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From the Editor

Much has changed in Latin America in the thirty plus years since the publication of A Theology of Liberation by Gustavo Gutiérrez, the groundbreaking work that opened the door to a new way of understanding the task of theology and the vocation of the theologian. In an editorial entitled “Is Latin America Losing its Way?” the March 2, 2002 issue of The Economist begins, “A dozen or so years ago, Latin America slipped from the shackles of dictatorships and the cold war, and from the economic stranglehold of protectionism. Amid exuberant optimism, the region embraced democracy, open trade and the free market. Capital poured in from outside, economic growth surged, and poverty began to fall. Today the mood could hardly be more different. Nowhere in Latin America is thriving.”

In his own brief entry on Latin American liberation theologies in the Dictionary of Third World Theologies (edited by Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000]), Gutiérrez himself explains: “The core of the gospel is the proclamation of the reign of God to real people living in particular historical situations,” describing the birth of liberation theology in the following terms: “Around the middle of the 1960s, the conviction arose in Latin America that poverty, in which the immense majority of its population lives, is not only the most serious social issue of the continent but also the greatest challenge to the announcement of the gospel and, in consequence, to reflection about the Christian faith” (132). However much may have changed in Latin America, the grinding reality of poverty looms even more monstrous now than it did three decades ago, with violence and economic and political disenfranchisement that cry out to heaven for justice. From the collapse of Argentina’s financial system to political instability in Venezuela, to the violence in Colombia that has claimed more than forty thousand lives over the last ten years—including the life of the Archbishop of Cali, Isasas Duarte Cancino, and the lives of the more than one hundred men, women and children killed when a bomb destroyed the village church in Bojaya—the daily bread of Latin America is seasoned with the tears and the blood of millions.

Whatever else globalization may mean, for better and for worse, it implies that what happens in Latin America must—directly or
out of the context of a Latino/a perspective that seeks to continue a basic aim: the goodness of the human creature even in the face of tremendous human evil. Indeed, a theology of art can also do much to expand the horizons of Latino/a theology. A theology of art can give a fuller account of the relationship between theory and praxis. A theology of art opens up a new perspective toward understanding the nature and theology of popular religion. A theology of art can help the Latino/a theologian appreciate anew the cosmic religious principles of America’s indigenous theology and bring it into conversation with the inherited cosmic principles of an older but venerable theology. Finally, a theology of art uncovers a project of Latino/a theology that has lain under the surface but now can gain conscious recognition—a new Christian Humanism. From its beginnings in Las Casas’s defense of America’s indigenous peoples, the plays of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, up to the contemporary concern for the particular humanity of the mestiza, of women, of Afro-Latinos, and many others, a Christian humanism has been an underground force guiding the creative energies of the theology of the Latin Church of the Americas. My hope is that a theology of art has brought this unspoken force into the consciousness of our small community of interpretation so that through our reflections on the marvelous capacity of the human for beauty and for making beauty, the glory of the Lord will shine through.

Introduction

The reigns of terror by authoritarian regimes that convulsed many Latin American societies in recent decades were characterized by extremes of political violence intended to create a culture of fear throughout society. During the 1970s, state torturers—especially in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay—abused the minds and bodies of their victims to expiate the stain of subversion from la patria. In the early 1980s the Salvadoran and Guatemalan militaries extended the scope and form of repression with massacres of civilians in the Central American countryside. In the aftermath of the violence, official truth commissions and other high-profile human rights reports have documented disappearances, rapes, torture and brutal executions. Their names testify to the hopes of those who produced them “From Madness to Hope,” “Memory of Silence,” “Truth and Reconciliation,” and the emphatic “Never Again!”

This article was presented to the Religion in Latin America and the Caribbean Group in the session on Homosexuality, Transsexuality, Hypermasculinity, and Machismo in Hispam/ Latino Culture at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Nashville on November 19, 2000. I am grateful to all who have commented on it.

These reports have played a significant role in the political transition to more democratic societies by recognizing the extent of the abuses and publicly acknowledging the physical and emotional pain of the victims. Recording the truth and coming to terms with military atrocities is important not only for the individuals who suffered them but also for the whole society in which they were perpetrated. Understanding why the violence reached the levels that it did and why it frequently took a sexual form is also an important part of coming to terms with the legacy of violence in which sexual atrocities expressed gendered relations of power and cultural values of honor and shame at their most extreme.

