social sciences

Article

The Sociocultural Dimensions of Gender-Based Violence in Afro-Mexican Communities in the Coastal Region of Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract: In Mexico, as part of the historical and political context, race heavily influences a person's opportunities. Moreover, the data refer to a scenario of normalized gender-based violence caused by sociocultural practices, the lack of application of the laws, and structural discrimination. Given this precedent, the purpose of this study is to analyze the social and physical dimensions of gender-based violence in an Afro-Mexican community in the south of Mexico. The techniques used to gather data for this study consist of a variety of styles of interviews with a group of Afro-Mexican women from the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, who are survivors of gender-based violence, and participant observation obtained through conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Oaxaca. The social phenomena of emigration and alcohol and drug consumption, in combination with the cultural dimensions of the machista practices in this region of Mexico, are the material and immaterial spaces where GBV is produced and reproduced daily. An intersectional perspective of the context can be helpful when collecting data for effective and well-grounded public policies and intervention projects established on a feminist and women-centered perspective.

Keywords: Afro-Mexican women; machismo; gender-based violence; violence dimensions

Citation: Sartini, Ilaria. 2022. The Sociocultural Dimensions of Gender-Based Violence in Afro-Mexican Communities in the Coastal Region of Oaxaca, Mexico. *Social Sciences* 11: 188. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11050188

Academic Editors: Dawn Hutchinson and Lori Underwood

Received: 30 December 2021
Accepted: 21 April 2022
Published: 24 April 2022

1. Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations initiated the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which perform a fundamental role as global benchmarks for development. The fifth goal of the SDGs precisely envisions the achievement of international gender equality (United Nations 2021). Historically, the dismissal of the practice of upholding gender equality has become a structural and diachronic phenomenon. As part of the framework of international jurisprudence, gender-based violence violates fundamental human rights such as the right of non-discrimination and the right to live a life free of violence, as has been exposed in the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, in the Convention of Belém do Pará in 1994, in the Protocol of Maputo in 1995, and in the Convention of Istanbul in 2011, and thus constitutes a crime of torture according to the Convention of Belém do Pará (De Vido 2016). The violence exercised, whether physical, sexual, or psychological, has significant repercussions throughout a woman's life: from feelings of humiliation, shame, and worry to a perception of loss of control, confusion, feelings of guilt, and fear (Vaca-Ferrer et al. 2020). Each woman reacts differently to the violence suffered; the reaction also depends on different macro-structural variables, such as cultural context and access to work (Chérrez Jaramillo et al. 2017), exosystemic variables, such as perceived social support, and variables related to her personal life, such as her level of empowerment, religious beliefs, and cultural values (Coker et al. 2004). The approach is to listen to her personal history to understand the context of this universal phenomenon. To achieve this, there must be a focus on social intervention with the survivors of gender-based violence, taking into account the sociocultural sphere that permeates the life and background of the women (Vaca-Ferrer et al. 2020). The awareness and knowledge of all social aspects and cultural dimensions that

affect a woman's life in relation to gender-based violence is important to understand her actions, how she comes to terms with the empowerment process, her obstacles, and her strengths (Baines and Stewart 2011). To analyze or understand this situation or these phenomena, it is necessary to consider the cultural context in which both the women and the violent acts are formed and developed (Geertz 1997). This demonstrates the importance of understanding the socio-anthropological context of intervention projects or the effectiveness of public policies focused on women survivors of gender-based violence. The existing policies and projects with GBV survivors are placed in a scenario of a global willingness to achieve gender equality. In this regard, for the empowerment of women it is necessary to take a real step forward and convert good words into good practices. Naila Kabeer, the creator of the Human Development Index (HDI), defines empowerment as "people's abilities to make strategic decisions for their lives in conditions in which these abilities have been previously rejected" (Kabeer 1999, p. 437). Currently, the lines of action established in the Beijing Platform, in 1995, include several specific commitments for the socio-political empowerment of women, including the incorporation of the gender perspective as an integral approach in public policies. The problem arises when the vision of public policy considers the gender approach but with a simplistic understanding of empowerment and a traditional conception of the role of women, without modifying the dimension of power from within (Robinson Trápaga et al. 2019). In Mexico, women aid programs such as "Prospera" (formerly 'Oportunidades') are an example of this vision (Ochman Ikanowicz 2016). The emphasis in this paragraph is two-fold: public policies and social programs implemented in vulnerable communities, such as those of survivors of gender-based violence, must consider the sociocultural complexity of the contexts and take into account individual empowerment as the basis for collective empowerment. Individual empowerment can be achieved in various ways, which change from person to person; yet, it is necessary to go beyond the economic sphere, as public policies to counteract the feminization of poverty have done so far in Mexico (Ochman Ikanowicz 2016). The challenge of these projects is to change the variables of the implementation in order to see a structural change from a grassroots perspective with a more poignant and personal understanding of the socio-cultural reality of women survivors of gender-based violence.

To achieve this, it is fundamental to identify the problems GBV survivors face and to act on the roots of these issues. In this research, the women were encouraged to share their stories to identify such obstacles. This study aims to comprehend the different sociocultural dimensions and aspects involved in the structural and subjective nature of gender-based violence against women in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca by giving a voice to the Afro-Mexican women. Furthermore, the research wants to underline the importance and effectiveness of qualitative methodology (Geertz 1997). At the same time, Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism (Mead 1972) stresses how fundamental it is to get to know the daily reality of the people we talk to during fieldwork and to be able to understand what they mean and do. Finally, Mies (1993) points out in her work on feminist research methodology how the qualitative approach is key to establishing a more horizontal relationship with the people taking part in the research.

In the community of this case study, how people perceive themselves and their social reality, together with the patriarchal traditional roles, influences gender performativity in the daily interpersonal interactions. When people communicate, they are very much aware of their social roles. Based on her research on women who had experienced sexual violence during the Colombian civil conflict, Kahn (2019) asserts that by discussing their own experiences of violence, women engage in a process of personal and collective empowerment, which inspires other women to do the same. A dynamic leading to positive outcomes can be triggered to foster mutual aid and solidarity among women. Gender-based violence appears in different forms and can manifest itself in diverse ways: from the most explicit physical and sexual violence to psychological, emotional, and economic violence. Gender violence knows no borders, but in different latitudes of the world it can assume diverse cultural connotations and can become somewhat normalized. The data of the geographic

area of this study, the Oaxacan Costa Chica in Mexico, refer to a scenario of violence normalized by cultural practices and, in some cases, to a lack of enforcement of existing legislation. Moreover, notwithstanding the measures taken in recent years, the number of victims continue to grow (Mexican Government 2020). The centuries of structural violence perpetrated by the Mexican State against its Afro-descendant population affect every aspect of this community. Here, death, as noticed by Smith (2016), does not only come in the form of a bullet, but also as a slow asphyxiating process triggered by the coexistence of circumstances such as poverty, discrimination, and the lack of access to healthcare, education, and justice. If we take a constructivist perspective on gender violence (Allen 2011), it can be understood as the outcome of different circumstances that in many cases could have been prevented by the state, which theoretically has the responsibility to guarantee justice in the framework of the social contract. However, in relation to the Afro-Mexican population, the absence of the state's involvement can be regarded as structural, creating inequalities and reinforcing the extreme marginalization that is visible in the socio-political structure of current society (Sesia 2011). Together with the indigenous communities, the Afro-Mexicans of the Oaxacan Costa Chica live in the most marginalized urban and rural neighborhoods. Perry (2016), in her study with black women in Brazil, illustrates how economic marginalization intertwines with discrimination in the access to public health, education, employment, and fair compensation. As part of this research, I argue that this extends to the Mexican context, in which race intensifies the experience of gender-based violence in the Oaxacan Costa Chica.

