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Femicides in Guatemala

A study of gender based violence and the construction of
female identities.

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Abstract

Femicides, the crime where women are murdered because they are women are increasing in Guatemala. Everyday two women are brutally killed in the country, without almost any efforts to stop it or find the perpetrators.

It is my opinion that conceptions and notions surrounding the gender identities are crucial in trying to understand the murders, motives and impunity which the murders are characterized by. That is why I have chosen to take a closer look on the femicides in Guatemala and especially it's relation to the female gender identities in the country.

Placing femicides in a gendered continuum of violence gives me the opportunity to discuss the crime in terms of social, economical and political violence. Together with theories surrounding gender, nation and identity femicides can be connected to the notion of female identities through power discourses surrounding gender. Furthermore, in a Guatemalan context these power discourses fundamentally shape today's gender identities due to the civil war that lasted for over three decades. Thus, during armed conflicts the perception of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' becomes essential in discourses related to the nation and the national identity. But as my thesis will show, the Mayan people, and especially the Mayan women came to symbolise a national enemy to the Guatemalan state, through her breeding of 'difference' which resulted in brutal assaults by the Guatemalan army.

In my thesis I will show how gender identities can become visible through placing femicides in a wider perspective and by analysing the power and gender discourses surrounding the crimes, but also discourses connected with armed conflict and national/community identity.

Key words: femicide, gender, identity, power, violence, armed conflict, Guatemala.

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1 Introduction

In July 2005 the body of a 25-year-old woman was found murdered in the suburbs of Guatemala City. Her name was Velvet Ortega and she had been bound, raped and battered beyond all recognition. Up to this date those responsible for Velvet's death still walk the streets. (Briggs, 2007)

Velvet died approximately one year before Amnesty International issued a report that highlighted a staggering increase in the number of women murdered in Guatemala. According to the report, the figure had increased by more than 400 percent since 2002. In 2005 there were 665 deaths registered, and the year after 672, which equates to nearly two women every day. But violence is not only a threat against women in Guatemala; homicides with male victims are increasing as well, everyday there are approximately 16 men murdered in the country. But when homicide with male victims tend to be related to robbery, assaults, drug trafficking and gang violence women seem to be murdered because of their sex, so called *femicides*. (Ibid.) Many of the murders have been characterised by exceptional brutality, with many victims subjected to sexual violence, perverse torture, mutilation and dismemberment. It is of my opinion that the construction and conception of the Guatemalan female identity/identities is crucial in trying to understand this fierce “manslaughter” and I will with this thesis try to share some light on this problematic issue.

1.1 Aim and Query:

The aim of this research is to examine and expose female identity constructions and the conception of these in the Guatemalan society and explain possible connections to the femicides committed in the country. My query follows: “*What gender based identity constructions are the notion/s of the Guatemalan woman based upon and can these identity constructions help us understand the increasing numbers of femicides in Guatemala?*”

1.2 Methodological Considerations:

1.2.1 Central Concepts and Operationalization:

Why femicide...

I would like to shortly discuss the term ‘femicide’ and why I have chosen to use it here in my thesis, this because the term might not be all that known and the understanding of the term is crucial in understanding the thesis.

My starting point in defining the word in this thesis will be Diana Russell’s definition where ‘femicide’ means “*killing of females by males because they are females*” (Russell & Harmes ed., 2001, p.13). But how can we know if a woman is murdered because of her sex? To solve this problem many writers have redefined femicide as “all killings of woman, regardless of motive or perpetrator status”. This way we don’t have to make inferences about the motives of the killers. But I will have to agree with Russell when she claims that with this definition the politics in the word femicide is lost. According to her, just as murders targeting African Americans can be differentiated into those that are racist and those that are not, so can murders targeting women be differentiated into those that are femicides and those that are not. (Ibid. p.15) More and more societies and countries pass legislation that criminalizes hate crimes based on for example sexuality, race and gender. But killing women is seldom prosecuted as a hate crime. The misogynist motivations of femicides are often ignored by the media, which instead tend to deny the humanity and therefore the masculinity of the killer, who is frequently portrayed as a beast or an animal. Even in the case of mass femicide in Montreal in December 1989 where Marc Lépine yelled “*You’re just a bunch of fucking feminists!*” before he fatally shot 14 female engineering students, most journalists and commentators denied Lépine’s misogynist motivations. (Radford & Russell, ed., 1992, pp.5-6) Thus, it is of my opinion that the discussion and discourse concerning gender based violence on all levels in society are not politicised enough, and I will therefore use the term femicide in my thesis to recognize these murders in Guatemala as an extreme form of sexual political violence.

...and why Guatemala?

The rather new concept, femicide, and the very old crime it describes are a global phenomenon. In fact, this thesis could be written with every country or state as context. The primary reason I’ve chosen Guatemala is because of a documentary called “*Killers Paradise*” produced by Giselle Portenier in 2006, which inspired me to choose this topic for my research. During the documentary I kept wondering what kind of notions and conceptions were connected with the Guatemalan female identity, since such horror could be committed against them and with almost total indifference from the officials.

Identity and gender:

Gender (and) identity can be discussed and seen in the light of power and power relations. Identity, both individual and collective, is a multiple and fluid process that is constructed and mediated through many different fields of power. Identities shift, change and are constantly being recreated. As Maria Stern writes “*Identity can be seen as an expression of multiple and constantly changing relationships, orders, discourses: it is a repository, a reflection, a product, as well as (re) creator of our surroundings*” (Stern, 2001, p.36). So identities are in fact constructed within, not outside, discourses and this results in the crucial fact that identities must be understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices. Moreover the fashioning of identities within discourse does not mean that *all* identities can change quickly and easily and an analysis of identity must not lose sight of the fact that all aspects of identity are not equal. Further, the capability to change identity is strongly connected to power especially if we see identity as a product of marking difference and exclusion rather than a sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity. Those who do not have power are not free to choose what differences are going to matter and certain differences matter because those in power enforce them. (Ibid.)