To explore these issues, this paper draws especially on the testimonies collected by the Archdiocese of Guatemala's Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) project recently published in the report Guatemala: Never Again\(^3\). The REMHI report documents the violence against indigenous communities in the Guatemalan highlands in the starkest and most brutal terms.\(^4\)


\(^3\) The Archdiocesan Human Rights Office (ODHAG) report on the REMHI project was presented on April 24, 1998 and translated as Guatemala: Never Again (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books; London: Latin America Bureau and Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1999). Work for the report preceded and supported the UN-sponsored CEH report and the distinctive brief for the project and the resources allocated to it make it one of the most comprehensive and innovative cases of Church-based human rights publications in a tradition that can claim nearly five hundred years of heritage if it is dated back to the letters of early Dominican missionaries such as Bartolomé de Las Casas. Since the late 1960s this tradition has been revitalized through liberation theology and pushed the church to the forefront of human rights work in many Latin American countries. For a good overview of church involvement in human rights work, see E. L. Cleary, The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1997). For an early and particularly influential example of recent church involvement, see especially the Archdiocese of São Paulo, Torture in Brazil: A Report by the Archdiocese of São Paulo, trans. J. Wright, ed. J. Dassin (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).


My purpose is to draw attention to the sexual violence documented in many of the testimonies and to examine the influence of machista conceptions of honor, shame and conquest on military atrocities. I start with examples of violence from the REMHI report and consider these testimonies in terms of the machista ideal of masculine agency in popular conceptions of gender identity and sexuality. I suggest that machista gender roles help to explain why women were seen as “natural” targets for sexual violence. Furthermore, the machista stereotypes of the “active man” and “passive woman” help to explain how sexual violence against male victims might include transgenering the victim and sexually abusing him as a “woman.” The final part of the paper suggests that the role of sexual violence in political terror indicated in the REMHI report may offer disturbing insights into the gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, among other victims of Roman imperialism.

Torture, Rape, and Humiliation

The sexual dimension of torture under Latin American military regimes in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina has been well documented in recent reports. In clandestine jails and torture centres state security agents subjected their victims to extremes of violence and humiliation, including: enforced nakedness; verbal humiliations; vaginal and anal rape by men, animals and objects; electric shocks to the genitals and sexual penetration with various instruments including the electrified picana (prod).\(^5\)

In the early 1980s Guatemalan soldiers trained in counter-insurgency techniques brutality indigenous communities in the belief that they were saving the soul of the nation.\(^6\) An integral part of this strategy was

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\(^7\) U.S. military aid and training assistance had been crucial in the development and support of Guatemalan counterinsurgency strategy between 1963 and 1977.
rape and other sexual violence against civilians in the Guatemalan highlands. Testimonies to REMHI include ninety-two accounts of sexual assault, which include rape as a cause of death and as a form of torture and indicate that rape of women was a standard part of operations by the military and civil patrols. REMHI points to the deliberate use of rape to increase the physical fear and psychological shock of military atrocities:

Sexual assault is, above all, a terror tactic used by perpetrators to demonstrate their power and dominance over female victims. In many places, rape was considered a way to subdue and humiliate communities and families. Soldiers raped "enemy" women for the same reason that they burned down their homes: to signal conquest and victory.7

The victims of violence frequently felt unable to speak out in protest and were forced to retreat into a culture of fear, shame and silence.8 Rape often created an ongoing trauma for the victim’s religious and (peaking in 1971). In 1977, Guatemalan President Kjell Laugerud (1974–1978) rejected the human rights conditions of the Carter Administration (1977–1980) and official U.S. military assistance and training were severely curtailed (although the flow through less official channels never completely ceased) until Ronald Reagan restored U.S. aid after 1981. From the mid-1970s the Guatemalan military relied much more heavily on Israel (from 1975) and Argentina (from 1977) for arms supplies and received counter-insurgency training from the Argentinean specialists in the early 1980s. See M. McClintock, The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala (London: Zed Books, 1985) 182–99; A. C. Armony, Argentine, the United States and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America 1977–1984 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997) 90–3.

8 See REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 76. Civil patrol—members or "Civilian Self-Defense Patrols" known by the abbreviation PAC (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil)—were members of rural communities organised by the military as local counter-insurgency forces in the early 1980s. REMHI confirms that at least one in every six massacres included systematic rape. On the same page REMHI notes: “It must be recalled that, because of the guilt and shame associated with sexual assault, it is under-reported compared to other forms of violence such as torture and murder. Studies on rape in the Western hemisphere have found that an average of just one out of every five sexual assaults is reported; therefore it can be inferred that under-reporting may be a much more serious problem in the present case” (76).

