage has been accused of constantly promoting violence (Oropeza & Toledo, 2014).

Thus, the media depicts a modified version of reality that fits with the discriminatory and racist social imaginary which society understands as the truth, therefore, they build reality (Verdugo, 2007). Bearing this in mind, this discriminative and prejudice image of indigenous women is taught across vast majority of media productions.

“It is obvious that the media reproduces the colonial, racist and sexist order of life (...) They reproduce power relations, unless they are alternative media, they do not have a conscience nor a concern to see what kind of message they are communicating to society.” – Aura Cumes

“The media sets the stage for hate speech, they legitimize it.” – Martín Rodríguez

“The media operationalizes the system of oppression, to make them invisible. And this contributes to building ‘sleepy societies’, that are not indignant over certain issues.” – Silvia Trujillo

“There are some media that are more aware, but the media in general transfer it (hate speech), confirm it or even use it. This is so normalized that it is not even questioned.” – Sandra Morán

The disregarded entity

*“It’s clear that despite being a multi-ethnic, multinational and multilingual country, indigenous people continue to be excluded in the media.”
CERIGUA Report, 2015, p. 158*

Besides recognizing media as reproducers of hate speech, they also legitimate the prejudice image of indigenous women that this discourse intends to promote. There does not seem to be any real interest from the media to add the indigenous figure neither to their agenda nor in their newsroom as journalists.

According to the findings, in media this legitimation of hate speech occurs every day through specific use of words and prejudice images. For instance, when it comes to speaking about poverty, media normally present it with an image of an indigenous woman among her children, in a rural environment. The opportunity to see indigenous women representing a powerful figure in the mass media is very low, or almost null.

Likewise, there is a constant reproduction of a *folklorized* image of indigenous women. The media tend to represent them as a cultural element of Guatemala, portraying them with colourful traditional clothing in a rural landscape, without taking them out from the stereotype roles of indigenous women: selling handcrafts, working on the market or preparing *tortillas*. In this case, when media refer to indigenous population in terms of cultural practices, traditional food and crafts it has a positive connotation in society, since in the social imaginary these are the legitimated economic activities for indigenous (Verdugo, 2007).

Regarding the wording of information, media tend to have a biased speech that represent indigenous women as victims, rather than empowered women that are protagonists. There is a constant reproduction of a paternalistic discourse that represents the political and economic elite as the supportive character which solves the problems of a helpless population (Verdugo, 2007). Thus, again, this speech legitimates and normalizes the social structures of power.

Analysing the media as producers of entertainment, it also reproduces prejudice, discrimination and racism. It is mainly represented on comedy programs that mock about indigenous population. For example, there is a very normalized discourse that imitates how indigenous people speak Spanish (normally it is their second language) and tease their accent or social situation.

“I believe that the media deny indigenous women and make them invisible. They just do not take them into account.” – Martha Casaús

“Completely *folklorized*, they (the media) always take advantage of indigenous woman when wearing vivid colours or a traditional clothing. There are many prejudices.” – Lucía Escobar

“To understand this dynamic of inequality or discrimination, we need to see how indigenous women are reflected (in the media) in the public discourse, both words and images.” – Carolina Escobar Sarti

“The media reproduce what most people stereotypically know or think about indigenous women. The media normalizes and feeds what society thinks.” – Aura Cumes

“When the president (Jimmy Morales) was a comedian, in his television program he disguised himself as *indito* and *indita* and his artistic performance was to make fun of the monolingual natives who do not speak Spanish well.” – Ana Lucía Ixchiú

“On many times, they are only *folklorized*. Is rare when they get mention in politics, arts, music or sports.” – Otilia Lux de Coti

Furthermore, the participation of indigenous women in media is very low in comparison to the percentage of population they represent. According to the findings, in Guatemala media tend to reject indigenous journalists, probably based on the fear of diversity and visions or opinions that go “against” the hegemonic model. This can also be understood as a mistrust of their capabilities, which Van Dijk (1984) categorizes as a reproduction of racism that also provokes a biased perspective in the media. The *Centro de Reportes Informativos Sobre Guatemala* (Centre for Informative Reports of Guatemala; 2011), presented a study concerning gender equality in Guatemalan media landscape and stated that since there is not any quota system the media are not interested in promoting female participation, which causes biases media content and reinforces the

asymmetric relations of power between men and women.

