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Part 2

Gender and Masculinities

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"Es que para ellos el deporte es matar":

Rethinking the Scripts of Violent Men in El Salvador and Brazil

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Introduction

"Their sport is killing" is how a Salvadorean gang member describes his fellow "homeboys." His description is of an extreme form of violent masculinity that has widespread purchase, both within gang structures and across wider public debates of gang members as the violent "other." While it is acknowledged that gangs are predominately made up of young men, many of whom engage in violent behavior, they are rarely analyzed as a gendered phenomenon. As Yllo observes, "male aggression is so closely bound to popular perceptions of violence that it has become a 'nonissue' . . . is that fact so thoroughly taken for granted that it is not regarded as requiring explanation?" (1993, 51). This lack of gendered analysis is indeed true of public forms of violence more generally. Through an examination of what we call the "everyday scripts of violence," we analyze some of the tensions in researching different forms of violence in El Salvador and Brazil from a gendered and class perspective. We situate this in a wider discussion of debates on men and masculinities, paying particular attention to the "pull" of the stereotypes related to extreme forms of masculinities—against which researchers are not immune.

The larger goal of the chapter is to make political connections between different types of violence at the urban margins, and thus we emphasize the importance of locating gender relations within the broader political economy of violence in Latin America. Drawing on data from our separate research processes, we explore how chronic levels of violence in different contexts reproduce similar silences, as well as discourses of blame and judgment, and how these are highly gendered, both to explain violence and to distance the narrator from it. We use these narrative tools—silence, blame, and judgment—to structure the following discussion. Based on feminist methodologies, underlying this is the imperative to prioritize normal and everyday experiences, as an antidote to the male frame of violence and insecurity.

In contrast to the ungendered world portrayed in mainstream discussions of urban violence, we argue that if violence is to be tackled holistically, we must acknowledge its multiple interconnected manifestations and the factors that facilitate it. This involves looking at violence both materially and discursively. This chapter is a product of many conversations over some years which have explored the shared experiences and tensions of carrying out feminist research on violence in different contexts across Latin America. Both authors have conducted research in urban marginal communities—Hume in El Salvador and Wilding in Rio de Janeiro over several years. Rather than claiming to be a comparative ethnography, this chapter is the interrogation of questions arising from both contexts that inform our frustration about the arbitrary distinction between different types of violence, and the implications this has for both the research process and our knowledge of violence. By bringing together these two cases in this way, we do not suggest that experiences of urban violence are universal, but that we have identified

certain tensions common to these settings and prevalent more generally in research on violence.

Our starting point here is to reject the normative separation between "gender-based" violence and other forms, and the resultant sidelining of violence against women from public scrutiny. Our ethnographic research in both Brazil and El Salvador has shown that popular understandings of violence are often underpinned by gendered assumptions that affect understandings of violence (Hume 2009a; Wilding 2012). On a very simple level, this makes it challenging at times to explain the type of research we do, since we are often pushed to disconnect "gender violence" or so-called "private violence" from "violence," as if they can be separated so neatly. In practice this indicates that private violence is deemed of lesser importance than the more public manifestations of violence and crime and are seen as something analytically distinct. This forced compartmentalization not only misses that violence against women takes multiple forms and that all forms of violence have gendered impacts, but it also reveals a certain reduction of gender analysis to women and, by default, to what happens in the private sphere. In part, this is explained by normative assumptions that violence against women is largely a private or family matter. In the case of more public expressions of violence, the notion is that these types of violence are ungendered, whereas violence against women can only be discussed as a gender or women's issue. This belies the fact that violence in marginalized communities is highly visible, ever present, and interconnected.

The chapter is divided into three substantive sections. The first situates the political economy of violence at the urban margins as complex and multifaceted in order to provide a backdrop for the subsequent discussion. Here we problematize some of the

existing debates on men and masculinities in order to argue for an analysis of men's violence as gendered and to caution against pushing for politically appealing, but potentially simplistic, causal explanations for men's violence. The second section interrogates the theme of silence. In particular, we are concerned with what stories and data inform the everyday scripts of violence and how these silences are gendered. Finally, we look at how violence is judged by those who live with it on a daily basis in order to illuminate the ways in which everyday scripts are underpinned by normative gendered assumptions that allow certain types of violence to go unquestioned. At the heart of this chapter is the tension between the gendered public scripts of violence and the reality of violence playing out in its multiple forms on an everyday basis.