7 REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 77–8. The REMHI report notes that the rape of civilian women has been part of war in other armed conflicts and that a United Nations team, which visited Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 described it as part of a systematic campaign of terror in the ethnic conflict. On rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina, see B. Allen, Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

8 As one testimony put it: "They terrified you, and so you felt humiliated. You couldn’t say anything." (Case 6259, Nentón, Huehuetenango in REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 10).

cultural identity as part of a group. Apart from the fear of pregnancy—and the ethical dilemmas that pregnancy from rape might create—women also struggled with the stigma of uncleanness and sense of violation.9 To increase the shame and humiliation generated by sexual violence the assaults were often public and took place in front of other family members.10 The report notes: "Beside the personal humiliation and family isolation that women may experience, their husbands, brothers, and fathers may also feel powerless and responsible for the rape."11 When men or women were wounded or killed they might be recognized as heroes or martyrs but as the report points out "there is no comparable status for a raped woman."12

In addition to the testimonies on rape, the report also indicates the sexual aspect of other forms of violence. For example, a number of witnesses mention executions by impalement or crucifixion. One testimony records: "What we have seen has been terrible: burned corpses, women impaled and buried as if they were animals ready for the spit, all doubled up, and children massacred and carved up with machetes. The women too, murdered like Christ."13 The overtly sexual form that impalement could take is graphically brought out in one testimony: "There are women hanging. Well, the stick goes into her private parts and then the stick comes out of her mouth. They had her hanging there like a snake."14 A similarly sexual dimension to a crucifixion is reported in another testimony: "Before murdering her, they nailed her to the cross they had made. They stuck huge nails into her hands and chest, then they burned her up."15

The REMHI report indicates that most of the sexual violence was directed against women. As will be discussed shortly, this pattern of

9 REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 81. The report also notes: “Often, women may experience changes in their self-image following such an experience; they may feel ‘dirty’ or repulsive, or even that they are ‘possessed by an evil spirit.’ Concern over personal hygiene, sexual anxiety, and fear of men are common symptoms experienced by rape victims” (81).

10 See, for example, Case 7906, Chajul, Quiché in Guatemala: Never Again! 76. Case 710 from Santa María Tzoljil, Ixčán, Quiché (1982) describes such a rape more fully: “There was also a couple. They took her aside to a room adjoining where her husband and the rest of us were. The soldiers said, ‘Don’t worry, we’re going to take good care of your wife.’ The poor man had to watch everything they did to her, torturing the poor woman, [until she] couldn’t take any more. The soldiers raped her one by one” (Guatemala: Never Again! 78).

11 REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 80.

12 REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 80.

13 REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 80.


15 Collective testimony, Ixčán, Quiché in REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 79.

16 Case 1319, Parraxutí, Zacapuñas, Quiché in REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again! 79.
violence against women is rooted in various “norms” of machista Latin culture that can help to explain its role in the conflict. However, to understand these machista values more fully it is important to recognize that sexual violence could also be used against male victims.

Because of the deep shame attached to male rape, documented cases are very rare. Perhaps not surprisingly, the REMHI report presents rape under the heading of “violence against women” and passes over cases of male rape in silence. It notes that excluding rape ninety percent of victims of violence in Guatemala were men, but it does not specify how many if any male rapes are included in its rape figures.

Despite the taboo around men as victims of rape, journalists and human rights observers in neighboring El Salvador have attested to the sexual mutilation of male victims as a relatively common form of abuse. Male corpses frequently turned up at the roadside or at death-dumps with the genitals hacked off and sometimes the penis placed obscenely in the mouth. In this context, one testimony reported by REMHI from Guatemala is particularly significant. Yolanda Aguilar Urizar recounts a scene from a military torture chamber:

"Then they took me to another door, and there were planks along the top of that doorway. Have you seen the crucifixion? Well here, very nearly, was Jesus Christ; there was a man, there was half a man—the most horrendous thing I have seen—a man totally disfigured. He already had worms, he had no teeth, no hair, his face was disfigured, he was hanging, I mean, by his hands. Right then someone from the judicial arrived. He was carrying a tiny scythe, a small one, like for cutting coffee. It was red hot, and he grabbed the penis and cut it off. That guy let out a scream, so horrifying that for many years I remembered the scream."

Without question, these testimonies were given and collected out of concern for the individuals who suffered them. But they were also gathered with the conviction that they had a wider significance for society as a whole. Any understanding of the human rights abuses documented by REMHI—and REMHI could be paralleled with reports on torture in many other countries—requires recognition of both the ferocity of violence against civilians and the frequency with which it was expressed sexually. To shed light on both these issues it is useful to understand their cultural context; ideologies of male power and social assumptions about honor and shame fueled the violence and encouraged its sexual expression.