Gender is a widely discussed concept, especially within feminist studies and theories. In its most common usages, gender provides a way in understanding the world based on the nature given sex. We are born male or female but gender can tell us what it means to *be* male or female in any particular time or place. But gender must be seen as a relationship of power; whereby “masculine” cannot be understood as separate from “feminine”, because it is defined in opposition to what is “associated” with the female sex. (Stern & Nystrand, 2006, p.34) Further, feminist scholars argue that each society is, in part, constituted by its gender order: a particular set of gendered relations of power and dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined in relations to subordinate masculinities and femininities. (Eichler, 2006, p.488)

Despite the discussion above concerning the “play of opposites” that both identity and gender are based on, I would like to take the opportunity here to stress the fact that my thesis will not include an extensive analysis on both male/masculine and female/feminine identity constructions although I realize the importance of it. During my research, I often found interesting leads and aspects on the male identity and the question of femicide, especially in this Guatemalan context where the militarization of society strongly affects the dominant notions of masculinity. But I felt that I had to limit myself if I wanted to make a gender analysis with depth and this is why my thesis is mainly about the female/feminine identities, although in some cases I will include male/masculine identity constructions to clarify a point of view.

Finally, masculinities and femininities are not singular; there are many ways to be a woman and many different attributes associated with femininity. This is why working with gender is a context specific project (Stern & Nystrand, 2006, p. 35). In a similar manner I would like to agree with Raewyn Connell when she

points out that masculinity and femininity are not by nature given, but nor is it solely something forced upon us through social norms or some authority. People construct themselves as masculine or feminine; we occupy a place in the gender order or accept the place we were allotted through our daily behaviours. (Connell, 2003, p.15)

1.2.2 Discourse analysis as a method:

As stressed above, identities are being constructed within specific discursive formations and practices that lead to the fact that in trying to understand and examine identity constructions, a discourse analysis is crucial. My thesis will therefore be founded on a gender based discourse analysis mainly concerning female/feminine identities in Guatemala. I find it important to point out that gender discourses are neither static nor closed entities. Just like identities are fluid and being constructed and reconstructed in particular contexts and different power relations, so are gender discourses. I would like to use Stern's and Nystrand's definition of *discourse* were the term implies the production and re-presentation of meaning which delimit the realm of understanding, action, and imagination within a certain framework (Stern & Nystrand, 2006, pp.35-36).

In any given society there are always many different and often competing discourses that organize life in varying ways, and the power of the discourses lies in however and to what extent we accept certain descriptions of reality as 'true'. Further, gender discourses are also based upon the 'play of opposites'. In fact, certain gender discourses which produce dominant idealized notions of 'being a man' only works if notions of 'unmanliness' or 'womanliness' act as the deviant that confirms the dominant norm. (Ibid. p.36) But the division between oneself and the 'Other' are controlled by power relations and positions where different discourses can be seen as struggles for the right to describe the 'Other'. This is a fundamental concept in a discourse analysis; it includes a context which is related to different types power relations and power hierarchies. (Bergstöm & Boréus, 2005, pp.305-306, 321)

So in other words we can use discourses and these kinds of stereotypes surrounding gender as models for how we produce roles, expectations and identities for men and women which is what I intended to do in my thesis, yet with focus on gender identities in Guatemala.

Finally, I would like to shortly stress the question of subjectivity. As stated earlier, discourses are fluid and changeable due to contexts and power relations. On the basis of this, I, as the researcher and writer, will have to place my self as an actor in the analysis as well because I interpret and influence the discourses on the basis of my own perspectives and views.

1.2.3 Material:

My research material concerning femicides in Guatemalan will mainly consist of secondary sources such as different international journalists who have written articles about the Guatemalan femicides, interviewing several involved actors such as relatives, human rights activists, politicians etc. Further, Amnesty International has published two reports on the subject which have also helped me in my research. Another important material have been the documentary “Killer’s Paradise” from BBC News, produced in 2006 by Giselle Portenier, an informative but shaking movie to watch about the killings in Guatemala. I also got a lot of help from the Guatemalan human rights organization ‘Sobrevivientes’, who has a lot of useful information available on their webpage (www.sobrevivientes.org) such as lists on perpetrated femicides, information they now use in their fight for solving the murders and bring the responsible to court. Available on their webpage is also a radio interview with the founder and Nobel Prize nominee Norma Cruz, where she talks about the organization and gender based violence in Guatemala. Finally, I would like to shortly mention another human rights organization ‘Mujeres Iniciando en las Américas’, MIA (www.miamericas.info) and who’s founder, Lucia Muñoz, have helped me in my search for information and with whom I have, via e-mail, had very interesting discussions regarding femicides and identities.

1.2.4 Disposition:

As starting point I will place femicides in a gendered framework constructed by Caroline Moser and through this be able to discuss femicides as a political, social and economical violence. The gendered framework also includes four different levels of causal factors which will intersect the three main categories, which will provide me with a more holistic analysis. But to make the identities visible I will use Yuval & Davis classical researches on gender, ethnicity, state and nation. I also find it relevant to discuss the femicides and gender identities in relation to armed conflict and post conflict societies, which I will do on the basis of, among some, the works by Maria Stern, Caroline Moser and Sheila Meintjes.

2 Theorizing gender, identity and violence

2.1 Femicide as a gendered continuum of violence

In exploring female gender identities in Guatemala I take my theoretic starting point in Caroline Moser's operational framework concerning violence, conflict and gender. This framework introduces a *gendered continuum* where she's categorizing violence in terms of a threefold continuum of social, political and economical violence. Further, she seeks to identify the *gendered causal factors* for committing violence and these are interrelated at individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural levels. The individual level contains factors as personal history and individual development which shape responses to interpersonal, structural and institutional power relations and implementations. The interpersonal level consists of for example gender relations between individuals within families or intimate relationships. Further, the institutional level constitutes formal or informal gendered or non-gendered institutions and organizations. Finally, examples of the structural level could be cultural gender norms and ideology that permeates society. (Moser & Clark, ed., 2001, p.31, 40) But I will not use these different levels for exposing possible causal factors for the murders; rather, I will use them to create a more multiple analysis where the complexity of female identity constructions can become visible.