One of the problems regarding gender-based violence is that the psychological, economic, and emotional aspects are not considered violence by a large part of the population. These aspects are normalized as character traits or even as gender-specific behaviors. This violence is woven into general society by generations of established norms and practices. Only now are some of these practices becoming questioned. This is true not only for the area of the case study but for regions in every continent.

In analyzing the sociocultural context of origin, it is necessary to introduce some historical facts for a better understanding of the dynamics of this case study. In Mexico, race is historically and politically an important component of social life and influences one's opportunities and tenor. To provide a definition of what the word race (*raza*) means in Mexico, I will use the words of Christina Sue (2013):

> In Mexico, *raza* or *la raza* (race or the race) has a variety of meanings that are more expansive than the English term, including common folks, the people or breed. When Mexicans use *raza* in a manner similar to English speakers' use of race, it connotes notions of ancestry, hierarchy and groupness. (Sue 2013, p. 203, italic in the book)

Sue explains that the translation from the Spanish word *raza* to the English "race" does not convey its true meaning (Sue 2013). When discussing *raza* in the Hispanic academic environment, the term ethnicity is preferred. Therefore, I argue that this miscommunication is not only linguistic but also cultural and political for audiences outside of Mexico. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this article, I use the word "race" as an equivalent of the concept of *raza* in Mexico.

It was not until April 2019 that the Mexican government formally recognized the Afro-Mexican population as part of the Mexican nation. Most of these peoples are inhabitants of the states of Guerrero, Veracruz, and Oaxaca. In the latter, 5% of the population identify themselves as Afro-descendant and live in the coastal region. Oaxaca is the second Mexican state with most people identifying themselves as Afro-Mexican (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020). The first survey reporting Afro-descendant Mexicans was in 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2015), and the first official national census including them was in 2020 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020). In 2015, 2 million Afro-Mexicans were reported, whereas in 2020 the number increased to more than 2.5 million. These data must be translated as an increase in self-recognition and acceptance of their own race. This is an ongoing process that will take decades to achieve, fostered by sensibilization

projects regarding Afro-Mexican culture and history in Mexico. This is necessary because of centuries of racist practices implemented by the elites that leave the Afro-descendant communities in a situation of extreme marginalization and poverty, in which they are poorer and less educated and have limited access to healthcare and food security compared to their 'mestizo' counterparts (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2015). In addition, there is a lack of acceptance and incorporation of their cultural practices and customs into the wider Mexican discourse. In order to create a national rhetoric after the independence, the philosophy of *mestizaje* was created; this was a process in which Creoles, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and foreigners had to give up their individual identities in exchange for the identity of *mestizo*, an identity characteristic of all Mexicans (Navarrete 2004). The nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* promoted between the 19th and 20th centuries aimed at the creation of a "cosmic race" for Mexico, in a sort of combination of the pre-Hispanic and the Spanish roots of its people. *Mestizo* was theoretically everyone who was "mixed" (*mestizo*), but practically only those who displayed Spanish descendance, that is, a fairer skin tone, were considered to be *mestizos.* The *mestizo* elite adopted Western culture as it was associated with the idea of modernity and progress, two key concepts of the positivist period (Navarrete 2004). This mentality is still reflected today, as was ascertained during the fieldwork process. The willingness of Afro-Mexicans to recognize themselves as *mestizos* is part of the discourse of recognizing oneself within a greater Mexican society, as this is associated with better status. Mexican society, which until recently did not recognize Afro-descendants as Mexicans, denied them not just a place in the national census but also their history, culture, and identity.

According to Belausteguigoitia (2009, p. 7), black Mexican women are "subjects hierarchically marked by gender, color, sexuality or class, as some of the most important variables of the difference that translates into inequality". As in other contexts outside Mexico, the bodies of black women are more sexualized than the bodies of indigenous or *mestizo* women. The roots of the eroticization of their bodies lie in the colonial past, in which they were brought from Africa to be exploited on the plantations and as prostitutes. They were systematically sexually, physically, and psychologically abused by their masters. They were used as machines to give birth to a new labor force to increase the fruitful slave market. This was how the stereotypes, the macho and androcentric imaginaries, were constructed, which established Afro-Mexican women as women of easy access, available for all sexual desires that the white man wanted to satisfy (Pineda 2016). In her article, Salmerón García (2020) interestingly points out, on one side, the hyper-sexualization attributed to Afro-Mexican women and, on the other side, how beauty standards in Mexico do not consider Afro-descendants' traits as "beautiful", as is reflected by the absence of Afro-Mexican women in the media. So, the paradox of considering Afro-descendant women as "hypersexualized" and "ugly" is inherently violent because it fetishizes women and reproduces colonial forms of oppression (Salmerón García 2020). Consequently, the intersectional discrimination Afro-descendant women are subjected to (not only in Mexico) concerns their social class, gender, and ethnicity and the discrimination against them for the color of their skin and their allegedly exacerbated sexuality, projected on them by historical sexual exploitation.

The context in which this fieldwork was conducted is a small village[1] in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, where the main source of income is fishing. As witnessed during the participant observation and confirmed during interviews, there is a lack of infrastructure in the village, in which only the main road is paved. Moreover, marginality is increased by the precariousness of the facilities and houses. For instance, the roofs of the houses need to be replaced almost every year because they are made of sun-dried *plátano* leaves, and they are destroyed during the hurricane season. The health center consists of a small clinic in which every 9 months the doctor changes. The doctor in charge of the practice is a medical student carrying out the compulsory internship period in a rural clinic. There is no secondary school (from the age of 14 to 18) in the village and no connection to the next village with a secondary school. For children to go to school, families must

either pay for a collective taxi or rent a room in the village where the secondary school is located. It is not uncommon for young people to interrupt their studies: the boys start working as fishermen to support their families, and the girls work as housewives if they marry or become pregnant. The ethnic composition of the village mainly consists of Afro-descendants, *Mixtecos*, and *Chatinos* (two diverse indigenous communities from the region). Within the village and the surrounding area, Afro-Mexicans are discriminated against by the other ethnic groups. The Afro-Mexican community carries the oppressive stereotype of being vulgar, lazy, promiscuous, bad workers, and not trustworthy. A biased and harmful narrative that "legitimizes" their lower position in Mexican society. These stereotypes further oppress black women as the patriarchy renders them unequal, subjects of male desire, and unable to achieve individual agency.