The media also legitimate hate speech when indigenous women are not consulted as valuable and reliable sources of information. Hence, when discussing politics, economy or any other professional area, there is almost no participation of academic indigenous women. Information is legitimated by governmental officials, experts or powerful figures, which are mostly ladinos. Indigenous voices are only heard when they come from well-known public figure, for instance, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Verdugo, 2007).

“The academic women should be on the radio every day, but we are not seen by the mainstream media. Media are surrounded by the walls of racism and sexism.” – Aura Cumes

“How are we going to transform our media content if we do not have people in the newsrooms that are willing to present other visions, but there are not any because they do not hire them.” – Silvia Trujillo

“There are very few indigenous women in the media. Perhaps, that I can identify, about 5 journalists.” – Claudia Hernández

“There is no desire, no interest. Neither for the gender issue nor for the ethnicity issue. Any attempt to make them understand, to make them open their spaces to have more indigenous women working in the media or to discuss more about that issue, there is always a barrier.” – Lucía Escobar

Transforming Hate Speech to the Online Sphere

Over time, social media platforms have become an online space where public debate also takes place. Unlike mass media, almost every person has the opportunity to produce and share their own content, in some sense, social networks originally propose a more democratic way of communicating. Concerning hate speech, the establishment of this new media tool has enlarged the

battlefield to counter harmful speech, due to its massive, quick and inexpensive dissemination these platforms facilitate the distribution of hate and violence (Alakali et al, 2017, Guiro & Park, 2017).

In spite that the focus of this study was not centered on online hate speech, social media networks were identified as disseminators of this harmful discourse toward indigenous women in Guatemala. The representation of indigenous population through words and images seems to be the same as in the mainstream media, the speech remains the same, only in a different environment. Since content on social media like racist comments, memes or discriminatory jokes is created and shared by the users, it reflects the feelings and prejudices of Guatemalan society. The possibility to have a hidden identity makes the authors more comfortable to express their feelings because it banishes the fear of dealing with any consequences (Alakali et al, 2017).

Besides, this anonymity on social media platforms represents a huge challenge to counter hate speech. In the case of Guatemala, manipulation of public opinion through social media is a very well known business. In order to influence online public debate, the so-called “netcenters”, disseminate specific messages through a large number of social media accounts. There is not control over these posts, so these platforms are becoming a new tool to continue reproducing and normalizing the system of domination.

On the contrary, social media is an emerging new space that gives a voice to “dissident” indigenous journalists. As they do not find a space in mainstream media, social media is becoming a tool to make the perspectives of indigenous women, proposing a counter speech of inclusion, diversity and equality, visible.

“You start to read the messages and you start to read hatred. It is a reflection of how we are as a society.” – Claudia Hernández

“In general terms I would tell you that what changed was the platform, but the minds that think and build the pieces are substantially the same. The worst is that the new generations, since in universities we are not discussing these things, come with the same prejudices.” – Silvia Trujillo

“The internet does encourage hate speech, since it is easy to reproduce it. Mainly with memes, using photographs of indigenous people, mainly women. Far from being a mockery is the reproduction of hate.” – Ana Lucía Morales

“I think that social networks have played a disastrous role, although we can say that is a space to spread new ideas, you do not have the strength to counteract it, because big companies run the *netcenters*. As much as you try, your chance to counteract those expressions of hate is very limited.” – Martha Casaús

“It is a great tool to transmit these new voices, we would not know them if it was not via social media. Conventional places do not give them space or give them a limited space.” – Lucía Escobar

Identifying the Greater Aggressor: The State?

“Racism happens to be analysed not only from the groups involved, not only from the spaces in which it is exercised (community, family, school, church), but also, from the State, which is considered responsible of the situation of ethnic-racial exclusion and discrimination.”
Martha Casaús, 2019, 6, p. 32

When hate speech is understood as a non-isolated issue, which operates a whole machinery of prejudice, discrimination and racism, it seems complex to point out only one aggressor. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish between producers of hate speech that have access to social power and therefore, can truly influence public discourse and those who do not.

