

Oral History Interview with Virginia Marta Velazquez

Conducted by Neil Brandvold

for Georgetown University's Institute for Women Peace and Security
Profiles in Peace Oral History Project

February 21, 2021

Washington, DC

transcribed by Anne-Cecilia Byrne

Interviewer: [00:00:00] Okay, so to begin, before we start we want to inform you that if there is a question in which you don't feel comfortable responding, there is no problem in not doing so. Just say "eh" or if you say something and after you decide not to, just let us know. And, when filming others in the office, they can do the same. If they don't want to be filmed or this person does, with confidence you can tell us, then we will not release anything. Also, if there are things that you don't want to talk about in the video or there are things that you don't want mentioned or...

Marta: Mhm.

Interviewer: Well, can you tell me a little about your story? Where were you born and how did you begin working here?

Marta: Well, I was born in San Pedro de Tutule in the Department of La Paz. I am indigenous, my mother is Lenca. For reasons of life, my mother gave me away to an aunt, but they had lots of money. I think my mother did this after seeing that I would be okay. So this aunt, well, she was an excellent aunt, a mother quite frankly and she raised me. She was my father's sister and I was practically raised by my father's family. So, my father never recognized me as his daughter, but there I was raised and as a child I had abundance in everything because they had [00:02:00] a huge store where they had everything. But, from there, I saw people's necessities in that they would buy one thing and they didn't have enough to buy the other. But my aunt got married and she moved to Tegucigalpa with her husband. So then I stayed with my grandmother. So at the time, the relationship with my grandmother was not that great compared to my grandfather and my aunt. All grandmothers during that time wanted to raise submissive daughters that served others. Suddenly as one follows these processes, they start understanding. Then at 13 years of age, I moved to Tegucigalpa to work as a domestic worker and there in Tegucigalpa I found some teachers and they were teachers and they had a ton of books. I really liked to read those books and there I asked them many things as I had not finished primary school. So, they said to me "Marta you should finish primary school". So, I finished it in night school. So then later on an aunt needed me to serve as a nanny for her daughter [00:03:54]. She said to me that we could go to San Pedro and I said that I didn't know because I had a daughter. My daughter was I believe 1 1/2 years old. So then, one of them tried to abuse me. I grabbed my daughter and I left. So then I decided to move with her and at the time I was accustomed to the affectionate care of the professors as they had treated me like a daughter and my aunt treated me like an employer, but an aggressive employer. There is where I had my first problem because her husband was a lawyer, who actually recently passed away and he had some barbecues there and the other lawyers came to drink and eat. So, there I was able to lose them and started looking for work in another place and my friend took care of my daughter and I worked in another place and that was that. Well there I started working, what I mean is that my youth and adolescence was spent beautifully, working but then I met with [00:05:25] the father of my children and my life changed, a total change as to what I was accustomed to. So then I got together with him and we had to live with our in-laws and we did everything we could so that they could be taken care of