Afro-Mexican women, in contexts such as the one of this case study, tend to occupy the lowest roles of the Mexican social hierarchy. They are housewives, fish sellers, farmers, day laborers, and traders of food products and handicrafts, often fulfilling multiple roles to get by. As evidenced by their lower literacy rates and access to education, Afro-Mexican women with no schooling or a basic education have on average one more child than those with at least a high school education (Sesia 2011; Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2015). Furthermore, there is a very clear distinction in the literacy rate between men and women: 76% of women know how to write and read versus 86% of men. This can also be seen in the enrollment rate from primary to secondary school: 68% of females enroll in school versus 72% of males. The correlation between schooling and the number of children is a topic already widely investigated (Barro and Lee 2013; Caldwell 1979; Livi Bacci 2017; Schultz 2002), in which increased poverty levels often result in a lower education rate, which therefore impacts the fertility rate. There is an inversely proportional correlation between schooling level and the number of children. In 2020, the fertility rate of women in the state of Oaxaca was 1.6; yet, the rate was higher, 2.5, among Afro-Mexican women (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020). In the village and in other localities of the Costa Chica, women often get pregnant at a young age: between 14 and 16 is the average age of the first pregnancy (data provided by the village health center). This means that young girls tend to abandon schooling due to pregnancy and become housewives. One of the most eloquent datasets refers to income: in 2011, Afro-descendant women in Costa Chica earned MXN 2275 on average, while their husbands earned MXN 5801; this means that women on average earned 39% of what their male counterparts earned (Government of Oaxaca 2011; Sesia 2011, p. 41). In reality, Afro-descendant women are generally engaged in domestic work and childcare and can contribute to the household economy through the preparation and sale of food (especially fish and tortillas)[2] and the sale of beauty products. The idea that the symbolic place of women, Afro-Mexicans or otherwise, is the house or the kitchen is reproduced by the performance of the domestic works and intensified by the media (Perry 2016).

Following a sexual division of labor, Afro-descendant women typically perform care-related tasks, in which care also describes the political and economic support of the household (Sesia 2011). In this regard, it is important to underline the difficulties Afro-descendant women had to face in Mexico to be taken into account as active members and as people with agency. Even within their communities, they were regarded as "cookers", "mothers", and "care givers", and this was also reflected in the Afro-Mexican movement, which at the beginning marginalized them within the movement itself. Since the 1990s, the Afro-Mexican movement has begun to grow and to put forward stances of political recognition, fighting against discrimination and marginalization (Varela Huerta 2021). Even though women were also part of the movement back then, even in their own community they were not treated as equals to men. As a matter of fact, with increased participation and involvement in the Afro-Mexican movement, to draw attention to their situation and the multiple discriminations they face, Varela Huerta (2021) argues that political activism becomes part of a triple working day, in addition to their domestic work to maintain the household and their remunerated work to support their family. It was the political activism that has provided

them with the power and agency to become aware of their situation and to start fighting these discriminations, firstly within their own communities (Varela Huerta 2019). Initially, they struggled to gain visibility even within the political movements for Afro-Mexican political recognition, as they were relegated to performing the "back-office" activities of support (such as cooking meals), reflecting a certain gendered division of tasks. However, thanks to their active involvement, they were able to shed light on the positionality and specificities of Afro-Mexican women in the Mexican society, becoming representatives of Afro-Mexican civil society's movements (Varela Huerta 2021). This is an important milestone as more political representation and activism can lead to less marginalization of Afro-Mexican communities and thus also to more support for the GBV survivors.

It is important to understand what factors lead to women's oppression and possibly to their agency. So, here, I briefly mention the phenomena intersecting with gender that I will examine in the following pages. Multiple factors affect the socio-economic vulnerability and marginality in the Costa Chica of Mexico, primarily corruption and institutional racism. As a result of the lack of opportunities in this area, there is also a high emigration rate to the United States and to other states of the Mexican Republic. The phenomenon of emigration to the US started thirty years ago in this part of the coast region (Sesia 2011); now, almost every family can count some member who went "to the North". The municipality where the research was carried out has one of the highest emigration rates on the Costa Chica. Emigration is still a masculinized phenomenon, even though in the last decade there has been an increased number of widows, unmarried, or separated women emigrating with their children.

Considering these factors, this article explores the socio-cultural phenomena and dimensions in which gender-based violence originates in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca. The argument is that race intensifies the GBV dynamics because Afro-Mexican women experience economic marginalization and discrimination when accessing public health, education, employment, and fair compensation.

2. Materials and Methods

Before carrying out the fieldwork, contact was established through social networks with the first key informant: the president of a civil association involved in the recognition of Afro-descendants and indigenous rights that had worked with a group of women in the village. Then, applying the snowball method, contact was established with the other informants, some of whom hosted the researcher in the village throughout the research period. Thanks to the networks of neighbors, friends, and relatives of the key informants, ten women of African descent who were survivors of gender-based violence participated in the research. Their profiles are summarized in the following Table 1. Moreover, interviews were carried out with an academic of the Universidad del Mar de Puerto Angel; the directors of the "Institute for Equality between Women and Men and Human Rights" (2014–2016 and 2017–2019) of the municipality where the fieldwork was carried out; NGO members who have worked with women of the village; and the village representatives (*representates del pueblo*).

Table 1. Profiles of interviewees.

Names of Interviewees	Age	Civil Status	Years of Marriage	Children	Schooling	Working Status	Years Living in the Village
1. Marisol[3]	42	Married	15	3	Primary education	Housewife and seller	42
2. Juana	58	Married	44	5	Incomplete primary education	Housewife	23
3. Antonia	61	Married	45	4	Incomplete primary education	Housewife	10
4. Karina	23	Married	8	2	Primary education	Housewife	4

Table 1. *Cont.*

Names of Interviewees	Age	Civil Status	Years of Marriage	Children	Schooling	Working Status	Years Living in the Village
5. Carmen	30	Married	10	3	High school and first year of university	Fisherwoman	23
6. Guadalupe	47	Widow	21	4	Primary education	Fish seller	21
7. Rosa	68	Widow	34	3	Incomplete primary education	Housewife and fish roaster	24
8. Ana	52	Separated	15	2	Secondary education	Tortilla seller	9
9. Paula	34	Married	14	3	Secondary education	Housewife	34
10. Juliana	49	Married	32	3	Primary education	Housewife and seller	15

Personal Data Elaboration

An ethnographic methodology was adopted using life histories and semi-structured and open interviews, depending on the context and the available time for each interview. Additionally, participant observation was essential for the realization of the study and involved living together with a family of the village in the state of Oaxaca between November 2018 and February 2019. The necessary characteristics for inclusion in the sample were being a woman of African descent (either by both parents or only one) and having suffered gender-based violence (GBV), whether physical or sexual. The script prepared for the interviews and life histories varied on several occasions so as not to interrupt the narrative flow of the interviewee, thus giving more emphasis to the themes and narrative modalities that the women wanted to adopt. More specific questions were asked only when these had not been answered during the interviewee's narrative. This technique proved to be very fruitful, allowing unexpected data to be provided and thus enriching this study.

