

Mapping Hispanic Latinx Identity and Gender Across Borders

By

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Introduction

Who are we? Asks the Liberator [Venezuelan] Simon Bolivar "... we are not Europeans, we are not Indians, but species in between...we find ourselves in the difficult position of challenging the natives for title of possession, and upholding the country that saw us born against the opposition of the invaders.... It is impossible to identify correctly to what human family we belong (qtd. Alcoff 139)

If you ask a group of people to list the main characteristics of a *Latino*, there is a high possibility that you will receive very distinct answers. Until about the mid twentieth century, the word *Latino* was mainly utilized to designate a person's origin of any country where Latin-derivative languages were spoken. Scholars who have studied the definition of *Latino* since the early eighties, like Gloria Anzaldua claimed that identification whether *Latino* or *Hispanic* might be different for each individual. In her book *Borderlands La Frontera The New Mestiza* she explains:

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80 percent Indian. (4) We call ourselves Hispanic (5) or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American (6) to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out). (Anzaldua 62)

Anzaldua emphasizes language as part of the definition of *Latino/Hispanic*. Moreover, she links the identity to Spanish colonization where language, culture, and religion were assimilated by indigenous communities of each region.

By 1970 the United States Census Office created the *Hispanic* classification to group all the people that came from Latin-American countries that were colonized by the Spaniards. By 1980 the US Census office officially used the term *Hispanic* in their census as a classification of ethnicity. *Hispanics* have been placed in categories for decades.

Linda Alcoff reaffirms this notion in her article *On Being Mixed*:

The mixed-race person cannot easily escape condemnation; if they are perceived to be trying to pass, they will be condemned by dominant groups for lying and by oppressed groups for individualist opportunism; but if they announce their nondominant status, they will be condemned for another kind of political opportunism." (Alcoff 267)

The use of the term *Hispanic* was not popular among the population of those who came from Latin American countries and who had indigenous heritage. Neither did these groups identify with Spanish roots. The argument still continues today.

Defining one's individual identity can be constructed by many outside factors. These experiences help shape one's identity and core values. Outside influences can also mark identity. *Latino* identity is a very complex subject and its roots comes from many years of oppression, political turmoil, and dark past. Linda Alcoff, a professor of philosophy and women's studies at the university of Syracuse University, comments in her analysis of mestizo identity:

We Latin Americans have never been able to take our racial or cultural identity for granted. Part European, part indigenous, half colonialist, aggressor, half colonized oppressed, we have never had an unproblematic relationship to the questions of culture, identity, race, or even liberation. (Alcoff 139)

The definition of Latino Identity is not a new concept and its definition has been debated since the eighties by scholars and writers such as Gloria Anzaldua, Jose Maria Saldivar and Ilan Stavans. My overall argument is to define Latinx identity as a shifting permeable concept that depends on the newer generations living in the United States. Professor Emeritus of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of Illinois in Chicago Marc Zimmerman defines the terms Latino and Hispanic in his book *US Latino Literature: An Essay and Annotated Bibliography* as:

I use the word *Latino* rather loosely, to refer to people of Ibero-American birth or family origin who have been born in or who have willingly or otherwise, come to see the U.S. as their home. The word *Hispanic* comes to suggest then the intent to erase (like courtesy) the indigenous and African roots of Latin American identity." (Zimmerman 12-13)

Both definitions of *Hispanic* and *Latino* have been used for several years, but even though identity has developed, the definitions no longer apply to the unique circumstances that cultural mixing has created.

Paola Ramos author of the book *Finding Latinx* claims that during her research she discovered that identification is very personal. Through her journey of completing her book she interviews several individuals who identified with many different labels Ramos mentions:

Some wanted to be called Latinos, others Hispanics. Some wanted to be seen as indigenous peoples, others as white. Some wanted their nationalities to define them, while others wanted their skin color to be the first thing people thought of when they introduced themselves, and many had no idea how to refer to themselves at all. (Ramos 11-12)

Ramos seeks to expand on the limits of the *Latino* definition and how it has changed throughout the years. At the turn of the twenty first century a new term was coined by many “Latinas” who did not feel identified with the term Latino because of gender exclusion. The term *Latinx* emerged as a new concept that allowed those who felt alienated politically in the required census response having to check boxes under the category *Latino/Hispanic*. Ramos analyzes the reason for the shift from Latino to Latinx: “Around 2004, coinciding with the Internet’s explosion, Latinx started popping up in online communities of queer Latinos. They were inserting the “x” as a way to express their breaks with gender binaries and welcome gender nonconforming folks into the conversation.” (Ramos 7) Ramos further examines that the shifting of the definition from *Latino* to *Latinx* was a strong motivator to those who felt they did not fit the criteria of a *Latino* or *Hispanic*.