**Male Identity, Machista Power, and Sexual Domination**

A starting point for understanding the violence is to consider how machista values in the wider society encouraged security forces and military torturers to act out their war on ‘subversives’ in aggressive terms of male conquest and domination. Machista conceptions of male identity valorize male power and men’s dominance. Men can show their power over their rivals by either conquering them directly or surpassing them indirectly by conquering others. In either case, the honor of the victor is accompanied by the shame of the conquered. In some instances, the honor of the victor actually rests in the shaming of the conquered.


The Mexican cultural critic Octavio Paz presents one of the most provocative reflections on machista culture in his famous work *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Paz identifies unrestrained power as the foundation of machismo: “One word sums up the aggressiveness, insensitiveness, invulnerability and other attributes of the macho: power. It is force without the discipline of any notion of order: arbitrary power, the will without reins and without a set course.”24 As Paz notes, “the essential attribute of the macho—power—almost always reveals itself as a capacity for wounding, humiliating, annihilating.”25 Destruction of the victim’s status is often an essential objective in macho contests, not an accidental byproduct. Emphasizing the defeat of the victim enhances the power of the macho. The victor shows that he has power over and can do as he wishes with the victim.

One of the most significant ways that a man can define himself as victor not victim is through his sexual identity as an active and powerful man.26 A man defines himself as a true man—and confirms his status as such to himself and to others, especially to other men—in his sexual relations. Thus men are invariably expected to take the initiative and lead in sexual pursuits and if they are successful in sexual conquests it usually bolsters the social esteem that they gain from other men.

Even in cases where sexual conquest takes places with a degree of physical force or violence a man might expect a certain esteem among his peers, since he has fulfilled his role as an active and powerful macho.27 In fact, notions of force and violence are commonly presupposed in the machista understanding of intercourse whether other physical violence accompanies it or not. Paz brings this out when he describes the macho as the *gran chingón*.28 He graphically contrasts the passive female *chingada*—typified in the long-suffering passive Mexican Mother—with the active male *chingón*: “The *chingón* is the macho: he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent and is determined by the cynical violence of the first and the impotence of the second.”29

Long-standing honor-shame values reinforce these machista attitudes to the physical body and constructions of gender and sexuality.30 Traditionally, masculine-feminine gender identity in Latin America has been influenced by notions of male-honor and female-shame, which reinforce the gender divisions between “active male” and “passive female.” In relations between men and women, a man usually gains esteem by sexual conquest while a woman can expect to be blamed and shamed for allowing herself to be overcome—even if it has been achieved by force. A woman’s male relatives are also likely to be stigmatized if they do nothing to avenge their honor.31

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27 Comparative work on Mediterranean honor-shame societies offers a particularly fruitful perspective for understanding these dynamics within a wider framework. These discussion have included: the paramount significance of honor in social interactions; the close relationship that usually exists between public recognition and private self-esteem; the competitive social hierarchy of honor; the significance of gender in determining sexual purity, sexual conduct and sexual shame; the reciprocal framework of honor roles and the role of honor satisfaction and revenge. See especially, the seminal J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965) and the more recent D. G. Gilmore, *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987). It must, however, be stressed that although comparisons with Mediterranean societies past and present may be helpful—and might generate useful insights—analysis of Latin American practices cannot just assume a simple correspondence to traditional Mediterranean codes (see A. Twinn, “The Negotiation of Honor,” in Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera, *The Faces of Honor*, 68–102 (especially 71–5).
The gender division between honor and shame in sexual relations can also be seen in other areas of social interaction, including conflicts between men and other men. The victim’s shame and the victor’s honor are invariably linked in the outcome of conflicts. Thus heightening the shame of the victim can increase the honor of the victor. The shamed and powerless victim is no longer a threat to the macho and is expected to defer passively to the active power of the macho.

Paz’s graphic account of masculine values in simple terms of victors and victims is not to be understood as a straightforward empirical description of how all men in machista cultures actually live. Nor is the pattern limited only to Latin America and unrecognizable in other societies. Common sense—and an extensive body of literature—indicates that the picture in Latin America is much more complex. In their everyday lives, few men would wish or be able to consistently live up to such stereotypical “ideals.” Nonetheless, as a behavioral archetype in Latin America, the chingón is a powerful cultural influence on popular constructions of masculinity. Even though most men are not able or really willing to fully play out the role, Paz’s account of the chingón points to deeply embedded popular attitudes about what makes a real “man” (or hombre-hombre).

As noted above, men in any country can act in what is described here as the ‘macho’ way and there is nothing exclusively Latin American in any of the forms of violence considered here. The common cultural understanding of the significance and symbolism of sexual acts and identities may vary between what might be very broadly termed conventional “Latino” and “Anglo” culture, however, this does not give a simple way to evaluate either culture over the other and it is certainly not the purpose of this paper to suggest that it does.