Once the women corresponding to the required profile (Afro-Mexican and GBV survivors) had been identified, the interviewer arrived at their homes to brief them on the project. Establishing all norms and ensuring they wanted to take part, a date in which they were at home alone or when the men of the household were absent was set to carry out the interview, thus creating a more intimate and comfortable environment for the woman to talk about her experience. Before consenting to the interview, the interviewee was informed that her interview was going to be recorded and then transcribed. The time spent with each woman varied, due to their time commitments; with some women, the researcher spent up to 3 h, while with others only 40 min. With some of the interviewees there was the chance to spend time together apart from the interview, to achieve a greater level of trust and intimacy, while with others this was not the case.

In total, 10 interviews of Afro-Mexican women survivors of domestic violence (all the perpetrators were their partners or now ex-partners) were recorded. The constraints of the research focused on the difficulties of finding women willing to share such sensitive and personal stories; their available time proved to be one of the key factors for determining the sample of this research. Another compelling factor was the richness of the data gathered during the three months of fieldwork, meaning not just the interviews but the additional participant observation and the real-life experience of living with a family in the village; the combination of these factors proved to be more than extensive in providing answers to the research questions of this investigation.

The interviews were recorded in the women's homes and backyards, with prior informed consent, then transcribed and analyzed for commonalities among the stories. Subsequently, an analysis was made through the Atlas.ti program, categorizing the data according to the variables selected. In this way, a thematic analysis of the topics discussed was achieved, offering further ground for the conclusive analysis. The data analysis applied codes based on the research objectives, allowing an in-depth exploration of additional emerging themes in the narrations of the participants. Open interpretative coding (Smit 2002) was used to do this.

3. Results

The investigation identified different dimensions in which violence against Afro-Mexican women is produced and reproduced. For each one of the results listed in this section, it is shown how this is connected to the group of women taking part in this research.

3.1. Social Control and Sexual Division of Spaces

As a result of the discrimination that Afro-Mexican women are subjected to by members of other ethnic groups in the village, seen in combination with the exacerbated sexuality attributed to Afro-descendant women, there is a higher degree of control over them and narrower opportunities of remunerated work. As mentioned previously, the work opportunities for Afro-women are minimal. One side to this is that the husbands prefer their wives to stay at home, taking care of the house and the family: they want to be the sole breadwinners, and in doing so, they want to keep the strict sexual division of work to reproduce the image of their masculinity. The extreme jealousy translates into physical control, with the intention of producing respect and reproducing masculinity through machista practices. Discrimination of Afro-Mexican women based on their alleged exacerbated sexuality is proven by the general masculine idea that all Afro-Mexican women are putas, whores, and if they have not manifested this yet, sooner or later they will "reveal their true nature" (Personal communication, 18 December 2018: director of the "Institute for Equality between Women and Men and Human Rights" 2017–2019), possibly with another men. As reported in the interviews, this can trigger the dynamics of physical and sexual violence (Fenton 1998). The questioning of this model of toxic masculinity can be ground for further research. Consequently, as historically witnessed, Afro-Mexican women are often at the bottom of the social hierarchy, extremely marginalized, and support their subsistence on minimal economic profitability, selling tortillas or fish door to door, with limited possibilities to gain a higher education (Sesia 2011). These circumstances increase the incidence of economic violence against the women, in addition to physical and sexual violence. The survivors participating in the study recount higher degrees of social control than their Mixtec or Chatino neighbors in relation to labor disputes among their families.

The results gathered from the interviews and participant observation in the village, highlight the importance of different themes. Firstly, machismo and other related patriarchal behaviors are very present in all human interactions in the village community. As a matter of fact, if we can identify machismo as an offshoot of the patriarchal structure, hyper-exhibited, that reproduces the oppression of women without filters, in a violent way, there is another side to this dynamic seen through the concept of marianismo. This is a response to the machismo that produces and reproduces machos, in which conservative mothers and grandmothers (the caregivers) pass on their way of thinking and acting to their sons. This mentality views men, even from their childhood, as the center of all attention and efforts. It is a sense of excessive sacrifice that follows the logic of "the greater the sacrifice, the better the woman". The term marianismo comes from the Virgin Mary, the ideal of woman all women should aim to become, prioritizing the family over everything, even over themselves. This means women who carry out any type of remunerated work must do this in combination with care-related tasks: care of the house, of the children and of the elders. They are discouraged from working by their husbands and families, especially if the husband can earn enough money to guarantee a decent quality of living for his family. Women usually leave their homes to visit a relative or their mothers-in-law and occasionally to visit friends. On occasion, when there are public meetings in the village, taking place in front of the office of the village's representative (representante del pueblo), or there are Prospera grant meetings, women attend these events. Most women must ask for permission to go to the meetings and to leave the house. There is division and lack of communication among these women as a result of the constraints of staying at home. Most women live the vast majority of their lives at home and going out is frowned upon by older generations, even more so at night, as a woman would be thought to have interests outside the recognized moral values of a "decent" woman (Personal communication, 15 January

2019: Antonia, housewife, 61 years old). Women who work independently are overlooked and discouraged to do so, unless their economic and social situation is so precarious that it might have detrimental consequences on their lives and that of their children. Moral judgement regulates behaviors and people's lives, resulting in women survivors of gender-based violence having no or very little support in coming to terms with their situation. Moreover, control is exercised by the family, acquaintances, and community and is exacerbated after the wedding day. Traditionally, the wife goes to live at the house of her husband's family, unless they already have a house of their own in which to start their new life together (Personal communication, 20 November 2018: Juana, housewife, 58 years old). In cases of GBV, given this tradition, it is even more difficult for the women to find support as many have to live with their abuser and his family. As noticed by previous research (Salmerón García 2020) and during fieldwork, families, either the woman's or the husband's, tend to reject and not give support to the GBV survivor.