Latinx identities are unique and vast and are composed of many layers such as geography, heritage, race, gender, and more. In my portfolio I aimed at exploring different meanings of Hispanic/ Latinx identity. As I expanded my knowledge into the nuances of

the cultural politics regarding identity issues I became more concerned with gender theories given that most of the cultural artifacts I was analyzing were marked by gender.

I explored different definitions of what Latino identity means from the perspective of scholars such as Jorge Gracia, Linda Alcoff, Steve Tammelleo, and Angelo Corlett who have studied Latino/ Hispanic Identity differently than scholars from the eighties. Angelo Corlett believes that is important to have a genealogical connection in order to be considered Latino/Hispanic. Angelo Corlett's definition of Latino/Hispanic according to Jorge Gracia's article *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A response to Tammelleo* states: "By establishing genealogical descent as a necessary and sufficient condition for Latino/a identity, his account has a degree of precision useful for public policy purposes." (Gracia 563) Steve Tammelleo agrees to a certain extent to Corlett's definition. Tammelleo in his article *Continuity and change in Hispanic Identity* mentions: "Despite these difficulties, an important strength of Corlett's position is that his genealogical condition is both necessary and sufficient for Latino identity; thus, his account could be directly employed by government agencies in making policy decisions." (Tammelleo 541)

Tammelleo further explains that in order to be considered Latino/Hispanic there needs to be a genealogical component or therefore the person cannot be identified as such and by meeting that genealogical criteria government agencies use it to gather data for creating future policies. Gracia believes genealogy is too arbitrary and expresses his opinion by stating: "If we were in principle to accept Corlett's genealogical view of Latino ethnicity, the fact is that we do not know how far we have to reach into ancestry for someone to be considered Latino/a." (Gracia 564) But he also argues that such definition leaves out special circumstances of those who do not have genealogical connection, but

have been adopted into the culture. Many Hispanics considered their background as their ethnic group and racial group without separating both.

Identity is shaped by experiences and influenced by many factors; one in particular that stands out is patriarch culture. Even after Latin American countries established independence from Spain, the values of the new independent nations did not change their hierarchical perception, instead, it adopted the same practices left behind by colonial *criollos* and continued passing those ideas to future generations. One of the major post-colonial theorists, Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, presents in his essay *The Lettered City* the residues of colonialism persist throughout independence and beyond.

The patriarchal values are still being questioned by different feminist groups as a system that continues to follow archaic norms and cultural traditions fueled by male dominance and the craving of power. The purpose of women in a patriarchal society is to maintain family unity at all cost, even if that cost is violence in their own home which becomes normalized. From a very young age women are taught that they are inferior to men and that their goal is to take care of the home and family. In Spain the patriarchal society came even before the dictatorship. Francisco Franco was in power for thirty-six years which shaped the country's ideals and culture. Women in Spain had very few rights during the dictatorship and even after Franco's death the process of gender equality was slow. In Spain the influences of the Catholic Church and its indoctrinated beliefs went hand in hand with patriarchal society. Fascism also was a strong motivator of oppression of women's rights. Professor Zecchi from John Hopkins University who teaches women studies mentions in her article:

While dictatorship had promoted an ideal image of women as self-abnegated mothers through legislative measures that removed married women from the workplace and sought to boost

the birth rate, late capitalist democracy witnessed an increased rejection of traditional gender roles that implied "the redefinition of the family ... the refusal to return to the domestic sphere on becoming unemployed, [and] the postponement of childbearing." (Zecchi 147)

After the dictatorship, the *Movida Movement* became the catalyst that broke all barriers or gender roles in Spain. The famous Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar showcases women's redefinition of family specially in films such as *All about my mother*.