Gendering the Political Economy of Violence

Latin America stands out as one of the most violent regions in the world. The issue attracts the attention of policy makers, scholars, and journalists. Violence related to crime, drugs, militias, and the police frequently hits the headlines, and—more often than not—the stories are presented in highly sensationalist terms and rely on a predetermined cast of actors. These stereotypical actors are usually young, poor (black) males who live on the urban margins. This representation of the violent actor is not only partial, but it reveals deep societal biases around class, gender, and—in many Latin American contexts—ethnicity and race. In Rio de Janeiro and the cities of El Salvador, male gang members, marginalized by their class and social origins, are seen as the primary protagonists of violence. Grotesque images of spectacular acts committed in the name of feuds, territoriality, and punishment feature heavily in the everyday scripts of violence that dominate all strata of society. The very title of this chapter speaks self-consciously to

such scripts. This representation of violent masculinity lacks rigorous and nuanced examination and fails to interrogate masculinities as relational, complex, and multidimensional.

(Mis)representing violence in this way leads to a curious impasse in our thinking, which is often underpinned by embedded and pre-scripted notions of gender and class. The fact that men are the key perpetrators and victims of lethal violence is taken for granted, while the obvious gendered dynamics are for the most part ignored. Where gender is addressed, the perpetrators' masculinity is often cited as the "reason" for their violence—otherwise men only appear "as men" when they engage in overtly gendered forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence and rape. In short, that the key protagonists of violence in the region are male is taken as a given, rather than being worthy of analysis.

Feminist research has argued the importance of recognizing the "thin line" between "identifying male power" and "accepting it implicitly" as a cause of violence (El-Bushra 2000, 82). We maintain here that the acceptance of male power as a cause both reproduces and naturalizes a simplified model of masculinity built on violence. Rather than looking at the intersectionality of different forces on men's lives and how these inform the use of violence (or not), causality is reduced to a sometimes abstract notion of masculinity or machismo. Yet it is at the intersection of race, class, and gender that violence is most productively understood. As Baird emphasizes (this volume), not all men benefit equally from patriarchy, so the relationship between masculinities and violence must be understood as both complex and changing. The risk in relying on simplified scripts of violence is that it serves to reproduce easy explanations that bolster

exclusionary power structures around race, economics, and politics in which different forms of violence are embedded.

Both of us have asked our research participants about the positive and negative elements of their neighborhoods, and, although the localized dynamics may be distinct, the theme of violence dominated these narratives of community in both research contexts. As Evelia (age forty-nine) says in the following quote, you cannot "remain indifferent":

> [Violence is] not only here in our community, but in all communities in general. It's just that in the favela we are more exposed to it because we live here and we hear about a lot that goes on—you can't shut your eyes to everything that is going on. Even if you can't help someone change their attitude, you still don't remain indifferent. So this ends up affecting you, being worried about your kids, when they go to school, when they come back, shootings, stray bullets.

Evelia pinpoints a crucial concern: violence crosscuts class and ethnic groups—"[it is] in all communities"—but those who live in the precarious political economy of the urban margins have less capacity to insulate themselves from its pernicious effects. Focusing our attention to the margins does not mean that the poor are more prone to violence than other groups, and we have an ethical responsibility to situate violence in its broader political economy. However, its impact is felt differentially. The lack of material resources has very real implications for how citizens respond to violence and try to protect themselves. The middle and upper classes may respond to perceived insecurity by physically insulating themselves against the perceived "threat." This crudely translates into urban spaces being segregated along class lines through the growth of luxurious

malls and gated communities and the growing presence of private security guards (Caldeira 2000). Those who do not have the means to negotiate the urban space through consumption, such as the participants in both our research contexts, have more permanent and more intimate contact with violence. In both research contexts, the presence of violence in the urban margins has profound effects on the way people live their lives. How people negotiate the urban space is shaped by threat and fear (Pain 2001). Gangs' use of violence to impose fear, for example, is achieved through a variety of mechanisms, including direct violence as well as ostensibly benevolent methods. Notably, however, both the directly aggressive and the more coercive aspects of their behavior are reliant on dominant models of masculinity: either the disciplinarian/protector or patriarchal provider (Wilding 2014; Hume 2007a).

Basic decisions, such as how to get home through your own community, whether to go to the local shop, and whether to speak to neighbors are therefore colored by the threat of violence. Delmy, a twenty-nine-year-old school teacher in Greater San Salvador suggests:

> Maybe what we see most is social violence, gangs. If you go to the shop at
> 7 p.m., you are afraid because just the fact that it is dark means that it is
> deserted.

