

## Inscribing Violence on the National Body

### "Savages," scapegoats, and sovereignty: Urban violence, borders, and femicide Guatemala City

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While Latin America has long been known as a violent region, one of the most high-profile 'types' of violence, called femicide or feminicide, is a relatively new and emerging category, referring to the brutal murders of thousands of women, mostly young, poor, and living in large cities. This violence is often portrayed as the extreme end of either domestic violence or urban/street violence – in other words, part of the 'criminal' violence problem. As "delinquent" youth are increasingly the scapegoats for social problems and the justification for hardline policies (e.g. the Mano Dura laws in El Salvador and Honduras) that impose social and political control on marginalized groups. This paper explores how femicide/feminicide constitutes – and more importantly, is framed as – a distinct type of violence, in terms of how the victims and (presumed) perpetrators are considered threats to society. I draw on Giorgio Agamben's theory of bare life, which suggests that "exceptional" violence against defined groups is integral to a given power system, and applications of this theory to sub-altern states and urban areas, to argue that the gendering of victims of violence – such as those of femicide/feminicide – further entrenches the dominant social and political order. I look at Guatemala City as an illustration of this process, in which the history of state terror and extra-legal violence continues to shape "post-conflict" violence described as criminal. Drawing on reports and testimonies relating to femicide/feminicide in Guatemala City, I also argue that the city itself manifests socially-produced, criss-crossing borders of membership and hierarchies.

### Peace at Last? Struggles in Post-Conflict Guatemala

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Based on fieldwork conducted in San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala in 2004, this presentation will first look at the daily struggles faced by Maya war widows in Guatemala. The conclusions from this research project – namely, that the Peace Accords have not brought the changes promised - will then be linked to a future research project looking at violence in post-conflict Guatemala. Working from Carolyn Nordstrom's assertion that the "habits of war die hard. They can carry beyond the front lines and into the fragile pulse of peace" (2004: 141), the hypothesis is that demilitarization in post-conflict Guatemala has not led to a reduction in violence, but simply altered the form that it takes, including increasing levels of gang violence and *femicide* (the killing of women because of their gender). Moreover, in response to this increased violence, the state has at times turned to repressive *mano dura* – or heavy-handed – policies, which leads to the question: Did demilitarization of the state truly occur in Guatemala?