It has been suggested that the gap between machista “ideal” and everyday reality may even be partly responsible for encouraging the extremity of the ideal. Because extra-marital sexual relations in Latin America are relatively circumscribed by the lack of privacy there is a correspondingly greater pressure on a man to act and talk like a sexual macho (since there are few other ways to demonstrate his sexual prowess), and he may feel more free to do so because he knows it is unlikely that he will ever be tested on his more extravagant claims. See S. O. Murray, “Latin America,” in Encyclopedia of Homosexuality (Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1991) 676–81 (676).

These popular attitudes permeate many areas of men’s lives. For example, Roger Lancaster has described how the equation of masculinity with activity and agency shapes popular conceptions of sexuality, gender and bodily identity in Nicaragua: “Machismo, then, is a matter of constantly asserting one’s masculinity by way of practices that show the self to be ‘active’ not ‘passive’ (as defined in a given milieu). . . . Every gesture, every posture, every stance, every way of acting in the world is immediately seen as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, depending on whether it connotes activity or passivity.”

Lancaster also makes clear that this machista understanding of men’s active role in sexual relations carries over from men’s relations with women to relations between men and other men. Popular opinion ascribes sexual stigma far more strongly against men who are seen as the passive partner in such relationships. A man who adopts—or is forced—into the passive/penetrated role is denigrated as being “unmanly” or “womanly” whereas the active/penetrator partner is often seen as a “normal man.” Examples of this widespread phenomenon have also been discussed in the work of Annick Prieur (for Mexico) and Richard Parker (for Brazil).

Paz links the notions of male agency and penetration back to issues of honor and shame by noting the deliberate denigration of the passive partner that can be typical of this mindset: “. . . masculine homosexuality is regarded with a certain indulgence insofar as the active agent is concerned. The passive agent is an abject, degraded being. . . . Masculine homosexuality is tolerated, then, on condition that it consists in violating a passive agent. As with heterosexual relationships,

Lancaster, Life is Hard, 226.

These relations would usually be referred to as homosexual in Anglo-American terminology but the word is avoided here to stress the different assumptions that exist in popular Latin American discourse on what actually constitutes “homosexual” behavior. In Latin America it is common for only the men who are penetrated—not the men who penetrate them—to be known as homosexuals.

In this schema, the bisexual man is potentially even more of a macho since he penetrates both men and women.

the important thing is not to open oneself up and at the same time to break open one's opponent."

Within the machista framework of sexual relations—whether between men and women or between men and other men—males are especially concerned with the politics of bodily penetration in terms of honor and shame. Men seek to display their superiority over other men and women while defending themselves and those they are responsible for against any physical or symbolic penetration by other men. To penetrate physically (by inflicting an injury or being the active partner in a sexual act) or symbolically (by insulting or humiliating) another person is to be "manly" and attract the esteem of other men. Conversely to be penetrated—or allow those whom one is responsible for to be penetrated—would be a cause of shame that would demand retribution if one is concerned for one's honor and public status.

Thus Latin American men are encouraged to admire and cultivate aggressive macho behavior despite more formal sanctions against it. The torture, rapes, humiliations and mutilations documented in the REMHI report make sense as a strategy of terror within this framework of penetrative machista violence, and the shame code associated with it. The widespread use of sexual violence against women—as well as the less frequently reported cases of sexual violence directed against men—both have their place in wider cultural expectations of masculine identity and sexual power. The violence shamed both the immediate victims and also the men in their communities who were shown to be impotent in their defense.

Latin American military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s commonly interpreted any form of political opposition to their authoritarian regimes as political subversion akin to armed insurrection. The armed forces viewed political opposition as a threat to the national body viewed in very physical terms. Threats to the corporate body of the state were seen in corporeal terms and vice-versa. As a result, the military's defense of the nation's body politic was readily gendered in sexual terms and then acted out through the "body politics" of state terror.

The body politics of sexual violence shows who is the dominant and who is the dominated subject. Latin American militaries reaffirmed the supposedly natural order of society by representing the power of the state over the population in terms of the power of men over women—and the power of "real men" over men who were their victims and could be shamefully treated like women. The basic message of sexual violence is the same whether the victim is male or female. However, in a machista society sexual violence against men—especially rape and mutilations—was an especially powerful way to humiliate male opponents because it undermined their fundamental identity as men by "transgendering" or "feminizing" them as women.