Other women spoke about how the growing problem of extortion in marginal areas of El Salvador has particularly negative repercussions for local residents: "You have to pay to work" (Paty, 58 years old). Many in Paty's neighborhood have "paid" for non-payment with their lives (Hume 2009). Violence therefore destroys livelihood strategies in very direct ways. Threat and force are used by and against different groups for a range of ends.

This has multiple ramifications for people, who are positioned differently in their communities according to their social networks and standing, as well as their social identity factors like age, race, and gender. Not leaving the house, especially at night, is a common way of "protecting" oneself against the threat of violence, particularly for women and older residents. This sets certain expectations or implicit rules for how to behave in violent areas. However, this modification of routines is not possible for residents who work shifts or have to travel late to get home from work. More precisely, it is not possible for most people who engage with the neoliberal economy. Eighteen-year-old Alfonso works delivering bread for a local baker, so his economic needs mean that he must leave the house in the middle of the night. He says:

> [Violence] affects me because there is no normal security that allows you to feel ok and let you sleep well because you don't know what time they might come to kill you. Maybe you don't know if they arrive they might not take it out on you but with someone in your family or who means something to you, or someone you care about.

"They" in Alfonso's narrative refers to the local gang. Similarly in Brazil, "they" is interchangeable with "the boys" (os meninos) to describe violent actors, which is only understood in context, alerting us to the importance of listening to local scripts. As Wheeler (2009) found, while doing participatory videos with favela residents, that participants spoke about violence without once naming the gangs or militia as the sources of this insecurity. This is one example of how the threatening presence of gangs in people's lives is tangible, but the reality of violence is much more complex and what is unsaid can be as revealing as what is said (Hume 2009b). For example, Carmen (age

fourteen) lists a number of interconnected forms of violence that affect her community in Greater San Salvador. She cites the gang as the major source of these different forms of violence.

> In the community, there are gangs, rapes. There are gang problems when others come here, drug pushing, gangs who beat up men. The gang mistreats people who visit, drugs, vices, lack of respect and gossip. Think about it, here, inside the community there are gangs and they have problems with outsiders, sometimes their blood gets up and they hit people. Rape, they rape kids and they grab them and take them away . . .
> Lack of respect.

Carmen's narrative reveals that in these contexts violence has multiple sources and many expressions. While it may be tempting to reduce all causality (and therefore, blame) to gang violence—a pattern very evident in narratives from both Brazil and El Salvador—both actors and expressions of violence are more dynamic. When asked about the negative aspects of her Rio community, Rosária (age sixteen) speaks not only of gangs, but also her fear of the police:

> The traffickers are abusive to the girls. Police officers hit and verbally abuse people who don't have anything to do [with trafficking]. I am scared of the police because they come into the community, drugged up, saying bad things. Once I answered back to an officer and he gave me a slap in the face.

Rosária's fear reminds us that discrimination against these communities comes from the state as well as local gangs. In fact, community members are readily critical of the police

violence. Although gang members are known for the acts they carry out in the name of the gang, there is a tension between the desire to distance gang violence, as a product of the "other," and the knowledge that gang members are socially embedded in the community: somebody's brother, son, and friend. In contrast to the horror stories of brutal acts of violence they commit, opinions expressed about gang behavior often suggest they observe a moral code: "They don't go from door to door, they only sell [drugs] to those that want it' (Sérgio, twenty-two, Brazil). Rosa echoed Sérgio's view, stating that she had "nothing against them" and that each could live as they desired, despite the fact her teenage son had been shot dead as a result of police-gang conflict. She did not openly criticize the part the gang played in the reproduction of violence and who the police had ostensibly come in to find. This is distinct from El Salvador, where the gang is highlighted as the key protagonist of violence in the community, as suggested in the above quote from Carmen. Limiting the scripts of violence to its most visible - or speakable – forms potentially silences the multiple actors involved in its localized production. What is clear from our research is the need to be alert to the interplay between criminal, interpersonal, and state-sanctioned violence.