I find Moser's operational framework relevant in this thesis because it gives me an opportunity to place 'femicides' within a framework that theorizes violence on the basis of gender and its relations to power. "*Gender power is seen to shape the dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena. It has expression in physique – how women's and men's bodies are nourished, trained and deployed; how vulnerable they are to attack; what mobility they have. It has expression in economics – how money, property and other resources are distributed between the sexes. It structures the social sphere – who has initiative in the community and authority in the family, who is dependent. And of course gender shapes political power, furnishing the sex of political elites, representative assemblies, executives and command centres*" (Ibid. p.15) By categorizing violence in terms of a threefold continuum of political, economic and social violence Moser argues that a more faceted view is provided, which is especially important because of the widespread tendency to categorize all gender-based violence as 'social' in nature. (Ibid. p. 31) Something

that Norma Cruz, among many, claims is the same when it comes to femicides in Guatemala. The officials often ascribe the murders as so called 'crimes of passion', meaning here a murder committed under a strong impulse such as jealous rage or heartbreak. This is seen upon as a "private social matter" and therefore not worthwhile further investigation. (Cruz, Radio de la Universidad de Ryerson, March 2007) Another reason that makes this model interesting is that femicides in Guatemala is often described on the basis of different understandings concerning the victim's and perpetrator's identity, based on different opinions and attitudes. As noted above the officials usually describe the femicides as a social problem related to jealousy and infidelity or economical crimes linked to the street gangs. But at the same time different human rights organizations tend to discuss femicides as a political motivate crime, pointing at corrupt soldiers and police officers. Moser's framework is also especially relevant in a post conflict society like Guatemala for as Meredith Turshen discusses; there are three different way's in reasserting the control over women in the aftermath of conflict: through escalated social violence both in the home and on the street, through political violence and finally control can be reasserted through economic violence against women. (Meintjes, ed., 2006, pp.84-85)

I would like to take the opportunity to describe the different categories more detailed; social violence is discussed as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for social gain or to obtain or maintain social power. This is mainly manifested through interpersonal violence such as spouse and child abuse including sexual assaults. Political violence is defined as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power. For example, it can be manifested through guerrilla conflict; paramilitary conflict; political assassinations; armed conflict between political parties; rape and sexual abuse as a political act; forced pregnancy/sterilization. Finally, economic violence is defined as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for economic gain or to obtain or maintain economic power. This can be expressed through street crimes; theft; drug trafficking; kidnapping; assaults; including rape during economic crises. (Moser & Clark, 2001, p.36)

But I would also like to emphasize Moser's point when she stresses the fact that the interrelationships in this threefold categorization are complex, context-specific and multi-directional as with the causal factors. (Ibid. p.37) It is a continuum which makes it impossible and unwanted to demarcate the categories from each other, so when defining the female gender identities surrounding femicides it is impossible to make distinct identification between the groups. In the next chapter I intend to present how I will theorize gender and identity in relation to Moser's gendered continuum of violence.

2.2 Gender – Identity – Violence; making the connections

Power and power relations are fundamental in understanding violence and the connection with gender (and) identity. Violence is related to conflict and underlying all types of conflicts is the critical issue of power relations. But I also find it relevant to link these fundamental power relations to a discussion on oppression, and especially structural oppression which I find relevant in clarifying the different dimensions of femicides and the underlying gender identities.

Traditionally, the term oppression is often understood as an exercise of brutal tyranny over a whole people by a few rulers. But Iris Marion Young talks about oppression as a structural concept, which means that oppression also refers to systematic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules. Further, she points out that it is not possible to eliminate this structural oppression by getting rid of the rulers or making some new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in economical, political and cultural institutions. This structural view can help us understand how group differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can oppress the same person in different aspects. (Young, 1990, pp.40-42) One example could be the ‘triple’ oppression of the Mayan woman, which Maria Stern describes as following: “*Mayan in/security is contingent upon where they are located in intersecting systems of oppression or ruling such as racism, sexism and classism*” (Stern, 2001, p.19)

Further, Young discusses violence as one of the ‘five faces of oppression’ where oppressed groups can face violence and/or threat of violence from other, more powerful groups in society. Violence becomes a face of oppression not only through the violent act itself but through the social context surrounding them, which make them possible and even acceptable. What makes violence a systemic and structural oppression is that it is directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group. (Young, 1990, pp.61-62) Feminist theorists have discussed violence as an ‘*assault on a person’s physical and mental integrity*’, and from here defining gender-related violence as ‘*violence which embodies the power imbalances inherent in patriarchal society*’. (Moser & Clark, ed., 2001, p.6) So one could argue that power relations between men and women are the roots of gender based violence, as a ‘face of oppression’.

Finally, I find it of importance to point out that violence is not only an act of those in power over those less powerful; violence have often be seen as oppressed groups only means in maintaining or gaining power.

Further, I have also chosen to use Nira Yuval-Davis theories and her efforts in conceptualizing gender identities in relationship with the state and the political sphere but also with the social and collective society. Yuval-Davis defines identities, both individual and collective, as specific forms of cultural narratives.

These constitute differences and commonalities between self and others, interpreting their social positioning in more or less stable ways. The positioning is often related to myths of common origin but also to myths surrounding a common destiny. Further, she points out that the discourse of culture is embedded in that of power relations in which gender and sexuality are central elements. Especially women are seen as important symbols in these myths and are often required to carry this 'burden of representation' as they are constructed as symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively. This can be manifested for example through women's clothing and behaviour which properness becomes the boundaries of the collectivity. (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp. 43-46)

One of the reasons that I find the theories of Yuval-Davis useful in my thesis is due to its relevance in discussing ethnicity and its political project. Although there isn't a clear connection between ethnicity and the perpetrated femicides in Guatemala implying that the murders should have racial motives, (Muñoz, e-mail correspondence, 13/8-07) most of the writers and human-rights activists agree on the fact that the Guatemalan civil war plays a crucial role in today's killing. Ethnicity was particularly a decisive question in the conflict which lasted for 36 years where the Mayan indigenous people were persecuted, tortured and murdered by the Guatemalan army and the civil defence patrols (PAC) in their warfare against the leftist guerrilla and "potential subversives". Mayan women and girls were especially a target because they "bred possible partisans" and countless were raped in the national project of attempting to make Guatemala a "modern, non-Indian" state. (Shea, 2001, pp.14-15)