Moreover, when discussing hate speech and the production and reproduction of this

discourse, the major role that the state plays is constantly pointed out (Butler, 1997; Tsesis, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2005). In the Guatemalan context, the state was identified as the greatest aggressor of hate speech toward indigenous women, being recognized as a strong producer of this discourse.

These expressions of hatred might not be declared directly, but it is identified by the lack of attention regarding indigenous population rights and necessities. This becomes evident when analysing the budget destined for education, health or social development in indigenous areas. For instance, the Guatemalan state invests Q.6.87 (\$0.89 approx.) in every ladino person daily, while for an indigenous person the amount declines to Q3.09 (\$0.40 approx.) (Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales. 2017). Furthermore, the findings pointed out that the state also reproduces hate speech through public institutions, such as governmental institutions or the educational system and through their connection to mainstream media.

Moreover, the state does not seem to be interested in redefining the figure of indigenous women in society because it continues to depict them as a synonym of folklore, under-development and poverty. They do not seem to be interested in amending the relation of power and violence that the state has established toward indigenous women.

Linked with the above-mentioned, the elite is also a strong producer of hate speech. In many areas the elite has established this harmful discourse that continues to normalize the system of domination, in politics, economy, arts, culture and even in the academic area. Another element moderately mentioned by the interviewees was the church as a social institution, mainly those with fundamentalist tendencies, that legitimate the marginalized position of women in society.

“It is not that the state is giving you the idea that indigenous people are to blame for underdevelopment all the time, you will not find it that explicitly. But the state acts by omission, by not doing anything. The

state does not work actively in all institutions to deconstruct those deeply racist social constructions. On the contrary, the state reformulates them all the time, they use them.” – Silvia Trujillo

“There is a responsibility from the State, creating an imaginary of exclusion and hierarchy” – Verónica Sajbín

“The Guatemalan state is double moral. Because obviously in their public policies, in their official discourse the recognition of indigenous peoples is stated, but in their practice it is different. In practice they continue to kill people from hunger, in their practice continues to deprive people of health. In their practice there are still women and indigenous peoples without access to education. I do believe that the state is a perpetrator and a total aggressor of the colonial and oligarchic hate speech.” – Ana Lucía Ixchiú

“The elites in general, economic, social political elites and even cultural and academic elites, the military elites of course, that they have reproduced this discourse (...) When a society in its imaginary has normalized this type of discriminatory practices, in discourse and in action, it is very easy for decision makers in this society to reproduce that discourse.” – Carolina Escobar Sarti

“There are people who work within state structures that sometimes own or belong to the media and use them as a tool to justify and send their discourse (...) The issue of the media is to keep repeating those speeches, although they should be neutral, with valid information sources, not reproducing violence and calling for analysis and change.”
– Claudia Hernández

“The state is the biggest discriminator and the biggest racist, the one that uses discriminatory public policies against the indigenous population. And when there really is a crisis or power vacuum, it uses violence and even genocide. I say that Guatemala is a racist state, and a racialist state that executes racism to suppress or exterminate the

population. (...) This is a society invaded by the cancer of racism.” – Martha Casaús

“The result is very evident when you look into development rates, women who die during pregnancy are mostly indigenous because the access to health services is low, deaths of new-borns mainly impact indigenous families, illiteracy affects mostly indigenous populations, living conditions are scarce for this population.” – Ana Lucía Morales

Hate Speech Cases and Public Discussion

As discussed in the previous sections, due to the normalization of discrimination and racism in Guatemala, indigenous women must deal with hate speech every day, even though it might not be recognized. Based on their freedom of expression and supported by the system of domination, many individuals reproduce this prejudice discourse constantly. Bearing this in mind, hate speech cases occur on daily bases, although most of them are not reported.

The Guatemalan legal framework only regulates discriminatory actions and does not have any specific regulation or legislation concerning hate speech. The Article 202 bis. from the Penal Code penalizes acts of exclusion, restriction or preference based on different innate characteristics. This article also specifies that when discrimination is based on ethnic or cultural differences, the punishment needs to be harder. According to the current legal panorama, this discrimination regulation works as sort of protection from hate speech.

There are some well-known cases of discrimination toward indigenous women, which have helped to settle some boundaries in the public and private space. The case of Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj (2002) and the case of Rigoberta Menchú Tum (2003), both very prominent figures.