Understanding the complex linkages between multiple violences poses a very real challenge for research and obliges us to situate violence within its gendered political and moral economy. Understanding linkages is not the same as determining causality, which requires a more complex mapping of violent processes and actors. Since the 1990s, there has been a burgeoning literature that seeks to understand the interplay between men and violence in an effort to tease out these political connections (Greig 2000). The impetus to bring men and a "masculinities perspective" into a sharper focus identifies men both as

allies in achieving gender equality and as having their own gendered needs (e.g., Sweetman 1997 and 2013; Chant and Gutmann 2000; Cleaver 2002; Cornwall 1997 and 2000). Many of the arguments given for the inclusion of a male perspective appear to mirror, and complement, feminist goals by focusing on the reproduction of harmful gender regimes. However, while feminists' primary goal is to end women's oppression by tackling inequality within and between men and women, the comparatively recent masculinities literature tends to focus on men in isolation, constructed primarily as victims of oppressive gender norms, but failing to recognize the role that these play in perpetuating hierarchies between men and women. Further, large sections of this literature ignore the insights gleaned from decades of feminist research on violence against women.

Men are often presented either as vulnerable victims at risk of being targeted by drug gangs or as the dangerous protagonist in need of containment/diversion. One tendency has been to construct men as victims of limited job and education opportunities and social exclusion, and therefore left without a legitimate means of "achieving manhood" (Barker 2005). The premise is that young, poor men from low-income communities are left with limited possibilities for productive and fulfilled lives by virtue of their identity and where they live. Both popular and academic representations of men in the context of neoliberalism have made allusions to men or masculinities "in crisis," referring to the process by which traditional male roles are being undermined by the emasculating nature of the neoliberal economy. The increasing precarity of labor, for example, strips men of their "traditional" pathways to becoming men. In response to this process of dispossession, Bourgois (1996, 412) has argued that men can develop a "street

culture of resistance" which "celebrates a misogynist predatory street culture that normalises gang rape, sexual conquest, and paternal abandonment. Marginalized men lash out against the women and children they can no longer support economically nor control patriarchally." In a similar vein, Baird (this volume) persuasively suggests that male gang members from low-income backgrounds in Medellín have few legal opportunities to pursue masculinity and thus violence becomes a key tool to achieve patriarchal dividends. The everyday scripts of violence are awash with convincing reasons why men lash out against women and other groups. Unemployment, alcohol, and drug use often feature heavily in such accounts:

> He drinks and then comes home and hits the children. . . . The financial situation is very influential. . . . If a father is unemployed it disrupts (desestrutura) everything, he will get drunk, go to the corner to take drugs, because he sees his wife and child going hungry, getting ill, without medicine, and his hands are tied. He will end up looking for a way out in drink and drugs. (Evelia, focus group, Rio de Janeiro)

This characterization of men as victims of a harsh socioeconomic system that leaves them no opportunities but to lash out at those less powerful than themselves is appealing and it usefully situates violence in the intersection of multiple forms of domination in men's lives. However, it is also problematic. Not all marginalized men respond through the use of violence, and not all men who use violence are marginalized. Feminists have been vocal in cautioning against overly simplistic causal analyses of men's use of violence, and we suggest here that a more rigorous and indeed historically situated analysis of gendered relations is necessary. Male domination (of women) crosscuts time, place, and

social class. The fact is that not only marginalized men "celebrate" or indeed benefit from misogyny and patriarchy. Without acknowledging the centrality of unequal gender relations to the reproduction of violence, we risk suggesting that male domination is a response to a particular economic climate, shifting the blame away from oppressive gender relations but also silencing the multiple ways violence is used by men who are not considered "marginalized." Indeed, it is specifically to the issue of silencing that the discussion now turns.

Silence

The questions asked by feminist scholars of violence against women offer important lessons for the study of violence more generally, particularly for the examination of the narratives of those who live in intimate contact with its multiple forms on a daily basis, such as many of those who live on Latin America's urban margins. A key challenge of feminist research has been to shatter some of the silences and myths that surround violence against women, many of which implicitly or explicitly blame victims of certain forms of violence (Kelly 1988). We understand silence here not only as the "unsaid" but also as productive of these everyday scripts of violence. A notable achievement of the feminist movement has been to expose the immediacy and intimacy of different forms of male domination expressed through both overt and hidden violence in women's lives. This runs contrary to popular assumptions that continue to inform fear and danger, which typically root violence as something "committed by strangers in public places" (Stanko 1990, 78) and, as argued above, silences much of the violence used by powerful men and groups. Feminist literature exposes the misconception that violence is something that is "out there," rather than being constitutive of relationships of both intimacy and

oppression. This insight has helped open up space to talk about other forms of violence and abuse that involve close relationships, such as intergenerational abuse. But it also has lessons for understanding other social relationships and groups that involve both trust and oppression, such as gangs. Approaching violence in this way calls attention to the arbitrary separation between what is perceived as two distinct phenomena—that is, "real" violence and that perpetrated in intimate relations—or indeed the notion that intimacy and oppression are mutually exclusive. This poses a direct challenge to popular conceptualizations of real violence as "mindless," "incomprehensible," "unpredictable" (Dobash and Dobash 1998, 141), and most commonly committed by a stranger.