well and all. But the reality is that the guy always was irresponsible. He left, he came and impregnated me, then left, then came back. Like that one day a couple of colleagues told me that “they were going to create a land reclamation, Marta and so it’s in a different place from here. So let’s go”. Well I said “let’s go because I did not have the means to pay for the little room of the house in which I lived”. So, they built a shelter with four sticks. Well, I had three kids and so there I started. There I met the land reclamation called “Seis de Mayo” in that colony. There I met Father Guadalupe. He came to give chats to the colleagues that were at the land reclamation. So I think that there I was active you know what and sometimes they didn’t have anyone that could help them write and I would write the cards for them and things and I would take advantage to sell my pastries there, my stuff. Well there the Father saw in me in that work and then told me to go to a workshop, to progress [00:07:23]. And there they gave me my first workshop and there is where I opened the night school. I came from there and then began organizing myself with Caritas. So then there we opened a children’s dining room as well. From there, we opened where there was a cooperative with other women so that we could plant vegetables and other things and like that I started getting to know the farmers over there during that time. They came to the training session with the syndicates and I always stayed for the training sessions where the syndicates stayed and so we went and left the food because we sold food and left food and I stayed in the training sessions where I always listened to what they said. Well just like that I started learning about many things and sometimes some other colleagues of the syndicate thought that I was a syndicalist. And one day, one of my colleagues asked, “Marta and why don’t you be a part of the board of directors?” And I said, “it’s that I am not a syndicalist.” And “so why by God do I always see you here in the meetings?” “Yeah I see you, I always come for the syndicate’s workshops” I told him. “But I am always here to learn.” And so, well, like that I started becoming involved there in the popular movement and there as well we started organizing women and in arrived a woman here named “Daniela Margel” and so she came to know me. And so, she says “Look Marta I am going to send you to the Primer Encuentro Feminista (First Feminist Conference) in Honduras” [00:09:23]. So there you will appear because the dining room we were around 60 women and there as well they came to talk about their problems with violence that they had. So then I had to listen to them because they always had confidence in me. And so I said “oh, women are always having problems” and we always supported the patronage as well. We boycotted to have water services, transportation, electricity because we all had experience in boycotting. We knew how to stop the train and those towelettes with vinegar, we knew how to use them since they threw bombs at us. But in the end, we saw that the patronage always just utilized the women to sweep, that we would make their food but we were never in the negotiations. And I said “but why are the women never there and we are the majority”? Well when I went to the event of the Feminist Conference, well there they spoke a little bit about the context of women and our rights. So I came back with the idea in my head and I told my women colleagues, “I think we have to create our own organization of women but not a feminist organization”. And they remained, “No Marta, feminist no”. And I with shame said “no feminist nor God wants to hear the cry of the men to the sky”.

And so then my colleagues did not want to organize themselves [00:11:22]. So, I went “even if they are single women I will start.” Well, I grabbed my female colleagues that didn’t have a partner even though I did but I no longer paid attention to him. So we started organizing ourselves and bringing colleagues to come and train. But afterwards our colleagues realized that the workshops and all that were beautiful and they started integrating themselves. Well at that point it was 1991 and we decided to establish ourselves as a women's movement and we called it a movement because we were a lot of women, well on the street, we were a movement. *Marta coughs* Sorry. And so they said “movement?” they said to us. And we said “yes movement”. And so, that's how we remain as a women's movement of the "López Arellano" until today. So now for a long time...

Interviewer: And how have you seen this movement change from the beginning because there have been a lot of distinct challenges like how it started with some things and there are other challenges coming.

Marta: Yes. Well we have gone from process to process. First, the colleagues did not agree with us. They always tried to trip us up. And we always tried to show that it was not what they thought. That we are, although it is true that we were feminist women that we did not even know much that it was feminism but that we were always in the social struggle [00:13:22] but that at this moment it was the struggle for our rights. So, of course, the patriarchy has a hard time understanding that. But then, we were always showing a lot of respect in the community. The female colleagues that worked with us were shown it as well. We have, if they had a partner, we have tried to show them the same respect as our colleagues and we have never had complaints. Even when our colleagues wanted to go on a trip when we went to Tegucigalpa. First they tell me “Marta, but go and to tell them that you are going because that is how they will let me go” because I had to ask them for permission. Then, but they started to have more confidence in us and then there was no problem. In the end they have been learning and unlearning things. At first, just like all has a cost, right. We did not really know within the movement what we wanted as a movement. Well, the promotion schools began to appear. So we registered in a promotion school. Two colleagues first and well there we learned everything about the issues of violence, handling the family code and everything. They taught us how to handle the filing process to go to the courts. Well, we said, “well then this is what we are going to do. To attend to women who have cases of violence and support them in it” [00:15:17]. Well, that is what we have been doing. In the beginning, we went with them to the prosecutor's office, to the forensic doctor everywhere because the reality is that the Public Ministry was just starting to be recognized as well. Well, in the processes, the women have been learning to recognize all of these places. We have given them the telephone number where they can call. So now the community, at least the women, now if they have problems, they already know that they can go directly to the police. They will go only more in cases of violation. If it is more aggressive then they come so that we can accompany them. And that gives us great pleasure because women have learned to seek their places in where they can be supported. Sometimes they always look for us because sometimes they go and they mistreat them. Until recently, they have gotten rid of what the women had to do