Further, I will discuss the gender identities in Guatemala from Maria Stern's research concerning gender and armed conflict and how they affect each other through gender discourses. She concludes that during different stages in a conflict gender discourses change when identities, activities and symbolism increases or decreases in importance, which I find of relevance in discussing female identities in a post conflict society as Guatemala. (Stern & Nystrand, 2006, pp.11-15)

3 Femicide as social violence and gender identities as social identities

Although many of the Guatemalan femicides are stranger related, more incidence of domestic violence has been reported and different women organizations have estimated that one third of all femicides in the country are related to domestic violence. (Sauer, 2007) At the same time Victoria Rich concludes that there exists a cultural 'norm' where women of Guatemala are said to represent the centre of the family and the community, but as she points out, clearly this 'norm' doesn't secure actual respect or physical and emotional protection for the women. (Rich, 2007) So what social roles and identities are taken on respectively forced upon the Guatemalan woman? Many authors turn to the cult of *machismo* when trying to explain the social violence against women, but it is of my opinion that the female counterpart, *marianismo*, is just as crucial in understanding the social violence in Guatemala.

3.1 Structural gender relations: the cult of *marianismo* and *machismo*

There are many different variants of the interpretations surrounding the origin of *marianismo* and *machismo*. One alternative involve the gender cults as inherited from the conquistadores and the 'New World'. The Spanish culture was deeply patriarchal, predicated on the primacy of male 'honor', on the inherent inferiority of women and on the need for strict sexual control and domination of wives, concubines and daughters. Women in the catholic Europe were to strive for the morals surrounding the ideal female icon; Virgin Mary, which were submission, obedience and chastity. These gender identities came to their fullest expression in mestizo Latin America, and were known to be the culture norm for the 'respectable' people, meaning the ruling class. (Chant & Craske, 2003, pp.9-15)

Clearly the gender identities have changed since the colonial days but as Nikki Craske points out there are still many traces visible today. Thus she defines the prevailing machismo as: "the cult of virility [whose] chief characteristics are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships" (Craske, 1999, p.11) Further, she points out that marianismo also still influences societies through beliefs that women should prove to have moral superiority and spiritual strength but at the same time be submissive towards the man, father or brother. But this submission also includes a conviction that men, like children, need caring

which fortifies the woman's role as family carer. Finally, these gender based stereotypes underlie the dominant understanding that women's primary role and gift are the motherhood while the fatherhood not necessarily constitutes the same key task in men's life. (Ibid. pp.10-12)

However, these gender identities and stereotypes can seem a bit exaggerated and I would like to take the opportunity to stress that far from all women in the region desire an identity similar to the Virgin Mary, neither do all men wish to be seen upon as some aggressive macho man. As mentioned earlier, identities are not static nor homogeneous and these two 'gender cults' are absorbed differently and in different extents depending on factors as class, ethnicity, sexuality and age. But as Craske points out they still exists as parameters, influencing the discourses surrounding 'womanhood' and 'manhood' in Latin America. (Ibid. p.12) It's of my opinion that these gender norms are crucial in understanding today's femicides, because many of the murders seem to be motivated by the fact that these gender barriers, in some way, have been broken. As Allysun Jackson points out many of the young women killed in Guatemala were girls who didn't follow traditional roles. They were young students who went to discotheques and weren't afraid to go out at night, which was seen as a transgression. (Jackson, 2006) It has also been problematized how the masculine identity and sense of manhood lost its contents when the peace agreement was signed and weapons put away. Soldiers and PAC's felt that they now lost both their sense of masculinity through the military and also their ability to provide for the family. This situation can lead to increased domestic violence and in worse cases, femicides, in trying to reassert their manhood. (Meintjes, ed., 2002, p.152)

3.2 Institutional relations between femicides and social identities

The cultural gender norms mentioned above is especially reflected on the macro levels in the Guatemalan society, in institutions as the church, state and the legislative assembly. Gender based violence in general are seldom investigated in the country, and when it comes to violence committed by family members it is hardly seen as a crime. Social and political institutions desert the woman because the violence is viewed upon as a male prerogative or a method to maintain social and economic power over women in the household. Wife battering are common in Guatemala and is often seen as a natural expression of male identity and dominance. (Parrot & Cummings, 2006, p.152,171). According to current Guatemalan law, domestic violence is not a criminal offence unless the victim's bruises last at least ten days; criminal responsibility for sexual relations with a minor is assessed according to whether or not the victim was a virgin at the time; furthermore a rapist can be exonerated if he promises to marry his victim, unless she is under twelve years old. (Amnesty International, report, 2006) This kind of

legislation results in social femicides being dismissed as a consequence of domestic violence or a 'crime of passion' and rarely further investigated.

Social violence must be seen in the context of wider power relations; it occurs within a gendered society in which male power dominates at all levels. Differences in women's position in relation to power structures of race, class and sexuality inform the responses by structural and institutional actors on violence against women. (Hester, ed., 1996, p.3) This is something that frequently is being experienced by relatives to femicides victims, human rights activists etc. The father to Claudina Velásquez, a 19 year old woman who was murdered in 2005 tells how the investigators almost apologized to the family for their initially indifference to the murder by saying that they thought Claudina was "*a nobody because she was wearing sandals and a belly button ring.*" (Amnesty International,campaign,2006)

In Guatemala, the state and the church typically call upon protection of the family as institution and enshrine the right of privacy within the family, and the justification police traditionally offer for non-intervention in domestic violence has been 'keeping the peace'. Especially the Catholic Church has advised women to try to work through a troubled marriage by being loyal, patient and self-sacrificing, encouraging an identity founded on the cult of marianismo. (Parrot & Cummings, 2006, p.37) Thus, social violence is seldom spoken about in many countries because it contradicts the idealized image of the family as a haven for love, security and loyalty. (Reardon, 1993, p.53)

3.3 Interpersonal and individual relations between femicides and social identities

Self-blame and societal blaming of for example rape victims are closely linked by feminist explanations to social myths about the male and female sexuality that cast women as seductress and men as victim of their uncontrollable sexual instincts. A survey made among the youth in Guatemala showed how young women listed 'decent wear' as an intervention for reducing rape, and young men especially pointed out how women should stay indoors at night, never go out alone and never go to lonely places to prevent an assault (Moser & McIlwaine, 2001, pp.146-147). This shows how women's clothes can be viewed upon as a source to security or insecurity and how women who try to take place in the public (masculine) space are doing it on 'their own risk'.