The *Movida Madrileña* movement in Spain began after the dictatorship of Francisco Franco where Spanish citizens unleashed their creativity in the literature, film, and arts in Spain without censorship. The awakening of the Spanish citizens and the need to reclaim their cultural identity after living thirty-six years of dictatorship became the main theme in many popular forms of art. I analyzed several films by the popular Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar and dove deeper into the influences of neo baroque in Spanish films. Pedro Almodóvar uses this form of expression to set his own vision of identity and gender in Spain as in films such as *Tie me up or Tie me down*, *High Heels*, and *All about my mother*. With these films Almodóvar exposes gender inequality as a result of years of oppression, representing homophobia and a critique of traditional roles of males and females in society. The *Movida* cinematography paved the way for directors like Pedro Almodóvar and Ventura Pons to reshape our notions of gender roles in post dictatorship.

With gender inequality a more acute problem arises, that of gender violence. Gender violence has become one of the main concerns in Latin America. According to Tamar Diana Wilson, a researcher from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Missouri, in *Violence against Women in Latin America*: "The array of country studies shows that violence against women is widespread in Latin America and often has deep historical roots." (Wilson 14) Over the years we have seen an increase in femicide cases

in Latin America. The violent death of women for reasons of gender are typically categorized in our penal system as femicide, it is the most extreme form of violence towards a woman and a manifestation of discrimination towards them. Wilson states in her research that: "Women in Latin America have been subjected to various types of gendered violence, among them torture and rape during civil war or under military dictatorships, femicide, and domestic abuse linked to machismo." (Wilson 4) Many blame these increases of cases to machismo ideals and its continued belief of inferiority towards women. Several articles, femicide accounts, novels, and songs have been the material support to work through gender inequality. My research focuses on the current problematic gender inequality particularly in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina and the current movement of *Ni Una Menos* of women around the world seeking justice for the continuous deaths and violence.

Today *Latinx* women continue to fight not only for equality, but for life. The mistreatment of women is defended by a corrupt system who believe their own machoistic views ensure justification of their actions. Rarely do femicide cases get any resolution or closure for the victims' families to feel any satisfaction that justice was served. Cristina Rivera Garza, author of the biographical novel *Liliana's Invincible Summer*, narrates the life of her sister Liliana as a victim of femicide murdered thirty years ago. Rivera Garza writes about her quest to find the suspect who killed Liliana and travels to Ciudad Juarez to obtain the sealed records of her case. Unfortunately, cases like Liliana's are not uncommon. Rivera Garza argues: "In Mexico, ten femicides are committed every day and, although over the years this news has become normalized, the rape of a teenager, perpetrated by members of the local police within the same official patrols, unleashed

outrage once again.”¹ (Rivera Garza 16) Because of the continuous rise in femicide cases feminist groups and activist have gathered in different parts of the world to demand justice and stop the unnecessary deaths of women, because of gender violence.

The Women-led protest for equality and justice is not a new notion in Latin America. In the late 1970s, women came together for the disappearances of their daughters and sons after the ruling of the military junta during Juan Peron’s dictatorship in Argentina. The *Ni una Menos Movement* was inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. These few and courageous women gathered outside the Argentina’s presidential palace to protest the disappearances wearing white scarves. Nora Amalia Femenia states in her article *Argentina’s Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: The Mourning Process from Junta to Democracy* what happened in the Plaza de Mayo:

The Mothers persisted in demanding the truth. They gathered in the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Casa Rosada, the headquarters of the Argentine government in the center of Buenos Aires. Passers-by were confronted with the spectacle of mothers and grandmothers displaying the names and photographs of their loved ones who were among the disappear. (Femenia 14)

The idea of the bandannas later was used to draw attention to abortion rights while paying homage to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The color green, became the symbol of the *Ni Una Menos* Movement representing life. The catalyst to the movement was the case of Chiara Paez a fourteen-year-old pregnant girl from Argentina who was murdered by her boyfriend and buried in his grandparent’s backyard. Chiara Paez death inspired the first *Ni Una Menos* march against gender violence. The movement erupted through social media platforms reaching a large audience. Romina Accossatto and Mariana Sendra from the National University of Cuyo in Argentina, explains how social media help spread the

¹ Translation is mine

movement even further. In their article *Feminist Movements in the Digital Era. The Communications Strategies of the Ni Una Menos Movement* they explain:

The central concentration was held on June 3, 2015 in the Plaza of Congress in Buenos Aires, attended by around 250,000 people, including women's and feminist organizations, political and social movements, unions, artists and numerous public figures. *Ni Una Menos* was replicated in more than 120 points in the country and managed to converge more than 400,000 people. (Accossatto et al 121)

The movement happened at a decisive moment for women's rights in Mexico. The *Ni Una Menos* movement became more powerful and has been growing and taking to the streets, repeatedly demanding greater protections and rights, as well as highlighting cases of violence against women.