In an attempt to address these connections between actors and acts, Liz Kelly (1988) suggests that sexual violence is best understood as a continuum of overlapping male behavior ranging from, for example, a shouted insult to rape. The utility of the continuum can be extended to an analysis of violence more generally since it forces us to challenge the notion that violence can be reduced to a discrete act removed from everyday and otherwise harmonious human relations. This has two key implications. First, it demands an examination of the relations that underpin violent processes and behaviors, which are normally imbued with inequalities. Second, it emphasizes the importance of the dynamism and interconnectedness of different forms of violence, which we have looked at elsewhere (Hume 2007a and 2009a; Wilding 2010 and 2012). Such lessons are crucial for the Latin American context, where violence is increasingly seen as a "normal option" for citizens to pursue their goals (Koonings and Kruijt 1999, 11).

The very way in which violence is measured exposes certain gendered silences. The principle mechanism for assessing levels of violence in a society is through homicide rates, which are taken as a proxy for overall levels of violence. Young men dominate in statistics of both perpetrators and victims of violence and crime, accounting for just under 90 percent of murder victims in both Brazil and El Salvador (89.8 percent for Brazil and 89 percent for El Salvador in 2012, according to UNODC, 2014). Young men are specifically vulnerable. Of 52,198 killed in Brazil in 2011, over half were between fifteen and twenty-four years old; 71 percent were black (pretos and pardos); and 93 percent were male (Waiselfisz 2013, 9); equating to 53.4 per 100,000 population (ibid., 11). Meanwhile in El Salvador, homicide rates reached 69.9 per 100,000 in 2011, dropping to 41.2 per 100,000 in 2012. In 2008, the homicide rate for Salvadoreans ages fifteen to twenty-four was 94 per 100,000. Despite this statistical salience, data disaggregated by gender is difficult to come by and rarely used in policy development. Even less reliable are the data for non-lethal violence, which suffer from both chronic under-reporting and under-recording. It is still worth pointing out that homicide data may be the most reliable available to researchers and can be compared across countries and cities, even though numbers only shed light on extreme forms of violence that result in death, without providing a more general picture of the low intensity violence and insecurity that marks everyday lives for many in Latin America's urban margins.

Nevertheless, it is through this prism of death rates, young, poor (black) men, often from informal settlements, are depicted as both dominant victims and perpetrators. This truism is used to fuel class-based stereotypes of violent young men killing each other. With reference to a more general "talk of crime," Caldeira (2000, 32) has termed

this both "a kind of knowledge and a misrecognition," suggesting it has much in common with other forms of classificatory thinking such as racism. Men are seen to be more vulnerable to outbursts of "natural" aggression; more likely to meet conflict and frustration with violence; and more easily lured by the temptations and glamour of crime, violent networks, and the desire to dominate. However, we should be clear that when we speak about men, we cannot do so in isolation from class. "Violent men" are normatively and implicitly working-class men. In Brazil, this also has racialized dimensions. The failure to interrogate the use of violence by men from higher social classes leaves working-class men to be the protagonists of these violent scripts even within critical scholarship, as suggested above. So while some men's violence is interrogated and challenged, the violence of others gets overlooked.

Therefore, although men may dominate over women in many settings, it is not simply the case that all men benefit equally from patriarchy. Indeed, differences within genders may be as significant as differences between men and women (El-Bushra 2000, 80). Connell's (1987) work has shown how some expressions of masculinity are privileged over others, with those who can perform to the dominant models benefiting the most. This is particularly evident within the hierarchical structure of gangs, which are often buttressed by specific notions of masculinity and reinforced through the threat of violence.