to be able to go to court to file a complaint, one had to come well-dressed. So, it would be a struggle because the woman runs out, beaten like this with a short or a shirt and there she arrives at the court and they say "no, as they come, we cannot attend to them" and so it costs these judges to understand that. They already have an order to attend to the women as they arrive. But even in some places they always insist that they arrive well-dressed. But that has also been our awareness campaigns that we have been doing to bring awareness and [00:17:17] prevention campaigns so that all problems of violence are recognized. And the community starts changing a little bit in those roles. So then I say they are processes but now it gives us pleasure to see that many young people go with their female partner to the hospital, to bring their child, they now come with their child, they carry things in their diaper bag. Things that were not seen before. But now I believe that from all these processes that have been carried out in these campaigns, they have already been learning and unlearning, right, that their children are not only hers but also his. So, we have had a lot of cases here of women who have come beat up, invalid. Then we have to go looking for refuge where we can put them. Between us making (monetary) collections to move them from one place to another because we have no fund to say that we have and we are going to send to them. But we have also learned to articulate as well with other organizations, with ACNUR, with the PORO, with the judges for justice and so just like that. So we obtain support and we resolve. And one of our policies was also that we would have a volunteer service here, they worked voluntarily because we were conscious of supporting women who have suffered what we have suffered [00:19:22] and that it was not for money. Money is necessary to give workshops and all of this needs money. But well, the attention, the service that we give is to us more than enough and that is how we have maintained ourselves. We had an organization that was Belgian that supported us for like five years like this with specific projects, but they gave \$5,000, but we made do. So we worked for a whole year with that in the communities. As we do not charge, we only spend for what we need for materials that we are going to invest. Thus we have been trying to improve the office. Well there have been good organizations that have come and they have seen the needs. That air was sent to us by a woman, it seems that it was, these desks over there and so then to better the attention of women.

Interviewer: And many of the women who have been victims of violence are afraid to come, or claim or put a report to the police, right? That is one that you are working to remove this fear.

Marta: That is what we work on but the women are now going to file a complaint. Yes, so that is what we have worked a lot on this here.

Interviewer: And the volunteers and you are not afraid of how open and loud you are saying that all of this has to be stopped. No?

Marta: Well, it is not that we are not afraid [00:21:22]. We are always afraid. What happens is that you get used to your fears. And here is a territory that is divided. Up to here, let's say those of this colony cannot go to the one in front. So those over by where I live, they can't come here. They forbade my grandchildren to come to see me, that they cannot visit me. So I said that "they shouldn't go" because they think that everyone is involved in this pain. Then one says "better that we avoid and one knows". You know these people and know the others. But as I tell you, we

have fear but there we live with it and let them do as they will because as we say “everyone knows where we live”. Sometimes they tell us we should take prevention measures of security, that you change your path. How do we change our path if it's just a single street we live on? All the motorcycle taxis, those of the buses know where we live. There is only what you call us changing our location but we can't be doing that.

Interviewer: And many through this, many of these women are fleeing to the United States now to leave. Can you talk a little about that?

Marta: Look, most of the women leave one because of violence [00:23:18], other girls have also gotten into those things because also they have been left alone. Their parents have left. So they then stay with their grandmothers, and the grandmothers are more enablers, right. We allow them certain things. It induces them, they threaten them and they have to go. There is not a lot of need for work here. There are no sources of work. So most young people too. So those who are not involved in things, better leave. Looking for what they say is an "American dream". They don't know if they will end up on the path or not. So because here there are no opportunities for young people nor youth. So sometimes it is said that “it is because they don't want to work, that whatever thing can be sold”. But one thing is that they sell whatever thing and you are working but for the day so just to survive. Sometimes just surviving that day. But families want to have a little house. Families need medicine, they need education and for that there isn't. So what they do is leave. Today they stay in Mexico working there for a little while and in Mexico sometimes the girls also go to work in bars as well, the girls. In bars because it is what there is most. So even on the way there they kidnap them and violate them.

Interviewer: And here most of them are working as assembly workers in a factory?

Marta: [00:25:17] Those who work here are assembly workers.

Interviewer: And have there been many I don't know attempts of violence against women on the way to work, at work, when they are leaving?

Marta: There have been girls who have come out of the factory and they are killed right there. There have been several. Or they are mugged, their money is taken from them and that is normal here.

Interviewer: What is let's say a normal day at the office like? What do you all do in the day? You all arrive at work and what happens?