3.2. Work and Psychoactive Substances Use

In the village, just like in other areas of this region, Afro-Mexican women suffer a greater horizontal and vertical segregation in the labor market. As a matter of fact, the jobs they perform are usually housework, fish selling, work in the field or on farms, and trade of food and beauty products and handicrafts, often fulfilling multiple roles to get by (Sesia 2011). The segregation to this sector comes both from the tasks Afro-Mexicans have performed traditionally and from the discrimination and sexualization of Afro-descendant women. Women who have a job outside their home have to face the burden of a double or triple working day (Narotzky 2004). They must comply with their alleged "duties" as wives, mothers, or sisters, carrying out care-related tasks in the family. Even though Narotzky (2004) describes the income women receive to contribute to the household as being ancillary to that of the male breadwinner, she does not give a complete understanding of the situation. In fact, sometimes a woman's wage is the only source of income the family can actually rely upon, as the economic violence often present in the couple's relationship implies that the husband decides on what to spend the money. However, in the case of alcohol or drug addictions money can quickly be spent on non-related household expenses. Moreover, substances such as alcohol and cocaine have recently started to be consumed by some younger members of the community (data provided by the health center of the village). This drug misuse increases the frequency and severity of domestic violence episodes. Many studies correlate the consumption of alcohol or drugs with domestic violence, especially in the contexts of marginality and poverty (Gilchrist et al. 2019; Sequeira 2009). By analyzing the interviewees' accounts with the information provided by the health center of the village, it has become apparent that cocaine consumption starts at an earlier age than what was previously witnessed, implying yet another psychological and economic burden for the families and a huge hazard for the physical and social health of the consumer. Due to the lack of economic resources available to the majority of the population, drug addiction means that part of the income destined for the needs of the household is systematically lost. Drugs function as a trigger of both economic and physical violence; almost all the women interviewed recounted how alcohol use has been a trigger of violent episodes in their lives, first as daughters and later as wives. In fewer cases, drug use appeared in their accounts; however, the implications of this use on the lives of the women are equally, or more, serious. Alcohol and drugs are substances consumed not only by the Afro-Mexican population but also by other ethnic groups in the village. Even though alcohol is on occasion consumed by the women, few of them are seen in the local "pubs", cantinas, as it is not well seen that a woman occupies these spaces, unless she is the owner or accompanied by a relative/partner.

3.3. Judicial Violence and Lack of Support

The lack of support for a woman survivor of gender-based violence originates from both the social surroundings and the ineffective judicial system. A key informant told me about cases in the village where lack of justice has been reported regarding judges not willing to attend meetings, claiming women should have been accompanied by an "official delegation" of the municipality, when this is not a legal requirement. It is interesting to note that there are no female judges in the area, nor any that are Afro-descendant. This may be a contributing factor (Ifill 1997) that does not favor the judicial *process* of gender-based violence cases (Hendricks 2017) in particular, but it is not restricted to Afro-Mexican women. Confirming this information, the National Government decreed the "gender alarm" in 2016 and then reaffirmed it in 2018. This means that the National Government gives a budget to act quickly and effectively in projects for the eradication of gender violence in states where the rate of gender violence is high, such as in the case of Oaxaca (Personal communication, 10 December 2018: director of the "Institute for Equality between Women and Men and Human Rights" 2015–2017). As previously mentioned, as an effect of structural racism, which is inherent in the Mexican state, being black constitutes a factor of discrimination; this is intensified if the person is a black woman. Considering that Afro-Mexican women are statistically less educated (it is not unusual that only primary school is completed) and have limited access to a support system, their marginalization is intensified by the impossibility of applying to those assistance programs for "minority" groups, as it was only in 2019 that they started to be recognized as an ethnicity in Mexico (Personal communication, 28 December 2018: president of a civil association fostering indigenous and Afro-Mexican people's rights). This multiple discrimination makes them extremely vulnerable when dealing with a racist and patriarchal judicial system. In practice, most women decide not to embark on a judicial trial against their prosecutors (Alves 2017; Salmerón García 2020). None of the interviewed survivors informed against their partner legally. They were too scared to either lose the case or to undergo the process of finding a lawyer and, more importantly, to run out of money. In addition, the lack of support of the family (both hers and her partner's) and not having any kind of economic security discouraged them from going through with the action; most end up either leaving the home or asking the partner to leave the house (Blotta et al. 2011). Thus, they do not receive any retribution for their partner's actions or any support to enable them to move on with the rest of their lives.

3.4. "Going to the North": When Emigration Reproduces Violence

3.4.1. Debts

A phenomenon recalled in every interview and throughout the duration of the stay in the village is emigration to the US or "going to the North" (irse al Norte). Six out of the ten husbands of the interviewees had emigrated abroad. This process began in the 1980s in this region, and although it began as a strongly masculinized phenomenon, now some women go to work in the United States as waitresses, cleaning operators, etc. (Sesia 2011). The phenomenon is widely spread among the Afro-Mexican families, as, due to discrimination, they have limited access to the more lucrative sectors of the labor market (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020), pushing them to emigrate abroad. The high costs of the journey, for which families often go into debt, are usually not enough to take migrants beyond the border. While I was doing fieldwork, we discussed this topic with Carmen, a fisherwoman of 30, whose enthusiasm and strength do not disappear even when she is talking about her husband:

> "We sold everything: the fishing nets, the boat, he even went to Guerrero to borrow money from his mother's family. He knew the *coyote*[4] since they were kids, and still... one day he calls me and tells me that the car to take them across the border never arrived and that they have been waiting for two weeks. He didn't even have the sheets to sleep on the floor. He is still there. Working in Caborca to save money and try again [to cross the border]. And we are here. *Ay*

> *mamasita*... But we endure, that's how we women do it: enduring." (Personal communication, 4 January 2019)

If the husband does not send money home, it is very difficult for his family to make ends meet, put food on the table, and afford the school material for the children. Therefore, women must be innovative: many of them start working without telling their partner, others make food to sell and send their children to bring it to the customers. It is very common that women sell *tortillas* and fish. In Afro-Mexican cuisine, fish (cooked, fried, *guisado*, grilled, salted, marinated, *enchilado*, etc.) is an essential part of their diet, and Afro-Mexican women are recognized for their delicious plates of fish in the community.

To combat the economic hardship, some women have collectivized their food preparation to be able to gain more money and create a community, to empower them to work together. Four of the women interviewed have taken part in two different groups of food makers. Due to the marginalization of this community and of its people, it is hard to find the presence of the state in terms of economic or social support for the families. The only option left is to create personal and new ways to cope with the hardships of life when trying to get by.