Mayan women's (traditionally) clothing has also become a symbol of great importance in the Mayan movement in general. The Mayan female identity is seen as the transmitters of the Mayan culture. The different Mayan languages are said to be received as milk from the woman's breast. Through her clothing and acting she functions as a defense line and source for the Mayan identity, something that was very important during the Civil War but also in the following peace

agreement between the army in Guatemala and the leftist guerilla movement, URNG. But it had also extensive consequences on the interpersonal level in the Maya community. Conflicts often took place within the Mayan family when young indigenous men after being in the military felt superior to and even depreciated the cultural values of their own family. They didn't want their mother or sister to wear the traditional *traje* (a traditional Mayan dress) because this was poorly looked upon, there have even been several cases where the son in the family have killed his mother for wearing the *traje* and being traditional, in other words, for being a woman and being indigenous. (Stern, 2001, pp.114-115)

The Guatemalan Civil War had devastating effects on the indigenous population, on all levels of society and armed conflict does without doubt affect the existing social gender identities. Through the militarization of the Guatemalan society, which lasted for over three decades, the most aggressive and violent features of notion of masculinity provided men with a heroic status, both within the Guatemalan army but also within the guerilla movement URNG. This militarization meant for the men to repress all that was viewed as 'feminine' within them, which also included repressing and oppressing all that was feminine outside of them. In order for the Guatemalan army to carry out atrocities against Mayan women, they needed a psychological construction that reduced women to property and objectifies women as the 'other'. (Meintjes ed., 2001, p.43, 151) Many claim that this indoctrination and dehumanization is still visible through today's social femicides in Guatemala.

4 Femicide as political violence and gender identities as political identities

As mentioned before many authors stress the importance of the Guatemalan Civil war and the political violence committed in discussing today's femicides in the country. Kent Paterson points out: "*As in the former Yugoslavia and the Darfur region of Sudan, Guatemalan government soldiers and pro-government paramilitary groups committed widespread human rights violations against women. Rape and sexual violence were an integral part of the counterinsurgency strategy. The present crimes reflect this pattern of hatred and domination of women.*" (Paterson, 2006) Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias have discussed in what ways women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to state practices. One identity is as biological reproducers of members of an ethnic collective, and also as boundaries of these ethnic groups. Women are transmitters of culture and also signifiers of ethnic differences through symbols in ideological discourses. But women can also participate in political struggles as combatants, spies or saboteurs. (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989, p.7) It is my opinion that these positions and participations have also played an important role in creating political identities surrounding the Guatemalan women, both during the civil war but also in the post-conflict Guatemala.

4.1 Structural gender relations in a militarized state

Whenever gender is mainly relegated to women and the areas traditionally associated with women such as the household, children and community, the gender difference argument is neglected. As a result gender roles and identities are excluded from conflict analyses and conflict prevention strategizing and implementations. (Sikoska & Solomon, 2002) But attention to gender is paramount if one is to understand the dynamics of conflicts involving claims to identity, especially when the political discourse surrounding nation and citizenship often is built upon notions surrounding male and female identities. As Yuval Davis writes; gender is 'nationed' and nations are gendered, informed and constructed by each other. Intersections between nation and gender construct both individual's subjectivities and the social and political projects of nations and states. (Yuval Davis, 1997, pp. 21-22) For example, the power of gender discourses is crucial in the militarization of society, similarly the militarization of

society produce particular gender discourses. During the war in Guatemala different discourses surrounding women and the biological reproduction of the nation were notable. Yuval-Davis talks about the 'people as power' discourse which sees maintaining and enlarging the population of the national collective as vital for the national interest and the 'eugenicist' discourse which aims at improving the quality of the national stock by encouraging those who are suitable in terms of origin and class to have more children and discouraging the others from doing so. (Ibid. p. 22) I would say that both of these discourses were important during the civil war to justify the genocide on Mayan people, and especially the Mayan women. Even though far from all Mayan communities were involved with the leftist guerrilla, the government thought of it that way. So to be sure to eliminate the insurgency the army terrorized or eliminated the civilian population. Rios Montt, president between 1982-1983 in Guatemala, stated "*...it is necessarily to drain the sea that the guerrilla fish swim in*" which resulted in massacres and razed villages, forcing survivors to flee to the mountains. (Jonas, 1991, p.149) So to stop the "breeding of partisans" one tactic were to kill the Mayan women. But another tactic were to encourage army soldiers to rape the women and in that way letting the soldiers, who were viewed upon by the state as 'suitable' citizens, cleaning out the Mayan genes and in that way pursue with the ethnic cleansing. In long term this were seen to be enlarging the population which would strengthen the national collective and Guatemala as a modern non-indigenous nation.

The nation is often described as 'a woman' who needs masculine heroic protection of the citizen-soldier. But in the Guatemalan case the female traditional nation (read Mayan nation) were not to be protected by the soldiers of the state. To the opposite; the Mayan women and community were faced with horrible outrages. Clearly, the militarization of societies is linked with hegemonic masculinity in many different cultural contexts – not as a socio-biological attribution but as a cultural construction of a hegemonic manliness where violence plays a crucial part. (Meintjes ed., 2002, p. 151)

4.2 Institutional relations between femicides and political identities

The military institutions in Guatemala, both the state military and the guerrilla army have played a crucial part in transforming political identities in the country. This transformation often had a gendered character and implemented through gender based violence. Therefore I will now take the opportunity to examine the relation between femicides and political identities in relation to the military as institution.