El Tarro Dorado

Irma Alicia Nimatuj is an anthropologist, journalist and writer, with a PhD in anthropology from Texas University, Austin, EEUU. She is recognized as a very prominent academic woman.

On the 5 of June 2002, after attending a conference to discuss the crisis of coffee in Guatemala, Nimatuj and a group of participants decided to have dinner together. They went to “*Tarro Dorado*”, a restaurant located in zona 13, Guatemala City. In the entrance of the restaurant, ladino women entered without any trouble but since Irma Alicia was wearing traditional clothing her entrance to the restaurant was prohibit.

“You cannot enter because you are wearing traditional clothes.”

“She was dressed as an *india*.”

She denounced publicly the facts, and achieved a moral punishment, since the owner of the restaurant and the workers had to publicly apologize. In that time, the Discrimination Article 202.BIS was not yet approved, her public denounce was an event that provoked pressure in the political sphere to penalize discrimination acts.

Setting a Precedent for Dignity

Rigoberta Menchú is an advocate and leader of indigenous rights, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

On October 9, 2003 she went to the Guatemalan Constitutional Court to present a legal recourse against the inscription of Efraín Ríos Montt as presidential candidate for the general elections in 2003. Ríos Montt conducted a coup against the government of Romeo Lucas García, and the Guatemalan Constitution prohibits the right to run for presidency when the individual has leaded a coup. He was sentenced with Genocide against Ixil population in 2018, after his death. In the moment Menchú was leaving the Court, she was physically and verbally assaulted by a group of supporters of the *Partido Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (Guatemalan Republican Front Party; FRG). The group attacked her indigenous origin, using pejorative language.

“India. You should be selling tortillas.”

“You should be selling tomatoes on the market.”

Under the Article 202.BIS of the Penal Code, which states that any discrimination act based on ethnic origin and/or gender will be punishable, Rigoberta Menchú presented criminal charges. The complaint was presented against 5 individuals that were identified from the supporter’s group. On 2005, Guatemalan justice sentenced the defendants, with three years and two months of prison, which could be converted to a fine.

Added to the little confidence on the judicial system due to the high levels of impunity, there is not a culture of denunciation, which results in a minimum number of discrimination reports. Besides, the mentioned article in the penal code does not explicitly cover language as a form of discrimination. The legal processes tend to be large and very exhausting for the complainant, therefore, not many cases reach the courts.

The cases that quickly reach court and get media coverage, normally were denounced by a public figure or a well know indigenous woman. On the contrary, reported cases by non-prominent people do not attract attention from media, and when they do, the articles are little and without much details. Therefore, media coverage seems crucial to promote awareness of the usage of language, in addition, publishing the sentences might as well raise consciousness that discrimination, racism and hate is punishable by law.

“I think it is very important to continue talking about these cases because the societies that do not talk about them have a very short memory. So, I always say that it seems extremely important to name things (...) We must continue talking about discrimination and racism.”– Silvia Trujillo

“The expressions are permanent, the speeches are terrible, every day.

When you are talking about prominent women, it is visible, it is made public, it is known.” – Sandra Morán

“It is important to make them (the cases) public, because Guatemala still does not differentiate between opinion and crime. People believe that they have the right to give their opinion by inciting hatred, reproducing hate speech, based on freedom of expression.” – Lucía Escobar

“The message is that you cannot damage a person, because of their condition, because of their identity, because of their ethnicity. Because there is a sanction, that the population understands the right of freedom expression is not being denied but that free expression cannot be loaded with hatred or justification to violence, there are limits.” – Claudia Hernández

Discussion

As many studies have demonstrated, findings indicate that in Guatemala, discourse has been used as a tool to maintain a structure of power that has positioned indigenous women on the bottom of the social structure. This discourse is filled with hatred, prejudice and discrimination and is used as an instrument to demonstrate power through language. In order to overcome this structure, an entire discriminatory, patriarchal and racist system needs to be deconstructed and besides, a long history of harmful speech to be broken.

In this context, it seems relevant to understand hate speech as a continuum of violence, since this issue has diverse edges that cause aggression on different levels. Therefore, Guatemalan indigenous women are constantly confronted with harmful discourses that damage their dignity and make them feel disempowered. Furthermore, this speech affects their life conditions and opportunities and enrolls them in a racist system that categorizes them depending on gender, ethnicity and social position. Thus, it seems crucial to highlight that there is a connection between

the symbolic and the material. This discriminatory speech promotes action; therefore, it shapes the reality of Guatemalan indigenous women.