3.4.2. The Call and Gossip

It is important to note how the geographical distance from her partner does not always correspond to greater autonomy or freedom for the women. It is rather difficult to draw a line and say whether emigration is a completely positive or a completely negative phenomenon, both for the people who stay and those who leave. It is neither of the two, as it really depends on the subjective experience. It is a process that can bring either more hurdles or give space to a women's agency, or it is a mix of both. In any case, it is a changing process. It can lead to a situation of control and coercive violence over the woman's behavior by her husband's family, by the community itself, and by the partner through the telephone. It should be emphasized that as of recently only a few areas of the village have telephone and internet coverage, and few families have a wi-fi router in their home, which influences the time and availability to take the calls. Guadalupe was a strong woman of 47 years old at the time of our discussion. She opened up about her life, telling me more incredible stories than I had ever heard. She also talked about her experience when her husband migrated to the US and how hard it used to be for her:

> "He told me to go to [take] the call to Pinotepa and as I didn't arrive on time for the call because there in Rio Verde the judicial [police] opened fire to halt a criminal, they couldn't get the cars through. Aaah, you should have seen how he picked on me, he told me everything. "For so long you have been busy fucking!", "That's the way you like it, huh?", I just said "if to tell me this you are calling me now, save your money", I told him "because you need it more than I do", I told him. I had gone all the way there to receive nothing, and I didn't know how to deal with all that was happening, and even when he arrived [back from the US], he climbed up on a pole to see how I was doing while selling fish. I had a life you can't imagine. Instead of coming home to eat a *tortilla* [after selling fish], I would come home to cry." (Personal communication, 12 December 2018)

Social control by the family and the community is something people, and especially women, must face when their partner emigrates. The other vehicle of social control is gossip (*chisme*) which can easily arrive over the phone to the United States or to the location of the husband. It can really harm and sometimes ruin not only the reputation of a person, but a whole marriage (Nava Reyes 2005). Even though gossiping is stereotypically "women's business" (Gluckman 1963), men are also part of it; indeed, there is even a physical place where fishermen relax after fishing that is called "the pole of gossip" (*el palo de los chismes*). To actively engage against gossip is almost impossible. Therefore, the interviewed women told me they have *learned* to deal with gossip by starting to ignore it. The process required to achieve this is not easy and can reverse the way life is perceived and understood. The women taking part in this research recounted that they had gone through this as part of an

empowerment process together. In previous research, it was underlined how gossip can create bonds of friendship among women (Brown 1987; Federici 2020), but here, it has the opposite impact on them: it is, rather, an obstacle to empowerment (Umer et al. 2017). The process of counteracting the spread of gossip has been empowering, not gossip per se. To be able to reach such a level of awareness and be able to speak up for themselves when facing gossip about them or their family, this is what they find empowering. Moreover, as mentioned above, the sexualization of Afro-Mexican women and the discrimination they face are the frames of a shared narration. The women who took part in this research, and who are also members of working groups, recounted that they were able to overcome their depression and the anxiety problems caused by gossip by sharing their experiences with other women facing the same dynamics of discrimination and threat.

3.5. Body Control

An aspect worth mentioning is birth control. In formal interviews, this topic was barely covered, but in informal discussions and thanks to the information provided by the health center of the village, this has emerged to be a relevant topic in families. Firstly, it is important to mention the data. In 2018, when this fieldwork was carried out, the population of the village was ca. 1800 people, out of which ca. 600 were children from 0 to 14. When I recounted these figures to some women in the village, they were astonished and affirmed that it is very difficult for a woman to build a life, grow as a person, when she has to take care of her children. "Imagine if each one of us here in the village is going through this . . . It is too hard to ensure a future for our kids" said an acquittance when we were talking about children in the village. According to the statistical data gathered in the last census, Afro-Mexican women have a higher birth rate than the average in Oaxaca (1.6 against 2.5 children) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2020). As the data show, and as witnessed during fieldwork, Afro-Mexican women have to deal with a number of children, which means that it becomes less and less likely for them to combine care-related tasks and remunerated activities. It is important to mention that in the state of Oaxaca up to two years ago abortion was penalized, according to article 315 of the Penal Code of the State of Oaxaca. The law prescribed from 6 months to 2 years of reclusion for those women who wanted to end their pregnancy voluntarily, under the following circumstances: (1) if they did not have a *bad reputation*; (2) if they managed to hide their pregnancy; and (3) if the pregnancy was the result of an *unlawful union*. When none of these three scenarios was in place, women could be charged with 1 to 5 years of reclusion for aborting (Salmerón García 2020). Clearly, the legislation did not help women to have proper control of their bodies.

The title of this paragraph refers more to the violence of the kind of body control imposed by some of the husbands on their wives, that is, no family planning, rather than the birth control strategies agreed upon and acquired by the family. Even so, women are not seen as victims, but rather as survivors with their own strong agency. This is shown by some women adopting the following strategy: they have a hormonal implant in their body without their husband knowing about it. This way they are able to retake control over their bodies and their lives. The health center provides patients with the implant and the doctor inserts it under their skin. It is not clear how many undergo this treatment or how the health center is seen by the population regarding this aspect. As it is a very delicate topic, it is not easy to talk about it even among the women of the village. It has to be underlined that it is a risky decision because of the possibility that the husband gets to know what has been going without his consent. Surely, it provides women the opportunity to have power over their bodies, deciding when and if they want to have a (or another) child.

3.6. Agency and Support

As briefly mentioned earlier, 4 out of the 10 women interviewed have worked or currently work in two feminized spaces; one is an established mixed (meaning not only Afro-Mexicans but also Mixtec and Chatino) cooperative of fisherwomen, while the other one is an organized group of Afro-Mexican women only, making products out of the

hibiscus plant (*jamaica*). Both experiences were created by women to give themselves better work opportunities. Yet, the result was not just about having more economic support; rather, it was about counting on social support to create a space where women, and especially GBV survivors, could spend time with other women willing to listen to them and help each other to manage life's difficulties that would go beyond making hibiscus jam or mussels *tamales*.[5] The idea of the cooperative emerged after getting to know the experience of another cooperative of women, fisherwomen, in Veracruz. Thanks to an association willing to help them with their formation, the women were able to attend customer service courses and empowerment workshops. The first ones to help them at a practical level, by increasing their skills, and the second one to help them psychologically, to be aware of themselves, and thus to build agency. At the beginning, it was difficult to create such a space due to the differences between members, the internal gossip, and the hurdles of working together (Sartini and Caravaca Sánchez 2021). After various changes in the composition of the group, the collectives managed to achieve their objectives; the time spent together has given many women the opportunity to find a support network and an objective shaped on their own needs and visions. Moreover, this experience helped them to manage relationships both with women and with men, to overcome fears such as talking in public or talking to men, and to work in a group. These were all skills that worked positively to build their empowerment and to provide them with more tools to possibly enter the labor market.

The themes that emerged through the accounts of these women offer us the opportunity to approach the socio-cultural dynamics of the Afro-Mexican population of the Costa Chica of Oaxaca through a female gaze and thus approach the women's issues with a feminist analysis.

4. Discussion

This study aims to provide an answer to the question "What are the different dimensions and sociocultural aspects involved in the structural and subjective gender-based violence against women in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca?". As shown in the results' section, five main sociocultural dimensions have been identified where violence against women is produced and reproduced: (1) social control and sexual division of spaces; (2) work and psychoactive substances; (3) judicial violence; (4) emigration; and (5) body control.