The military has always played an important role in creating the nation and the notion of citizenship. Sacrificing one's life for one's country has long been viewed upon as the ultimate citizenship duty, which has led to a debate questioning why women should be excluded from this institution and through this be excluded from a political identity which involves full citizenship rights. Instead women are naturalized into 'worriers' and men into warriors. But militaries and warfare has never just been a 'male zone'. Women have always fulfilled certain, often vital, roles within them – but usually not on an equal, undifferentiated basis to that of men. (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp.93-94)

When military violence came to the Mayan communities, through the externally army and PAC's or internally through the returned Mayan soldier, the women started organizing political on different levels. Some became guerrilla soldiers in URNG, and participated in the ethnic/state process through military struggle. But female combatants have been rather invisible in Guatemala because women's military role is easily forgotten in a post-conflict society because the more traditional gender identities are reintroduced, and women are expected to revert to more traditional gender roles. (Carmack, ed., 1988, p.25)

The guerrilla movement seldom recognized the political identity of the women as soldiers and true combatants. Neither did the Guatemalan army, but one could argue that they did view her as a political enemy through her responsibility for reproducing 'difference' and opposition. This resulted in a hateful military discourse surrounding the Mayan women which were expressed through extensive sexual violence.

Sexual abuse when committed in the context of political violence differs from the crime as it is usually played out in the civil society. In Guatemala the overt political sanction transforms the act of a sexual abuse from an individual, deviant power transgression into a normative act of social and political power/control executed on behalf of a collective goal. In Guatemala the goal was an annihilation of the political opposition, through a counter-insurgency programme of psychological warfare. This military campaign was carried out across the country especially in the 1980's but also in the 90's, and has been confirmed several times by survivors' testimonies and through forensic evidence from mass grave exhumations. (Rich, 1996) The PAC's routinely used rape and sexual harassment as a way of demonstrating their power and 'disciplining' wayward citizen. Embedded in these tactics were distinct definitions of what was and wasn't acceptable for men and women to do and be, because during the Civil war gender identities were specifically and explicitly politicized. Transgressions outside of these gendered roles became seen also as subversive acts against the state. (Stern, 2001, pp.13-14)

Gender based violence in wartime has been filed away as an inevitable by-product, a matter of poor discipline and/or the inevitable bad behaviour of needy soldiers who are 'out of control'. Despite increasing evidence showing that rape in war is used as a strategy of war itself it appears to be accepted by military and political leaders. During war, bodies, boundaries, violence and political power come together in devastating combination. (Jacobs ed., 2000, p.95)

4.3 Interpersonal and individual relations between femicides and political identities

Structural and institutional attitudes can result in gender specific state terrorism and acts of repression, which have major consequences on interpersonal and individual level. Guatemala's national security discourse defined Mayan-women as dangerous threats to national identity, constructing a hegemonic national subjectivity based, in part, on the exclusion and fear of contesting political identities: similarly, the political identity 'Mayan woman' have been constructed in relation to the assignment of those who threaten, namely the Guatemalan government/military, Ladino society, men etc. (Stern, 2001, p.17) The different types of oppression and threat became even more visible in relation to the political identity and Mayan empowerment. Many of them experienced that when they started to organise of them were exposed to threats both internally from the family and community but also externally from the army and PAC. The Mayan women were kept a close eye on from both sides because "*a political woman must be under foreign influences*". (Ibid. p.110)

Further, refugee women who had organized themselves during the exile also found their political identity questioned, especially when they returned. They were often excluded from the cooperative structures that was set up in the return communities, with the motivation that the women's organization was to disruptive. Throughout the years of the return process, organized refugee women were subject to threats and attacks and even had their offices burned by their own husbands, sons and colleagues. The increase in political and social power and status experienced by women in exile was met with hostility by men who expected to resume the status quo upon return. (Giles & Hyndman, ed., 2004, pp.60-61) Likewise, many female soldiers in the URNG did choose to be silent about their military experience because they were otherwise easily stigmatised from both the military society and the social society. The male soldiers could respect women while fighting but after the ceasefire they did not really consider the women as part of the political struggle. From the social society she was often viewed upon as a traitor or a 'cheap woman', especially if she left a family behind and went to stay in the barracks in the mountains. (Bouta, Frerks & Bannon, 2005, pp.16-18)

Any peace involves a reworking of power relations, not just between nations or parts of nations, neither only on a structural and institutional level but also on an interpersonal and individual level; as in between men and women. Attempts are made to conscript women into a 'rebuilding the nation' agenda in which their needs are subordinated to those of repairing the damage to men and 'the society'. One central, but universally neglected, element of this is that violations women experiences during conflict are silenced, since the male combatants need to be constructed as heroes rather than rapists. Even defeated combatants are welcomed home as heroes, and the violence and torture they have been exposed to are looked upon as courageous and bravely. But defeated female combatants who

have been exposed to sexual violence at worst rejected by their families, at best hidden away. (Jacobs, ed., 2000, p.62)

The ending of many armed conflicts, between or within nations, have frequently required women to relinquish certain freedoms and /or forcible removal of what had previously been 'rights' – for example to employment, abortion and childcare. (Ibid.) Women seems to be de-politicized in a ceasefire and expected to return to their more social roles in the society but as Cynthia Cockburn concludes concerning the male political identities: "*It is one thing to call a ceasefire, another to decommission militarized masculinity*" (Cockburn, 1998, p.11).

5 Femicide as an economical violence and gender identities as economical identities

According to Moser's continuum the economical violence is defined as 'the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for economical gain or to obtain or maintain economic power. Economical violence can be manifested through different street crimes as carjacking; robbery/theft and drug trafficking but she also includes rape in this category, when it's related to economical power and assets. (Moser & Clark ed., 2001, p. 36) Femicides in Guatemala is often discussed as a result of economical criminality and it is especially linked with the street gangs, 'maras'. Therefore I find it relevant to discuss the murders in relation to economical structures and how women are placed within these structures, especially in the post-war Guatemala.

