


Spring 5-30-2019

# Murder and Machismo: Behind the Motivations of Salvadoran Women Asylum Seekers

Victoria Colbert

University of San Francisco, vmcolbert@usfca.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes>

 Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Latin American Studies Commons](#), and the [Migration Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Colbert, Victoria, "Murder and Machismo: Behind the Motivations of Salvadoran Women Asylum Seekers" (2019). *Master's Theses*. 1194.  
<https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1194>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

Murder and Machismo:  
Behind the Motivations of Salvadoran Women Asylum Seekers

Victoria M. Colbert

University of San Francisco

May 2019

Master of Arts in International Studies

Murder and Machismo:  
Behind the Motivations of Salvadoran Women Asylum Seekers  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by **VICTORIA M. COLBERT**  
May 1, 2019

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Capstone Adviser

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
MAIS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Abstract

This thesis aims to draw connections between a culture of machismo, an ideological gender belief distinct to Latin America with heavy traces of patriarchy and misogyny, and the motivations of Salvadoran women seeking asylum in the United States. I develop these connections by first reviewing the literature on structural violence, the form of violence wherein the structure or social institution prevents certain demographics of people from meeting their basic needs and living their optimal lives (Galtung, 1969). I repeatedly use structural violence and its functions to parallel the operations of patriarchy and machismo to suggest that violence against women (VAW) in El Salvador originates from a deep-seeded belief system that defines and dictates gender relations in the country. I further support my arguments that machismo is a manifestation of structural violence with a comprehensive case study on El Salvador and the phenomena of widespread VAW. With extensive collected data and testimony pulled from news, government, and non-government reports, I argue that machismo, in all of its forms and applications (including disregard for women's human rights), has very real and negative effects on Salvadoran women. I aim to suggest that machismo plays a significant role in the escalation of extreme gender-based violence.

Because widespread violence rooted in machismo has become so dangerous for women, ultimately I argue that Salvadoran women seeking asylum on the basis of gender should not be ignored, dismissed, or quite frankly denied asylum solely because their claims are gender based.

*Keywords:* machismo, structural violence, gender-based violence, femicide

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>CHAPTER 1: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE THROUGH PATRIARCHY .....</b>                            | <b>8</b>  |
| 1.1: WHAT IS STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE? .....   | 9         |
| 1.1.1: <i>Cultural Violence</i> .....   | 15        |
| 1.2: IS PATRIARCHY STRUCTURAL/CULTURAL VIOLENCE? IS MACHISMO? .....                       | 17        |
| 1.2.1: <i>The Masculine State and Economics in the Public/Private Sphere(s)</i> .....     | 22        |
| 1.2.2: <i>The Masculine State and Citizenship in the Public/Private Sphere(s)</i> .....   | 25        |
| 1.3: THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL TAKEAWAYS .....   | 27        |
| <b>CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF MACHISMO AND LATIN AMERICA .....</b>                      | <b>28</b> |
| 2.1: WHAT IS MACHISMO? .....  | 29        |
| 2.1.1: <i>Intersections of Machismo and the Role of Hegemonic Masculinity</i> .....       | 33        |
| 2.2: THE SOCIALIZATION OF MARIANISMO (MACHISMO’S MIRROR IMAGE) .....                      | 35        |
| 2.2.1: <i>Machismo and Economics in the Public/Private Spheres</i> .....                  | 38        |
| 2.3: THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL TAKEAWAYS .....   | 41        |
| <b>CHAPTER 3: A CASE STUDY: THE SALVADORAN WOMEN WHO ENDURE VIOLENCE ..</b>               | <b>43</b> |
| 3.1: EL SALVADOR: A NATION AND ITS VIOLENT HISTORY .....                                  | 44        |
| 3.2: THE PROBLEM WITH LATIN AMERICA AND THE DEGRADATION OF WOMEN .....                    | 47        |
| 3.3: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMICIDE, FEMICIDE CODING, AND LAWS IN EL SALVADOR .....         | 49        |
| 3.4: EL SALVADOR’S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: AT-A-GLANCE .....                              | 51        |
| 3.5: EL SALVADOR, INTRA-FAMILIAL VIOLENCE, AND MACHISMO .....                             | 56        |
| 3.5.1: <i>Intimate Partner Violence</i> .....   | 56        |
| 3.5.2: <i>Sexual Violence, Incest, and Teen Pregnancy</i> .....                           | 59        |
| 3.6: EL SALVADOR, GANG CULTURE, AND MACHISMO .....  | 62        |
| 3.7: EL SALVADOR, IMPUNITY, AND MACHISMO .....  | 67        |
| 3.7.1: <i>The Evolution of Laws and Legal Structures in Place, But Not Enforced</i> ..... | 68        |
| 3.7.2: <i>The Inefficiency of Local Authorities</i> .....                                 | 70        |
| 3.8: CASE STUDY TAKEAWAYS .....   | 73        |
| <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>   | <b>76</b> |
| 4.1: SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS & MAJOR FINDINGS .....  | 76        |
| 4.2: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....  | 81        |
| <b>REFERENCES .....</b>   | <b>83</b> |

List of Tables

|              |    |
|--------------|----|
| TABLE 1..... | 53 |
| TABLE 2..... | 75 |

## List of Figures

|                |    |
|----------------|----|
| FIGURE 1 ..... | 3  |
| FIGURE 2 ..... | 13 |
| FIGURE 3.....  | 17 |
| FIGURE 4 ..... | 55 |

## Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge the entire University of San Francisco, Master of Arts in International Studies department with special thanks to my professors- Loperena, Zarobell, Bercault, Paller, and Gifford. I especially want to thank my professor and thesis advisor Annick T.R. Wibben, for working diligently and patiently with me throughout the entire writing (and waiting) process.

Secondly, I am forever indebted to my parents Brent and Sonia Colbert, who have supported my graduate studies morally and financially. I thank my tia, Myrna Castro who helped me decide what my thesis topic would be (all those months ago) and proofread my drafts when my eyes gave out. I specifically want to mention and honor my grandmother, Juana Castro, who was the first on my mother's side to emigrate from El Salvador to the United States. Her sacrifices and stories are very similar to the ones mentioned in this thesis, which make it all the more special and personal.

Lastly, and most importantly, I must acknowledge my significant other, Abimbola Oshinuga for not only being my biggest cheerleader when I needed encouragement but my biggest critic when I needed a push, and my preferred companion when I needed comforting. I also want to express enormous thanks for delivering on all those last minute requests for food, ice cream, and caffeine in the final hours along with creating the tables and figures for this thesis. These last two years have not been a cakewalk for us and I am grateful for all the support I received throughout the entire process.



Murder and Machismo:  
Behind the Motivations of Salvadoran Women Asylum Seekers

Victoria M. Colbert

University of San Francisco

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration in the United States is an inescapable topic of debate as of current. An influx of Central American men, women, their children, and unaccompanied minors, have left their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (commonly known as the Northern Triangle; see Figure 1 on page 3) in pursuit of safety and protection from civil violence. This major event of mass immigration is not new. The complex timeline of irregular immigration to the U.S. from Central America, El Salvador specifically, has been stirring headlines since 2014 due to large numbers of minors fleeing gang violence in the region. Under the Trump administration, immigration policy is yet again a “hot topic” as immigration policies and procedures have become dramatically restrictive, even for refugees and asylum seekers. The narrative specific to Salvadoran women and girls who are fleeing the region remains largely overlooked as they are generally grouped with the broader category of migrants perceived to be seeking economic security. Their stories, however, reflect a growing prevalence of femicide and extreme gender-based violence (GBV) in the small country that is unknown to most Americans. But widespread gendered violence in is an everyday reality for Salvadoran women and girls, and their primary motivations for claiming asylum in the U.S to escape it.

In the United States, grants of asylum to women who suffer human rights violations related to their gender, or gender-based-asylum, remain largely controversial. Although the U.S. is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and therefore obligated to honor the law, critics like to argue the “floodgates” argument, contending that if the door to refugee protection is



*Figure 1: Map of Northern Triangle Reprinted from End Child Detention, 2015, retrieved from <https://endchilddetention.org>.*

opened to women fleeing gender-based-harm, the United States will be flooded with such individuals (Chazaro & Casey, 2006). Even under this pretense, U.S. immigration officials have in the past granted asylum to women who've fled violence related to domestic attacks, forced incest, rape, sex trafficking, gang threats and more. However, in an unexpected turn of events, GBV claims were virtually reversed in June of 2018 by U.S. Attorney General, Jeff Sessions. Within this new policy the U.S. will only recognize and protect 'persecuted groups' and not victims of 'individual misfortune' (U.S. Department of Justice [USDOJ], 2018). Furthermore, Sessions stated that claims involving intra-familial/domestic violence, gang-related, and any other non-government targeted violence would not qualify women to claim asylum status any longer, saying:

“The mere fact that a country may have problems effectively policing certain crimes—such as domestic violence or gang violence—or that certain populations [women] are more likely to be victims of crime, cannot itself establish an asylum claim” (USDOJ, 2018).

The Salvadoran women who flee share fundamental traits with the wider global migration population, yet their circumstances are still quite unique. Recent reporting shows there is a growing number of cases where Salvadoran women and girls state that the only reason they flee north to the U.S. is to escape the threat of death and persistent violence (Kinzer, 2018). These acts of violence are largely attributed to gang structures, intra-familial violence, and overall legal impunity of perpetrators. Violence against women (VAW), whether it be murder, rape, sexual slavery, or socio-economic and political restrictions, is very common in El Salvador and rooted in a culture of *machismo*.

Machismo, a term, that is distinctive to Latin American language and culture signifies strong or aggressive masculine pride (Novas, 1994). Beyond its definition, machismo is the shared philosophy among men and women signaling that within societal functions men dominate and women submit. On the basis of this philosophy, machismo societies provoke structural inequalities and violence upon women at all levels and in all spheres where women must dwell and survive.

The content in this thesis aims to draw connections between machismo and rising cases of GBV in El Salvador. Additionally, I explore why and how this ideology has continually gone uncontested despite growing activism, awareness, and advancements of women's rights and equality. To explore the underlying reasons why machismo is prevalent and inherent to Salvadoran culture, I also investigate some of the institutional legacies that lead to the formation of machismo, like patriarchy. Ultimately, my findings suggest that forced migration of women in the country not only stems from spikes in targeted violence, but that these spikes are by-products of the various demonstrations of structural violence that are expressed through machismo.

On Salvadoran women seeking asylum in the U.S., I build my core argument by also arguing that drivers of forced migration, for women especially, are also attributed to machismo. Finally, I contest that because machismo is so ingrained in the cultural and societal functions of El Salvador to which women suffer and sometimes die, U.S. immigration courts should not ignore these gender-specific claims solely because they are gender-based. Instead, these women and their claims should be embraced with unbiased ethics despite the recent push to cease all asylum privileges. My completed research will address four main objectives in the following ordered sequence: 1) to investigate the ways structural violence takes shape or form through machismo; 2) to suggest that machismo has a key role to play in explaining violence against women; 3) to further note that this violence, exemplified specifically in the phenomenon of femicides, is a key causal factor in women's migration from El Salvador to the U.S.; and 4) to propose that advocates for Salvadoran women applying for asylum in the U.S. should use these findings to argue that they deserve a fair legal process.

I use a feminist peace studies approach to build a new theory signifying all systems and variations of patriarchal structures, like machismo, are forms of structural violence. The impact of this research is significant because no comprehensive research or literature that links structural violence to machismo exists. To fill this major gap, this research makes connections between the mechanics of structural violence and patriarchal systems, adding a new theory of feminist peace studies to the broader catalogue of critical feminist theory. To shift focus to the overarching goal to advocate U.S. asylum for women, this thesis also contributes to the existing literature on migration theory, with a gendered lens on the Salvadoran women in an effort to reinstate gender-based asylum in the U.S. This unique theory is used to explain systemic disparities that negatively impact women in El Salvador, issues that are not currently being captured by the

policy makers in El Salvador. Therefore, those issues are documented here with contextual and empirical data. Additionally, my motivations<sup>1</sup> for completing research on this subject are primarily to debunk common myths and uncover more truths about mass immigration from El Salvador, particularly for women. My contributions to the topic are even more valuable given the timeliness of major events that have taken place within the last year which all involve harsher U.S. policy on immigration<sup>2</sup>.

As a roadmap, the first chapter begins with a literature overview on the theory of structural violence as this is a recurring theme and establishes the tone for the remainder of the paper. Other complementary concepts such as human potential, optimal life chances, social position, hierarchies and cultural violence are all central themes I explain in depth to make meaning and understanding of power dynamics, particularly gendered-power dynamics. I then apply structural violence to explore the ways in which men and women are viewed as rivals rather than equals within patriarchal systems to make meaning of patriarchy as a demonstration of structural violence. It is not the purpose of this paper to make the causal argument that structural violence produces machismo but a more conceptual one (machismo is a type of structural violence). I further explain the legitimization of structural violence towards women by identifying and explaining various types of intersectionalities, masculinities and masculine privileges that affect women's lives economically, socially, and politically in both the public and private spheres.

In the second chapter "The Importance of Machismo in Latin America", I use similar approaches in reviewing the literature on machismo to explain the term's history and legacy on

---

<sup>1</sup> My secondary motivations stem from family ties to the country, and with these ties I have personal knowledge of the deeply strained diplomatic relationship between El Salvador and the U.S. regarding immigration.

<sup>2</sup> Those events, such as family separations at the border, widespread Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, and the ongoing public vilification of Central American immigrants

gender dynamics of men and women in Latin America who are generally dictated and defined by the ideology. The concept of marianismo is also discussed at length to explain the gender specific roles ascribed to women and girls in Latin America, further signifying the dichotomies of accepted and rejected gender norms within the region. The chapter establishes background for the succeeding chapter to emphasize that machismo plays a significant role in the escalation of extreme violence against women in El Salvador.

The third is a case study that analyzes violence against women in El Salvador within the last five years. Within the case study, I use numerical data, government documents, and second-hand testimonies to illustrate the multiple ways machismo plays out in women's lives at the micro and macro level. I also address the numerous international and domestic gender-specific legal codes the country has either developed or signed into law to highlight the country's recognition of rising femicides and brutal acts of violence related to machismo behavior. What is revealed and further discussed is that the country's history of normalized perception of violence against women is difficult to reverse despite more awareness and legal advancements. Ultimately, women who experience chronic violence in their homes, out of their homes, and by the government that is supposed to protect them, renders strong motives to seek political asylum in the U.S. simply to survive.

*“When one husband beats his wife, there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance, there is structural violence.”*

*- Johan Galtung*

## **CHAPTER 1: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE THROUGH PATRIARCHY**

Women, from the micro to macro level, have taken note of their plight in relation to their male counterparts whether they accept it, counter it, or navigate it for survival. Often times, the institutional imbalance of rights, access, and power between men and women are rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy, the system that favors men as leaders, not just in the public but also in the private sphere, is a manifestation of unequal power dynamics that excludes women and is reinforced by the systems and structures in place. This formulation and perpetual cycle of unequal power-gender dynamics is not random but in place via social constructs and superstructures which can be categorized as structural violence. Structural violence, a concept usually associated with the work of peace scholar Johan Galtung, is systemic or institutionalized imbalance of power between elite and non-elite groups, which degrade the overall quality of life for marginalized demographics (1969).

Latin America also experiences patriarchy, or a demonstration of it at least, in the form of machismo. Linking the concepts of structural violence, patriarchy, and machismo, help make sense of how and why machismo practices continue to be applied at all social levels and have gone uncontested within superstructures despite growing awareness of women’s rights and increasing demands for gender equality, specifically in the country of El Salvador. What is revealed about structural violence is that it does not function in isolation from other types of violence, but rather fuels extreme acts of personal (or direct) violence. When speaking about patriarchy or machismo, I argue structural violence also fuels extreme violence against women,



which is the very cornerstone of my overall argument regarding women seeking asylum in the U.S. from El Salvador.

I approach the first chapter with an in-depth literature review on the theory of structural violence and its operations as a standalone. As I previously mentioned, structural violence does not operate in isolation therefore I also discuss the interconnected relationship between direct, structural, and cultural violence and their function in sustaining ongoing conflict. The second portion focuses more comprehensively on patriarchy and its employment to disenfranchise women (and sometimes even other men) of equal rights and access based on obsolete, yet still present, essentialist gender views. I further discuss this manifestation of structural violence against women by analyzing how women experience and are affected by the negative effects of patriarchy in both the public and private spheres of economics and citizenship. These initial concepts, structural violence and patriarchy, recur in second chapter involving machismo and are ultimately the foundation of the entire paper. With this in mind, I revisit the works of Johan Galtung to conceptualize structural violence.

### **What is Structural Violence?**

Violence is a broad, yet tangible, concept although we often recognize violence as persons being harmed, maimed, or killed (Köhler & Alcock, 1976). Peace researchers, however, have identified that violence has varying types and is applied at different socio-economic levels, sometimes having no involvement of weaponry or immediate physical impact. When we think of violence to include physical harm and bloodshed, we are linking those ideas to direct violence. Direct violence is different from structural (or indirect) violence in that the impacts and effects of violence are visible, the perpetrator and the victim are distinguishable, and the timing is sporadic,

even in instances of protracted conflicts (Galtung, 1969). To that point, direct violence is argued to be a manifestation of some other deep rooted origin such as severe famine or long-standing oppression, not the point of origin (Anglin, 1998). Direct violence is also depicted as the violent acts that kill quickly, again referring to my previous example of immediate physical contact and harm, in contrast to structural violence that kills slowly (Galtung & Höivik, 1971).

Structural violence on the other hand, is one type of indirect violence, which deals with imbalanced power relations embedded and activated by societal institutions and systems including but not limited to classism, racism, sexism, militarism, totalitarianism, neoliberalism, globalization, and more. The concept was first developed by peace scholar, Johan Galtung (1969), to answer perplexing questions about global disparities in which developing countries remain economically, politically, and socially depressed despite all the industrial and technological advancements made and that are available. Similarly, we can use this same inquiry model to ask and answer questions about social inconsistencies between men and women on a global scale despite the all capital, educational, and political platform advancements made and available.