The following three papers presented in this portfolio are connected by a common thread which is identity, but more specifically *Latino/Hispanic* identity and how it has been shaped by a patriarchal society. After exploring more thoroughly the topic of identity, gender inequality became more relevant and intertwined with patriarchal views and the role that women play in such society. Due to this ongoing patriarchal paradigm there has been an increase in several Latin American countries of femicide cases. The *Ni Una Menos* movement spreads throughout Latin America and the world as a call to action to stop the violent crimes happening against women and to demand justice for all the cases that remained unpunished.

Latino Identity

“A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español* ni *inglés*, but both.” (Anzaldúa 55)

Latino identity is a term that many scholars have studied extensively to define. With the increase of ethnicities in the United States the current definition of *Latino/Hispanic* has shifted to *Latinx* allowing the newer generation to feel represented and included. Scholars who have studied the definition of *Latino* since the early eighties like Gloria Anzaldúa claimed that identification whether *Latino* or *Hispanic* might be different for each individual. In her book *Borderlands /La Frontera The New Mestiza* she explains:

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70-80 percent Indian. (4) We call ourselves Hispanic (5) or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American (6) to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out). (Anzaldúa 62)

Anzaldúa emphasizes language as part of the definition of *Latino/Hispanic*. Moreover, she links the identity to Spanish colonization where language, culture, and religion were assimilated by indigenous communities of each region. Language is something that is constantly changing. The definition of *Hispanic* and *Latino* has evolved with the current times and as language has changed there has been a shift of the terms *Latino/Hispanic* to *Latinx*. Professor Emeritus of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University

of Illinois in Chicago Marc Zimmerman defines the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* in his book *US Latino Literature: An Essay and Annotated Bibliography* as:

I use the word *Latino* rather loosely, to refer to people of Ibero-American birth or family origin who have been born in or who have willingly or otherwise, come to see the U.S. as their home. The word *Hispanic* comes to suggest then the intent to erase (like courtesy) the indigenous and African roots of Latin American identity." (Zimmerman 12-13)

Both definitions of *Hispanic* and *Latino* have been used for several years, but even though identity has developed, the definitions no longer apply to all the special circumstances that cultural mixing has created. Through my researching I will be analyzing different definitions from scholars like Jorge Gracia, Linda Alcoff, Steve Tammelleo, and Angelo Corlett. I argue that some of the definitions are flawed and with the current shift of generations comes a new term that better defines special circumstances of *Latino/Hispanic* identity.

Dr. Steve Tammelleo, a philosophy professor at the University of San Diego discusses in his article *Continuity and Change of Hispanic Identity* the definitions of *Latino* identity among other scholars in the field. Tammelleo believes it is important to have some sort of genealogical condition in order to sufficiently identify as a *Latino*. Steve Corlett mentions Tammelleo in his article and also takes into consideration the importance of genealogy in terms of *Latino* identity. Tammelleo explains in his article that he believes *Hispanic* identity is divided into three identities: "Hispanic identity is understood in terms of three distinct *Hispanic* identities; a *Colonial Hispanic identity*, a *National Hispanic identity*, and a *Latino/a identity*." (Tammelleo 541) According to Tammelleo a colonial Hispanic identity is being a part of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, particularly Spain. National Hispanic identity is a product of the wars that occurred in Latin America

and their independence from Spain. Lastly, Latino/a identity, “refers to the formation of distinctive Hispanic identity within the context of the USA.” (Tammelleo 541) Tammelleo mentions that there are many *Latino* identities since there are twenty-one Spanish speaking countries. Every country’s culture differs from the other and has different experiences and history. Tammelleo's point is important, because *Latino* identity has been typically seen as one entity instead of separate identities.