5.1 Structural relations between femicides and economical identities

In 1995, on the 'eve' of the official end to the war, Guatemala's recent economy still reflected the economic and political ravages of 30 years (cold) war-raging, and economic 'modernization'. Mayan women, in particular, suffered from the unequal distribution of resources, land, knowledge and power in Guatemala during the three-decade long war. Especially the land tenure systems tend to reflect the gender ideologies that, in part govern the relations and distributions of power and resources in society. Judicial, customary, and structural obstacles complicate women's ability to provide for themselves and their children. (Stern, 2000, pp. 205, 222) These obstacles especially constitute a risk for the many families where the woman is the head of household and responsible for all forms of reproduction. It is during situations of armed conflict, periods of exile or even post conflict phases of reconstruction that women generally suffer specific difficulty in terms of procuring or maintaining rights to land. Even though women in Guatemala have been legally able to own land, this right has often been obstructed in practices. When a woman was widowed it was often difficult for her to claim the right to the land that her family held. Often the deceased husband's family (brothers or fathers) claimed this land. The situation became even harder for returning refugees or internally displaced women to claim and enforce their

right to property. Furthermore, many women living in rural areas were illiterate, did not speak Spanish and did not have knowledge of their rights or the financial or practical capacity to appeal to the proper authorities in the case of a dispute. Customary law dictated that land belonged to men and was inherited through men. Many of the Mayan women that Stern interviewed explicitly identified women's lack of access to land as a primary source of insecurity in their lives and in women's more generally. Through this men can consolidate their gender power which were threaten during the war. (Stern, 2001, pp. 222-223) Thus, both destruction and reconstruction presents itself differently to women and to men. In the absence of capital, credit and land many women fall into even deeper poverty that they knew before the war began. But it is equally true that even though overall men may have greater access to public power and economical assets, this does not necessarily give all men the same access to material and productive resources. (Meintjes ed., 2002, p. 155)

5.2 Institutional relations between femicides and economical identities

In this section I would like to take the opportunity to discuss the 'maras' and their relation to the murders in Guatemala. One could find it strange that I chose to define the street gangs as an institution but I find this type of organised economical criminality an important informal institution which affects the gender identities on all levels in society.

Gangs are to blame for most of the female killings – or so runs the line in the Guatemalan officialdom where it is stated that 'since the end of the war and the virtual breakdown of law and order, gang culture has spread from the United States and taken hold in the slums of primarily Guatemala City'. (Briggs, 2007, p.2) The two most notorious groups in the region are 'Mara 18' and 'Mara Salvatrucha', both gangs derived from Los Angeles and which are known to terrorize communities through violence and threats. They make money on stealing, robbery, drug dealing and so called 'security' payments from local shop owners and bus drivers. Corruption is widely spread among the police as Dani and Bayron, two members of the 'M18', concludes "*...as long as you give them a new cell phone they don't bother you. It is the same with many of the judges*". (Erik Gustafsson, D.N.se, 21/9-07)

Although primarily a male social institution, a small number of female 'maras' also exists. They are often described by the locals as "indigenous adolescents who have abandoned their traditional *traje* for large trousers". The gang 'Los Calambres' are mainly girlfriends of members of the male gangs, while 'Las Chicas Big' is a female gang on their own. (Moser & McIlwaine, 2004, pp.145-149) Lack of family relations and parental guidance are often pointed out

as one of the main reasons why young people choose to join the 'maras', but poverty and lack of job opportunities are also crucial reasons. Many children lost their parents during the Civil war and the gangs substitute that loss through offering some kind of safety and a feeling of belonging. (Moser & McIlwaine, 2004, pp.145-149)

Girls usually get involved with the 'maras' through a boyfriend or fiancé, however several women have witnessed how they were sexual abused and taken advantage of once they joined a male dominated gang. In fact, many of the organizing principles of gang membership are based on the cult of machismo, power and the subjugation of women. (Ibid. p.149) The female gang members or girlfriends of the male gang members are often viewed upon as a boundary for the group. One of the main reasons for violent confrontations between different gangs is often to restore the gang's honour which have been violated through an assault or murder of a girlfriend or female gang member. There have been several cases where femicides have been used as a message from one 'mara' to another and the female body as "message board". For example, Andrea Fabiola Contreras was found raped and murdered in a dump with the word 'vengeance' carved into her right leg with a knife. She is believed to be a victim of a conflict between two rivalling gangs in Guatemala City. (Jackson, 2006) Thus, economical femicides are used by criminal gangs to carve up national territory into zones of influence. Rumour says that killing a woman is also a part of some gang's initiation process (Paterson, 2006). So once again the female body and identity are used as borders for competitive masculinity.

Although the 'maras' most certainly are behind some of the femicides, they tend to become scapegoats for all femicides committed, as a matter of fact the government tend to blame all violence and crimes committed in Guatemala on the gangs. The rest of the crimes are believed to be connected to other types of criminality, especially the drug-mafia. (Gustafsson, DN, 21/9-07) This is another problematic issue surrounding the economical femicides, which relates to prostitution and the international drug cartels which have been linked to the police and the judicial system in Guatemala. After the war ended several drug-cartels moved into the country, organizations which also deal with money laundering, prostitution, pornography etc. Guatemala and the rest of Latin America is said to be a new 'hot spot' in the international sex economy. If the prostitutes get sick, pregnant or don't make enough money, they are often threatened by the pimps or, even worse, killed. The same goes with the purchaser where there are reasons to believe that several femicides are committed by the hands of the buyer. (Paterson, 2006)

As mentioned earlier the police hardly ever bother to investigate further on a murder of a prostitute or if the girl was a 'muchacha vaga' (a 'wild girl', implying that they take drugs and hang around with men.). Some officials even blame the victims for their own deaths, implying that the women bring it on themselves because of their supposed involvement in gang activities or drugs, or because in some way or another they refuse to live properly conforming lives within the safe confines of a traditional family and community. ('Killers Paradise', 2006)