Galtung's theory of structural violence is unique because of its premise on reshaping the meaning of violence altogether. For instance, structural violence does not necessarily entail the action of physical aggression, assault, or harm as most would relate to the concept, although effects of structural violence can and do affect the human body physically. Instead, structural violence points to the institutions, systems, and structures (sometimes social constructs i.e. culture) as the "actors" or aggressors that deteriorate not only the body but also the spirit. Structural violence is generally defined by Galtung and similar scholars as the prevention or depletion of basic needs of humans caused by structures, systems, and institutions which lessen

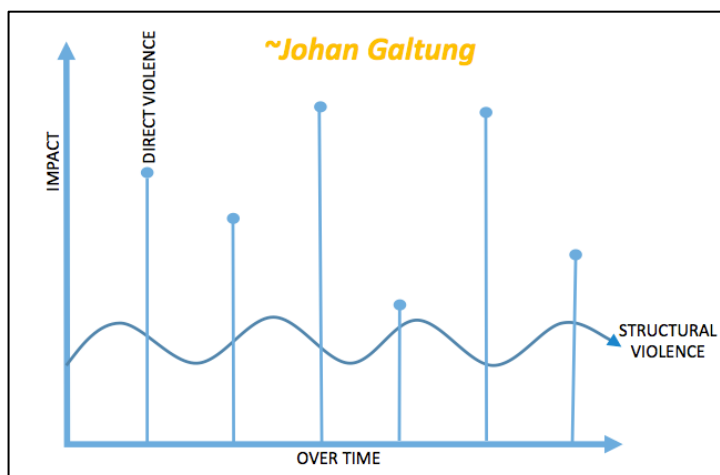
chances of human survival (Farmer, 2009; Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969; Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Höivik, 1971; Köhler & Alcock, 1976; Wood, 2016). Structural violence is especially apparent when there is clear evidence that premature death or permanence of human degradation can be avoided. One of the most cited examples of this is Galtung's explanation of tuberculosis as cause of death in the 18th century versus today: if a person dies of tuberculosis in the 18th century because there is no proven cure, that is not structural violence. But if a person dies today of tuberculosis despite credible and proven treatment but is rejected of that treatment because of limited income, that is structural violence.

As a starting point, Galtung argues that violence is present when "human beings are influenced" in their life choices and experiences "so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations - in other words, the difference between "what could have been and what is" (1969, p. 168). The farther the gap widens between humans' potential realization and actual potential, the more violence is present. What is distinct and possibly most important to understand about violence is that violence does not need to be attributed to one singular actor as the aggressor. In a subject-action-object model, direct violence is evident because the subject is the perpetrator and the object is the victim - both parties are well defined and specified (Confortini, 2006; Galtung, 1969). Direct violence, sometimes referred to as personal violence, is committed when the subject-action-object model is verifiable and usually occurs during acts of war, insurrections, gang rifts, torture, rape, murder, and the like. In each act, violence can be carried out by acquaintances or mere strangers while still upholding an interpersonal relationship (Wood, 2016). On the contrary, indirect violence, or structural violence, does not entail a clear or singular perpetrator, leaving the subject to be filled by an ominous, unidentified force. Because violence is deeply rooted in the structure, the violent

relationship between the subject and object is rendered impersonal thus whether an actor exists or not is irrelevant (Confortini, 2006).

The absence of subject implicates that violence is “built into the structure” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Given this foundation, scholars have described structural violence in many ways, for example, as “natural as the world around us,” as “silent” violence (Galtung, 1969), as “subtle and submerged” violence (Confortini, 2006), “systemic” violence (Farmer, 2004), or “less visible violence” (Wood, 2016). The commonality between all of these interpretations of structural violence is the conveyance of permanence. Because the acts and impacts of structural violence are often invisible to groups whom both benefit and suffer from it, structural violence is very similar to the theory of hegemony as argued by Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1999). Gramsci insisted that the values and norms in a capitalist hegemonic culture become “common sense” for all, although those who benefit from hegemonic culture are often the ones in control (the bourgeois) and maintain their control through this very process of ideological manipulation of the proletariat (the non-elite commoner).

Instances of personal or direct violence often register with the public and are documented as key moments in history while instances of structural violence go largely undetected and often actively hidden, showing little fluctuation but pacing within society (Galtung, 1969, see Figure 2 on page 13). The relationship between dramatic events and everyday “mundane-ness” reveal that social structures are at work where they are least apparent (True & Tanyag, 2018). To drive this point home further, “many... do not conceptualize the violence they experience... as new or unique but as a continuation of processes they have known their whole lives” (Vogt, 2013, p. 765), a clear indication that it is structural.



*Figure 2:* A chart showing structural violence pacing in the background of society. Adapted from Johan Galtung, 1969.

The theory of structural violence argues that, in fact, violence can be attributed to interacting constructs like laws, rules and other types of social and legal enforcements which work indirectly in society, applied universally, but have greater and harsher direct impacts on marginalized populations (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969; True and Tanyag, 2018; Wood, 2016). It should be noted that although direct violence can be measured in number of deaths and indicate physical, social, and psychological damage, structural violence, while more challenging to detect, can also be measured by mortality rates (Galtung, 1969; Köhler & Alcock, 1976). Social position is a key indicator to computing life expectancy or oppositely, premature death. To support this claim, multiple tested hypotheses and argued theories assert higher social position leads to longer life expectancy while lower social position leads to shorter life expectancy (Köhler and Alcock, 1976; Galtung & Høivik, 1971; Wood, 2016). Regarding life expectancy, structural violence is the difference between optimal life expectancy and actual life expectancy much like the previous model measuring the difference between potential and actual human realizations (Galtung & Høivik, 1971). Social position is key not just for life expectancy but also for overall quality of life.

For example, hierarchies of social position are apparent in the United States, an affluent and developed nation, among Black and Native American populations which experience higher rates of incarceration, public and private violence, extreme poverty, substance abuse, and mortality in contrast to white populations. What is uncovered of these social positions within global systems are uneven distributions of resources, income, education, and medical services that are accessible to certain demographics and nonexistent for others (Farmer, 2004). In the case of African American and Native Americans in the U.S. (to model most cases of racial or caste hierarchies globally), low social positions are often “aggravated further” not just by low levels of income, but also intersect with low levels of health, education, and power because rank dimensions often correlate or bind together within the social structure (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Taken these factors collectively, these groups are systematically denied equal access to basic needs, and then materialize into unequal bargaining power and consequently unequal life chances; therefore these groups suffer from structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Wood, 2016).

As Wood (2016) explained, “structural violence can be perpetuated by norms and laws that apply equally to the rich and the poor but adversely impact the poor” (p. 18). Prime examples include: limiting factors such as expensive fees for higher education, unpaid or no maternity leave for new mothers, expensive fees for medical visits and treatment, proof of valid identification, laws forbidding soliciting or loitering, sleeping in cars, or picking food out of dumpsters. These examples of discriminatory practices embedded in society and the law lead to higher rates of arrests of the subordinate population simply because their social position does not suffice societal standards put in place by the elitist structures.

As I stated before, structural violence does not and cannot act alone. Often times, those very standards are a result of the culture, or become part of the culture. In the following section,

cultural violence will be discussed and explain how structural, cultural, and direct violence activate and coexist with one another and together (see Figure 3 on page 17).

### *Cultural Violence*

Legitimization of structural violence is accomplished through desocialization, resocialization, erasure of history, and most importantly, cultural violence. All four components assist an incessant cycle of imbalanced power relations among privileged and underprivileged groups. Without presence of direct violence on the body, structural violence manifests itself on the soul through continued agenda-driven “lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats [etc.] that serve to decrease mental potentialities” (Galtung, 1969, p. 169). Anthropologist and medical doctor Paul Farmer (2004) echoes familiar sentiments calling the manipulative erasure of history a critical step to founding a society in which adherence to fate of subordination is acceptable.

“Erasing history is perhaps the most common explanatory sleight-of-hand relied upon by the architects of structural violence. Erasure or distortion of history is part of the process of delocalization is necessary for the emergence of hegemonic accounts of what happened and why” (Farmer, 2004, p. 308).

Spivak (2010) coined epistemic violence, or an erasure of history strategically worked in through processes of de-socialization, which removes a people from their history, origins and language, followed by resocialization, which imposes a different history by replacing languages, values, and customs with new ones to create a homogenous society. Spivak further argues this erasure of history is at the core of determining “The Other,” or the subjugated population(s) that is deemed undeserving or counter-productive to social progress. Finally, creation of a renewed cultural identity aligns all peoples to subscribe to a universal code of ethics which overtime becomes customary ideology.

In comparing similarities between cultural violence and structural violence, both work as agents of “invisible” violence however cultural violence deviates slightly by justifying, or rather legitimizing, both direct and structural violence (Confortini, 2006; Farmer; 2004; Galtung, 1990; Wood, 2016). It functions through storytelling, written (or rewritten) history, media messaging, school, religious, and familial lessons, or any other means of transmitting cultural views and beliefs (Wood, 2016). Galtung (1990) reiterates “culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation as natural, or not seeing them... at all” (p. 295). In fact, further intensification and rationalization of modes of dominance, via cultural and structural violence, are driven by the needs of the structure (Anglin, 1998), a theme I continue to discuss in the proceeding section. For instance, in a capitalist economy, modes of dominance are used to produce capital, its primary need. Because of these structures, Anglin reinforces that humans aren’t born inherently violent, but because these social positional formations widen the gap between elites and non-elites, humans adapt violent behaviors and mentalities towards each other.

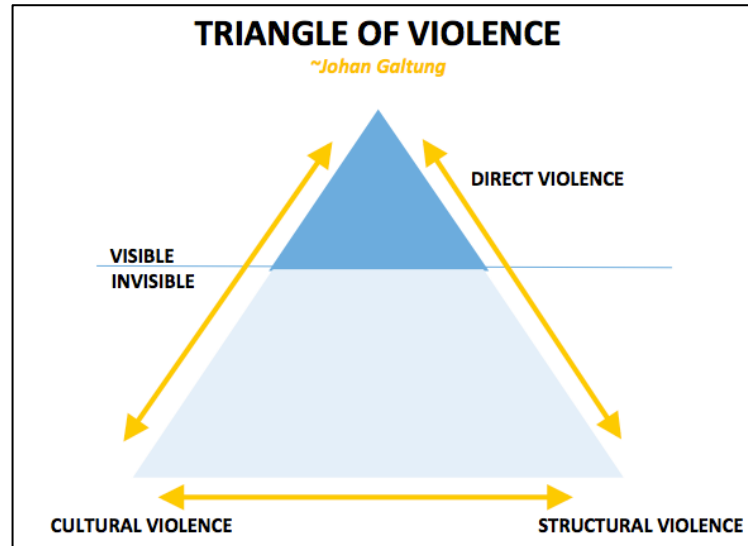
Within the structure and further constituted by the culture, societal complacency with violence is expected, and the gender inequality gap widens. Furthermore, modes of dominance, as Anglin (1998) suggested are appropriated to the subordinate sex/gender so that the dominating structure can succeed permanently. I revisit the significance of Galtung’s quote<sup>3</sup> cited in the beginning of the chapter to speak about women’s complacency with violence: it did not start at the point a man personally attacks a woman, but at the point the man’s understanding of women

---

<sup>3</sup> “When one husband beats his wife, there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance, there is structural violence” (Johan Galtung, 1969).



as the inferior sex was learned, and simultaneously at the point the woman, as well as the rest of society, accepted this false narrative as well and I build on this thought in the next section.



*Figure 3:* An adaptation of Johan Galtung’s Triangle of Violence, 1969

### **Is Patriarchy Structural/Cultural Violence? Is Machismo?**

In making the connection between structural violence and machismo, the exploration and argument of patriarchy as a form of structural violence is necessary. Patriarchy has a wide range of definitions and is very challenging to simplify because of its dynamic and complex operations over time and across space in both women and men’s lives. Patriarchy, in literal terms means, rule of the father and has come to materialize into a social structure where the father or the eldest male within the family structure bears the most authority (Cohn; 2012; Puechguirbal, 2010; Walby, 1989). A patriarchal system is one in which not only are the fathers heads of families, but also where men exercise power and “dominate women through control of society’s governmental, social, economic, religious, and cultural institutions” (Cohn, 2012, p. 4). Long standing global patriarchy has functioned to disenfranchise women from land and property

rights, voting rights, reproduction rights, right to work, fair wages, and education among a list of other human rights that are granted to men but selectively applied to women. That is until new legislation arises. Although we can confidently argue that in most developed nations many fundamental women's issues and inequalities, such as universal suffrage, have been reversed by policy reform, nowhere in the world today do women have equal representation and participation in corporate leadership, share of capital, and/or state power and decision making as men (Burguières, 1990; Pettman, 1996; True, 2012).

Gender, at its core, is a structural power relation. Just as colonialism, slavery, class, race, and caste are all systems of power, so is gender. Everyday realities ranging from daily routines to personal interests to financial decisions and everything in between are all gendered and have been gendered from the start (Cohn, 2012). Because patriarchal systems exist in many cultures, so do essentialist gender stereotypes with their sexist confirmations trailing close behind (Simic, 2010; Willett, 2010). Essentialist views of gender maintain that men and women possess unique and universal behavioral traits derived from their sex difference - their biological difference; thus the common yet misinformed idea is that gender difference follows sex difference (Wibben, 2017). Therefore gender is the visible maker and marker dividing men and women within a social structure (Cohn, 2012). Gender difference is practiced through the socialization and shaping of individuals' and community identities, very much like the processes of legitimation in cultural violence. Formulas of gender assignment reside in how we see ourselves and see other, defining expectations of what men and women should be and how they should behave (Cohn, 2012, pp. 6-7).

A stereotypical, even exaggerated, example of gender difference or roles is the following: women as mothers, caretakers, homemakers, natural pacifists, and they are generally perceived

to live uncomplicated lives within the dwellings of their homes. Simultaneously, men are believed and depicted to be more aggressive and willing to fight (for the family, property, or the state), physically and emotionally stronger, more intelligent in academia, more rational, more able to tackle challenges, and achieve the best possible outcome.<sup>4</sup> As Carol Cohn (2012) noted, it is no wonder men are in charge when they appear to be dynamic, able and ready. Women, on the other hand, appear *simple*. In the context of patriarchy, the qualities and characteristics of men are more desirable, so appointing them to administer leadership over society seems obvious. This is a clear indication of both cultural and structural violence are at work to drive the needs of the patriarchal structure. Therefore, the male persona is valorized and celebrated, clearly making the moral distinction between good: men and bad: women.

With this in mind, I also circle back to the concept of social position and social hierarchies, a key theme in Galtung's theory on structural violence. Because a gendered hierarchy exists and women continue to be "constructed in relation to men, and given inferior value" (Pettman, 1996, p. 7), women's social position is therefore inferior. The universalization of gendered hierarchy which celebrates the male figure is dangerous, not only because popular opinion discredits women and continues the erasure of women's contributions to society, but also because women will always be compared to men as primary models for society. Efforts to disrupt this gendered hierarchal mentality and create a universal space for equality for men and women (and other non-binary genders) have been attempted but altogether continue to struggle. This gendered social structure or construct "shapes, regulates, rationalizes, and justifies social relations of power" (Confortini, 2006), and therefore feminists maintain that all power relations

---

<sup>4</sup> Here I am speaking very generally as there are various systems of patriarchy depending on region, era, and political/social climate. However, overall systems of patriarchy universally posit women as subordinate to men.

are absolutely gendered (Cohn, 2012; Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Further gender hierarchies then exist between women and women, and men and men.

This is especially true in discussing the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which conceptualizes men as the dominant sex over women, and even other perceived non-masculine men (Connell, 1995). Through the internalization of traditional patriarchal beliefs, young boys are socialized to value power and dominance, especially over girls, and then graduate to maintaining norms of male dominance, oppression, and exploitation of women in adulthood (Sokoloff, 2005; Sugihara & Warner, 2002; Walby, 1989). Alas, this group of perceived masculine men use violence to sustain their dominance against their perceived-inferior female counterparts in public and private spaces via cat “catcalling,” harassment, assault, rape, and murder (Connell, 1995; Sugihara & Warner 2002). Hegemonic masculinity not only legitimizes men’s dominance and women’s subordination, but also outcasts and exudes violence against other men deviant from the so-called masculine norm (Connell, 1995). Normative standards of masculinity reject even the slightest association with femininity creating a social norm for boys and men to display “toughness” among other acceptable characteristics depicting what men should and shouldn’t be. Anything less can lead to punishment for men not living up to those ideals (Alcalde, 2010; Connell 1995; Christensen & Jensen, 2014).

Connell (1995) developed this theory of dominant masculinity, closely linked to her theory of hegemonic masculinity, explaining that homosexual men are easily assimilated into femininity resulting in mild harassment to full-on oppression in the social stratification of men. The tactic to offset deviant forms of masculinity such as “gayness” begin when boys are young and heavily influenced by institutions like education and mass media. Finally, “terror is used as means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions” such as targeted violence against gay men

and non-conforming women (Fox & Zagumny, 2017, p. 83). In a later critique, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revisit hegemonic masculinity revealing that the concept is indeed universal but not universally applicable to all demographics of men in different global regions at different points in time. Thus, types of masculinities, much like types of patriarchies, are diverse depending on region and time, and have capabilities to evolve, transform, or be overthrown altogether.

Of course, a system which empowers a category of men over other men (and the collective body of women) requires backing from political, social, economic, cultural, legal, and educational structures which actualize and undergird distribution of power, all-the-while appearing to “make sense”, or pass as legitimate (Cohn, 2012, p. 5), which again is a clear indication of structural and cultural violence. These subscriptions of values based on gender are deemed unremarkable and natural, but really the social relationship of gender is a continuation and perpetuation of unequal gender differences between men and women. And to state the obvious echoing other academic scholars, of course the fight for universal gender equality has been an uphill battle because men do not want to give up or share their power when they continue to reap the benefits (Cohn, 2012; Connell; 2002; Puechguirbal, 2010). The standard idea that women and men continue to fit into binary definitions gives more power to hegemonic masculinity and the structures of patriarchy, reinforcing the repression of women even when/where it is not deserved.

