The United Nations has referred to the large increase of violence against women and girls during the Covid-19 pandemic as a “Shadow Pandemic” (Godoy 2020). In Colombia domestic violence reports increased by 175 percent during their stay-at-home order, and in El Salvador gender based violence reports increased by 70 percent (Rodriguez 2020).

Historically femicide has been underdiscussed, it was often swept under the rug. In the 1970s it was introduced as category by the feminist movement to separate femicides from other homicides. The goal was to draw attention to the specific kinds of violence women face and promote political change (Standish and Weil 2021). In this case, homicide, the killing of men, is the unmarked category, and femicide is intentionally distinguished as a marked category (a link would have been useful here e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markedness). In contemporary discourse femicide is recognized as a structural problem enabled by culture. As put by McHugh, “femicide doesn’t happen because women put themselves in danger – it happens because an unjust system fails them again and again” (McHugh 2020).

Femicide manifests itself similarly in many Latin American countries. Rodriguez identifies “Imbalanced household burdens, machismo culture, and the prevalence of victim-blaming” as contributors to the high rate of domestic violence in Colombia (Rodriguez 2020). Machismo and marianismo both help to foster domestic violence. Machismo expects men to perform their sexuality as “active and dominant” and marianismo expects women to perform theirs as “passive and submissive” (Chant and Craske 2003: 141). When these two are combined you create a culture where women are seen as vulnerable – an easy target – and men are expected and allowed to behave violently.

Governmental policies both contribute to and are informed by this culture. Even if laws against domestic violence are passed there is often little infrastructure to enact them. A 2019 survey conducted by the Peruvian government “found nearly 53 percent of Peruvians think a woman’s job is to focus first on her role as a mother and wife, and only after that on “her dreams”” (Godoy 2020). The role of woman as mother and caretaker first is integral to marianismo (Chant and Craske 2003). Peruvian activists state these ideas pervade the government and lead to the dismissal of woman as individuals deserving of aid and protection (Godoy 2020).

While femicide and domestic violence are more prevalent problems in Latin America this “silent pandemic” is by no means theirs alone. In the United Kingdom, three times as many femicides were committed in March 2020 than previous decade’s average for the same period (Standish and Weil 2021). Latin American activists on the whole have paid more attention to these killings. In the United States femicide is not on our national radar yes... for many it may not even be an ontological category , though women here also face high rates of violence. We lag behind many Latin American countries in this regard. On March 8 2020, International Women’s Day, before pandemic measures were put in place in most of the world, there were large protests in Mexico and Argentina calling for governmental action. McHugh is unsure why these differences have occurred, but theorizes abuser’s access to guns might be a contributing factor (McHugh 2020).

Chant, Sylvia and Nikki Craske

Godoy, Maria

McHugh, Jess

Rodriguez, Leah

Standish, Katerina and Shalva Weil