Jorge Gracia, a Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Department of Comparative Literature in the State University of New York at Buffalo, debates with Tammelleo on his conception of Latino identity. In his article *Hispanic/Latino identity: A response to Tammelleo* he argues that his definition of *Latino* identity coincides with Angelo Corlett’s. Gracia does not agree with Tammelleo and Corlett’s definition in their claims that genealogical descent is what makes an individual a Latino. Gracia, on the other hand, believes that this definition does not create a definite criterion of what being truly a Latino means. Gracia argues that neither Corlett nor Tammelleo clearly state how far back in the genealogical pool should we trace in order to be considered Latino. Gracia explains: “I would like to ask, instead, how is it that Corlett determines Latino identity? He proposes to do it on the basis of genealogy: “I am Latino because my parents were Latinos, and they were Latinos because their parents were Latinos, and so on.” (Gracia 564) Gracia argues that by Corlett's definition it would be too hard to determine how far back we have to look into ancestry for someone to be considered a *Latino* and that also brings forth other problems such as those who identify as *Latino* and do not have any *Latino* ancestors.

Gracia gives an example of a child who has been adopted from a European country by Latino parents. By nationality the child would be considered *Latino*, but by Corlett's definition he would not be considered *Latino*, because there is no genealogical connection. This flaw that Gracia is pointing out in Corlett's definition is something that I agree with personally. By only considering genealogical components Corlett is leaving out situations such as naturalization of people who were not born from *Latino* ancestors and those who identify *Latino*, because of their cultural upbringing. Neither does he consider those who have migrated from other non-Spanish speaking countries to a Spanish speaking country and would have children that would be citizens without any genealogical component.

J. Angelo Corlett, a Professor of Philosophy & Ethics at San Diego State University analyzes the definition of *Latino* very differently from Gracia. In his article *Latino Identity*, he defines *Latinos* as: "I use the category "*Latinos*" as an inclusive one to refer to a number of ethnic groups such as Mexicans, Dominicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans, and other of us folk who are in some way descendants of (and including) Iberians." (J. Angelo Corlett 274) He clarifies that under that definition they will relate to each other in various ways such as language, culture, and historical roots and physical appearance. Corlett argues that apart from the genealogical ties some might say that it would be necessary to speak Spanish to be considered a *Latino*. He further justifies: "It might be argued that one's ability to understand or speak Spanish (or a dialect thereof) is necessary and/or sufficient for membership in the cluster of Latino groups." (Corlett 279) I do not agree with condition that language is a primary factor to being categorized as a *Latino*. As a language teacher I know the importance of learning a second language

in order to understand and appreciate the culture, but that should not determine the “membership” into being considered a Latino. I come from a family of four girls. My oldest sister and I retained our Spanish language when we moved to the United States. My two younger sisters decided not to maintain their Spanish and therefore they are not fluent in the language and have difficulty understanding Spanish. Does that make them less Latinas? They meet the genealogical criteria that Corlett stipulates but if language was the criteria needed they would not be accepted as a member of the *Latino/Hispanic* community.

I also consider my own personal experience. My children were born here in the United States. Their genealogical ties to the Latino community come from myself and their father, but my children will also not meet the language criteria since they only speak English and are not fluent in Spanish. Corlett does state that he also doesn't believe language should be a condition of membership, that this would be something other people would mention as part of their criteria, but that language is strongly tied to ethnic identity.

Linda Alcoff, a Professor of Philosophy at Hunter College and the Graduate Center defines *Latino/ Hispanic* in her article *Latinos and Categories of Races as*:

The term “Latino” signifies people from an entire continent, sub-continent, and several large islands, with diverse racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic aspects to their identity. Given all this internal diversity, is “Latino” a meaningful identity at all? Latino identity is, with few exceptions, a visible identity, for all its variability, and I will argue that unless we pay close attention to the way in which Latino identity operates as a visible identity in public, social spaces, our analyses of its social meanings and political effects will be compromised. (Alcoff 300)

In my personal experience in the United States Census from 2019, I had to fill out boxes stating my race and ethnicity. The 2019 US Census was written differently than previous

census. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans had their own box and every other Spanish speaking country could add their own country's name under "Other". This was interesting because it eliminated the race box which was no longer needed to be checked and could be left blank and one could just fill out the *Hispanic/Latino* category. I believe this is an example of what Alcoff refers to when she states that ethnicity becomes also race. Personally, I do not check the race box, but I always check the *Latino/Hispanic* box in any application. It is difficult for me to determine what race to pick from since my family is so mixed. Technically, I could pick white or native, but I never feel it is necessary to do so nor do I understand the reason why it is important. In the end I always refer to my nationality, which is Costa Rican when someone asks me where I am from or where I was born.