In the next section, I discuss how these gender essentialist attitudes carry weight even in times where it appears gender essentialism is evolving. For example, classic discourse on gender would have us assume that women cannot or should not work. However, women have increasingly entered the workforce and made contributions in and outside of their homes. The

reality, though, is that binary definitions of sex and gender continue to fuel structural and cultural violence infiltrating into the earning economy of working women.

*The Masculine State and Economics in the Public/Private Sphere(s)*

In Western politics, the state is almost always male-dominated, despite the gradual increase in women participation. Women's growing presence in politics, and frankly any other public structure predominantly led by men, creates conflict. State structures with gender essentialist views towards women constrain and contain women in the home, their "rightful" domains, based on their sexed bodies (Pettman, 1996), again following the false pretense that gender difference follows sex difference. In this sense, the state functions as the main organizer of power relations through the implementation of legislation and policies influencing both the public and private (Connell, 1990). Restrictions on women's roles in the public sphere, with the state's backing, are seen in the exploitation and discrimination of women's labor stemming from matters within the home, the private sphere. Alas, although many more women in westernized nations are active in the public workforce, attitudes of devaluing women continue to exist, and the proof is in the numbers: women are generally underpaid for their labor in comparison to men's wages (Connell, 1990; Pettman, 1996; Stobbe, 2005; Torras & Grow, 2015; True, 2012).

"Patriarchy pre-dates and post-dates capitalism hence it cannot be considered a derivative from it" (Walby, 1989, p. 214). Patriarchy and capitalism in Walby's views are analytically independent pointing to tensions between the two systems, however Walby acknowledges and argues that these two systems largely interact at different periods to produce different forms of patriarchy. As feminist scholar Jan Jindy Pettman (1996) states, one of the starting points of gender-public-private interaction (and interference) is in the division of labor, rooted in gender

ideologies that hold women primarily responsible for unremunerated work within the home, paired with unequal household bargaining power in relation to their male partners.

This idea that mothers do not and should not get paid for their maternal duties is then infiltrated into the ideology of government and corporate agencies to value women's work, whether inside (private) or outside (public) of the home, as free (Pettman, 1996). Thus, women's labor outside of the home is undermined and then legitimized by the government's non-regulation of private employers. False preconceived notions of unpaid women's labor inhibits women's opportunities to enter and advance in the workplace as they face an added layer of discrimination in the system via gendered segregation of labor.

According to Walby (1989) women experiencing segregation in the labor force takes several forms but the two most common are vertical and horizontal: vertical relating to the top-down hierarchy of job title and income; then horizontal relating to the different types of tasks assigned to women based on gender. Because patriarchal structures in the workplace allow vertical and horizontal segregation, or more simply, gendered division of labor, exclusion of women from higher paid work and/or gender-appropriate work isolates them to certain positions and ultimately devalues their wages, therefore it is not a coincidence that the majority of major corporations and private fortunes are owned by men (Connell, 1995; Walby, 1989). I use this example to showcase the ways in which masculine body politic intervenes in the private sphere to make an acceptable economic case for public capitalization of women's labor.

Although women's increased exposure to employment opportunities is a step toward financial independence (despite the ongoing battle for fair compensation), employed women face a dilemma that may lead them back to violent (direct and indirect) environments in the private sphere. Built up animosity of men who feel robbed of their right to income use the women

who've entered the job market as a scapegoat to further justify violence against women at home. Income insecurity then becomes a major concern for men as the pressures to meet society's expectations as providers are threatened by structures such as neoliberalism which demands cheaper and faster labor, and unfortunately women are consistently hired for that very reason (Walby, 1989; Pettman, 1996; True, 2012). These pressures of men to feel they are destined as providers to their families, or, at least, to claim their right to work without competition of women, refers to the notion of breadwinner masculinities (Connell, 1995; True, 2012). Breadwinning masculinities suggest that it is the right, or entitlement, of men to yield income. When this entitlement is disrupted, the male status and identity are at risk, viewing women's gains as men's losses (Bloomquist, 1989; True, 2012).

Women in the labor force challenge the notion that men are the sole breadwinners, regardless if men are losing their jobs to women. Women earning income for the household gain some autonomy and, in a way, some power too, even if comparably insignificant to their male counterparts. For men, loss of masculinity through loss of masculine functions like breadwinning can lead to feelings of loss of masculine identity and ultimately what ensues is escalated violence (Bloomquist, 1989; Connell, 1995; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Lagarde, 2010; Olivera, 2006; True, 2012). Particularly poor and racially diverse men impacted by chronic unemployment, atop various other factors that inhibit patriarchal dividend (or entitlement to patriarchal privilege such as the man's perceived right to earn an income), may choose to participate in male-driven competition by aggressively pursuing women in the acts of assault or rape, solely to exercise and retain their little share of masculine power (Bloomquist, 1989; Pettman, 1996; Segato, 2010). Neoliberalism in some ways also pushes underprivileged men with few opportunities into extreme violence where hegemonic masculinity is heavily exerted. For instance, local gangs,



transnational crime organizations, terrorist groups and the like all provide some sense of security and honor while also exposing them to deadly weapons and warfare (Mobekk, 2010).

*The Masculine State and Citizenship in the Public/Private Sphere(s)*

Historically, women were excluded from full state citizenship largely due to the state's construction of women as dependents. The state viewed and granted full citizenship to contributors to the nation, men mainly, as they were income producers, and better yet, soldiers for the state. Repurposing the arguments of Pettman (1996), I introduce the theory of women as client-citizens. Conventional patriarchal values view women's roles in the state as client citizens-producers of male workers, soldiers, and leaders. Through the state's gender essentialist lens, women were and continue to be primarily needed for increasing the state's population and not necessarily for executing state functions, in order to strengthen the sovereign state. Thus women seeking contraception or abortion were viewed as traitors of the state by resisting their roles as breeders. In part, decreases in citizen numbers weaken state sovereignty because sovereignty is partly defined by population numbers (Pettman, 1996). For this reason, the state is deeply invested in motherhood and reproductive rights become controversial since women generally view their right to reproduce and make decisions about their own bodies as their fundamental right. With state intervention however, women's reproductive rights are publicly discussed, legally and religiously interpreted, and then ruled upon through passing of legislation. Although patriarchal systems deem homemaking and childcare as private matters left to women, women's reproductive choices are, paradoxically, a public matter in the decision making realm of the state, a conglomerate structure overwhelmingly governed by men. Criminalizing abortion and limiting

access to contraception is one of the ways political institutions barricade women's ownership of their own bodies.

Continuing on the theme of women's sexual relations and reproductive rights, women face a combination of structural and cultural violence at the intersection of gender, race and income level once more, via tactics of moral coding. With the backing of institutions and platforms like media, politics, and academic studies, historically and sometimes currently, poor and perceived racially inferior women continue to be painted as bad mothers: they are depicted as mothers who have children out of wedlock, bear more children than they can afford to support, (Alcalde, 2010; Pettman, 1996) and when forced to take multiple jobs to support their families, they are also blamed for juvenile delinquency (Olivera, 2006). Alas, the procreation of these particular women remains incredibly criticized by the institutions that celebrate 'rightful and deserving' citizens whilst demonizing poorer and racially diverse 'non-deserving' citizens.

I revisit the arguments of Johan Galtung (1969) to drive this point home. In the context of cultural violence, moral coding is a key tactic for the state in persuading large populations to support peace and/or violence for certain groups, domestic or foreign. For example, state leaders code abortion, an issue that primarily affects women, as "murder" (or anti-life) and outlaw these procedures according to moral ethics that aim to preserve and protect life. Meanwhile, the same leaders and their followers justify, provoke, or remain complicit with the mass incarceration of "undesirable" (say, Black) men for nonviolent crimes degrading the lives of these men and their families through continued inflammatory propaganda. Through moral coding, leaders and institutions apply cultural violence to legitimize direct and structural violence on impressionable audiences, and the case for state interference within women's personal lives and choices is none more apparent when discussing the role of their sexed bodies and their reproductive choices.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Takeaways**

Rather than connecting violence to instant physical harm or death, structural violence is determined by other factors such as the ability (or inability) to attain optimal life chances or reach full potential realizations. Typically individuals who are unable to achieve both endure more hardship over time and are usually from populations that are perceived to have lower social positions in the structure's social hierarchies. Those groups deemed socially inferior commonly comprise of low-income or no-income populations, the racial-ethnic-religious minorities, women, and non-binary identifying individuals. What is pertinent to the function of structural violence is that through social conditioning and subtle processes of manipulation, there are glaring injustices and inequalities.

When we analyze the effects of global patriarchy, very quickly we are able to identify the obvious differences between the social, political, and economic advantages or disadvantages between men and women. What we are not able to see or identify right away are the administrators of these continuous differences. When women are denied competitive pay, denied the right to their body decisions, denied a voice in their home but expected to accept their denials (and often they do), they are unknowingly participating in the very operations that oppress them. Therefore, patriarchy is precisely the operation of structural violence because administration of discriminatory patterns between men and women is pushed by the structures and accepted by society.

*“...Machismo is not the same as male dominance or patriarchy. Our understanding of machismo has been clouded by tendency to equate it with forms of male superordinance in quite distinct types of social systems. In feminist as well as nonfeminist literature, this assumed congruence between machismo and patriarchy leads to unwarranted conclusions about the centrality of masculine influence in domestic affairs. This is not simply terminological finesse; it has real implications for how we approach household and family dynamics, kinship, and women’s status. Moreover, by distinguishing types of masculine prerogative, we enhance our understanding of how female subordination as opposed to sexual complementarity, is created and maintained in sex and gender systems.”*

*-Elizabeth Ellen Brusco*

## **CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF MACHISMO AND LATIN AMERICA**

The conception of machismo is not exclusive to Latin America, as patriarchal and misogynist societies exist all over the globe. In fact, many of the characteristics of machismo are reiterations of patriarchy; therefore much of content in this chapter is similar to the previous and will seem repetitive. I argue however, that machismo takes unique forms and the term, concept, and application are indeed distinctive to Latin America. It’s critical to understand how the origin, meaning, and evolution of machismo have transformed since the term’s emergence and what it means for today’s Latin American women.

The embodiment of machismo is complex depending on the positionality of the person describing the term since machismo overlaps with other social factors like race and class. Therefore, intersectionality of machismo will certainly be addressed. However, I will first describe what machismo is by relaying the term’s history in both Spanish colonial folklore and modern American culture, followed a detailed description of how machismo takes meaning and application among Latin American men, women and children. I will then discuss marianismo (machismo’s mirror image for women), before describing how machismo and marianismo affect women economically in both the public and private spheres. The commonality between all the various definitions and/or depictions of machismo lie in unequal gender-power dynamics

between Latin American men and women, therefore I argue that machismo can be absolutely categorized as structural violence.

### **What is Machismo?**

To begin, machismo is a word that has only recently appeared in Spanish dictionaries dating back to the 1950's and thereafter heavily coined by social scientists, urban elites, modernizers, and journalists. In the United States, machismo has historically been used to stereotype the demise of Latino families as well as the national security of Latin American countries, which I will later address in the discussion/conclusion chapter. But in order to peel back the origins of machismo, it is critical to understand the Spaniards' divisive programming that stigmatized indigenous (and later Black) peoples and their customary practices when the Americas were colonized. The legacy of Spanish colonialism starts with the reduction of indigenous peoples to murder and servitude; and for the women as sexual slaves (Quijano, 2000). As the legacy of colonialism lingered beyond independence, Latinos identified the mother of Latin America as the mestizo woman, or the Indian, and in contrast the father is the authoritative Spaniard (Alves & Tamez, 1987; Paredes, 1971). Additionally, Christianity, and more specifically Catholicism, was forced upon the native populations. With backing of the Catholic church, the tale of Eve's original sin was used to deepen women's guilt which legitimized the exclusion of women from education, economic gain, political and property rights, and ultimately sanctioning the woman's day-to-day activities to the home (Alves & Tamez, 1987; Bloomquist, 1989).

Before the era of colonialism, the very concept of machismo existed in Spanish-Andalusian origins, which assert men's dominance over women, and women over the household

(Quinones-Mayo & Resnick, 1996; Paredes, 1971). The word “machismo” derives from “macho” which in the Spanish language is associated with the male gender and masculine identity (Novas, 1994; Rivera, 1994). In the post-colonial Latin America, a general interpretation of machismo not only alludes to the male gender but the very defined gender roles assigned to Latino men and dictates many aspects of the broader Latin American culture. These include qualities ranging from strength, importance, valor and honor to power, dominance, violence, and virility (Brusco, 1995; Intindola, Jacobson, Jacobson & Del Campo, 2016; Mirandé, 1997; Novas, 1994; Sugihara & Warner, 2002). Brusco (1995) sought to explore a deeper meaning of machismo among Colombian men proving variations of significance for the term. She found that indeed machismo had very strong implications of exaggerated Latino masculinity, both positive and negative. Interpretations, specifically on the examination of Latino masculinity, identity, and behavior hit on similar yet varying themes such as hyper-masculinity, hyper-sexuality, arrogance, aggression, and irresponsibility. In contrast, courage, protection, risk-taker, independence, and leadership parallel those traits.

Mirandé (1997) questioned the legitimacy of machismo with its negative and exaggerated connotations, ultimately concluding that Latino men cited responsibility, self-reliance, and protector/provider of the family more often when asked to reflect on their own masculinity and fatherhood. Although many men in Mirandé’s extensive study agreed that the rightful head of household belonged to men, contributions to the household among opposite sexes were viewed as egalitarian. Brusco and Mirandé in separate arguments both expressed their rejection of machismo as a hyperbolic generalization to describe Latino men as one particular way and Latina women as another, overlooking the circumstantial nuances to which both sexes have

proactively or reactively defied essentialist gender dynamics given the opportunity or situation. Alas, the common stereotypes of macho men and submissive women in Latin America remain.

A “machista”, or a man who exudes characteristics of machismo, can be or is known to be violent towards his wife (Pinos, Pinos, Baitar, Jerves & Enzlin, 2016). In fact, domestic violence and abuse are behaviors so commonly associated with machismo that in circumstances where men do not use physical force to exude dominance upon their wives, other men will chastise them as not “macho” enough (Englander, Yanez & Barney, 2012). Furthermore, a machista likely saw his own father assault his mother and embraced similar behaviors towards women in adulthood; most men justify this behavior claiming they “were born into” this lifestyle and therefore these acquired patriarchal attitudes and behaviors are acceptable and difficult to reverse (“The Violent Machismo”, 2016).

Machismo can also describe the caliber of man who asserts misogynist traits like objectifying women as purely sexual objects and boasting emotional detachment, even in marriage (Alcalde, 2010). It is not uncommon for a married machista to dwell in extramarital affairs, and if wealthy, own a “casita” to partake in adulterous activities with his mistress(es) (Alves & Tamez, 1987). Adulterous husbands do not expect or accept their wives to dispute their behavior but to endure it, and certainly not to leave the marriage (Ingoldsby, 1991; Pinos et al., 2016). Furthermore, infidelity is only acceptable in the case that the men can abuse this privilege (Alcalde, 2010, Alves & Tamez, 1987; Ingoldsby, 1991, Pinos et al., 2016). By contrast, machistas exude jealous and possessive control over their wives to negate cheating with other men. In Alcalde’s (2010) documentation of battered Peruvian women, many of the survivors cited their husbands’ strict rules to not engage with other men and remain in the house so as to not draw attention from other men, which inhibited their opportunities to work or attend school.

In one documented incidence, a woman living in Lima was mandated by her husband to dress in her traditional indigenous garb to divert attraction from urbanite men, clearly exploiting racist attitudes towards native populations in an attempt to govern the dynamics of their marriage (p. 82). This is just an example of stereotypical suspicious-and-jealous-husband characteristics that play out in near-identical fashion for many Latin American women: a series of binge drinking, accusations of cheating, followed by beating and/or humiliation (Alcalde, 2010; Brigada, 2018).

This is not to say that men dictated by machismo culture only inflict violence towards women. Machismo discourse also explains the actions and attitudes of “bien macho” men directing violence or exuding dominance towards other men in social, institutional, or other public settings including the job place (Englander et al., 2012; Pinos et al., 2016; Stobbe, 2005). Stevens (1973) echoes similar sentiments stating a machista is full of pride which manifests through displayed arrogance and expectation of respect in any environment. To name a few tangible and symbolic examples, competitions between men to prove their macho-ness amongst each other are measured by the amount of alcohol consumed in one sitting, the number of women lured into meaningless sexual relations, the ability to show physical strength in a fist fight or the ability to show financial strength with purchasing power (Sugihara & Warner, 2002; Stevens, 1973; Stobbe, 2005; Englander et al., 2012; Pinos et al., 2016). As two Ecuadorian students described, “a macho thinks that he is amazing; he can do anything... he will beat both women and men... and truly believes he is more important than others” (Pinos et al., 2016, p. 20).



*Intersections of Machismo and the Role of Hegemonic Masculinity*

In applying intersectionality to machismo and Latino men, multiple masculinities need to be considered (Englander et al., 2012). It should be noted that definitions of machismo and masculinity among Latino men differ because of other socio-economic factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and stage in life. This concept of intersecting factors that complete an individual's unique life experience is popularly known as intersectionality, coined by Black feminist critics, and was initially introduced to reveal injustice of Black women not only by gender inequality, but also racial bias and discrimination just as much (Collins, 2012; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; Walby, 1989). Looking broadly at masculinity, heterosexuality and men's position of social dominance intersects, or interacts, with race and class. However specific configurations of male privilege and masculinity like sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class (especially when marginalized) weaken and even disqualify, masculine legitimacy stripping these men from gaining 'patriarchal dividend' which in turn creates further cycles of power and oppression among men and women (Bloomquist, 1989; Connell, 1995; Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Sokoloff, 2005). This simply means that a rich, educated, white man's expressions and understanding of machismo resembles slight differences when compared to, say, a poor, minimally educated, indigenous man's. Author of *The Women in the Violence* (2010), M. Cristina Alcalde, discusses the ways in which middle and lower class Peruvian men identify configurations of masculinity via the natural, the domestic, and the public:

“Natural masculinity refers to men's genitalia, heterosexuality, and physical strength, all three understood by men and women; innate and foundational to be a man. The domestic construction prioritizes family, marriage and fatherhood. However for lower and middle class men, control and sexuality over the spouse paired with authority over the family are key components of masculine identity. The third configuration, the public, demonstrates

the man's place and validation outside of the home including involvement in politics, social and economic competition, and seduction of women" (pp. 28-29).