In light of what has been said earlier, both male rape and genital mutilation can be understood as symptomatically transgendering the victim through very physical acts. In both cases, the penetration is so serious that it is widely seen as irreversibly "feminizing" the victim.

Graziano has explored this as an aspect of Argentinean torture practices (Divine Violence, especially 130-8). In the early 1980s the Guatemalan military adopted both techniques and terminology from the Argentinean "Dirty War," see Armony, Argentina, the United States and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America 1977-1984, 92-3.

REMHI notes how the violence against physical bodies reflected much wider political issues: "Using the female body is a central feature of violence against women; it serves to underscore who must be dominant, and who must be subjected. This type of violence was employed in numerous circumstances and occasions, reflecting the social perceptions and behaviors that transcended the armed conflict" (REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 76).

Diana Taylor describes how Argentinean military juntas (1976-83) defined themselves as true men in opposition to female enemies and transgendered their male enemies as female: "This conflictual scenario [the national crisis] legitimated the quest for order even as it gendered the enemy and backgrounded the population. Whether they were regaining control from the hysterical isabellita or fighting the 'subversiva' (who were feminized as well), or challenging 'La Thatcher,' whom they portrayed as delusional for clinging to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, the junta leaders fetishized male virility into a model of authentic Argentineness" (Taylor, Disappearing Acts, 62).

Verbal and other non-physical insults can be—and very often are—used to publicly challenge the masculinity of opponents and symbolize their effeminariness. However, verbal and symbolic insults are much more powerful when linked to physical actions of sexual violence such as rape or mutilation.

Male victims of sexual violence who survive are likely to live under a stigma that makes it hard for them to accept themselves or be accepted by others. A victim
Pain, Honor, and Atrocity

At a very straightforward level, the soldiers who carried out the violence were encouraged—or at least not discouraged—by the notions of manliness and the longstanding cultural influences of honor, shame and conquest discussed above. However, other factors may have heightened the impact of these influences on the military’s sense of institutional identity and given further impetus to the atrocities. Two such factors will be considered in this section: first, military training that carefully constructed insensitivity to the pain of victims; second, the military’s over sensitive concern for institutional honor.

MILITARY TRAINING

All-male institutions in Latin America—such as the military—are likely to reflect machista influences in an exaggerated way. The military as an institution draws upon and further stimulates the machista energies of its members as it moulds them into a new identity as real men. The competitive drive within machista values provokes more and more aggressive displays of “manliness” from all recruits. The machista values that predispose the chingón to aggressive violence are therefore often exemplified in the “hyper-masculine” mentality of Latin American security forces. In Manlio Argüeta’s famous novel One Day of Life a Salvadoran soldier reflects: “to be a woman is to have been born a whore, while men are separated into two types: the faggots and we the machos, who dress in this uniform. And among the machos one could even select the most macho: those of the Special Forces.”

Military training encourages brutalization and a steady erosion of esteem for the moral and social conventions that normally restrain violence. For this purpose, violent initiation rituals create and celebrate a dehumanized culture of violence. Manliness is demonstrated through increasingly gruesome acts to show the hardened nature of soldiers who are ready to rise above the conventions that restrain ordinary civilians. For example, reports from both El Salvador and Guatemala indicate that counter-insurgency units developed group solidarity by sharing a repulsive blood stew made from dogs, vultures and other such creatures. The deliberately revolting nature of the stew—and its clearly intended association with death—gave the soldiers a powerful group experience. Communal participation in rapes and other forms of sexual violence also served as initiation rites that reinforced the unit’s sense of special identity as above normal social conventions and bound them together in common cause as a group.

Military training thus gradually created the militaristic esprit de corps that made any atrocity possible. When normal restraints on behavior (physical, political and moral) fail or are deliberately swept away the atrocities that REMHI reports become not just possible but almost inevitable. In Guatemala, the military had an overwhelming advantage in terms of physical military force and never expected to answer for the morality of their actions. When they were given a free political rein, none of the normal factors that kept a chingón’s aggressive urges in check were left. As REMHI reports: “Membership in military structures provided army soldiers and civil policemen with the violent context and immunity from punishment they required to display their power over women.”

See REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 126–32. See also the passages on military training in One Day of Life (90–8 and 126–35) which illuminate the soldier’s comment that “being congenial is queer business” (126).


The mythic dimension of these meals of blood may also be significant. In Argentina, the Navy pilots that flew the planes dumping the “disappeared” into the ocean, referred to the flight rotation (which ensured that they all shared in the abuses) as their “communion” Horacio Verbitsky, The Fight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior, trans. E. Allen (New York: The New Press, 1996) 22.