Interrogating what is silenced and omitted from these everyday scripts of violence becomes a challenging but crucial task for the researcher. Caldeira (2000, 33) argues that the pervasive "talk of crime" elaborates prejudices. She suggests that in order to make sense of the violent reality, one must adhere to the available stereotypes: "The categories

are rigid: they are meant not to describe the world accurately but to organise and classify it symbolically. They are meant to counteract disruption at the level of experience, not to describe it" (ibid.), which allows people to construct a feeling of safety in spite of the actual risks they face (Wilding 2012). Our research suggests that one reason these simplified representations of men have such purchase is that they are based on partial realities, such as those presented in crude statistics or sensational headlines that appeal to commonsense assumptions of what a violent actor is. Hume (2009a, 24) has suggested they are "seductive in their simplicity" because they insulate those who see themselves as upstanding citizens from those they label as violent criminals. These same citizens are often the ones to support heavy-handed and even extrajudicial measures to deal with criminals (Hume 2007a). This automatically distinguishes types of violence as acceptable or unacceptable. In this sense, such scripts are a "constant form of moral discourse" (Liebling and Stanko 2001, 428). It is therefore important to understand the everyday (gendered) scripts of violence and the ways in which these draw on judgments made on the acts and actors involved (Wilding 2014). Judgments are reinforced by wider political and social norms, as discussed in the following section.

Blame and Judgment

In spite of the fact that gender identities are generally only acknowledged when violence is considered to be overtly "gender based," which is most often reduced to violence against women, the way in which men and women construct femininities and masculinities is done in conversation with one another—both symbolically and materially. This making of categories, what it means to be or become a man, draws on particular notions of what it means to be a woman as a counterpoint. As research into

gangs in Brasilia has identified, "masculinity is not only reproduced through interaction with violence, but through gender relations, with femininity a co-producer of models of virility" (Abramovay 2010, 242). In El Salvador, Vladimir, a member of the Mara Salvatrucha gang suggests that central to his participation in the gang is precisely a specific masculine identity premised on violent domination: "What makes me a man are my balls because I haven't borrowed them . . . I have them because God gave them to me and I show them that with tattoos or without tattoos, I sleep with who I want. No matter how big a guy is, I'm better than him." Emphasized here is both an aggressive sexuality and competition among men. Research has suggested gangs can provide a sense of belonging for young men, but such belonging has its costs. Intragang violence is common. One of the ways Vladimir (age twenty-three) has rectified problems with other members of his gang has been by carrying out executions on their behalf:

> The guy spoke up for me and he brought me here at night. I told him I thought they were going to kill me. No, you silly bastard, there is no hassle. So we came up. . . . They asked me did I want to fix [the problem I had with them], so I said yes and they told me to go kill someone. I said, great, just give me the gun to do it right. I went and I pumped him with nine bullets and left him there in the [community], here in that street, up there.

MH: And was he from another gang?

No, from a [criminal] gang. Maybe you have heard of los Ricos gang? He was one of those guys. They called him "el Limpio." I shot

> him straight, in that fucking street. I left him lying with
>
> nine bullets in him. That was how I fixed getting back in.
>
> From then on, thanks be to God, they treated me like they
>
> had done beforehand. Now there is no conflict in the gang. .

In this case, Vladimir recognizes that he had a choice: to kill or be killed. Others do not have this "choice." A common example that portrays the brutality of the gangs in both Brazil and El Salvador involves the spectacular act of displaying victims in public places: gangs and other violent groups often leave the heads or hearts of "traitors" in public spaces, such as sports pitches and street corners. Such rituals are presented as a warning to potential rule breakers or "traitors," but they also reinforce gang power through their display of ruthlessness. These tactics have a long history in Latin America, most notably during the period of authoritarian rule when the state used such displays to spread terror in the population.

Similar to the politically motivated state terror and despite the fear and disgust that these contemporary displays generate among the wider population, narratives of victim blaming continue to resonate in everyday scripts. Some residents have expressed their relief that "criminals" are killing themselves, while others are vocal in their support for both legal and illegal social cleansing policies (Hume 2007a and b; see also Snodgrass Godoy 2006 on Guatemala). Such scripts underpin a moral discourse of guilt and innocence, which distinguishes between "good" and "bad" citizens, "worthy" and "innocent" victims. According to Ana María, a resident of a marginal area in Greater San Salvador:

> I think that we're okay now because all those, all of them who were
> thieves here, they're all dead and others are in prison. That guy that lived
> up beside Don Chepe, the one they called "the chicken," he's left here. I
> mean, thank God, they are killing themselves and now there are some
> thieves, not like that though, those other thieves that went about robbing
> clothes, hens.