In Peru and much of Latin America, where economic wealth and status are closely aligned with race, middle and lower income men of indigenous or Black backgrounds dismiss the public configuration of masculinity, a social sphere dominated by white Latino elite, and instead link masculinity to their Black and brown bodies. "Their attractiveness lies in their bodies, the very essence of their masculinity, whereas the attractiveness in men of other races lies in their beauty, a quality symbolically associated with femininity" (Alcalde, 2010, p. 29).

In contrast, homosexuality among Latinos is commonly stigmatized and also associated with femininity. This assertion was found to be true among a published study (Hirai, Popan, Winkel & Dolma, 2017) with a Cuban sample population, concluding that "machismo contributes to anti-gay prejudice equally" among men and women (p. 2). Due to the conventions of social constructs and order, the importance of heterosexuality, a norm of hegemonic masculinity in Latin America, appeared to be a key indicator that channeled people's attitudes on gay acceptance or discrimination.

I mention hegemonic masculinity and its interactions with race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation because it is key to understanding machismo as structural violence towards other men. Although structural violence against and amongst other men is not the basis for my central argument, the takeaway is that machismo creates gender hierarchies based on the "acceptable" levels of income, social status, and sexual orientation that make-up the ideal "macho man." Thus men whom are considered outliers in the image of the ideal macho man are grouped with women based on their "feminine traits" and therefore they are socially subordinate. This goes to show how overwhelmingly important being a figure of power is to men in Latin

America, El Salvador included, and further exemplifies that machismo is destructive to the culture and quality of life overall.

### **The Socialization of Marianismo (Machismo's Mirror Image)**

A key indicator on Latino men's treatment and valuation of women begins with the family dynamic (chiefly patriarchal) and cultural identity (strong emphasis and identity aligned with family and honor; i.e. familism). It is in the family where machismo by way of patriarchy is predominantly taught, learned, and reinforced (Quinones-Mayo & Resnick, 1996; Intindola et al., 2016). Although machismo is almost always applicable to men and exclusionary in that sense, women can also be "macho," categorized as "muy macha." Women possessing "muy macha" characteristics break the mold assigned to Latin American women and are often generalized as brave, resolute and may drink tequila straight like she is one of the guys (Novas, 1994). Sugihara & Warner (2002) showcased that Mexican-American women displaying macho traits equally used violence against their male partners, highlighting that both men and women equally executed acts of abusive and possessive demeanor. The scholars, however, dutifully noted that these acts took place in the United States inferring that these Chicano women grew acculturated to American norms of perceived gender equality, which then prompted them to push common gender norms including beating their husbands.

Opposite of "muy macha" and a direct counterpart to machismo is "marianismo." Marianismo applies to the female gender, called "marianistas", and finds its roots in Christianity a la "the virtuous woman," using the Virgin Mary as the premiere model. Brusco (1995) argued "marianismo is machismo's mirror image... arrogance and intransigence in the male are mirrored by self abnegation and submission in the female... a double standard of extreme

proportions” (p. 79). In many machista families, the roles of the marianista mothers and daughters are characterized by catering to the men of the house, even the young boys, maintaining the cleanliness of the house, preparing the food, and often taking a back seat to education opportunities to their male familial counterparts (Blossom, 2018). Just as machismo dictates the man, marianismo dictates the woman with overwhelming messages of obedience and submission; thus the marianista never fully realizes her own oppression (Alves & Tamez, 1987). Sokoloff (2010) reiterates that such confining gender roles and “cultural prohibitions” for Latina women deter women from disclosing their treatment to outsiders or reporting abuse to counselors (p. 51).

With this in mind, there are stages to marianismo and the first starts with the era of innocence. Coming-of-age and unmarried marianistas are innocent, chaste, self-sacrificing, obedient, giving, and most of all faithful (Blossom, 2018; Quinones-Mayo & Resnick, 1996; Rivera, 1994; Sokoloff, 2005; Sugihara & Warner, 2002). A cult of virginity plays a large role not just for coming-of-age girls, but also for boys seeking to prove their macho-ness. Brothers and male family members shield the sisters’ virginity from premature advances proving their ability to protect, while others prowl for a young girl's virginity proving their ability to seduce and conquer (Ingoldsby, 1991). Loss of virginity of a young unmarried girl is shameful not just for the girl but for her family as well, and is stigmatized within the Latin American community (Englander et al., 2012; González-López, 2004). It should be noted that not all Latin American families, especially fathers, prioritize the preservation of their daughter’s virginity, as progressive attitudes towards sex education and responsibility emerge more frequently. As concluded by González-López (2004), recent parenting values for daughters include excelling in

education and prioritizing secure futures. These sentiments especially ring true for recently emigrated Mexican families living in the U.S.

For the families that do subscribe to marianismo values however, coming-of-age girls experience structural violence well into their adult years for fear of being penalized for engaging in sex before marriage, even in cases of rape, which I will explain in detail in the following chapter. Sex before marriage often discredits and devalues girls as they are not generally viewed as individuals who deserve to fulfill their sexual desires (particularly in the eyes of the church and state) but to reproduce, which makes them ‘client-citizens’ (Pettman, 1996). As I explained in first chapter, this is a blatant inhibition of women’s liberation to their own bodies, and therefore marianismo as it relates to girls’ virginity is also structural violence.

In marianismo culture, married women are expected to be sexually responsive upon demand, run the husband’s household when he is away and also suffer her husband’s flaws, regardless of his questionable and poor behavior (Quinones-Mayo & Resnick, 1996; Sugihara & Warner, 2002). That is because self-sacrifice and ‘carrying a big heart’ are core to the marianista’s character, especially to her children whom she carries the bulk of the responsibility in raising them (Pena, 1991). As I alluded to in the previous section, a marianista is expected to respect her husband and stay away from public social gatherings to avoid attracting or engaging with other men (Pena, 1991). Tugging at the fears of men losing their control over women in the power dynamics between both sexes, women who are emboldened to leave their relationships, participate in extramarital affairs, or simply go out dancing are deemed as harlots, “putas”, or treacherous women (Pena, 1991). What is revealed in the next chapter is that women who bend culture and social norms are ultimately hurt by these strict stipulations since their society’s values are clouded by pre-existing views of marianismo.

Playing deeper into the traditional machismo/marianismo role, a woman becomes of most value when she yields children, and in fact, motherhood is a stepping stone for a woman to earn respect - a rite of passage to womanhood - ultimately earning reverence amongst her husband, peers, and family. Rivera (1994), Ingoldsby (1991), and Brusco (1995) express similar views: among Latinos, Latina matriarchs are the foundation of the family unit, but altogether women are robbed of individuality and independence. Machismo enters the discourse of kinship and family by reducing women's activities to two: "suffering the male presence and mourning his absence" (Brusco, 1995, p. 80). What is standard among most, if not all, definitions and descriptions of machismo and marianismo is the assertion of dominance of men over women where "women are expected to serve in submissive roles acting as caregivers and nurturers" to the entire family, and men are expected to be "overbearing and imperious" (Fox & Zagumny, 2017, p. 98).

#### *Machismo and Economics in the Public/Private Spheres*

In many cases where male migrants from Latin America on U.S. soil and send remittances home, machismo and marianismo are at play and at odds. Although these migrant communities of men act as financial providers (or breadwinners) for their families, they also participate in domestic chores like cooking meals and washing laundry, showcasing that they are indeed capable and willing to do "women's work" without fear of ridicule (Brusco, 1995). For the migrants' wives, they rely on their husband's remittances but also manage the property, harvest the land, and acts as an autonomous head of household. This role is mostly symbolic since nearly all property titles remain in the men's name, and often left to their son(s) for inheritance (Olivera, 2006).

Whereas men have been labeled breadwinners of the household globally, the same is true in Latino machismo culture. Machista men often manage the finances in and outside of the household, allocating an “allowance” to his spouse for household purchases, a clear indication of financial dependence of women. Latin American women unbound to the home experience machismo in the professional field as well. Torras and Grow (2015) stress that machismo plays a significant role for Latin American women, referencing horizontal and vertical segregation which inhibit women’s ability to meet their full potential. In Torras and Grow’s study focusing on Peruvian women creatives, they reveal that despite 80% of South American women driving consumption decisions, men monopolize senior and managerial positions within advertising agencies in the region. On the contrast women creatives are minimally hired, largely underrepresented and placed in junior positions. Thus clients and colleagues, male and female alike, overlook these women workers. The continuous hiring of men over women in male-dominated labor forces across Latin America is a result of dual responsibility: typically women do not actively seek “those” kinds of jobs, and for women that do, they are either discouraged or not fully supported to pursue their professional goals (Stobbe, 2005; Torras & Grow, 2015).

Just as machismo in the social and family dynamic takes similar but slightly variant meanings, the same can be applied to the sexual division of labor in Latin America. On one hand, men are known for their “natural” biological abilities which makes them strong, and on the other their authoritative abilities makes them managerially fit. This is not to say that women don’t have these same abilities. However these innate attitudes among the male labor force frequently prompt men from all professional fields to offer women help lifting heavy objects on the job, silo women to gender-appropriate work, and make passive sexual jokes (Stobbe, 2005). Latina women whom have earned a place in higher levels of the workforce and academia face

additional opposition and criticism. Women's overall attitude, work ethic, and performance evaluations range from being described as "too pushy", "bitchy", "despotic", or pretending to be helpless to get out of a work situation (Englander, 2012, p. 75). Multiple studies have shown that Latina women in higher positions of work or academia also tend to combat each other with condescending remarks making it difficult for women to trust other women in the same professional space (Englander, 2012; Torras & Grow, 2015). To add, women workers who are aware and emboldened by their political, social, and economic rights may face social problems in their male-dominated labor industries as well as in the home, both spaces commonly dominated by men. This form of hostility is captured in "cumulative disadvantage" referring to the "discrimination against women at one level leads to discrimination at the next level whether in public, the home, and work domains" (Kōu & Bailey, 2017). With this in mind, I circle to the intersection of class, race, and gender to speak about the ways in which economics paired with machismo affect women who are both working and non-working, affluent and non-affluent.

Alves and Tamez (1987) reveal that dominance, violence, and subordination affect Latina women at all levels of society, however oppression is dramatically worse for poor women, particularly in the home. In discussing intimate partner abuse, Sokoloff (2005) revisits the significance of intersectionality bridging gender and class (versus gender and race/ethnicity) as main indicators of violence, especially among poorer populations. Race and or ethnicity largely disappear when analyzing violence and only emerge when the link between economic class is a result of long, systemic racial/ethnic discrimination (Sokoloff, 2005). Many scholars maintain working class men of color experience an added layer of oppression, constantly fighting an uphill battle to prove their worthiness in society, and because these men never really had a sense of social power (Miller, 1989), whether patriarchal or material (Connell, 1995), their grasp of



power is sought in the home, within the media they consume, and through reinforcement of machismo behavior in all spaces (Segato, 2010). Failures of Latin American men including but not limited to economic insecurity, political exclusion or oppression make the woman the target for men's pains, shortcomings, lack of opportunities, and virile conquests (Miller, 1989; Segato, 2010). These same angers are further fueled when women gain some independence by earning income, education or some other form of political/social autonomy (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Markham, 2017; Wright, 2010). This again ties back to the notion of hegemonic masculinity and fear of women testing the man's capability to secure his future, his finances, and claim to power against the divisive structures which tell this man he is worthless because of his race or status. This is structural violence because others will see the man as both inferior because of his race, and second because of his inability to be the sole provider for his family; therefore his perceived inferiorities make him "feminized". Furthermore, this inadequacy of manliness leads to the escalation of physical and more structural violence against women.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Takeaways**

Machismo and patriarchy are very closely aligned however, machismo deviates from patriarchy in that it is specific to Latin America, and affects Latin American men, women, and children in slightly different ways. All aspects of machismo maintain that men are the sole grantors and receivers of power in the relationship between men and women. For men who cannot achieve this standard of a macho man, they are left out of this group entirely, creating more hierarchies within gender. In mirroring ways, marianismo reinforces machismo values by fueling strict gender roles for women and girls as well. Such confining gender roles and "cultural prohibitions" for Latinas deter women from disclosing their treatment to outsiders, alas they continue to accept their injustices which ultimately keep them from reaching their potential

realizations. This culture of machismo based in patriarchy, has essentially influenced the nature of men to be violent, for virtually no other reason other than because they can- because society will not penalize this behavior. The outcome is that their families, their places of work, their schooling, and their governments, who uphold these structural injustices, fail women. The same cannot be truthfully argued when discussing the privileges of men.

Machismo is important to understand because, as I uncover in the following chapter, it is widespread in El Salvador and is considered by many a major contributor to extreme violence against women, both structurally and directly. With this in mind, then we are able to make the connection between inherent views towards women's worth and rising rates of femicides in the country.

### **CHAPTER 3: A CASE STUDY: THE SALVADORAN WOMEN WHO ENDURE VIOLENCE**

In El Salvador, there are really three (if not more) different but collective narratives to be told on behalf of the women whom endure extreme violence, die from extreme violence, or seek asylum in the U.S. to escape violence. Machismo beliefs are present in all of these narratives. This chapter is a comprehensive case study on gender-based violence in El Salvador using quantitative and qualitative archival data to convey each narrative and show evidence that extreme crimes against women is on the rise. Ultimately, the case study aims to answer the third objective of the thesis, which was outlined in the introduction: to further note that extreme violence against women, exemplified specifically in the phenomenon of femicides, is a key causal factor in women's migration from El Salvador to the U.S. Therefore, this chapter is critical in addressing and analyzing the motivations behind the increase in Salvadoran women applying for asylum in the U.S. by documenting their real experiences.

To understand the violent nature that civilians have experienced (by a number of different actors) I will first expand on the violent history that has permeated and remained in the country before El Salvador was coined the murder capital of the world (Griffin, 2018). I then will provide a general overview of the international laws in place that address violence against women in Latin America. Building on the theme that violence against women is widespread, I continue to look at the ways machismo is applied in the daily functions of women's lives as proof that machismo is more tangible than a theory or concept but an application of violent behavior. I do this by looking at the three scopes of violence, where they occur and who perpetrates this violence. In order of appearance, I focus on intra-familial violence, gang structured violence, and finally, systemic impunity of perpetrators.

**El Salvador: A Nation and Its Violent History**

Despite data that shows violent crimes and homicide has dropped in the country for a third consecutive year, El Salvador still remains one of the most deadly outside of a war zone with an average of one homicide every two hours (Donovan, 2019). The country with a population of six million is one of the world's most dangerous, totaling 5,278 murders in 2016 (Organization of the Americas [OAS], 2018). Unfortunately, this pattern of deadly violence is not new to the country and hasn't been for decades.

The continuation of violence and conflict in the country is a result of conceding to the 'conflict trap' (Collier, 2007). The conflict trap, theorized by global economist Paul Collier, is described as the never-ending cycle of internal national battles triggered by permanent low-income and slow growth. Many internal conflicts materialize into either civil wars or coups, and have a higher probability of re-emerging so long as the state of the economy remains poor. This pattern makes such relapses normal, and erases economic growth achieved during peacetime. Unfortunately when a country falls to the conflict trap, peace agreements generally don't lead to progressive change, rather it leads to more violence as opposing sides maintain mutual distrust. As a result, homicide rates surge.

In the case of El Salvador, the country has been unstable, or fallen and remained in the conflict trap, since the country's independence from Spain (early 1800's), and certainly before the emergence of gangs, which began in the 1990's. Like the majority of Latin America, El Salvador has not made significant economic progress to compete in global trade, develop sustainable infrastructure to maintain livability, or improve its approach to resolve national issues. For example, military privilege used to resolve domestic issues began in the mid-1800's and continued throughout the early 1900's during the country's coffee boom. In an effort to

contain civil unrest among peasants, farmers, and socialists, the central government enlisted the military to create and disperse “Death Squads” to distinctly target anyone who looked native or was suspected of supporting communist-led uprisings<sup>5</sup> (“El Salvador Profile”, 2018). From the 1920’s onto the early 1970’s, recurring events such as military coups and extra-judicial killings of protestors (anti-government and anti-coup) paired with prolonged lack of income and agricultural cultivation came to a tipping point which sparked a decades long civil war in the late 1970’s between right-wing-backed militias and left-wing rebels<sup>6</sup>.

The United States feared that El Salvador, like Nicaragua and Cuba, would fall to communism and in response the Carter administration supported the military-led government with monetary and military aid upwards of five million dollars. Under the Reagan administration, support for the Salvadoran government increased significantly allocating up to one billion dollars in aid, which also included elite military training (Bonner, 2018; Motlagh, 2019). As with previous civilian massacres, the U.S.-trained elite squads were instructed to target anyone, even civilians, they suspected of supporting social and economic reform along with rebel insurgents. Many of the victims that were targeted included unionists, independent farmers, university officials, priests and students (Bonner, 2018).

As a result, over 75,000 civilians were killed, rape of women was a common practice for both warring parties, and thousands fled to the United States as war refugees (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Motlagh, 2019). By the war’s end in 1992, a group of refugees concentrated in Los Angeles, California formed the notoriously violent gang, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), prompting the U.S. to enforce mass deportations of MS-13 members back to El Salvador. In

---

<sup>5</sup> The country retains some very similar and controversial militia malpractices today by stereotyping poor-looking boys and men to be gang members who are mostly concentrated in the poorer cities and regions of the country.

<sup>6</sup> Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, commonly referred to as FMLN

result, what was once political violence transformed into civil violence as many of the deported gang members infiltrated the remaining population whom were left in a recovering, but badly damaged, country (Donovan, 2019).