Marta: Well. There are days in which we are always here because sometimes in the afternoons women come to look for us. There are days that a lot come. There are days when nobody comes. And so that is the luck of each person. So, there are days when there are cases that are tough in which we have to mobilize and just like that. But we are always here because they are always looking for our service. Or sometimes they just call, they call for guidance on something.

Second Interviewer: And what are the workshops you teach?

Marta: We give workshops on self-esteem, on gender, workshops on sexual health, workshops on self-care, also on context, national reality, events. So we do a series of workshops, so we go in stages. So we start first with self-esteem, self-care and then from there we increase the workshops.

Second Interviewer: First, the basics.

Marta: [00:27:18] The basics. And we do it like that.

Interviewer: What do you think about the role of women in combating this violence that comes from the gangs, the drug traffickers? What is the role of women in combating this?

Marta: Look to combat this, we don't have like the tools. The only thing that we have is the conviction or the faith or the hope that with the campaigns that we do, at least a little bit grabs hold. Then what we are doing is minimal, minimal. So we do the little that we possibly can do. There advising women, trying to tell them not to get involved in things. We have little projects like here we teach them to embroider too, to some young girls. We have made agreements with the first organization that has made agreements with the University. That the University comes to the foundation. Let's say, we have brought psychologists to attend to the women, the family members of these women that they have been killed and so we are bringing these people here [00:29:15]. Because we cannot afford to have a psychologist. So we say that "but you all are there and they are with our taxes getting an education". They have to be looking for patients there to graduate. There is the community waiting. Well, we have a group of psychologists who are doing a job here.

Interviewer: I was reading a story that you used to go out on the streets with a loudspeaker.

Marta: With a megaphone.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about this? How did it go? How did the idea start and how was it?

Marta: Well, the history of the megaphones is us when there are problems. So before we used to summon people by talking in cars via loudspeakers or in megaphones. It was when things happened. That time was when they kidnapped Father Alberto Raymond here. That is what the communal is called. Well then that time everyone was scrambled right. So we went out with a megaphone there to call the people that "they have kidnapped him, that they have kidnapped him" and that "the people should gather around, that they should gather around" because we were going to protest and so just like that the people [00:31:16]. Look it's that everything here has been changing. Let's say in two years, from the '80s to like around '95, all of the people here, we all knew each other. We were all from the community and all of us struggled with things. Then with the factories that's when the people started coming. So all the people of the community and the gangs started organizing. So the people of the community started to be afraid and they started to leave and their houses started being converted into quarters. So now that process of unity that existed in this sector was disappearing because the people who have come are no longer aware of the struggle that the communities have had because they have already found electricity, water and everything. And so for us it did cost us. Well then we went out to shout and say "come if you all ever need anything. Come". Well we were very fanatical when we started. One time we all were walking together and we were going to a workshop and there was a man yelling at his wife there and hitting her. Well we tied him up and we brought him to the police in between us. But, see that time it was also enjoyable because he never ever hit his wife again [00:33:14]. Never and the man still lives there. And when she came to leave us off food, she was telling us because she is from this community here. And so we have a colleague who is a

promoter and she lives there too and she said that the woman was telling her, “look I never left food for him again”. She said “I am not going to leave off anymore food”. And I said to him “if you ever touch me again, I will call my colleagues again” and they never called him again. So we have done things like that like that all crazy, very fanatical, yes. My colleague, the one who is there, she has gone all the way to Colón, another Department to bring children, to recover children with other colleagues. And so and it's 8 hours from here to Colón and she has gone, and the women have come here with their children. But we are like that. When we say we are going to support this for this, there we go. No we don't care that we have to spend what we don't have, we just go.

Second Interviewer: How do you think it will be in a future that has been changing from the '80s and the '90s, that has changed this unity that there was? From like 2019 and beyond, what will be the future of the women of that community?