The public display of sexual violence against women, often by several men at once, reinforced a spirit of machista complicity and exalted power and authority as ‘masculine’ traits” (REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 77).

Unlike neighboring El Salvador, the threat from armed guerrilla combatants in Guatemala was always quite low and the vast majority of Guatemala’s 200,000 victims were innocent civilians. In both countries, however, the political and physical restraints placed on men’s actions by other men were removed.

REMHI, Guatemala: Never Again!, 77.
serious forms of honor and shame relate to the physical body and are expressed in blood vengeance or sexual violence. For serious matters of honor, only physical retribution against the body of the offender will suffice.

The hypermasculine ethos of the military combined with an acutely sensitive sense of honor was therefore a recipe for dramatic displays of power and aggressive shows of force. As "true men" they felt entitled—even obliged—to demonstrate their position of power through violence and aggressive sexual conquest. Physical bodies thus became the scarred battlegrounds onto which the military inscribed its strength to reassert its institutional honor.

Thus the incredibly high levels of sexual violence documented by REMHI and other reports should be understood within the machista framework of a dehumanized and authoritarian military mentality, determined to avenge any challenge to its authority, and demonstrate its power against all threats to the established body politic. In this context, military honor was affirmed through campaigns of physical conquest and sexual humiliation in which the innocence of the victims was largely immaterial. Where dishonor was often worse than death, sexualized atrocities were part of a strategy not just to contain a civilian population but also to avenge even the most faintly perceived insult and assert the military's dominant status for all to see.

From Guatemala to the Gospel

REMHI is more than just a record of the violence and a useful source for understanding the political conflict and symbolic meaning it conveyed. As the introduction to the English language version of the REMHI report by U.S. bishop Thomas Quigley shows, the REMHI report can be read as a work of "pastoral theology." In these terms, it is noticeable that various testimonies from the REMHI report cited above link the suffering of victims to the suffering of Christ. The precise

Military discipline merges the individual body of the soldier with the military as a body. Diana Taylor's work suggests how the uniformed and upright physical bodies of soldiers on parade express the maleness of the military body: "Rows upon rows of erect figures stood with their shoulders back, heads high, stomach held in and neutralized by broad leather belts. The high black-leather boots and the caps, or at times, helmets, erased all traces of individuality or human vulnerability. The military body was a contained body, always ready for action, always under control. On parade it moved as one: one body, one will, an efficient, disciplined, military machine" (D. Taylor, "Spectacular Bodies," in M. Cooke and A. Wooliscott, eds., Gendering War Talk [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995] 22). See also D. Taylor, Disappearing Acts, especially 29–58.
nature of the link in the eyes of those giving the testimony is left unclear. In some cases, it appears to refer quite explicitly to the shared experience of crucifixion as a form of torture and execution; in other cases, it might express a metaphorical similarity between Christ and the contemporary victims; additionally—and perhaps at a theological level most challengingly—it might point to a direct ontological identity between Christ and those who suffer similar violence today.60

A further aspect of religious interest is that the REMHI testimonies may yield insights into the historical context and political symbolism of crucifixion. The REMHI report suggests how the Guatemalan military displayed their power through horrific violence against men, women and children in rural communities. Likewise, in the first century Roman Empire, rape and sexual humiliations were pre-eminent acts of shaming.61 Violation of a victim by a more powerful force re-affirmed the honor of the victor and publicized the shame of the victim.

The revolt of the Iceni tribe in Britain in 60/61 CE is highly suggestive in these terms.62 When Iceni king Prasutagus died, he left his king-


63 During the rule of Prasutagus the Iceni of East Anglia benefited from a degree of political autonomy and may have had the status of a friendly allied kingdom rather than being directly part of the new Roman province established in the aftermath of Claudius’ invasion (43 CE).

64 To what extent the rapes were actually ordered from higher authorities as a planned and deliberate political gesture is less clear but certainly cannot be ruled out. In any event, it seems that the Romans dangerously overplayed their hand in this case. Boudica rallied the Iceni to avenge the dishonor to herself and her daughters. The Iceni rose in revolt, along with the Trinovantes of Essex and other tribes, and sacked the Roman settlements of Colchester, London, and St. Albans. According to Tacitus (Ann. 14.29), something like 70,000 Roman citizens or friends of Rome were killed in the process and the enraged tribesmen took merciless vengeance on the Romans, dispensing with the usual trade of war (which involved selling captives as slaves) so that they “wasted no time in getting down to the bloody business of burning and crucifying. It was as if they feared that retribution might catch up with them while their vengeance was only half-complete.” Eventually the governor, Suetonius Paulinus, managed to defeat Boudica’s huge army and exacted his own merciless vengeance on those who had either supported the revolt or attempted to stay neutral.