The recovery after the war has been stagnant as the majority of infrastructure, education and political institutions remain stunted by lack of capital, production, trade, and redevelopment. Weak institutions, paired with low or no income and jobs created the perfect grounds for the birth and proliferation of gangs as many civilians remained poor, minimally educated, and survived on remittances sent from relatives in the United States (Hallock, Soto & Fix, 2018). Even decades after the civil war's conclusion, many civilians do not trust their national government and feel hopeless of any meaningful progress. The demographic that suffers the most from economic and political failure are the country's young adults. While one-third of Salvadorans live in poverty, the unemployment rate for 16-to-24-year-olds is double the national average, and roughly 300,000 in the group do not work or study (O'Toole, 2018). Lack of livable income and even basic necessities like food and electricity cause fatigue and desperation among young and poor populations who then seek purpose, belonging, and a sense of power in criminal groups (Hallock et al., 2018). Despite concerted efforts and significant lending from international agencies to promote prosperity and remove gang structures, violence has become an ingrained part of life, a natural way to resolve conflicts, and the country still remains in a state of conflict (or in the conflict trap) despite no official or active war (Donovan, 2019; Musalo, 2018).

This background is provided to reiterate that before the gang structures emerged, instability and violence in the country was already present. Thus, gang structures were not the point of origin of widespread violence the country experiences today, but a continuation of violence leftover from the civil war which transformed into civil violence. And although

machismo is not extensively addressed in this historical background, it should be understood that machismo and other patriarchal biases have existed in El Salvador during both peace and conflict times. There is sufficient data however, to state that violence against women is escalated, in both volume and extremity, during conflict times. It's possible to hypothesize that because El Salvador resembles a country experiencing national conflict, the increase in gender-based-violence cases may be a correlating result.

### **The Problem with Latin America and the Degradation of Women**

The region of Latin America has made strides to address women's inequality, and that should be recognized. However Latin America has a problem with effectively fighting violence against women and has had this problem for decades. Due to the fact that many government bodies operate with the perpetuation of gender hierarchies, the region has had to recognize its devaluation of women's lives to the point that all Latin American states are signatories to United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Today, 14 of 19 Latin American nations have also ratified CEDAW'S Optional Protocol which recognizes the competence of the UN CEDAW Committee to monitor states' compliance and to receive and consider complaints from individuals within its jurisdiction ("Femicide and International", n.d.). The same 14 nations that opted into CEDAW's Optional Protocol are also signatories to and have ratified the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) (Carrón, Thompson & Macdonald, 2007; Musalo, 2018).

The Convention of Belém do Pará "affirms violence against women constitutes a violation of their human rights and fundamental freedom" and recognizes violence against

women as physical, psychological, and sexual violence within either the private or public spheres (“Femicide and International”, n.d.). In addition to a woman’s right to a life free of violence, the convention grants women’s authority to speedy recourse from local courts and law enforcement in the instance these rights are violated (Musalo, 2018). Despite the adoption of these international laws, Latin America as an entire region is considered to be amongst the most notorious regarding targeted killings or murders of women regardless of war or civil conflict.

The region is also recognized internationally as a region where women lack freedom, safety and security (Wulfhorst, 2018). For example, of 25 countries with the highest femicide rates globally, 14 were of the Latin American and Caribbean region (Pavesi & Wildmer, 2016). Even more focused reports reveal that seven of the top 10 countries with the highest femicide rates are from Latin America (Yagoub, 2017), indicating that both conventions (CEDAW and Belém do Pará) are mostly symbolic (perhaps to appease or have been imposed by the global community) due to weak applications and general lack of enforcement of the international laws (Wilson, 2014).

Despite the fact that all of Latin America countries have made attempts to fight gender-based violence, the increase in gender-related homicides has ignited family survivors, organizers and advocates to contest that the outdated gender norms outlined in machismo culture are the very inhibitors that keep women from living free of violence (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). In effect, mass killings of women prompted the region to deal specifically with a new category of homicide, now recognized as femicide, and to codify these kinds of “aggravated gender-related” killings to carry a criminal sentence (“Femicide and International, n.d.).

This background on the problem of the degradation of women in Latin America is purposed to set up the framework for the rest of the case study, as the chapter dives deeper into



the numerical data and second-hand testimony of victims in El Salvador. What is revealed in the next segment is that the Salvadoran government has tried to resist sex and gender inequality and free women of all forms of violence, but progress has been slow to advance, and femicide is increasing. I hypothesize, and others agree, that institutional and social resistance to women's equality and right to life free of violence is largely due to the patriarchal and machismo legacies that have been adhered to, and are incredibly difficult to deconstruct.

### **The Significance of Femicide, Femicide Coding, and Laws in El Salvador**

Because El Salvador is cited as one of the countries with alarming rates of femicide, it's important to know what femicide actually is. By global definition, femicide refers to the killing of a girl or woman solely based on her sex, or motivated by the female sex (Lagarde, 2010; Moreno, Guedes & Knerr, 2012; U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018). The term has evolved over time (first appearing in the 1970's by Diana Russell) but its origins tie back to the awareness-raising of male-misogynistic killing of women motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or sense of ownership over women (UNODC, 2018). Mexican feminist scholar Marcela Lagarde de los Rios expanded the term, femicide, to be more inclusive of human rights violations against women beyond the actual act of murder. The term *feminicide* was birthed in response to the widespread disappearances of young girls and women in Ciudad Juarez, [Chihuahua] Mexico concurrent with the widespread impunity of perpetrators. Feminicide varies from femicide in that the term accounts for women who are believed to be dead although death cannot be proven (like forced disappearance) along with the unreliable and untrustworthy law enforcement whom either collude or neglect these crimes against women altogether (Lagarde, 2010; UNODC, 2018). In short, "feminicide entails a partial breakdown of the rule of law that is

incapable of guaranteeing respect for women's lives or human rights" [therefore] "femicide is a state crime" (Lagarde, 2010, p. xxiii).

Femicide, as a standalone term, faces some challenges. Many experts and scholars agree that although femicide signifies the killings of women motivated by sex and or gender, the term lacks a universal and standardized definition. Among Latin American nations, femicide varies from state to state and has proven to be very problematic in the opinion of watchdog organizations, especially since the region stands out for this very problem (Rauls & Ziff, 2018; UNODC, 2018). Vagueness or different interpretations of whether the murder of a woman constitutes as a femicide often leads to mischaracterization of the crime, which then leads to misrepresented reporting, inaccurate data, and misinformation (UNODC, 2018). Activists, survivors, and feminists agree that the lack of consistent, internationally prescribed definitions, standards, and procedures have contributed to the persistence of high femicide rates (Sandra, 2014; "Femicide and International", n.d.; Rauls & Ziff, 2018).

In the case of El Salvador, the country registered 383 femicides in 2018, although this figure does not reflect all violent killings of women in the country for very specific reasons regarding what does or does not constitute as a "femicide" (Brigada, 2018; Musalo, 2018). The first passing of a national femicide law appeared in 2010 with aims to protect women from such extreme acts of violence, and make femicide a specific crime carrying up to a 50 year sentence in jail time (Moloney, 2017). But in order for investigators and other local legal agencies to determine femicide, one of five criteria is required. Aside from establishing the perpetrator-victim relationship, the Salvadoran femicide code requires more concrete evidence to determine that force and power were part of the overall homicide act including signs of rape, torture, mutilation, trauma, or display of disregard towards the woman's body (Donovan, 2019). In some

cases, the victim-perpetrator relationship is not a major concern. For example, cases where the victim is loosely connected to her assailant or not connected at all, prosecutors and judges still determine femicide by drawing on the apparent displays of force and power.

Since femicide lacks a consistent and universal definition, individual courts prosecuting these kinds of crimes run the risk of losing the full scope of extreme gendered crimes which do occur and could fit within the parameters of femicide coding. When criminal codes fail to protect all crimes committed against women that potentially lead to death, the governing bodies essentially fail to guarantee protection of women, which is, indeed, an act of femicide. In the later section that discusses widespread impunity, I look closer at the implications of selective femicide coding in El Salvador and its impact on the courts and victims alike.

### **El Salvador's Violence Against Women: At-a-Glance**

Specifics on Salvadoran women's motivations to escape violence by fleeing to the U.S. begin with understanding the full scope of gender-based violence that takes place in the country every day. When researchers asked Salvadoran female refugees why they fled, most cited rape, gender-based violence, and fear of sex trafficking (Kinzer, 2018). That is likely because the country ranks globally to have one of the highest rates for violent deaths of women, the highest rate of femicide in Latin America, and the third highest in the world (Donovan, 2019). While El Salvador is a signatory to both CEDAW and Belém do Pará, the country has also earned remarks from the global community as one of the most dangerous places to be a woman in association with increased reports of femicides, domestic and or intra-familial violence, sexual violence, and widespread impunity for these crimes (Donovan, 2019; Griffin, 2019; Hallock et al., 2018; Musalo, 2018).

Although the homicide rate for women is lower than that for men, the proportion of homicide victims who are female increased from 10 percent since the early 2000s to 15 percent in recent years (Musalo, 2018). As early as 2012, the country had already revealed signs of systemic femicide with 8.9 homicides per 100,000 women (Yagoub, 2017). As recorded by the Institute of Legal Medicine (2018) based in the country's capital, in 2017 a woman was murdered every 18 hours and women's bodies were found in various places including public areas where they were clearly visible. Out of 468 women murdered in El Salvador in 2017, nearly 45% of the murdered women were recorded being 29 years of age or younger. Of this data 16 cases of femicides were of girls younger than 15 years old (Institute of Legal Medicine, 2018). Collectively, the highest recorded numbers of murdered Salvadoran women were between the ages of 15 and 29, roughly 41% of the total tally<sup>7</sup>.

In 2018, the number of femicides slightly decreased to 383 (Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz [ORMUSA]) but most of the murders of women under 30 were brutal, savage killings (Donovan, 2019). Of course this preliminary data is to showcase that VAW in El Salvador is persistent, growing, and why the country has earned less than pleasant remarks from the international and regional community regarding the issue (see comprehensive data on Table 1 on page 53). But I argue that the increase in murders of women relate to the contextual background of the victims, as well as the background of the perpetrator, such as details on the victim–perpetrator relationship, the location of the crimes, the final location the corpses, and the motivation of the men behind the violence (Pavesi & Wildmer, 2016).

For instance, many women civilians and experts on the subject agree that “women's mutilated corpses left in public places are being used” [by the perpetrators] “as a weapon to

---

<sup>7</sup> Although this paper does not intend to discuss the demographics of the women victims comprehensively, I note that the majority of femicide victims are of childbearing age.

spread terror” (Carrón et al., 2007), or the bodies are presented in such brutality that they are sensed to send messages of intimidation (Chazaro & Casey, 2006). Because these killings are brutal and sometimes public, they can be seen as a hate crime against women (Carrón et al., 2007; Sagot & Cabanas, 2010).

**Table 1**

| <b>VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN STATISTICS [El Salvador] 2014 -2018</b> |             |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>  | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>2018</b> |
| Sexual Crime Cases  | 1793        | -           | 658*        | 1572        |
| Violence Against Women Cases                                      | 1264        | 4686        | -           | -           |
| Intra-familiar/Domestic Violence Cases                            | 1233        | -           | -           | 569         |
| Sexual Abuse Children Cases                                       | 60**        | -           | -           | 1331***     |
| Disappeared Women   | -           | -           | -           | 209         |
| Violent Deaths of Women due to Gang Structures                    | 294         | -           | -           | -           |

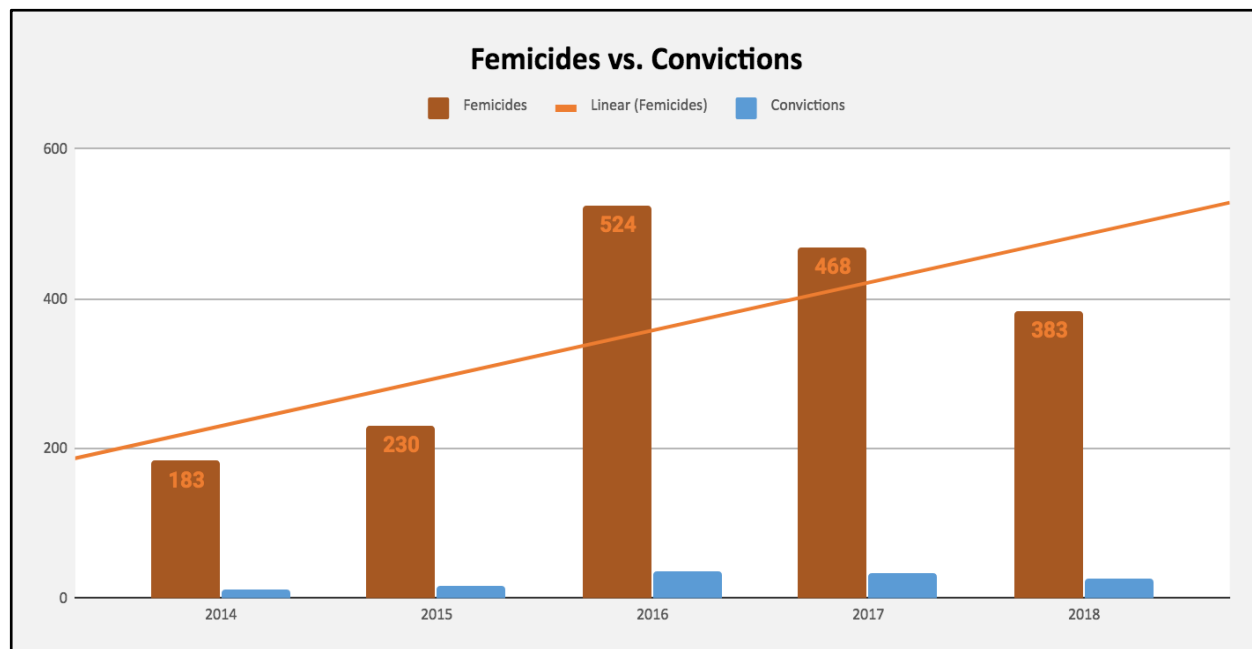
*Note.* Data for the 2014 column from Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor [DHL] (2014), for 2015 column from DHL (2015), for 2016 column from Institute of Legal Medicine (2016), and for 2018 column from Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz [ORMUSA] (2018).

\* Number identified is from January to July 2016  
 \*\* Number identified is from January to June 2014  
 \*\*\* Number identified are children from ages 12-17

Evidence of misogyny playing out in the murders of women are discernable by apparent markings on their bodies including lesions, abrasions, dismemberment of limbs, decapitations, sexual aggression, body dumping in public spaces and more (Carrón et al., 2007; Donovan, 2019; Markham, 2017; Musalo, 2019). Because many women’s corpses reveal a pattern of trauma, torture, mutilation or other intimate/physical contact, many conclude machismo plays a part in the woman’s death because these signs are not typically revealed when men are murdered (Chazaro & Casey, 2006), although it can and does occur. Lastly, machismo is assumed to be a

factor when men kill women because of the blatant lack of respect for the treatment of their bodies during the act of killing, the exertion of male dominance, and mindset of invincibility.

Motivations of femicide represent backlash against women who are empowered, for instance by wage employment, and have moved away from traditional roles closely aligned with marianismo (Carrón et al, 2007). The general hypothesis of femicides is that men intend to cause more suffering and terror, deriving from feelings of wanting to reaffirm male power, control, and domination (Donovan, 2019), identical to the behavior and characteristics outlined in the preceding chapters regarding hegemonic masculinity and dominant masculinity (Connell, 1995). Male perpetrators not only devalue women when they commit mild to extremely violent crimes against them but also view themselves untouchable in the eyes of the law, many times thinking the law will side with men and not women for the crimes committed (Griffin, 2018; Koopman, 2010; “Wonder Women”, 2015). Thus, there is no coincidence that El Salvador is named one of the most dangerous places to be a woman since the numerical data shows spikes in the amount of cases since the early 2010’s matched with the savagery of the killings of women (this data is reflected on Figure 4 on page 55).



*Figure 4:* A bar chart comparing femicides and convictions in El Salvador from 2014 to 2018. Data for 2014 from Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor [DHL] (2014), for 2015 DHL (2015), for 2016 from Aponte of Latin America Working Group (2018), for 2017 from Institute of Legal Medicine (2018), and for 2018 from ORMUSA (2019).

It appears the cruelty wherein these femicides are carried out by perpetrators (compared to their male counterparts) substantiate that male assailants pull from machista norms which signify these acts are acceptable because they are enacted on women (Donovan, 2019; Sagot & Cabanas, 2010). The incline of femicides in the country convey that targeted and extreme VAW is getting worse (escalating in volume and brutality), therefore becoming a dangerous norm within the country, and a bleak reality for the women and girls experiencing or witnessing this violence.

Within the next segment I present a closer analysis to argue that savage killings of women by their partners are not results of impulsive actions but a pattern of chronic and escalating violence. The in-depth case study will show the escalating problem and depict the reasons why women are fleeing to the U.S. for asylum and protection.

## **El Salvador, Intra-familial Violence, and Machismo**

### *Intimate Partner Violence*

A 2012 Centers for Disease Control study found that intimate partner violence in Latin America is widespread where, in some countries, over 50 percent of women suffer abuse (Segura, 2018). Similarly, Oxfam International found that 86% of the young people living in Latin America would not intervene if a friend hit his girlfriend, a common characteristic of machismo culture (Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is key to dissecting the motivations behind killings of woman since many women were killed by the same men they had long-term partnerships with (“Wonder Women, 2015; Olivera, 2006; UNODC, 2018). Opposite of my initial assumptions regarding femicide in El Salvador, I discovered that many murders of women are at the hands of their current or former partner(s) and/or family member(s) (Carrón et al. 2007; Griffin, 2018 Musalo, 2018; Olivera, 2006; UNODC, 2018) and in fact, this group of perpetrators represents the highest risk to women (Sagot & Cabanas, 2010). To that point, “the myth that women are attacked in dark desolate places in debunked since those kinds/types of crimes only make of 15% of total femicides” (Sagot & Cabanas, 2010, p. 151-152).

Intimate partner homicide in El Salvador is generally associated with distinct behaviors including possessiveness, jealousy, fear of abandonment, or fear of losing dominance (Musalo, 2018), which are all found in staple characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and machismo (Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018). For example, the Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace [Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz] (ORMUSA) found in their investigations that most cases in which a woman was killed by her partner, the male counterpart did not work



or maintain the “head of household” role, signifying that the woman sustained more financial and social independence (2019). This statistical and contextual data point suggests that Connell’s (1995) concept of breadwinning masculinities is more than a theory but a truth. The underlying correlation one can draw from this data is that a man in El Salvador killed his female partner out of resentment when it became apparent that he had lost his patriarchal dividend, or his guaranteed right to be the provider of income, along with a part of his masculine identity to a woman.