Marta: Look so I see things now with this form of governing. If we continue with the same government structures, if we go like this, we will get worse [00:35:15]. Rather, what we have advanced because after the coup d'état, women have regressed. Women's laws have set them, but backwards. Everything that we had advanced, has gone backwards. So we also think with these kinds of structures that exist with these politicians that we have that in the end they are all the same. So we don't see much of a future. So then we have to continue. To keep digging, right, to move forward because as long as this corruption exists, there is not there is not much future. They change to new faces, new surnames. But in the end it's all the same, it's the same. The only thing they think about is the firm hand, it's that they must terminate this and for us, the women, we never think to kill or to disappear. We think that there should be a more just construction, more equitable. But this is how the process is, well we are in that and that is what we believe. Right now we believe that one of the things that women do is self-care as a way of politics as well as protest. So then to eradicate as well the monopolies [00:37:21], the sale of so much soft drinks and of so much junk food. So we have as well bet on that and I am very much a believer that it is also part of loving ourselves, of loving our body and of loving our nature.

Interviewer: And how do you think that, could you talk a little bit about corruption, well, quite a lot of corruption? Are there other things that you have to achieve here to reach a certain level of more peace and stability here in the country for women, children?

Marta: Well. We have confidence in the youth, right. There is also a lot of confidence. And I believe that all is not going to be lost. I believe that the youth will make the call for these changes because they too are part of this suffering. So I think that young men and women from there are going to emerge as new leaders with other options that will also cost, right because all politicians take a lot right. But there is faith and hope that we are going to have new changes, new leaderships [00:39:19] and that the countries are going to change because I think they are getting tired, right. Of so much corruption, of so much violence.

Interviewer: And for a foreign person, who has never come to Central America, who does not know Honduras. How is the life of a girl, let's say growing up from 12 to 13 years? What are the challenges for a girl here in this community in which you live?

Marta: For a foreign girl to come to live?

Interviewer: No like, we know that about them. Like for them the idea of a girl growing up in the United States is quite different than from a girl growing up here.

Marta: Sure, sure. Imagine a girl here among us in which she leaves her house for school, one is saying "go carefully, be careful with this, take care of the other (thing)". Take care because in the schools, there is where they sell the drugs and everything. So one lives with that fear, right, of what could happen. The massacres that are already taking place here every so often here. So, also the child is also carrying that. They get stressed and so then the children. The education here is poor, completely poor. With all this stress that they perceive because children perceive all these things. So *Marta coughs* sorry. [00:41:16] As I am sick in the lungs. *Marta coughs* This happens to me.

Interviewer: Do you want more water?

Marta: I have some here. So in the poor education that we have and the teachers who are not so committed either then it is an education that we say "I did my sixth grade in those times is how I will graduate today", right. And/or to go to university because there are those that have been graduating there and you don't know anything. Then one says the teachers now have no commitment. Children with so much stress and so much I tell them in the circles where they meet is also stressful or rotten. It is rotten. Also these children don't have don't have and they are badly fed, also malnourished. So these kids don't have that education like yours. They have their snacks on time, they have their coat, their little dress, and then they go with their transport, all tranquil. So these children do not, if these children have for the bus they may grab it and if they don't they have to walk to where they live. And there they all go sweaty, their shirt all torn, all that. But that's the way it is and we are going to change only [00:43:18] when in reality it will be when we stand up that we will be aware of what to do. But that there have to be changes, there have to be changes because I believe that we cannot continue to live that.

Interviewer: And speaking a little of the issue of the gangs here, for a girl of this age many times they are forced to join the gang, they force themselves.

Marta: They force the poor young women. They force them to be with them, they force them to sell and if they don't want to, they kill them. That is why there are many girls who have been killed because sometimes they refuse to so they kill them. So we live in an uneasiness that one apparently looks tranquil, but when we get down to all the things that happen to analyze it, one says "wow" how does one live. But, well, this is our country.

Second Interviewer: And you were so young when you started all of this. I am curious of how you make your character or how is your character as a leader that you have forged and that capacity of seeing that the corruption is not helping. But, you always maintain the fight?

Marta: That is conviction, really what we have as women. Because as we have said, right, you can rob everything from us except our joy or conviction. Because if we have already lost that, until there we are. But I believe in the hope and the faith that we have to see changes and that in the processes that we have seen some things that we have been doing [00:45:18] and that has been fulfilling, right. Because when we support a woman, because when we support a girl, when

any colleague too that we have supported them because they have been transferred to a hospital and then because we have to pick them up something. So I think these are the things that keep us going. So also if we say “there is nothing that we can do, right? And why fight if we are in the same and we repeat the same”. So it’s like we sit but it is not all we are doing, we are advancing. And that itself gives us positive energy to keep going.