The media, as reproducers, play a major role in this problematic. On the one hand, there is no interest neither in including indigenous journalist in the newsroom nor in addressing indigenous topics appropriately and on the other hand, there is an absence of awareness concerning the usage of images and words that reproduce and legitimize prejudices toward indigenous women.

Likewise, the state appears to be another main aggressor of hate speech toward indigenous women. Over the years this actor has played a crucial role to maintain this structure of power that only benefits the elites and ignores vulnerable groups of population, which clearly affects indigenous people the most. Although this discourse might not be expressed directly, it provokes irreparable consequences on indigenous women lives, undermining their human dignity.

The aim of this contribution is to open a debate of such major issue, which due to the normalization of discrimination and racism, seems to be invisible for society. In Guatemala, there is a lack of studies concerning major social problematics, therefore, this study provides a general conceptualization of the issue of hate speech toward indigenous women and aims to make these racist social practices, which are, as well, based on a racist social imaginary, visible.

Further research should study hate speech in media coverage and identify bad practices of journalism. Furthermore, it would be crucial to gather further experiences of indigenous journalists and identify patterns of intersectional discrimination. Another important research area would be to conduct critical analysis about public discourses concerning indigenous population. The interviews of this study were mainly conducted with prominent figures in terms of gender and ethnicity, as well as with representatives of well know human rights organizations. Therefore, further research should focus on analysing this issue more in-depth with non-prominent indigenous women from different regions of the country.

Apparently, the machinery of hate speech toward indigenous women has been operating for a long time. The situation of indigenous women is of constant struggle and resistance and there is still a long way to go to break this racist and discriminatory walls that surrounds Guatemalan society and blocks the opportunity to achieve equality.

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Abstract

This paper analyses the systematic use of hate speech against indigenous women in Guatemala and reflects the impact of intersectional discrimination. The aim of this study is to conceptualize hate speech toward indigenous women and to analyse the characteristics of this discourse, the impacts and the major aggressors. Through extensive literature research and twelve semi-structured interviews with scientists, journalists, human rights defenders and representatives of social organizations, a deeper insight into this topic was gained. The findings indicate that hate speech towards indigenous women can be found in almost every private and public space, and is characterized by discrimination, racism and sexism. With regard to the primary aggressors and in the consolidation of public discourse, the state and the media seem to play an important role. In Guatemala, hate speech is part of a systemic problem based on colonial logic, a system of domination and strong power structures. This study argues that it is necessary to deal with hate speech and its impact on indigenous women and to bring this issue into the public discourse.

Keywords: hate speech, indigenous women, Guatemala, discrimination, racism, gender

Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie analysiert den systematischen Einsatz von Hassreden gegenüber indigenen Frauen in Guatemala und spiegelt die Auswirkungen intersektionaler Diskriminierung wider. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, Hassreden gegenüber indigenen Frauen zu konzipieren und die Merkmale dieses Diskurses zu analysieren. Durch umfangreiche Literaturrecherchen und mittels zwölf teilstrukturierter Interviews mit WissenschaftlerInnen, JournalistInnen, MenschenrechtsverteidigerInnen und VertreterInnen sozialer Organisationen konnte ein tieferer Einblick in dieses Thema gewonnen werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Hassreden gegenüber indigenen Frauen in fast jedem privaten und öffentlichen Raum zu finden und von Diskriminierung, Rassismus und Sexismus geprägt sind. In Bezug auf die primären Provokateure und bei der Festigung des öffentlichen Diskurses scheinen der Staat und die Medien eine wichtige Rolle zu spielen. In Guatemala ist die Hassrede Teil eines systemischen Problems, das auf einer kolonialen Logik, einem System der Dominanz und auf ausgeprägten Machtstrukturen beruht. Diese Studie argumentiert, dass es notwendig ist, sich mit Hassreden und deren Auswirkungen auf indigene Frauen auseinanderzusetzen und dieses Thema verstärkt in den öffentlichen Diskurs zu rücken.

Schlüsselwörter: hate speech, indigene Frauen, Guatemala, Diskriminierung, Rassismus, Gender