Comparatively, 80% Salvadoran women said they endure abusive relationships for the sake of their children signaling marianismo customs by making selfless sacrifices for the whole of the family despite a hostile relationship (Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018). Violence and jealousy coupled with love, care, and affection create a distortion of a loving partnership for many Salvadoran women and ultimately it keeps them ignorant to the manipulation of their partners (Alcalde, 2010; Musalo, 2018; Rauls & Ziff, 2018), which is a clear demonstration of structural violence through machismo/marianismo practices. In El Salvador specifically, the threat of death in intimate relationships resonates heavily with men and women 20 to 25 years old even though, paradoxically, most view violence in the relationship as completely normal (Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018; Sagot & Cabanas, 2010). These data points show that there is recognition of wrongdoing but for the Salvadoran women recorded as those who endure intimate partner violence, it is treated as a fact of life. This commonly accepted sentiment is generally shared by others adding to the notion that femicides are a consequence of escalating intra-familial violence (Musalo, 2018, p. 41).

There are two fairly recent and high profile cases of femicides in the country that follow the pattern of brutality and a history of chronic violence worth mentioning. These two incidents

of murdered women caught the attention of Salvadoran national media and are thought to have prompted the nation to take more legal action to protect women from their intimate partners. The first was Salvadoran civilian G.E. Ramirez-Chavez, who was stabbed 56 times the day before her wedding. The fact that Chavez's body was stabbed excessively indicates the murder was indeed savage, brutal, and an exertion of dominance according to the Salvadoran femicide code. Chavez's fiancé was arrested as the prime suspect amid a history of police complaints, which never resulted in any police intervention until her death (Griffin, 2018). The second is well-known journalist Karla Turcios, who was found murdered by strangulation and suffocation; her boyfriend, the suspect, had a history of possessiveness, at one point refusing Turcios to cut her hair without his permission (Griffin, 2018). Turcios boyfriend's behavior, particularly the case in needing permission to change her appearance, resembles similarities to the Peruvian woman in Alcalde's (2010) book who was not allowed to dress in modern attire, per instructions by her husband<sup>8</sup>. Apart from these high profile and recent cases, cases also exist in which the victim does not know the perpetrator but the crime was conspired by the partner or ex-partner and contracted to ex-police or para-military personnel for precision and professionalism (Carrón et al., 2007).

Socialization and conditioning of machismo and marianismo are demonstrated through acts of aggression (versus peacefulness), control (versus dependence) and dominance (versus submission), which enhance men's internalization of power relations and evolve in severity with time. These forms of violence have become so natural to the point that "wives and girlfriends, and estranged/former partners [ultimately] pay the price with their lives" (Sagot & Cabanas, 2010, p. 155). It is also not uncommon for victims of forced sexual intra-familial violence to also

---

<sup>8</sup> Referencing back to M. Cristina Alcalde's in-person interview with a Peruvian woman in book, *The Women in the Violence* which was discussed in chapter 2 on page 32.

become murder victims mirroring similar prolonged patterns of trauma experienced by women. However even without the involvement of homicide, what is uncovered in the next section is the stigmatized yet prevalent practice of intra-familial sexual assault as another example of a motive to leave the country altogether.

### *Sexual Violence, Incest, and Teen Pregnancy*

In El Salvador, on average it's estimated at least 10 women per day suffer or experience sexual assault or violence (Lobo-Guerrero, 2015). In the same fashion, 26 percent of Salvadoran women report having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Brigada, 2018). Intra-familial sexual violence and abuse is incredibly common in the country with nearly three out of every four acts of sexual violence taking place in the victims' homes, and seven of every 10 victims under the age of 20. This suggests that sexual violence is common during girls' coming-of-age years (Lobo-Guerrero, 2015; Koopman, 2010; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor [DHL], 2015). The men who rape Salvadoran women and girls view women as sexual objects to fulfill their virile conquests and these sexual perpetrators are husbands, fathers, brothers (including in-laws), uncles, neighbors, family friends and or acquaintances (Kinzer, 2018; Lobo-Guerrero, 2015).

Salvadoran institutions, such as the Technological University of El Salvador along with international organization like the World Bank and U.S. Department of State (DHL, 2014) note there is a general tolerance of incest within the country, citing nearly one-quarter (22.8 percent) of perpetrators are natural fathers, step-fathers, or other family members, and most cases report the abuse started as young as ten years old (Musalo, 2018). In an effort to dissuade victims from reporting to authorities, male perpetrators pretense abusive acts with threats of more harm and

violence or convince the victims they won't be believed by police, insinuating older girls and women of age voluntarily engage in sex and do not or cannot experience rape (Koopman, 2010). Tolerance of incest can be two-fold and rely heavily on gender power dynamics within the home. For example, some mothers allow incest to occur because the family is heavily dependent on the man's income (the breadwinner), and most times the victims and or victims' mothers fear retribution for filing complaints with police (intimidation leads to silencing or discouragement of political/legal rights) (Musalo, 2018). Ultimately, all factors that force women into silence contribute to mass under reporting of sexual abuses<sup>9</sup> (Kinzer, 2018; Koopman, 2010; Musalo, 2018). I make the case that when women are manipulated or forced into silence, they are robbed of their rights to seek the help and resources to defend themselves from perpetrators, essentially yielding to prolonged abuse and low optimal life chances.

Revisiting the themes of bodily autonomy, public interference and control over women's bodies extends beyond sexual violence (as well as intra-familial or other) to reproductive rights. For example, El Salvador has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy of all Latin America with one quarter of young women between ages 15 and 19 who've already become pregnant (Kinzer, 2018; O'Toole, 2018). While not all teen or adult pregnancies are a result of intra-familial or gang rape in El Salvador, there is sufficient data and testimony to support this claim (Lawson, 2017). In fact, 41 percent of first pregnancies of girl between 10 and 19 years old stem from sexual abuse and 12 percent of those are result of incest (DHL, 2014). The degradation of women's rights in the eyes of the law is most apparent when teenagers seek, or rather don't seek,

---

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that data portraying young boys in in El Salvador (and globally) whom also endure sexual violence are not accurately reflected in reports due to the stigmatized notion of homosexuality (among other stigmas). Therefore young boys also choose not to report their abuse and data is not entirely valid.

abortion, which is considered a homicidal offense carrying a 30-year-minimum sentence (Musalo, 2018; Lawson, 2017).

The hypocrisy of how the law is applied to men and women in the country lies here: while male assailants can go unpunished for widespread rape, incest, and murder of women, women suspected of aborting a pregnancy can go to prison for murder. This mockery of criminal sentencing ties back to the theme of moral coding that functions in both structural and cultural violence. For example, of all Latin American countries, El Salvador is the country with the highest prevalence of belief that aborting an unwanted pregnancy is morally wrong (agreed by 95 percent of young men and 87 percent of young women) (Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018). That is likely because women's reproductive functions are closely aligned with the country's overwhelming Catholic faith, which prohibits taking life. But despite the fact that the majority of churchgoers in the country are women (Alvarez & Tamez, 1987), they are not socially or legally defended by religious institutions when they seek abortion for a pregnancy that was forced on them. The abortion ban in El Salvador mirrors feminists' theories that women's are client-citizens as Pettman (1996) suggested, as they do not have full rights to their bodily autonomy, which is largely considered a private matter that should to be left to the discretion of the private citizen. Yet, the Salvadoran state interferes with women's private lives by restricting choices over their bodies with little regard for the various nuanced situations women face when, where, and what stage in life they are at when they become pregnant.

Beyond legalities, social and cultural beliefs about social attitudes towards abortion is consistent with the law which play into the pressures of young women and girls opting to conceal their abuse and carry out their pregnancies. Strict social views and laws on abortion in El Salvador leaves the burden of child bearing on the girl or young woman with little to zero

consideration of the crimes committed against them, again, essentially freeing the perpetrator from any criminal accountability. The sexist attitudes towards Salvadoran women and girls are so ingrained in the country's politics, culture, and religion that many young women "don't even know they have rights" to change the outcome of their afflicted violence by seeking out counsel and resources (Brigada, 2018). In fact, the U.S. is perceived to be more progressive towards abortion, in liberal states especially, that young girls and women resort to crossing into the U.S. specifically to receive an abortion and not be criminalized (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2018; Chappell, 2017; Rayasam, 2017).

I repeat my argument that when women are ignorant to the rights and resources that are available to fight sexual violence which then force them to suffer chronic abuse, structural violence is indeed at work, and working against the women that desperately need help. In the following segment, a closer look at how the permeance of organized crime which is largely dominated by men, enact destructive machista behaviors towards women and girls, offering more insight into the motivations of women and girls wanting to leave El Salvador for the U.S.

### **El Salvador, Gang Culture, and Machismo**

There are two main gangs that operate in El Salvador and influence the country's functions: Barrio 18 (18<sup>th</sup> Street) and Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13). Membership among both gangs range between 20,000 to 60,000 although difficult to verify exact estimates (Musalo, 2018). Because resistance to membership often leads to death, many simply choose to leave the country altogether (Markham, 2017; McEvers & Garsd, 2015; Segura, 2018). In recent years, gang culture has posed an increasing threat to women and girls in El Salvador, and has gained international attention due to the alarming numbers of women killed by gangs. "Mata, viola,

roba, controla” translates to “kill, rape, rob, and control,” and is often spoken among the members of MS-13 as a slogan (Trimble, 2017). Rape, as the slogan suggests, is a standard practice within the MS-13 among the other commands, and further suggests that gendered power dynamics are weaved in the operations of the organization.

It’s important to understand that machismo culture had already existed in El Salvador when gangs proliferated therefore inherent attitudes of domination over women did not originate within gang culture, but rather they were strengthened (OAS, 2018). For this reason, incredibly high rates of public violence in connection with organized crime affect women and girls differently than men. Although both men and women are targeted and intimidated by gangs through means of force, threats, bullying, and coercion, there’s an added layer of misogyny towards women and girls, regardless if they are affiliated. Evidence of misogyny or machismo exuded by gangs is evident on the markings of women’s bodies (Olivera, 2006), as well as long-term, psychological effects on women’s state of mind (Yagoub, 2017).

In some cases, innocent civilians who do not have direct ties to the gangs, or any ties at all, are young girls and women caught in the crosshairs of gang culture and operations (Markham, 2017; McEvers & Garsd, 2015; O’Toole, 2018). That’s because these groups’ influences in El Salvador extend to the public arena such as prisons, schools, businesses, and even the streets where civilians walk, sell goods, or commute to work. In one National Public Radio (NPR) report, a young woman, aged 17 was killed and left dead on the street in San Salvador for display. Police and family hypothesized she was murdered because her former boyfriend, a bus driver, refused to pay the neighborhood gang’s extortion fees to run his route. The local gang had too murdered the boyfriend a week earlier (McEvers & Garsd, 2015).

While a majority of El Salvador's homicide victims are young men from poor urban areas (O'Toole, 2018), femicide rates have also soared along with the number of women and girls entering gang life (Markham, 2017). In addition to homicides, gangs perpetrate a wide range of other violent crimes, including kidnapping, extortion, sex trafficking, drug trafficking, and labor trafficking, all of which women and girls are involved either as participants or victims (Hallock et al., 2018; Musalo, 2018). Female gang members serve a variety of roles: they are turf monitors, rent collectors (extortion fees), drug mules, and most notably sexual partners; they also provide gangs discretion as they can sneak under the radar of street police who primarily profile young boys and men (Markham, 2017; Musalo, 2018; Hallock et al., 2018). While some women voluntarily join gangs, the majority are involuntary recruits forced into these situations for fear of retribution.

The gangs' operations of sexual violence, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and human trafficking whose victims are primarily women is well known by various national and international institutions as well as civilians (Hallock et al., 2018; Kinzer, 2018; Markham, 2017; Lawson, 2017; OAS, 2018). Through force, threats, or coercion, women and young girls are recruited to be the girlfriends or wives of gang members (*novias de pandillas*), and in other cases they are the sexual partner of several gang members (Hallock et al., 2018; Markham, 2017; OAS, 2018). Reports of sexual slavery extend as far as gang members photographing unsuspecting women in the neighborhood and showing the photos to jailed members as if they are shopping for a female sex partner (Musalo, 2018).

Other civilian testimonies tell stories of neighborhood gang members taking girls as wives against the families' will (McEvers & Garsd, 2015). To resist or refuse the gangs' demands may result in death for girls and or their families; threats are usually taken seriously



given the amount of executions gangs commit daily (Lobo-Guerrero, 2015; Musalo, 2018; McEvers & Garsd, 2015; O'Toole, 2018). A *New York Times* article reported on one woman who was repeatedly raped by various gang members after they kidnapped her. Her brothers were executed in retaliation for refusing recruitment and the woman contracted H.I.V. upon her kidnapping (Lobo-Guerrero, 2015). While her brothers died by gunfire, the bodies of her brothers were not subject to further trauma like the woman victim was. The difference between the two scenarios is that male domination, machismo, and misogyny were targeted towards the woman, while the two brothers only suffered domination. I mention these three specific cases of second hand testimony to show that these forms of violence reinforce hegemonic and dominant masculinities that turn women in sexual objects, and are available for men's virile conquests. Again these behaviors are pulled from the societal normalcies in machismo culture that allow men to think, act, and treat women as accessories they possess rather than individuals. Additionally, advocates of women victims continue to empathize arguing "the victimization cycle never ends," citing rescued or escaped sex slaves face death if they are found again, or simply re-enter the informal sex business for basic survival (Yagoub, 2017).

In other instances, women become loosely affiliated helpers of gangs as they are the mothers, grandmothers, and sisters who house, cook, and even do laundry for the gangs (Markham, 2017). Again, there are connections to be made between machismo/marianismo culture and the women who serve the gangs by default. The primary connection is that women relatives of gang members become indirect affiliates who aid gang structures, which put them in questionable and dangerous positions. The second connection is that despite mothers and grandmothers having more authority over the home (or at least that is what is assumed), male

offspring involved with gangs claim their role as head of household by assigning duties to women to service the gangs.

It should also be noted that women with strong or loose ties to gangs leaves them vulnerable to rival gang vendettas and are often the vessel of which disputes are “resolved” through acts of rape, kidnapping, beating, or death (Hallock et al., 2018; Musalo, 2018; OAS, 2018; O’Toole, 2018). Revenge rapes, kidnappings, and killings are easier to commit upon women whose gang relatives are jailed since the so-called ‘male-protector’ is no longer present (Yagoub, 2017). In almost the same manner, revenge is sought upon the female relatives and partners of gang members who have violated the “Mara” code of honor (Yagoub, 2017; “If You Come Back”, 2016). In one [The] Guardian segment, an asylum-seeking woman suffered gang rape by her husband’s affiliates after he fled the city, leaving the woman and the gang with no answers. The woman ultimately paid the price of her husband’s betrayal and bore a child as a result of the gang rape (“If You Come Back”, 2016); eventually she left El Salvador with her children for asylum in the U.S. This kind of situation is not unique either. In fact, many girls and women choose to leave El Salvador for the U.S, a critical decision that resembles life by leaving, or death by staying (Martinez, 2018; Motlagh, 2019; Nugent, 2019).

When gangs exert their dominance over women, they further fuel the objectification of women whose roles’ (in their views) are to be consumed with satisfying the group’s demands (Segato, 2010, p. 77). Ultimately, the overwhelming gang culture in El Salvador forces women and girls into situations that destroy their lives, leaving them with few or no options to escape the gangs’ grip (Markham, 2017; O’Toole, 2018). However, both gang violence and intra-familial violence are only two of three social failures that negatively impact women. In the next segment, I discuss the role of the government institutions to conclude this case study discussing

widespread impunity of perpetrators. This is critical because impunity operates as its own form of political violence and enables gang and intra-familial violence to persist.

### **El Salvador, Impunity, and Machismo**

It's difficult to speak about the widespread femicides and other extreme acts of VAW in El Salvador without addressing the correlation of widespread impunity for these crimes (B. Bookey, personal communication, February 15, 2019). As impunity of homicidal crimes against women persists, so does the rise in femicides. Many attest, and I agree, that attitudes, views, and influences of machismo culture play a role in legal systems intended to protect all human life including women's, yet because of gender biases they don't. Widespread impunity needs to be addressed because it helps argue the broader issue that women face even more layers of structural violence when Salvadoran local authorities and courts cannot, or choose not to, protect them by bringing their perpetrators to trial. When women are not vindicated legally by the state and socially by the culture, the underlying messaging women receive from their government is that they are not worth protecting, advocating, or defending.

I begin with discussing the Salvadoran gender-based laws that are currently in place to show attempts the country has made to protect women's human rights before discussing additional structures the country has developed to intensify the protection of women's rights. What is also addressed is the general lack police action and attention whom are heavily relied on by women victims to intervene on their behalf. These legal components work inter-connectedly with each other but altogether counterproductive in guaranteeing the security of women's right to optimal life.

*The Evolution of Laws and Legal Structures in Place, But Not Enforced*

There are a number of comprehensive laws (listed on Table 2 on page 74) in place to protect Salvadoran women to live free of all types of violence. Beyond international treaties, the country has implemented more descriptive and specific laws to counter sexual, intra-familial, economic violence among a range of other types. Most notably, the country has specifically adopted a law to address femicide and recently created special tribunal courts specializing in gender-related crimes and issues (Brigada, 2018; Moloney, 2018; O'Toole, 2018). Despite these legislative measures, women continue to experience persistent violence throughout the country. Evidence of this violence is apparent in the statistical data which relay that the low rate of convictions does not correspond with the high rate of femicides in the country (revisit Figure 4 on page 55). For example, in 2012, a year after the Salvadoran femicide law was instated, the United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights estimated El Salvador's impunity rate to be as high as 77 percent (Brigada, 2018). The following three years, from 2013 to 2016, records show that only 33 cases of 662 femicides received justice in the form of convictions, which equates to about five percent<sup>10</sup> over the three-year period (Donovan, 2019).