Interviewer: And do you have an example that you can think of a person that has been really impacted by your program and has been able to get ahead?

Marta: Yes, we have examples.

Interviewer: Do you have one that you can share with us?

Marta: Look, this colleague lived, I tell her that she lived in a gilded cage because she lived in the sector over there. So this colleague, her husband, bought her everything, everything, everything. She had everything but the house had three gates. And only one can see the three gates using a key. They only allowed one open because the backyard was big. And so imagine a fire there, something could have burned her because the husband would take the children to school, pick them up and bring them back. One day we were distributing bulletins [00:47:19]. Well, she picked up a bulletin on the floor. She was going with a comrade to buy food at the supermarket. Well, she read it and saw the phone number. Then one day when they came to mass, she told a colleague to lend her her phone. She came to mass with her husband but right there at mass another colleague lent her the phone and called us and told us. “Look this is and this happens to me and what can I do?” And then to the colleague who called me, “look Marta, a colleague is calling and says what can she do?” “It’s easy” I say, “tell her that if she has decided that she is going to leave the house, well she will have to leave her children and that she can recover them later”. Well just like that in the church they were in agreement because the husband wasn’t paying any attention because they had gone to sit over there. From there that’s how we were communicating. Well one day, she says, “what can I do? I don’t have money to travel?” and I said, “don’t worry, we’ll collect (money)”. Well, between all of us, we collected. I told her, “go to the supermarket, I’ll be dressed like this there. I already told you how I am going to be dressed and you tell me how you are going to be dressed and how your husband is going to be dressed too. So there we are going to see each other and there we are going to do the exchange. So let’s see how we are going to do this” [00:49:18]. Well that’s how we did it. There in the supermarket, we met. Well, I was there looking over there and she was as well. Then she finds me and says, “I am the girl”. I say: “ah, I’m the promoter”. So she was buying meat and I was there too. Well, we went from that section to where the cold cuts were in the refrigerators. Well, as she was opening the (refrigerador) door and I the other and there we were deciding amongst ourselves how we were going to do this. “Look here, what you can do is do you have someone that can receive you over there. She said, “I have an uncle that is waiting there for me”. Well then look “don’t be preoccupied over clothing. Come here and we will put you on a taxi to take you to the terminal and we will look for a bus there and you can go”. And that’s what we did. I went to drop her off at the terminal. At first she cried for her children. There were two. And from there she called me and said, “But when am I going to be able to see my children”? “Don’t worry, just wait and you

will come for your children. But first, station yourself well, look there for your uncle” because the uncle had money. So, “I have worked with her uncle. I have a record that shows that you are working and have a house. And then we are going to go to the prosecution and don't worry”. Well that’s how that went. About six months later, she came and we went to the prosecutor's office and went to pick up the children. You know who she organized herself with? With some women who are coffee growers, no I forget everything. But, there she became organized with these women [00:51:18] because her uncle is a coffee grower. Her uncle died of cancer and she stayed. Her uncle left everything to her. So she organized yourself with these women who now export coffee to Germany. She says “for me MOMUCLAA was my door to heaven” she always says. And then with that so much that we have gotten out, that we have recovered their home, that we have recovered homages from their homes and like that. So there are hundreds of women that have gone through here with processes, some tough and others smooth and yes. But here we have been.

Interviewer: And in a short sentence, how do you explain MOMUCLAA's mission? What is MOMUCLAA's mission?

Marta: Well, the mission is to empower women with a focus on gender to learn their rights. That's it.

Interviewer: And at this event in Washington, there are going to be women from all over the world who are coming together. What advice would you give, based on your experience, on how to organize and work together to achieve your successes?