65 See Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror and Sexual Abuse.”

66 See especially V. H. Matthews and D. C. Benjamin, eds., Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible (Semeia 66; Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 1996).

67 One scholar who examines crucifixion in shame but not gender terms—and then argues that the evangelist deliberately draws on an inversion of the expected to present it in terms of Jesus’ honor—is J. H. Neyrey. “Despising the Shame of the
dom to his two daughters as co-heirs with the emperor.63 Despite this, the procurator Decianus Catus dismissed the claims of the daughters and along with other Roman officials started to treat the Iceni as if they were already a servile people to be plundered and used at the will of their Roman lords. Roman centurions raped Prasutagus’ daughters and flogged his widow Boudicca, publicly enacting their understanding of the new position of the tribe as a whole under Roman mastery.64

At the other end of the empire, and thirty years earlier, Jesus’ crucifixion as the “King of the Jews”—however this was understood—can be seen in new ways in the light of Latin American state terror and sexualized violence.65 Jesus’ naked and pierced body, penetrated, humiliated and broken on the cross, displayed Rome’s mastery to all onlookers and proclaimed Roman domination to the world. The torture, public humiliation and final execution of a rival ‘King’ enacted with extreme violence satisfied the corporate honor of the Empire’s military representatives.

Over the last decade biblical scholars have started to explore honor-shame motifs in the Bible.66 However, so far, the work on honor and shame has not been applied in gendered terms to the physical and symbolic penetrations associated with torture and crucifixion to suggest a transgenerical dimension to Jesus’ humiliation.67 The significance of
honor and shame values, gender identity and sexual violence documented by the REMHI report—along with the many other reports from Latin America that paint very similar pictures—may now provide an impetus for this to happen in works dealing with the New Testament and Roman state terror tactics in the first-century.

Conclusion

The Archdiocese of Guatemala’s Recovery of Historical Memory (REMH1) project Guatemala: Never Again! offers a frank and chilling insight into Guatemala’s years of state terror and political violence. During the repression, the more violent and sadistic tendencies of the security forces were often reinforced by machista values. The readiness to avenge personal and corporate honor, the machista valorization of unrestrained power and the military’s desensitization to the effects of violence all played a part in making the level of violence against innocent civilians so high. Furthermore, the dynamics of gender, sexuality and power, and the place of the body within the male honor code explain the type of violence indicated in the reports. The widespread use of sexual violations documented in the REMHI report—including rape, mutilation and public humiliations—are to be understood against a gendered honor-shame framework, which evaluates sexual behavior in terms of the active male who penetrates and the passive female who is penetrated. Sexual violence against women and men often had a different emphasis—rape for the former and mutilation for the latter—but they shared a common purpose in the shame and humiliation of their victims. Furthermore, when the victims of sexual violence were male they were additionally shamed because the sexual violence was understood to transgender them.

For Christians, these insights into recent state terror might also raise questions about the past. They encourage further research into body politics and the honor-shame framework of crucifixion and sexual violence in the first-century Roman Empire.


Making Hombres: Feo, Fuerte, Formal. On Latino Masculinities1

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Introduction

I would like to begin with an anecdote and a note. Shortly after The Good Citizen appeared, a book I coedited with David Batstone, we were giving talks about the book at the Commonwealth Club of California. This club is a high-power and high profile civic group that promotes public discussion about contemporary trends and events in San Francisco. The offices and lecture hall of the club are located in a very modern building that overlooks the business district of San Francisco. We had an unusually crowded lecture hall, given the early hour of the evening. My talk was a condensed version of my contribution to the volume, which had to do with the Latino quest for citizenship in the U.S., and the call for a transformation in our understanding of U.S. citizenship in light of that quest. After our talks, we had a question and answer period. I was asked a question—read by the moderator—that went something like “when will these Latinos learn to treat their women properly?” At first I was speechless because of the tone and the way this question had been phrased. Fortunately, I regained my composure and was able to provide a “nice” answer, without engaging the question and its prejudices (retrospectively, I wished I had had one of those biting remarks). Clearly, however, the trust of the question had to do with an unannounced suspicion about the worthiness or eligibility of Latino males to be incorporated as trustworthy citizens within the

1The following essay is a revised version of my response to the papers presented at the panel Homosexuality, Transsexuality, Hypermasculinity, and Machismo in Hispanic/Latino Culture. The panel was jointly organized by the Hispanic American Religion, Culture, and Society Group and the Religion in Latin America and the Caribbean Group at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Nashville, Tenn., November 18–21, 2001.