Such symbolic acts of violence are reliant on the construction of a brutal and brutalized masculinity, whereby gang members' own involvement in violence validates their victimization.

Following Caldeira (2000), we argue that such "classificatory" thinking, which compartmentalizes actors and simplifies their motives, underpins some of the key ways in which violence is judged. These hegemonic scripts are nourished by stereotypes that offer a particular ordering of social reality that eliminates the possibility of ambiguity and are reliant on the construction of a dangerous "other." As everyday scripts, stereotypes insulate citizens from the complexities and closeness of violence. Importantly, this narrative also has a protective function. It can insulate other residents, who believe that they can protect themselves: "As long as I abide by the rules, I am safe" (Wilding 2012). Likewise, "belonging" to a particular group or community can foster protection, however illusionary this may be in reality (Hume, 2007b). In this way, stereotypes are both reflective of and complicit with bigger exclusionary narratives that operate to sanitize and stamp an "official" value on violence.

As researchers, we are not immune from such scripts. The quote at the start of this paper, "their sport is killing," is evocative of a particular image of the young violent

gangster that dominates much research on the issue. As researchers of violence, we are often drawn to the extreme in our efforts to understand violence. We self-consciously used this to attract attention and to problematize the issues under discussion. When we present this quote in context, a more complex picture of Vladimir's life emerges that unsettles the somewhat one-dimensional notion of the gangster concerned only with supposed glamour, consumption, and violence.

> I have been in the gang for almost seven years. I don't regret it. I know that at some stage it will be my turn [to die]. Their sport is killing, robbing, you could say, raping girls. That was my thing before, I can tell you, but that child [his daughter] changed my mind a fuck load. Even though I am what I am because for people who have money, what are we gang members? We're rubbish. I mean I am not interested; as long as I feel alright what people say doesn't interest me—it goes in this ear and out that one. It's hard to forget the past.

Here we see a young man who has spent a large part of his life in the violent structure of the gang. He faces discrimination on a daily basis, both because of his gang status and his poverty. He is also a man who has been profoundly affected by fatherhood. At the time of the interview, he was an active member of the Mara Salvatrucha and main caregiver for his young daughter. Both lived with his mother, who had been tortured by the security forces during the war because of her leftist sympathies. Her partner (Vladimir's father) had been killed. As a result, she had suffered a severe breakdown when Vladimir was a baby and he was brought up by relatives. For him, joining the gang was a way of escaping the local bullies who picked on him because he was considered "small" for his

age, but now that he had taken on responsibility for his daughter's care (the girl's mother was living with another gang member), he found he no longer enjoyed the "vacil" or gang life.

Presenting Vladimir in this more complete way allows a more complex understanding of violence to emerge. We see how different forms of violence can create conditions where violence is reproduced and challenged. It also humanizes the violent actor and destabilizes any potential for a neat account of violent masculinities. Yet everyday scripts of violence cannot allow such ambiguity. Media portrayals of both actors and victims of violence rely on caricature, showing images of body bags emerging from the urban margins and presenting one-dimensional portrayals of brutal gang members. In such cases, the victims are constructed to have been at best foolhardy or at worst complicit in their own deaths. In contrast, middle-class victims of violence are portrayed in terms of the lives cut short and the pain and loss of family members. Their innocence is emphasized. Greer (2004) has termed this a hierarchy of victimization that ranges from "ideal" to "undeserving" victims.

Both our research contexts have shown that in cases of violence against women generally, men use women to explain and excuse their behavior, and absolve themselves of responsibility for the violence they have inflicted. Men impose their own definitions of violence in order to neutralize or minimize women's experience of abuse. For example, in El Salvador, men argue it is "her" fault that they are being held to account for their behavior (Hume 2009a). Similar narratives have been identified in other contexts such as Trinidad (Sukhu 2013) and the United Kingdom (Cavanagh et al. 2001, 695). Of interest here is less what men say or how they try to excuse and explain their violence, and more

the ways in which the wider society engages with and reinforces these scripts that allow women to be blamed.