Marta: Well, let me think about what I would say. Success is the awareness and the faith and the hope. So if we do not have awareness, then we are not doing anything. Because what good is it that I look at a beaten woman and tell her that she was beaten. What happened, happened [00:53:18]. But, if I have awareness and I know that I also went through that, so then I will give them my hand to hold. So there is a lot of that and what has happened is that humanity has been dehumanized. So you do not feel the pain of the other. So we have been taught to be blindfolded and with that, social awareness has been lost. But if once we see to love ourselves then we can love others. So that's where we are. It has to start there. By first loving yourself, get to know and love the body because sometimes we don’t love it either. Perhaps due to lack of knowledge or not. So if we do not know ourselves, if we do not love ourselves, if we do not value ourselves, we cannot value one from the other person who is in worse condition. So our advice is that you have to open your eyes, you have to put your feet on the ground. You have to know how to love to be able to love yourself. And you have to have more social awareness. So it is not money that gives awareness, it is not money. Rather, some of us come from sleeping in a cardboard box and we have gotten awareness. There are others that have been born in a golden cradle and they have gotten awareness [00:55:17] because there is. So it is not money nor is it poverty. If not that it is feeling, it is love. When there is no love, there is nothing. So that's where we have to start.

Interviewer: And for you has it been difficult to see so many, you have been working on this for years. Has it been psychologically difficult to see so many difficult things? So many things that..

Marta: It has been difficult for us. It has been for us. Because at first we cried at the same level with our colleagues who came to file the complaint. Because if you look at a woman with a wound, look at a woman with her eyes like this and then and so sometimes one went through that. So, we cried together. But the process also starts healing oneself. It starts healing it and also one starts learning techniques, right, of healing and putting them into practice. As a result of women that we are always getting so ill, we got so ill before because we were absorbing all that negative testimony, right, from the women. Because it is not easy for us too. Then we also needed to vent. But we have learned with some tools how to do these processes. That is why now with the processes like self-care, we are betting on it because it is going to be one of the forms that we as women will use to take better care of ourselves.

Interviewer: Why, it has got to be difficult.

Marta: Oh yes.

Interviewer: It's got to be difficult day after day, listening to things.

Marta: Very difficult.

Interviewer: It has to do with how.

Marta: We have colleagues that have gotten involved in it. So these are things that one says "wow" and other colleagues [00:57:18] have been demoralized because they say "wow Marta, one tries to help and do and they always are trying to trip us that I don't even know". And I tell them "let's not get demoralized. These things will always happen because here is power over power. So let's not demoralize. Let's hold hands, sing along and say that we can". And so...

Interviewer: For you, I have a few last, almost almost. A few last questions. What does it mean to be a leader for you?

Marta: Well, for me being a leader is like I said, it's a way of serving. A way of supporting and also a way of serving oneself also because the leader helps others and takes care of themselves. So it is acting without selfishness, it is acting as one is. With the humility that one is. So like I have told you that being a leader shouldn't go to our heads. So because if we do let it then we are not leaders. So I always say that the doctrine that Jesus Christ left behind was a beautiful leadership. So a great example. [00:59:16] So I don't know why everyone puts him in the foreground but no one really follows his doctrine of having their feet on the ground. They only put it for what is convenient for them, but not to serve or serve themselves. Because I say this leadership has served me because I have grown and have met other people. I have male and female friends that love me. So it has served me, it has served me because it has supported me also along the way. So it is a reciprocated thing and for me this is what should be done in leadership. So no, never I thought. I always say to my colleagues, "look, money tears one apart, colleagues. It tears one apart, money. Let's not go around thinking about what we want to have, let's continue with what little we have and we are going to be happy and we are going to walk with the community in peace". If I no longer arrive at the day, I do not arrive, but that's that. Yes.

Interviewer: And how do you see your leadership role in the organization changing in the future? In the organization itself, how is it changing and growing?

Marta: Look, the organization has been growing and I think it will grow more because the new youth that we have have other visions, right and that's how it is. These are the processes. So I tell them that with these new [01:01:16] visions and experiences with us joining together, we are going to grow the organization more. And what we want is that there are more women that are organized, that there are more committed women and more male colleagues that are committed as well. So and that will make our organization rich. We do not want a building, we do not want lawyers here, lawyers there. No, we always want to be humble and have the same service with the same love and quality of service to the women.

Interviewer: And when you are at this meeting, you will have the opportunity to be surrounded by people from all over the country and organizations. What things do you need? Are there things that you all need, monetary support that you can take advantage of?