Although these laws are a positive step forward for the advancement and improvement of women's quality of life, as with most societal problems, these laws are mainly symbolic because they do not yield the meaningful change for the victims it's intended (Rauls & Ziff, 2018). The Family Domestic Violence Act [Ley contra la Violencia Doméstica Intrafamiliar] (LVI) addressing intra-familial violence and femicide is a good example of a well-intentioned but

---

<sup>10</sup> Because of lack of efficient data on actual conviction rates available, in Figure 4 (on page 55) a five percent correlation was applied to the number of femicides recorded and adapted for the bar graph, in order to show the disparities between crimes and convictions.

toothless law. It's considered to be a complete failure as the "phenomenon of beatings, rapes, and murders has continued to increase in both frequency and brutality" since its implementation in 1996 (Musalo, 2018). There are a few assumptions that can be made from these ineffective laws: either the laws are merely lip service and not enforced as they were purposed, perpetrators and victims are not aware of the laws or their ramifications, or lastly, women survivors lack confidence in the laws based on historical patterns of neglect. I do want to note that there are a few logistical factors which also contribute to widespread impunity including lack of government funding for thorough investigations and court proceedings (Rauls & Ziff, 2018). The increase in crimes against women paired with high rates of impunity prompted the Salvadoran government to issue a national state of emergency (SOE) in 2016. Following the SOE declaration, the government responded to the growing VAW with the creation of two tribunal courts. Resembling similar models (like those of Guatemala and Nepal), these courts are dedicated to women-specific violations and crimes under the notion that the implementation would yield positive results (Brigada, 2018; Moloney, 2018; O'Toole, 2018; UNODC, 2018).

Essentially, the tribunal courts are viewed as a step in the right direction as earlier federal courts faced a particular set of challenges in confronting 'deep-rooted patriarchal biases' which resulted in weak sentences, and reinforced the normalcy of impunity for perpetrators (Brigada, 2018). For example, the courts recognized various forms of VAW as crimes, yet were accustomed to believe that to violate women was not a real crime, and this mentality further implicated women instead of securing their right to safety (Lagarde, 2010). Judges had also been known to pass judgment on women experiencing chronic intimate partner violence (atop other typical machista forms of violence) by using their decision to stay in abusive partnerships against them instead of recognizing other factors (like economic limitations) which forced women to

stay (Brigada, 2018). For that reason, El Salvador is making strides to equip more women judges with proper training on gender issues because they are likely “to be more supportive of victims, which could strengthen prosecution” (Moloney, 2018).

Although repetitive, I make mention once more that these tribunal courts look for evidence of contempt on the woman’s body in order to register killings of women as femicide (Brigada, 2018, Donovan, 2019). Thus when reporting on murders of women, some prefer to use “violent killings of women” to accurately portray the total numbers of these murders (Musalo, 2018). Prosecutors specifically look for signs of trauma because women whose bodies are indicative of cruelty or trauma fulfill the narrative that men kill because they can (Brigada, 2018). More importantly though, the tribunal courts, which are really a new installation of the current laws in place, indicate that El Salvador is barely scratching the surface in bringing about peaceful and valuable change for women and girls whom are exhausted by witnessing and experiencing daily targeted violence from gangs and family members. Aside from these two distinct groups, many women also face systemic discrimination from local police, which further inhibits them from achieving higher life chances.

#### *The Inefficiency of Local Authorities*

Women do not report their abuse to police for a variety of reasons but the most common stem from fears of retribution from the perpetrator(s) and alternatively because women generally lack confidence in local authorities to effectively intervene on their behalf (Musalo, 2018; Hallock et al., 2018). To name a few examples from second-hand testimony, often police do not show up during or after a domestic conflict. And when they do, they tend to disbelieve the victims. Instead they unfairly label, blame, tease, chastise, interrogate, scrutinize, or dismiss the

victims for their assault altogether (Brigada, 2018, Griffin, 2018; Koopman, 2018; Olivera, 2006; Segato, 2010; Wright, 2010). In fact, across Latin America where femicide is prevalent, the same male partners whom had run-ins with police after domestic complaints would later be suspected or accused of murdering their wives and intimate partners (The Economist, 2015). These examples refer back to the argument that often the biggest risks to women are the men they are closest to (Sagot & Cabanas, 2010). Another critical point to mention is that local authorities could have prevented femicide had they arrested and convicted the male perpetrator much earlier during the timeline of chronic abuse.

Generally speaking, it is the opinion of local authorities, and society too, that domestic conflicts are best left to the privacy of the home and the discretion of the family (L. Markham, personal communication, August 22, 2018). In turn, local authorities do not treat these matters urgently or sensitively as they are viewed beyond the scope of government authority (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010), which draws back on Pettman's (1996) concept of women's partial citizenship, rather than full citizenship. Here we have a clear example of government functions, or rather ineffective functions, in women's public and private lives. Since women's citizenship is only recognized when the state benefits from it (making them client-citizens in the public sphere), public service groups like the local police view women's issues like domestic conflict as personal (or private) matters, and not to consume the time or resources allocated for real crime-fighting. Yet, as mentioned earlier in both the case study and literature reviews, the government does not view women's right to reproductive choices as a private matter, proving that the patriarchal state selects when public/private interference is appropriate without logical explanation or apology.

Police also tend to treat female victims and their families with incredible unprofessionalism, often degrading and inhuman ways (Olivera, 2006). Studies find that women are often blamed for male violence because of the way they dress (sexually suggestive or provocative), for socializing late at night (going to the local cantinas, dance clubs), for drinking alcohol, for owning their own material possessions, and many other ways in which women cross social and cultural barriers deemed unacceptable (Wright, 2010; Koopman, 2010; Olivera, 2006). Hence, as feminist scholar Rita Laura Segato states, “dead women are transformed into prostitutes, liars, partygoers, and drug addicts, all of which can inoculate us from the responsibility and bitterness of facing injustice of their fate” (2010, p. 82).

Alongside the police, media and other groups of interests attempt to defer responsibility onto to the victim(s), suggesting that the victim is not worth justice, further signifying that perpetrators can commit these crimes without consequence (Wright, 2010). For this reason, surviving members and activists commonly try to portray the disappeared and murdered women as “innocent daughters” or marianistas rather, in response to the inaccurate portrayal of women as immoral beings and in an effort to receive some form of reparations (Segato, 2010). Although unfavorable by societal terms, many beloved daughters and sisters do engage in social spaces where booze, men and sexual activity are present, “but to acknowledge this is to imply that one’s child is a slut undeserving of redress” (Wright, 2010, p. 321).

Definitively, ineffective and unprofessional police action signal to women who rely on this civil service that their issues will not be taken seriously; eventually they are overwhelmingly dissuaded from taking action at all. The main takeaway is that women lack protection from their government whom directs the courts and local authorities to serve all citizens. Within this systemic pattern of neglect, women of the patriarchal structure are essentially trapped in a cycle



of violence in the home, out of the home, and then in the eyes of law enforcement adding another motivation to the long list of others in fleeing the country altogether.

### **Case Study Takeaways**

Almost two decades after the destructive civil war, El Salvador still remains one of the most deadly outside of a war zone and the continuation of violence in the country is a result the country remaining in the ‘conflict trap.’ Although women are typically nonviolent civilians, they are witnessing, experiencing, and dying of violence at alarming rates.

Men are assaulting and killing women for a variety of reasons: because women have accessibility to income and social autonomy, because men hold strong to dominating mentalities (or masculinities), and because men simply want to express control as private civilians or criminal affiliates. Men also choose to attack women because they do not fear legal ramifications, or more simply, because they can (Brigada, 2018). What is critical to note is that many killings of women are not random or spontaneous, and neither are they premeditated. Men are attacking and killing women because they are accustomed to viewing women as less than equal counterparts, and their violent behaviors escalate over time and with harsher severity. In every case that a man assaults a Salvadoran woman, machismo beliefs are present.

In effect, the persistence of femicide increases each year despite laws in place to protect women from femicide. When criminal codes fail to protect all crimes committed against women (and there are plenty), El Salvador is essentially failing to guarantee protection of women. A lifetime’s worth of economic, social, political, and physical violence amid a society that is stunted by legal ineffectiveness and social progress are a collective of reasons women choose to

seek refuge in the United States, and the precise reasons U.S. immigration courts should remain open to these individuals.

Table 2

| YEAR | TITLE<br>[ENGLISH TRANSLATION, if applicable]   | DESCRIPTION   |
|------|---|---|
| 1981 | Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW   | Referred to as the international bill for women's rights  |
| 1995 | Ratificación de la Convención Interamericana para prevenir, sancionar y erradicar la violencia contra la mujer.<br>[ <i>Ratification of the Inter-American Convention to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women.</i> ]<br>"Convention of Belém Do Pará" | This convention states that "violence against women shall be understood as any act... which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women in public or private sphere"<br>(OAS, 1994)  |
| 1996 | Creación del Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de las mujeres<br>[ <i>Creation of the Salvadoran Institute for the Desarrollo of Women</i> ] ISDEMU  | This "law dictates, among other things, that women and men obtain the same salary for the same work and that the value of domestic labor, paid or unpaid, be recognized"<br>(UN Women, 2011)  |
|      | Ley contra la violencia doméstica intrafamiliar<br>[ <i>Family Domestic Violence Act</i> ]  | Decree 902 defines "domestic violence as any act or omission whether direct or indirect that causes injury, physical, sexual or psychological suffering or death to family members"<br>(Sistema Internet de la Asamblea Legislativa, 1996)                    |
| 1998 | Amendment to Penal Code article 200 (addressing domestic violence)  | Any family relative who continues acts of violence shall be subject to 1-3 years in prison  |
| 2010 | Ley Especial Integral para una Vida Libre de Violencia para las Mujeres<br>[ <i>Special Integral Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women</i> ]  | Comprehensive law aimed at punishing all forms of violence against women (i.e. femicide, mocking, and workplace harassment)<br>(UN Women, n.d.)   |
| 2011 | Creación de los Tribunales Especializados para una Vida Libre de Violencia y Discriminación para las Mujeres<br>[ <i>Decree 286 for the Creation of Specialized Courts for a Life Free of Violence and Discrimination against Women</i> ]                             | Decree 286 was created for specialized courts that deal with cases of all violence against women and requires all legal staff of these courts to obtain necessary knowledge on women's right to life free of violence and discrimination.<br>(UN Women, 2011) |
| 2012 | Ley de Igualdad, Equidad y Erradicación de la Discriminación contra las Mujeres<br>[ <i>Law of Equality, Equity, and Eradication of Discrimination against Women</i> ]  | Principle that all people are equal before the law despite race, sex or religion.<br>(Global Regulation, 2016)  |

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Arguments & Major Findings

Within this thesis, major connections were drawn between machismo and rising cases of GBV in El Salvador, along with rising cases of Salvadoran women seeking asylum in the U.S. Through an extensive literature review of structural violence and machismo, motivations of Salvadoran women attempting to seek asylum in the United States were uncovered in the case study, and this thesis found that many motivations were gender-based.

Upon understanding and analyzing the mechanics of structural violence as theorized by Johan Galtung (1969), this study drew links between structural violence and patriarchy, determining that patriarchy is indeed a form of structural violence. The central theme of structural violence is that it is present when individuals are influenced in their life choices and experiences so that their actual-somatic realizations never meet their potential realizations, and in this function, equality between two (or more) distinct groups is eroded. These disparities between groups are further perpetuated when inequality within the structure is legitimized by the culture (Galtung, 1969; Wood, 2016). Therefore, cultural violence works alongside structural violence to maintain oppression of certain groups, while stimulating other groups (the dominating groups), simultaneously making the entire system appear as if it is mere fact instead of manipulation (Galtung, 1969,).

Through a feminist critique lens, I argue patriarchy is designed in such a way that men and women think and believe in gender essentialist norms (like men as breadwinners and women as homemakers), then carry these norms out in daily activities. Gender, at its very core, is the social difference between men and women, creating both a divide and social hierarchy between the two distinct groups (Cohn, 2012). Hence, with continued assignment of these gender

essentialist roles passed onto the next generation of boys and girls, the power structure between men and women remains in the man's favor. Moreover, the internalization of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) in a patriarchal society socializes young boys to value power and dominance, especially over girls, then graduate to maintaining norms of male dominance, oppression, and exploitation of women in adulthood (Connell, 1995; Sokoloff, 2005; Sugihara & Warner, 2002; Walby, 1989). The standard idea that women and men continue to fit into binary definitions gives more power to hegemonic masculinity and the structures of patriarchy, reinforcing the repression of women even when/where it is not deserved.

Patriarchy is undoubtedly a manifestation of structural violence and can be evidenced when reviewing the number of women, globally, who are largely under-represented in positions of leadership or live with full autonomy, in comparison to men (Burguières, 1990; Pettman, 1996; True, 2012). The reality is that in a patriarchal structure, women are robbed from reaching their potential realizations in both their public and private lives, which include earning a competitive income (Walby, 1989) and exercising their bodily autonomy (Pettman, 1996). Because the structure and culture do not view women as equals to men, this coercion of standard practice persists. Thus, because the patriarchal social hierarchy deems so, women are constructed in relation to men and given inferior value (Pettman, 1996).

Patriarchy leaves heavy traces of gender essentialism in a social system distinct to Latin America known as machismo. Within a machismo cultural structure, men and women have very distinct gender roles and identities. Boys are groomed to possess hyper masculine qualities that will make them truly macho as adults such as behaving dominantly, arrogantly, aggressively, violently, and hyper sexually (Brusco, 1995; Intindola et al., 2016; Mirandé, 1997; Novas, 1994; Sugihara & Warner, 2002). Although machismo characteristics are generally perceived as

negative, there exist positive connotations of the ideology such as courage, protector, risk-taker, independence, leadership, and pride in fatherhood (Mirandé, 1997). Generally speaking, a machista, or a man who exercises machismo, is thought to dominate over women, devalue women as equal partners, and retain his right to control whatever and whomever is within his reach. Hegemonic, dominant, and breadwinning masculinities within machismo culture is prominent, and those men who are not perceived as “macho enough” are ridiculed (Englander, Yanez & Barney, 2012). That is particularly why homosexuality among Latinos is often associated with femininity, remains highly stigmatized, and spews strong anti-gay prejudice (Hirai et al., 2017).

Machismo culture reveals itself as a form of structural violence in the same ways as patriarchy. Many men believe they exude this sexist behavior towards women simply because they were molded to do so from childhood, never realizing the harm they invoke when they oppress women solely because they are women. In the same ways machismo reflects functions of structural violence, marianismo is also an ideology that does not allow women to access equal bargaining power in both the public and private spheres. Women are expected to preserve their virginity until marriage, take instruction from the male head of household, tend to the home, and remain obedient in the eyes of the family, church, and law (Alves & Tamez, 1987, Blossom, 2018; Quinones-Mayo & Resnick, 1996; Sugihara & Warner, 2002).

A common, and notably stereotypical example of this can be revealed in the dynamics between husbands (the machistas) and wives (the marianistas). Machistas who assault their wives or intimate partners typically do not see anything wrong with this (Pinos et al., 2016; “The Violent Machismo”, 2016) and neither do women fully understand their repression although they recognize chronic abuse is detrimental to their mental and physical health (Alves & Tamez,

1987; Ruiz & Sobrino, 2018). Additionally, even women who do cross cultural boundaries by earning income and providing for herself or her family, machismo biases affect women's pay and advancement in the workplace, therefore they are never really supported in gaining economic independence and social autonomy as men do (Stobbe, 2005; Torras & Grow, 2015).

Among a collection of other forms of violence women face, femicide is among a growing trend in El Salvador. Most commonly, the very partners or family members that have chronically physically or sexually abused women for years then kill them. This proves that machismo behaviors escalate over time and the acts of violence grow more extreme. Men are assaulting and killing women for a variety of reasons, but primarily because their masculinity is challenged, or because men engaged in group-think (such as the prevalent gangs) reinforce domination and control. Perpetrators also choose to attack women simply because they do not fear legal retribution, and maintain they are above the law (Brigada, 2018).

Men attack and kill women because they have not broken out of the cycle that dictates that men always dominate and women always obey. In every case that a man assaults a Salvadoran woman, machismo beliefs are present. Thus, femicide increases each year despite laws in place to protect women from femicide. Ultimately, the nation of El Salvador fails to protect its women citizens from the precise violence it's trying to negate; and after experiencing a lifetime's worth of domestic violence, sexual violence, gang violence, and legal violence, Salvadoran women choose to seek refuge in the United States.

My research heavily suggests that drivers of forced migration of Salvadoran women derive from machismo culture that is inherent in El Salvador, amid other factors like poverty, lack of opportunities, and other basic needs. Throughout the thesis, I argued that various forms of structural violence that are expressed through machismo are the precise reasons why violence

against women persists and shows no signs of decreasing. Machismo is deeply ingrained in the culture, so much so that more women are dying because of it, and therefore U.S. immigration courts should review the societal and cultural norms of this kind of violence before dismissing these claims.

Although I used gendered motivations of Salvadoran women as the primary example, the U.S. should remain a haven of refuge for all individuals who suffer from systemic and direct violence in their home countries until it is safe to repatriate. These asylum-seeking individuals should include women who experience chronic gender-based violence because it is precisely this kind of violence that is undoubtedly a factor, or a motivation rather, for women to flee. This research also challenges the legitimacy of negative conceptions about immigrants from Latin America. The truths revealed about immigrants from Latin America, specifically Salvadoran women, are that they do not seek asylum in the U.S. to 'game the system', but to fight for their fundamental human rights.

With a feminist peace studies lens, this research is purposed to pull from existing peace studies on structural violence to build a new theory signifying all systems and variations of patriarchal structures are forms of structural violence. Currently there is no comprehensive research or literature that links structural violence and patriarchy, and more specifically, machismo. To fill this major gap, this research makes connections between the mechanics of structural violence and patriarchal systems, adding a new narrative, a new story, of feminist peace studies to the broader catalogue of critical feminist theory.