5.3 Interpersonal and individual relations between femicides and economical identities

Poverty plays a crucial part throughout the gendered continuum of violence, and especially when we discuss femicides as an economical violence. Poverty challenges senses of manhood and womanhood, and many times with violent results. Economic underdevelopment and with high levels of unemployment thwart the traditional sense of manhood as a provider. In situations of post-war reconstruction, this frustration can merge with the eroded sense of manhood produced by subjection to violence in war. Any resistance or challenge to power in the one area where men can assert their manhood, that is intimate relationships, further threatens masculinity and can lead to ever more violent and perverse attempts to maintain control. Violence and threat of violence can be an effective way of re-establish and preserve control over wealth and resources and above all, over women's productive and reproductive labour. (Meintjes ed., 2002, p. 13, 155)

Another important aspect on women's labour and femicides is the large migration of indigenous people to urban areas, as a result of the unequal land distribution. One of the most popular destinations for urban workers is Guatemala City, where factory jobs are available particularly in 'maquilladoras', factories that are notorious for hiring only young women. Further, many of the murders are committed in relation to the workplace, especially during the transportation back and forth to work. Shae Garwood, author to "*Working to Death: Gender, Labour and Violence in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico*" stresses the connection between the 'maquilladoras' and the discursively construction of women as cheap labour and the construction of the women as 'cheap' and without dignity, which she claims is a crucial factor in understanding the notion of female identities and femicides. Women's participation in formal employment (and challenge to 'traditional' gender roles) is often blamed for the violence, rather than men's fantasies of identity and power that contribute to, and legitimise gender violence in the first place. (Garwood, 2002)

6 Summary and Concluding Comments

The aim for this thesis was to expose and examine notions and constructions surrounding female gender identities in Guatemala, and conclude if this could help us understand the terrible crime of femicides. To find the answer I found it important to put the murders in a wider perspective and through this expose the multidimensional gender identities, but also to view the different dimensions of femicides. Placing the femicides in Moser's gendered continuum of violence gave me a more holistic analyse through her framework which consists of three different categories; social, political and economical violence together with four different causal levels; structural, institutional, interpersonal and individual levels. The relevance of this framework was confirmed during my research by the many different perspectives and discourses surrounding the murders.

By analysing femicides as a social violence several social gender identities became visible. On a structural level notions surrounding gender identities in terms of *machismo* and *marianismo* play a important role, through gender norms that distinguish womanhood into 'good girls' and 'bad girls' based on the notion of the woman as either a saint or a sinner. This is something that is highly visible on the institutional level, clearly through the church but also through the legislative assembly where for example it is taken into account weather or not the victim of a sexual abuse was a virgin at the time of the assault, when convicting the perpetrator. Further, this identity construction is also manifested on an interpersonal and individual level where women's clothes play an important role both in the question of security in today's Guatemala but also during the civil war were Mayan women were viewed upon as an symbol for the Mayan culture through her traditional clothing, which also meant risking personal security through this symbolizing.

Continuing on to the analysis surrounding femicide as a way of gaining political power I stressed the importance of the civil war as re-structor of gendered political identities. Men and women's roles played an important part in creating violent and militarised discourses, and the Mayan women were often politicised as an enemy in reproducing 'difference', which made them highly vulnerable to political violence as gang rape and genocide. But many Mayan women took on a political identity as a soldier through joining the guerrilla movement, but their political identity were seldom recognised and after the peace assignment they were expected to return to the more feminine gender role as the carer. However, political women were often looked upon with suspicion, not only from the Guatemalan state but also from the Mayan community.

Finally, when discussing femicides as an economical crime which is the discourse that most often surrounds these crimes in media and from Guatemalan officials, discourses related to street gangs and "bad girls" are dominant. Through

patriarchal economical structures women are often left without assets and instead she is viewed as an asset herself, both through her productive and reproductive labour but also through her body and “sexual honour” which for example is highly defended by competing gangs. Further, I also discussed how the discourse surrounding cheap female labour in the ‘maquilladoras’ can confirm this theory where women’s cheap productive labour can result in a notion of the women as ‘cheap’ and ‘worthless’, an identity which could help us understand the brutal crimes.

Throughout the analyse I find that women’s gender identities first and foremost constitute boundaries of social, political and economical characters. This notion of the female identity as a boundary is constructed on all causal levels; structural, institutional, interpersonal and individual but also violated on all these levels. I would argue that the notion of women as ‘borders’ was constructed and implemented throughout the civil war where especially the Mayan women were viewed by the Guatemalan army as the border to the Mayan and guerrilla movement, but at the same time they represented the border to the PAC’s and military by their own Mayan community. Through their bodies the enemy could trespass and force their way into the community, which explains why many of the gang rapes were conducted while the family or the whole village were forced to watch. There is an interesting paradox here concerning the importance of rape; the violation is of high significance both as a weapon for the perpetrator and clearly to the violated women and through her the communities which will fight to protect the women. But on the other hand the crime was until recently highly invisibly in national and international courts. Sheila Meintjes, among many, states that this widely observed double-faced attitude towards rape can be explained through the recognition that patriarchal societies regard women as property and that the value of this property resides in women’s productive and reproductive labour. (Meintjes ed., 2002, p. 12)

However, during the civil war these boundaries was as much a question about ethnicity as about gender, so how can this be translated into today’s murders which not necessarily can be related to ethnicity? As stated in the analysis above there are dominant gender identities which have affected all women, not only the Mayan women. When women and the notion of ‘womanhood’ try to move outside traditional identity constructions, her power relation is measured against many other power structures, not only questions of class and ethnicity but also in terms of hegemonic social identities between gender. So committing a femicide can be viewed as violating a social, political and/or economical boundary which implies that hegemonic discourses surrounding identities and power can be reinforced. This strengthens my argument for using the gendered continuum as a theoretical framework, and which exposes the complicated characters of these crimes and even more the complexity surrounding gender identities. The subordination of identities through power creates the conditions for gender based violence, yet subordination is elaborated in different ways by class, race, ethnicity and culture within and across space and time (Meintjes ed., 2002, p.157) In this sense, context shape the gender specific violence, the form it takes, the way women and men experience and understand it, and the possibilities for resisting it.

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