Marta: Well, we have always said that we like to give workshops in the communities. Well, we always need funds to buy the materials. We want to write, I want to write a book to systematize the entire history of MOMUCLAA because I think I don't want to die without doing it and my colleagues are also still here and to collect all the very rich testimonies of all of us. Also to write this book, funds are also needed, right. But, finding because you have to look for the writer to write [01:03:17] and she does not make things for free. Because they sell their service, they don't give that away like we do.

Interviewer: And how does it feel to be recognized by this Georgetown Institute for Peace, Security and Women?

Marta: Well, it was a great surprise, right. Well, we were like *expression of disbelief*. We said "wow" and the professor, a university professor, I told him because he is a very good friend. And then, I joked, "these gringos, they see one thing and they take you somewhere else". I joked "Aha" he told me "what happened, Marti"? "They are going to give me an award over there in Washington". "Oh!" he says and "and when"? "Oh in September, I don't know". Well there I said, "there are good gringos and there are bad gringos too. I see, it is not that all of us are going into the same sweater like us here, right. And there are other people being honored there as well". As I was reflecting with them, "well, Marta, we're going to see".

Interviewer: Do you want to add something more about the organization, about your work, something that?

Marta: Well, nothing else just a thank you to those that named me for the award. Perhaps there are other awardees that also deserve it. Well then, if it falls back on me, well a thousand thank yous because it is an honor for the organization and for myself and for my community, truly [01:05:16]. Well, I think that in the book you read a lot and you have read many testimonials and soon if we write the other one about MOMUCLAA you will see more testimonies. So I want to start this project soon after. In case of my illness, one never knows, right. So, I want to write it a bit quickly.

Second Interviewer: And if you absolutely deserve it for sure.

Interviewer: And we are not talking about a lot of territory. That is block by block. Can you explain a little bit about that? Why a person, it always costs me to explain that in the United States that you can't even cross the street because that is from street to street.

Marta: From street to street. Yes, because let's say the street over there, where there is the school that I told you all about, up there at the school. Those young people that come, they can come until the church, you all saw the church. Well from there they cannot pass. That is already another territory. So if there are families that have problems, the family can't either cross over there. From here as well, from this street here to the front, they cannot go over there and these others can't either over here. So because if they come, it is death for sure. It is death for sure. They are over there armed. They go around armed.

Interviewer: And you all are in the middle of it all.

Marta: We are in the middle of everything. There is that, in the middle of everything.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Marta: That's how we live [01:07:17]. We cannot go out that late, so late at night. More so for security, because what for the massacres normally are during the day.

Interviewer: And why do you think that the violence is focused against women? As these femicides are increasing, why are there so many women?

Marta: It is precisely because they are living with them. They are living, then as they are so vulgar that women want to leave but they then cannot. So it is better to kill them. And today they kill them horribly, in little pieces, horrible. Between more days, they are more crazy.

Interviewer: And there are a lot of people who have a girl and when they reach the age of 12, they better send them to the United States because they know that.

Marta: You will see that everyday people leave with their children because they say that as parents with children they are prisoners over there for like three months but they prefer that. So because it is terrible here. Well, there is youth here, but I think we will no longer have them. The youths are staying out of the school. The young people hardly even look at you, they have taken a different path.

Interviewer: Because I feel that people do not understand how hard it is to be a young person here. When they talk about immigration, they do not understand why they are leaving and more than anything children.

Marta: They don't understand this division of territories. If I cross here, they will kill me here. If I cross there, they will kill me there. It is like being in a little cage.

Second Interviewer: [01:09:13] And that affects education, why they cannot go to school.

Marta: Many cannot come to study here at this school, they have to go to the one over there. There in Estala or Choloma. They cannot come here.

Second Interviewer: And no education.

Marta: And if it's too far away, they don't go. They do not enter the school they simply do not enter. Aha and in this rotten environment, they grab them for something else. And just like that the boy is lost.

Second Interviewer: The only option that has remained.

Marta: Yes.

Interviewer: And also being a child and being surrounded by so much violence at such a young age to see all that.

Marta: Very young, very young. And some children are already aggressive because they watch so much violence on those televisions, so much narco shows. This has also made children's minds sick. So here, it is rotten all over the place. The media, the environment, then. People don't understand that. And sometimes they are going to do vulgar things there too. So there they go, yes, they are already sick.

END TIME: 1:10:40

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----