The development of this new theory, which labels machismo as structural violence, is used to explain systemic disparities that negatively impact women in El Salvador, issues which



are not currently being captured or adequately addressed by the nation's government. Because the legal parameters of El Salvador are not addressing these issues adequately, particularly regarding violence against women, those issues are captured here. To shift focus to the overarching goal to advocate U.S. asylum for women, this thesis also contributes to the existing literature on migration theory, with a gendered lens on the Salvadoran women in an effort to reinstate gender-based asylum in the U.S.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

The initial research design was mapped to include in-person interviews with at least 10 Salvadoran women who were victims of gender-based violence and/or planning on applying for asylum in the U.S. I would have conducted these one-on-one interviews in Tapachula, [Chiapas] Mexico, a small municipal city near the Mexico-Guatemala border during the summer of 2018. The city's proximity to the bi-national border was imperative for one main reason: many Central American asylum seekers traveling North to the U.S. pass through Tapachula either as a resting point or to gather resources to apply for asylum in Mexico. Due to time constraints, travel logistics, and lack of connections, I did not travel to Tapachula or complete any in-person interviews. Rather, the testimonies repurposed in this thesis were gathered from online and printed archival data, and repurposed to narrate the story of Salvadoran women asylum seekers.

The second discrepancy in the method execution is excluding expert interviews for this research, despite completing the interviews. The experts I spoke with were Erik Schnabel, an LGBT activist and former employee of SHARE El Salvador (an NGO with a focus of empowering women in El Salvador), Lauren Markham, a journalist, author, and counselor at the Oakland International High School (a school for immigrant youth), and Blaine Bookey, the co-

legal director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at UC Hastings Law School. Extensive inclusion of these interviews may have provided more credibility and insight to the case study, however analyzing these discussions thoroughly was a challenge. In the end the most critical themes and points of information from these interviews were used as starting points for the more comprehensive research and narrative development.

Most critically, the research design was meant to include clear immigration policy proposals, developed by me, addressing gender-based asylum claims based on the ubiquitous structural violence women endure in El Salvador. Again, due to time constraints and other scholastic demands, developing the proposals were not feasible, but I recommend that the next iteration of this research will include comprehensive gender-driven immigration policies.

Additionally, I recognize that this thesis portrays Salvadoran men negatively and could be used by the wrong audience to argue that Latino male asylum seekers should be denied asylum altogether. There were continuous mentions of machismo culture being inherent to the overall culture of Latin America that could be easily spun to say '*Latin American men are born violent.*' I do not believe this to be true and recognize the danger in reporting on this narrative. Therefore, it is not the aim of this thesis to blame all Salvadoran men for women's unfair treatment. My only aim is to hold the men who do practice misogyny fully accountable by raising awareness to these unfortunate truths. In fact, many Salvadoran men are fleeing the same kinds of endemic violence and poverty as women. I recommend that a future study focus on the motivations of Salvadoran men as it relates to structural violence to complement this study, regardless of gender.

## References

- 'If you come back, we'll kill you': Central Americans seek refuge in US only to be sent home [Video]. (2016, August 04). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/>
- Alcalde, M. C. (2010). *The woman in the violence: gender, poverty, and resistance in Peru*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010
- Alves, R. A., & Tamez, E. (1987). *Against machismo: Rubem Alves, Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Miguez Bonino, Juan Luis Segundo ... and others talk about the struggle of women: interviews*. Yorktown Heights, N.Y.: Meyer-Stone Books, [1987]
- American Civil Liberties Union (2018, August 8). Garza v. Hargan - Challenge to Trump Administration's Attempts to Block Abortions for Young Immigrant Women. *American Civil Liberties Union*. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/cases/garza-v-hargan-challenge-trump-administrations-attempts-block-abortions-young-immigrant-women/>
- Anglin, M. K. (1998). Feminist Perspectives on Structural Violence. *Identities*, 5(2), 145-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.1998.9962613>
- Aponte, A. F. (2018, March 7). Left in the Dark: Violence Against Women and LGBTI Persons in Honduras and El Salvador. *Latin America Working Group*. Retrieved from <https://www.lawg.org/>
- Bloomquist, K.L. (1989) Sexual Violence: Patriarchy's Offense and Defense. In J. C. Brown, & C. R. Bohn (Eds.), *Christianity, patriarchy, and abuse: A feminist critique* (pp. 62-69). New York, N.Y: Pilgrim Press
- Blossom, P. (2018, March 14). We Need To Talk About Marianismo (And How It Hurts Latinas). *Hip Latina*. Retrieved from <https://hiplatina.com/>
- Bonner, R. (2018, January 20). America's Role in El Salvador's Deterioration. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/>
- Brigada, A. (2018, September 11). Inside a Court Room Specialized in Justice for Gender Violence. *VICE*. Retrieved from <https://broadly.vice.com/>
- Brusco, E. E. (1995). *The reformation of machismo: Evangelical conversion and gender in Colombia*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. (2014). *EL SALVADOR 2014 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT*. [PDF File]. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236900.pdf>
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. (2015). *EL SALVADOR 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT*. [PDF File]. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265798.pdf>
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. (2016). *EL SALVADOR 2017 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT*. [PDF File]. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265798.pdf>

- Burguières, M. K. (1990). Feminist Approaches to Peace: Another Step for Peace Studies. *Millennium*, 19(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298900190010201>
- Carrón, M., Thomson, M. & Macdonald, M. (2007). No More Killings! Women Respond to Femicides in Central America. *Gender and Development*, 15(1), 25
- Chappel, B. (2017, October 25). 'Jane Doe' Immigrant Has Abortion In Texas, After Battle With Trump Administration. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/>
- Chazaro, A., & Casey, J. (2006). Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala's Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado's Quest for Safety. *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, (Issue 2), 141
- Christensen, A.D., & Jensen, S. Q. (2014). Combining hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality. *NORMA*, 9(1), 60–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2014.892289>
- Cohn, C. (2012). Women and wars: Toward a conceptual framework. In: C. Cohn (Ed.), *Women & wars* (pp. 1-35). Cambridge, MA: Polity Press
- Collier, P. (2007). *The bottom billion : why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*. Oxford University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2012). Social Inequality, Power, and Politics: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism in Dialogue. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26(2), 442–457. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspephil.26.2.0442>
- Confortini, C. (2006). Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance. *Peace & Change*, (3), 333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2006.00378.x>
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*. 43(6), 1241-1299. Retrieved from <http://funnel.sfsu.edu/>
- Department of International Law (n.d.). III.C.14 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women “Convention of Belém Do Para”. *Organization of American States*. Retrieved from <https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html>
- Donovan, L. (2019, April 01). 'Men Kill Women Because They Can'. *Elle*. Retrieved from <https://www.elle.com/uk/>
- El Instituto de Medicina Legal. (n.d.). El Instituto de Medicina Legal, registró 468 feminicidios en 2017, uno cada 18 horas. [PDF File]. *El Instituto de Medicina Legal*. Retrieved from <http://www.observatorioseguridadciudadanadelasmujeres.org/>
- El Salvador profile - Timeline. (2018, May 16). *British Broadcasting Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/>
- Englander, K., Yanez, C., & Barney, X. (2012). Doing science within a culture of machismo and marianismo. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, (3), 65

- Farmer, P. (2004). An Anthropology of Structural Violence. *Current Anthropology*, 45(3)
- Farmer, P. (2009). On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below. *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 3(1), 11-28
- Femicide and International Women's Rights: An epidemic of violence in Latin America (n.d.). *The Global Americans*. Retrieved from <https://theglobalamericans.org/>
- Fox, B. L., & Zagumny, L. (2017). ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING MACHISMO AND SEXUALITY IN CUBA. *Journal Of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*, 12(2), 97-109
- Fregoso, R., & Bejarano, C. (2010). A Cartography of Femicide in the Americas. In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in Latin America* (pp. 1-44.) Durham: Duke University Press
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291-305.
- Galtung, J., & Høivik, T. (1971). Structural and Direct Violence: A Note on Operationalization. *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(1), 73-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234337100800108>
- González-López, G. (2004). Fathering Latina Sexualities: Mexican Men and the Virginity of Their Daughters. *Journal Of Marriage And Family*, 66(5), 1118-1130
- Gramsci, A. (1999) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith (Eds.). International Publishers.
- Griffin, J. (2018, June 06). 'Police never turned up': El Salvador's devastating epidemic of femicide. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/>
- Hallock, J., Soto, A. G. & Fix, M. (2018, May 30). In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of Women Flee Central America. *Migration Policy*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>
- Hirai, M., Popan, J., Winkel, M., & Dolma, S. (2017). Machismo Predicts Prejudice Toward Lesbian and Gay Individuals: Testing a Mediating Role of Contact. *Sexuality Research And Social Policy*, 1-7.
- Ingoldsby, B. B. (1991). The Latin American Family: Familism vs. Machismo. *Journal Of Comparative Family Studies*, 22(1), 57-62
- Intindola, M., Jacobson, R., Jacobson, K., & Del Campo, R. (2016). Machismo in Organizations: Individual Predictors & Context-Dependent Outcomes. *Employee Responsibilities And Rights Journal*, 28(2), 113-131
- Kinzer, S. (2018, December 05). How "femicide" drove the caravan. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/>
- Köhler, G., & Alcock, N. (1976). An Empirical Table of Structural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 13(4), 343
- Kõu, A., & Bailey, A. (2017). 'Some people expect women should always be dependent': Indian women's experiences as highly skilled migrants. *Geoforum*, 85, 178-186

- LA ASAMBLEA LEGISLATIVA DE LA REPUBLICA DE EL SALVADOR. (1996). *DECRETO N° 902*. [PDF File]. San Salvador, El Salvador. Retrieved from <http://www.jurisprudencia.gob.sv>
- LA ASAMBLEA LEGISLATIVA DE LA REPUBLICA DE EL SALVADOR. (2003). *DECRETO N° 1030*. [PDF File]. San Salvador. El Salvador. Retrieved from <http://www.jurisprudencia.gob.sv>
- LA ASAMBLEA LEGISLATIVA DE LA REPUBLICA DE EL SALVADOR. (2011). *DECRETO N° 1030*. [PDF File]. San Salvador: El Salvador. Retrieved from [https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/slv/Codigo\\_penal.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/slv/Codigo_penal.pdf)
- Lagarde y de los Rios, M. (2010). Preface: Feminist Keys for Understanding: Theoretical, Political, and Legal Constitution. In R. Fregoso & C. Bejarano (Eds.), *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in Latin America*, (pp. xi-xxvi). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Law of Equality, Equity And Eradication Of Discrimination Against Women. (2016). *Global Regulation*. Retrieved from <https://www.global-regulation.com/translation/el-salvador/3369336/law-of-equality%252c-equity-and-eradication-of-discrimination-against-women.html>
- Lawson, K. (2017, July 07). Teen Rape Victim Sentenced to 30 Years for Stillbirth in El Salvador. *VICE*. Retrieved from <https://broadly.vice.com/>
- Lobo-Guerrero, C. (2017, September 02). In El Salvador, 'Girls Are a Problem'. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Markham, L. (2017, September 12). The Girl Gangs of El Salvador. *Pacific Standard Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://psmag.com/>
- Martinez, S. (2018, June 26). Today's Migrant Flow Is Different. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/>
- McEvers, K., & Garsd, J. (2015, October 05). The Surreal Reasons Girls Are Disappearing In El Salvador: #15Girls. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/>
- Mirandé, A. (1997). *Hombres y machos: masculinity and Latino culture*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997
- Mobekk, E. (2010). Gender, Women and Security Sector Reform. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(2), 278–291
- Moloney, A. (2017, August 24). Judge at new El Salvador women's courts ready to tackle gender. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/>
- Moreno, C., Guedes, A., Knerr, W. (2014). Understanding and addressing violence against women. [PDF File]. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/>
- Motlagh, J. (2019, March). Inside El Salvador's battle with violence, poverty, and U.S. policy. *National Geographic*.
- Musalo, K. (2018). El Salvador - A Peace Worse than War: Violence, Gender and a Failed Legal Response. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, 1(3)

- Novas, H. (1994). *Everything you need to know about Latino history*. New York: Plume.
- Nugent, C. (2019, May 19). Violence Against Women in El Salvador Is Driving Them to Suicide — Or to the U.S. Border. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/>
- O'Toole, M. (2018, March 04). El Salvador's Gangs Are Targeting Young Girls. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/>
- Olivera, M. (2006). Violencia Femicida: Violence Against Women and Mexico's Structural Crisis. *Latin American Perspectives*, (2), 104
- Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz. (2018). Observatorio de la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres. *Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz*. Retrieved from <http://observatoriodeviolencia.ormusa.org/index.php>.
- Organization of American States. (2018, January 29). Conclusions and Observations on the IACHR's Working Visit to El Salvador. *Organization of American States*. Retrieved from <http://www.oas.org/>
- Paredes, A. (1971). The United States, Mexico, and "Machismo". *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 8(1), 17-37
- Pavesi, I., & Wildmer, M. (2016). A Gendered Analysis of Violent Deaths (Number 63) [PDF file]. *Small Arms Survey Research*. Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved from <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/>
- Pena, M. (1991). Class, Gender, and Machismo: The "Traacherous-Woman" Folklore of Mexican Male Workers. *Gender and Society*, (1), 30
- Pettman, J. (1996). *Worlding women: a feminist international politics*. London ; New York : Routledge, 1996
- Pinos, V., & Pinos, G., & Baitar, R., & Jerves, M., & Enzlin, P. (2016). Perception of gender stereotypes, machismo and marianismo in Ecuadorian adolescents: A focus group study. *Maskana*, 7, 17-28
- Puechguirbal, N. (2010). Discourses on Gender, Patriarchy and Resolution 1325: A Textual Analysis of UN Documents. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(2), 172–187
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*. 1(3), 533-580
- Quinones-Mayo, Y., & Resnick, R. P. (1996). The impact of machismo on Hispanic women. *Affilia Journal Of Women And Social Work*, (3), 257
- Rayasam, R. (2017, October 16). Trump official halts abortions among undocumented, pregnant teens. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/>
- Rivera, J. (1994). Domestic Violence Against Latinas by Latino Males: An Analysis of Race, National Origin, and Gender Differentials. *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, (2), 231
- Ruiz, D., & Sobrino, B. (2018). Breaking the Mould: changing belief systems and gender norms to eliminate violence against women [PDF file]. *Oxfam International*. Retrieved from: <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/>

- Sagot, M., & Cabanas, A. (2010) When Violence Kills Women: Femicide in Costa Rica, 1990-99. In R. Fregoso & C. Bejarano (Eds.), *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in Latin America*, (pp. 138-156). Durham: Duke University Press
- Sandra, M. H. (2014). Central American Migrants in Transit through Mexico Women and Gender Violence; Challenges for the Mexican State. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 161, 263–268
- Segato, R.L. (2010). Territory, Sovereignty and Second State Crimes: the Writing on the Bodies of the Assassinated Women of Ciudad Juarez. In R. Fregoso & C. Bejarano (Eds.), *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in Latin America*, (pp. 70-92). Durham: Duke University Press
- Segura, L. (2018, July 29). For Survivors of Violence in Central America, Asylum Can Be a Matter of Life or Death. *California Health Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.calhealthreport.org/>
- Simic, O. (2010). Does the Presence of Women Really Matter? Towards Combating Male Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(2), 188-199.
- Spivak, G. C., & Morris, R. C. (2010). *Can the subaltern speak?: Reflections on the history of an idea*. Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/>
- Stevens, E. P. (1973). Machismo and marianismo. *Society*, 10, 57-63
- Stobbe, L. (2005). Doing Machismo: Legitimizing Speech Acts as a Selection Discourse. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 12(2), 105-123. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0432.2005.00265.x
- Sugihara, Y., & Warner, J. A. (2002). Dominance and domestic abuse among Mexican Americans: Gender differences in the etiology of violence in intimate relationships. *Journal Of Family Violence*, (4), 315
- The Violent Machismo Culture in El Salvador: WOMAN (Exclusive) [Youtube Video]. (2016, June 9). *Viceland*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/>
- Torras, M. M., & Grow, J. M. (2015). Creative women in Peru: outliers in a machismo world. *Communication & Society*, 28(2), 1-18
- Trimble, M. (2017, April 18). 10 Things You Should Know About the MS-13 Gang. *US News*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/>
- True, J. (2012). *The political economy of violence against women*. New York : Oxford University Press, [2012]
- True, J., & Tanyag, M. (2018) Violence Against Women/ Violence in the World. In: C. Gentry, L. Shepard & L. Sjoberg (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security*, (pp. 15-36). London ; New York : Routledge, 2018
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2018). *Matter of A-B-, Respondent (27 I&N Dec. 316)*. [PDF File]. Washington, D.C.: U.S.
- UN Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). Global Study on Homicide [PDF File]. *UN Office on Drugs and Crime*. Vienna
- UN Women. (2011, December 2). A Salvadoran Law to Achieve Equality between Men and Women. *UN Women*. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org>



- UN Women. (n.d.). Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women. *UN Women*. Retrieved from <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/>
- Vogt, W. A. (2013). Crossing Mexico: Structural violence and the commodification of undocumented Central American migrants. *American Ethnologist*, (4), 764
- Walby, S. (1989). Theorising Patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23(2), 213
- Wibben, Annick T. R. (2017) Debates in Feminist Security Studies. In M. D. Cavelty & T. Balzag (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies, 2nd ed.* (pp. 85-94), London; New York: Routledge, 2017
- Willett, S. (2010). Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325: Assessing the Impact on Women, Peace and Security. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(2), 142–158
- Wilson, T. D. (2014). Violence against Women in Latin America. *Latin American Perspectives*, 41(1), 3–18
- Wonder women and macho men. (2015, August 22). *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/>
- Wood, H. (2016). Peace Concepts, Disputes, and Confusions. In: C. Cohn (ed.) *Invitation to Peace Studies* (pp. 15-31). New York, NY: Oxford University Press
- Wright, M. W. (2010). Paradoxes, protests and the Mujeres de Negro of Northern Mexico. In R. Fregoso & C. Bejarano (Eds.), *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in Latin America*, (pp. 312-330). Durham: Duke University Press
- Wulfhorst, E. (2018, June 25). Exclusive: U.S. among 10 most dangerous countries for women. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/>
- Yagoub, M. (2017, October 19). Why Does Latin America Have the World's Highest Female Murder Rates? *Insight Crime*. Retrieved from <https://www.insightcrime.org/>