4.1. Social Control and Sexual Division of Spaces

The sociocultural practices of control on women originate from their performance as good wife and good mother. Moral beliefs and judgements are shaped by the patriarchal and Christian representation of what a woman should be, here just like in other countries where the Christian morality is interiorized by the population. Together with machismo, marianismo actively contributes to reproduce inequalities. The "*marianas*" are accepted and respected in the society (Sequeira 2009) and form part of the structure which organizes social life. Marianismo is a well-defined model of beliefs and behaviors that outline the ideal woman. The concept is based on the idea that the qualities personified by the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe are the ones that all women should long for. This concept is divided into two dimensions: one that focuses on a sense of collectivity, self-sacrifice, devotion to family and care, and the other one that fosters dependence, submission, passivity, and resignation in the face of oppression (Kulis et al. 2003). This is the root of the moral beliefs applied to judgements, like the lenses of optical glasses. Machismo and marianismo produce and reproduce domestic violence, either directly or indirectly, creating the idea of a submissive woman. This creates the basis of the division of spaces for men and women, as each space is devoted to specific "gendered" tasks: housework, child rearing, care of the elders for women and outdoor work for men. The division is not always as clear, but for most of the families, this is what has been reported and witnessed. A consequence of this situation is that women do not tend to create strong social bonds, and therefore, when it comes to organizing themselves for community projects or to work together, for instance in a cooperative, there are obstacles in achieving these goals as they are not accustomed to

this level of female interaction. Due to these hinderances, even opening up about domestic violence or actively helping someone is considered an extremely difficult act. There is a huge lack of social and familial support, resulting in women having to deal with their violent husbands or relatives on their own, relying on their own strength and personal assets, often trying to hide the violence from the others, either to protect their children or other relatives or because they may become threatened.

4.2. Work and Psychoactive Substances

Work corresponds to a dimension that can help prevent violence, when seen through economic violence; yet, this financial independence can also trigger domestic violence as it is not always well seen that a woman, a wife, a mother, leaves the house to work, especially if the husband can already provide for the family. Fights concerning the allocation of the family's income can be a constant source of violence, which is exacerbated when the money is spent on psychoactive substances such as alcohol or drugs.

Sufficient data have not been collected to give a more complete understanding of this new phenomenon, to show the reasons why and the means of obtaining cocaine in a generally low-income population, and why they start consuming it. A sound explanation about cocaine's use among very young people was given in an interview with an academic and was confirmed by two fishermen. Apparently, boys start using cocaine to go fishing at night and in the early hours of the morning. As many of the young people now go to school and fish only occasionally, they are not used to the heavy work and the early schedule this work requires, and so, they begin to consume cocaine to keep awake and do their job. The consumption of the drug in the short and long term implies an increase in the marginality of the consuming subjects (Minujin and Kessler 2015) and in violence towards the partner.

4.3. Judicial Violence

Judicial violence is a serious problem when considering gender-based violence cases in Oaxaca, just like in many other parts of the world. The whole judicial process is structured in such a way that the victim has a harder time presenting herself as a victim and not as seductress or a *mala mujer* than the perpetrator has building a defense (Epstein 1999). Moreover, complicit in this is, on one hand, the patriarchal and conservative mentality that many judges, doctors, lawyers, and administrative personnel have, making it practically and psychologically impossible for the survivor to reach the end of the judicial process. On the other hand, men have strong bonds of loyalty and belonging to the systems of power that have naturalized the use of violence through the mechanisms of devaluation that *de facto* affect women, removing responsibility from the perpetrators and blaming the victims (Facio and Fries 2005). As explained in the previous sections, this is even truer and harder for Afro-Mexican women due to their multiple oppressions. The dominant image of black women as passive and undereducated are key aspects of the racist and stereotypical narration (Perry 2016) to undermine Afro-Mexican women's credibility during trials.

In this context, the spread of corruption is a serious obstacle to finding justice; even if we leave economic corruption behind, if the judge is a "*carnal*" (very close friend) or "*compadre*" (relationship of acquired kinship) or simply an acquittance of the violent partner, he will not be inclined or willing to prosecute the perpetrator.

4.4. Emigration

Emigration of the partner is seen either as the prolonging of the coercive violence (Personal communication, 13 January 2019: Marisol, housewife and seller of 42 years old; Mitra et al. 2018) or as providing more agency to the women, although limited. Migration to the US acts as a very strong change for the couple, who then face new challenges and new pressures. Women must initially face fewer economic resources before their husbands find a job and earn enough money to send home in the form of remittances. Even then, it is not unusual that they do not send anything, and new families are created in the US In these circumstances, the telephone becomes a weapon of control rather than a means

of communication. Via the means of the phone, families and friends in the village tell husbands how their wives are behaving, often spreading gossip of their misconduct and thus controlling them (Skolnik et al. 2012; Nava Reyes 2005). Additionally, with the calls the husband exercises a form of control and psychological manipulation over the wife: not respecting the time of the call means feeding thoughts of her infidelity, not respecting her husband's authority, making him "less of a man", and undermining her position as a decent woman. The phone gossip is communicated from one country to the other, either regarding real events or only communicating false information about the family's behavior in the village. Through the means of the phone, a lot of information comes and goes, and it can heavily influence the lives of those who are left in the village (Nava Reyes 2005), such as when granting permission to attend a meeting or to travel to visit a relative in the capital, as well deciding about the future of the children. Gossip can become very hard to manage for a woman left alone as the head of the family. The agency women develop as strategies to deal with the spread of gossip about themselves is to be able to ignore it and to continue with their lives. Here, I would like to underline the fact that generally women, at any latitude, perceive the loss of income (or job) not as something that affects them or their dignity in the first place, but rather as something that affects their responsibility in taking care of the people they are in charge of (Anzorena 2008). This is to underline how strong and pressuring they feel the responsibility on themselves to be when money is tight. Thus, they are pressured to find new solutions. These pressures can sometimes lead to positive and other times to negative outcomes, such as depression, anxieties, and stress (Álvaro et al. 2019).

As far as agency is concerned, sometimes the hurdles can turn into opportunities. Even though once the husband emigrates there are still forms of control on the wife, physical and sexual violence often ends because he is no longer present. There is also a chance that if he returns, he would be changed by the emigrating experience and his behavior towards his partner would also change. Additionally, during the time the partner is gone, women have to deal with less money for their family, so they look for work they can perform and that coincides with their "duties", such as taking care of the house and of the family members they are responsible for. This has led some of the women I interviewed either to join women-only working groups or to prepare food to sell, also helped by other family members. The agency they develop thanks to working in a group with other women has empowered them and helped them to overcome some of their fears and to improve their well-being and their social status in their community.