Blame is frequently ascribed to women for tolerating the abuse. Women's dress, speech, greed, infidelity, and even walking down the street after dark have all been used to "explain" men's use of violence. Widely held assumptions include that women are complicit in the violence against them because they should have known better and are responsible for protecting themselves. According to Tulio (fourteen years old, focus group in San Salvador): "Women even wear miniskirts and you can see almost everything and he goes and fucks her and worse if he is drunk or on drugs, he grabs her more." Such scripts leave the male violence unquestioned. Women's presumed financial dependence on men is also cited as the key reason women endure abuse, but such explanations can border on accusations of greed. One fourteen-year-old boy in Rio commented, "Men end up taking this [violent] attitude due to the fact that the women accept it. Because much of the time, women get abused and they don't leave the man, they stay with him, so that they don't get stuck without clothes, money and so on." The risk of abuse is particularly acute for women in relationships with gang members. Interviewees in Brazil suggested that girls go so far as to show off their bruises as a symbol of their relationships, which not only reinforces the connection between sex and violence but also reinforces popular perceptions that some women actually enjoy violence. Although this framing may be exacerbated when it concerns young women in relationships with gang members, it should be noted that it is not exceptional and indeed forms part of a broader logic in which women are seen as complicit in the violence that is carried out against them.

However, it should be pointed out that Hume's research in El Salvador suggests that the much-cited financial rationale for staying in violent relationships is often overstated and itself a product of gendered scripts. Although their economic contribution is all too often rendered invisible, women often have sole economic responsibility for their families' well-being. There are also cultural obstacles to leaving, such as fear of what people will say. "If she leaves that man, she will have to be with another and if he doesn't want her because of the children then she will have to get another" (Mary, El Salvador). This is a clear indication of the cultural value placed on "having a man" and the shame associated with being alone. It also reveals women's lack of autonomy in terms of her own sexuality and provides a caution against accepting at face value the "reasons" for women's apparent tolerance of violence.

Nevertheless, women are not only vulnerable to violence because of their roles as girlfriends and partners, and we should be careful about reducing all forms of violence against women to intimate relations. One of the most pressing problems in Central America for women is the growing problem of femicide. Interviews with police in El Salvador suggest that the murder of women is growing in both scale and brutality. Increasingly, women's bodies are used as sites for retaliation and punishment. In San Salvador, Hume's research participants talked about one particular case of a young woman who was taken from the street in front of her house, brutally tortured and mutilated, then dumped on a football pitch because her father worked in the police. Media stories speak of partners and mothers who have been targeted in gang rivalries. Women's bodies have long been an acceptable site of men's violence in both public and

private. Placing this historical fact at the center of our analysis opens up the possibility to reveal the gendered connections of violence.

Conclusion

As we have shown, male gang members are seen to be the primary protagonists of violence in Rio de Janeiro and the cities of El Salvador, with grotesque images of spectacular acts—committed in the name of feuds, territoriality, and punishment—imprinted on the public memory. These images feature heavily in the everyday scripts of violence that dominate all strata of society. Yet those who live in the communities affected can't "shut their eyes to everything that is going on," as Evelia stated in a focus group in Rio.

Both Brazil and El Salvador have high levels of violence, which have reached chronic proportions. Each country has at various times been labeled as having levels of violence comparable to war zones. However, the violence that this invokes is the violence of the street, "real violence" that occurs in public places, supposedly by "public" actors. This image curtails alternative voices, experiences, and interpretations that might give a fuller depiction of violence. Studying violence in these contexts from a feminist perspective requires that different forms of violence be studied together, challenging the implicit hierarchy that prioritizes the visible over the invisible, the "ungendered" over the "gendered," men's experiences over women's. But more importantly, it requires us to not treat them as separate phenomena that can somehow coexist in the same locale without sharing any common source or logic. Rather, the connections between different forms of violence and the gendered dynamics that underpin all forms of violence need to be considered as mutually constitutive. Everyday forms of violence need to be studied

alongside the spectacular, criminal, and institutional in order to better understand the reproduction of violence in all its forms.

In seeing violence as gendered, we do not wish to cite gender to "explain" why violence occurs but rather to understand the contextualized gendered relations, dynamics, norms, and contradictions that underpin violence and its relation to everyday human relations. We have argued that so-called mainstream understandings of violence, which see gender as at best secondary to the analysis, result in a partial understanding of violence, silencing subaltern voices and ignoring the everyday dynamics of conflict and aggression. In particular, silencing voices that are not constructed as being part of the problems deemed to constitute "hard" security overlooks and may legitimize certain forms of violence. Given that social relations are informed by gender stereotypes and norms, and violence occurs in the context of these social relations, gender norms therefore provide meanings and logic to the performance of violence, the actors involved, and their relationships and apparent motives. As such, acts of violence—and which forms are legitimized and which are challenged—can only be understood in combination with localized gender scripts and practices.

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