4.5. Body Control

In the village, as well as in many other parts of the globe, the value of a woman is also measured based on her fertility (Anukriti and Kumler 2015). When getting married, the women are aware of this and having an abortion is unthinkable, as it is expensive, not possible under all circumstances, and the first available hospital is 2 h away by bus. Moreover, due to cultural and religious moral standards, abortion is not seen as a tool for family planning (especially by men). Families who adopt a family planning strategy and agree upon it use contraceptive methods such as condoms and the contraceptive pill. In couples where domestic violence has been reported, such as in the sample of this study, unplanned pregnancies are not unusual, and they are seen favorably by men mainly for two reasons. First, according to the macho ideal, a real macho is the one who can prove his fertility, even with more than one woman, as extramarital sex is not considered a problem in the patriarchal system; in contrast, if this happened to a woman, it would be the end of her. Secondly, a new pregnancy ensures that the woman will spend more time in the home, thus not allowing her to pursue activity outside the home.

An additional aspect often reported both in the interviews and in informal conversations with some men of the village is that one or more pregnancies also ensure that no other man will want to run away with a woman with children as it is considered a huge economic and social hazard. This reflects a degree of toxic masculinity that is fostered by

the patriarchal system and machismo: it is not only dangerous for women but also for the psychological and physical wellbeing of men.

Finally, solidarity for Afro-Mexican survivors of GBV is found in feminized spaces. After getting to know one another, women can open up about their situation, eventually finding support or even just someone to listen to their stories; it is a space in which to focus on something that can cherish them and give them satisfaction and a way to reappropriate one's life.

The findings of this study highlight the dimensions where gender-based violence is produced and reproduced. Currently, the dimensions reported in this article have been addressed only in part by public policies, leaving out the violence caused by the partner's migration and any policies at all addressing men and young people regarding hard drug consumption in rural villages.

To conclude, in order to understand how gender-based violence is racialized in Mexico or, better said, at least in this specific geographical, cultural, and socio-political area of Mexico, it is fundamental to take into account the marginalization process of Afro-Mexicans that has continued for centuries and the hyper-sexualization of black women. Despite the precarious conditions shared with other ethnic groups in the communities, the discrimination towards Afro-descendants comes not only from the white elite, but also from the mestizos, Mixtec, and Chatino people. Additionally, the sexualization of black women's bodies happens also within the Afro community. As a result, survivors of gender-based violence find it difficult to access either justice, work, or those services that could help them to improve their lives. As a defense and survival strategy, Afro-Mexican women resort to creative ways of dealing with the obstacles in their lives, being able, in some cases, to turn them into opportunities.

4.5.1. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Often, projects and policies have a top-down approach, without actually understanding or being willing to see the roots of the problems they try to act upon (Ochman Ikanowicz 2016). In the long run, this is translated into non-effective policies or policies that are not as effective as hoped for in the first place (Ochman Ikanowicz 2016). The anthropologist Rita Segato (2003) underlines how important it is to take into account qualitative and anthropological research to build effective policies to fight gender violence. I strongly believe in the bottom-up approach of research, and thus of policies, as to act on a problem you need to have a clear idea of the whole situation. Asking the people affected by that problem and trying to find a solution together has proven to be effective for policy and project implementation (Jiménez-Aceituno et al. 2020; Jørgensen and Fallov 2022; Osland and Peter 2021). So, one of the policy recommendations would be to get more Afro-Mexican women with different backgrounds involved in governmental committee boards and courts of justice, fighting gender violence and supporting human rights. By "different backgrounds", I mean women who know what the difficulties of living in rural areas are; women, for instance, who have worked with gender-based violence survivors in those areas, as well as feminists. In this regard, it is advisable to establish greater and more reliable connections between the municipalities and the central state, and the municipalities and the federal states, so as to ensure representation and participation in the committee boards and task forces creating policies and regional projects. At the local level, what can be done is to foster feminist education and sex and affectivity education in schools starting from kindergarten, as the positive outcomes of education on affectivity have been witnessed among children too (González 2002). What is important is to foster the progressive autonomy of the child (Fernández and Herrera 2017), that is, taking into account what a person (from childhood to adolescence) can understand and do, depending on her age, and to tailor sex and affective education programs to it. Regarding access to health services, it would be wise to allocate in the local health center a fixed doctor who is also trained in gender violence cases so as to allow the creation of a trust relationship with patients, especially women. Moreover, an increase in shelter houses in the territory would be a good step to take. Here, GBV survivor

women could be welcome and find shelter with their children, but also find legal and psychological help when needed. The author here does not take for granted that women will automatically go to these places in the case of violence, but at least, it means providing them with an additional choice.

Regarding men in the community, more programs and policies addressing them rather than only women should be created. It would be advisable to build positive models through school education. Workshops about gender equality and the redistribution of tasks would benefit both men and women, because in this way the economic burden would not fall only on one person (Segato 2003; Personal communication, 20 January 2019: worker of NGO fostering women's rights and food security). The problem of alcohol and drug consumption should be addressed at its roots: what are the causes? How are they related to men's wellbeing in the long run? This should definitely be ground for further research.

Last but not least, it is important to work towards Afro-Mexican people's rights. The official recognition of Afro-descendant people in Mexico was surely a fundamental step in this process. Now, what still needs to be accomplished is the decolonization of the public institutions that should guarantee equal access to their services to the population. As a variety of studies suggest, color-blind policies are ineffective in fighting for equality (Bailey et al. 2017; Omi and Winant 2014); place-based, multisector, and equity-oriented initiatives, rather, are tools to decrease the marginalization (Bailey et al. 2017) of Afro-Mexicans. These kinds of projects would be focused on the specific problematics of the recipient communities by working on the different areas of their marginalization. As a matter of fact, marginalization is the result of centuries of discrimination. This has translated into poorer healthcare facilities, harder access to the labor market, difficult access to housing and social housing, faraway schools, the absence of public transport, and food security problems (Bailey et al. 2017; Gaumer et al. 2015; Hurtado-Bermúdez et al. 2020). These are the basic services that a state is supposed to give to its citizens. Negating access to these services means to actively discriminate and marginalize part of the population, thus making it more vulnerable. Moreover, to increase the awareness about the Afro-Mexican population's history, it is important that school programs include this in their curricular activities.

To implement these suggestions, the Mexican Government and the federal Oaxacan State should allocate more money to education and human rights agendas.

4.5.2. Limitations

The number of the sample can be regarded as a limitation as with more people more dimensions might have been illustrated. For further investigation, it would be interesting to analyze how the dimensions of violence's reproduction are considered by the public policies and programs in Mexico.

Funding: Fieldwork was made possible in part thanks to the Lustra+ scholarship from Leiden University.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the head of the Research Seminar in Modern History at Leiden University, the place where the author was trained and started this research.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Due to anonymity reasons, no dataset will be made available.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks all the participants in this research.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 The name of the village is not mentioned so as to preserve the interviewees' privacy and safety.

2 The Mexican tortilla is a type of thin and round bread made with maize or wheat flour, depending on the region.

3 All the names are fictious so as to preserve the interviewees' privacy and safety.

[4] A person who organizes the travel to the USA and guides the migrants on the other side of the Mexican border.

[5] Typical coastal dish of sweetcorn flour and another ingredient (herbs, meat, fish, or seafood) wrapped in *platano* leaves and cooked.

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