After reading Alcoff's, Gracia's, Tammelleo's and Corlett's definition of *Latino* identity I feel that the definition of a *Latino* has gradually evolved and the use has shifted among the newer generations. If we take into consideration a different approach to the definition by using some of the criteria from each cultural critic I think there could be a better, a more rounded definition of *Latino* Identity that could apply to the present-day generation. I agree with Gracia that Latino identity should not be determined by genealogy. I consider Corlett and Tammelleo's opinion that the *Latino* experience in the culture, traditions, and language are important aspects of *Latino* identity, but should not be a determining factor of how *Latino* someone could be. Overall, Alcoff makes a strong argument that *Latino* Identity is an ethnic racial identity and that her definition provides a closer representation of how *Latino* Identity is seen today in the United States by younger generations.

The Latino Identity is a very personal and self-exploring experience and it is certainly influenced by our ancestors and the experiences that surround someone who grows up in a Latino community or household. Paola Ramos author of the book *Finding Latinx* claims that during her research she discovered that identification is very personal. Through her journey of completing her book she interviews several individuals who identified with many different labels Ramos mentions:

Some wanted to be called Latinos, others Hispanics. Some wanted to be seen as indigenous peoples, others as white. Some wanted their nationalities to define them, while others wanted their skin color to be the first thing people thought of when they introduced themselves, and many had no idea how to refer to themselves at all. (Ramos 11-12)

But Latino experiences are not just something that someone can gain by being born in a Spanish speaking country or by having *Latino* ancestors; the current generation is able to experience a multitude of cultures through immigration and culture mixing. That's why Tammelleo and Corlett's stipulation that there needs to be a genealogical component in order to determine whether someone is considered a Latino or not does not apply in the current evolving world.

I take into consideration some of the examples Gracia mentions in his paper and also Alcoff's personal experience of being a *Latina* immigrant and moving to the United States in the influence that had on her own personal *Latino* identity. I have a student who was born in South Korea. Her father was also born in South Korea, but his parents migrated to Argentina when he was a very young child. He grew up in Argentina and learned to speak Spanish and learned all the cultural traditions of Argentinians which he later passed on to his own children. I would consider that my student's father could identify as *Latino*. He doesn't hold any genealogical components, but his personal experiences in the *Latino* community has shaped his individual identity. I asked my student when

someone asks her father where he is from he would say, "I am from South Korea and Argentina." Each individual experience I believe plays a major role in self-identification and how those influences can shape one's own identity.

Most scholars agree that the experiences and the ethnic identity play a role in the *Latino/ Hispanic* identity, but in the end when it comes to identification in the United States all *Hispanic/ Latino* ethnicities are clumped into one category disregarding the experiences or the ethnicities. Tammelleo says in his article, "Upon arriving in the USA, Latin American immigrants from different countries are united by two factors. First, most Latin American immigrants are united by the fact they speak Spanish. Second, Latin American immigrants are united by the fact that many people living in the USA treat them as if they were members of the same group." (Tammelleo 548) We are no longer "Mexican, Cuban, Argentinian etc.", but just a group of people who have in common a language and therefore clumped into one category *Latino/ Hispanic*. Alcoff says, "The fact of the matter is that throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, a true melting pot of peoples, cultures, and races was created unlike anything north of the border." (Alcoff 270) The United States has always been mentioned as a melting pot as well the land of opportunities and dreams, but unlike Latin America the United States are not as accepting of cultural mixing.

There are common misconceptions when it comes to *Latino/ Hispanic*. If you speak Spanish for some people that automatically makes you Mexican. There is a disregard for the other twenty Spanish speaking countries and their cultures and traditions to what many identify with today. Azara Rivera-Santiago talks about the development of Latino Identity in the United States, where their ethnic backgrounds are diverse and have

to consider how this shapes their Latino identity. Identifying Latino/ Hispanic in the United States implies being placed in one category. Stereotypes surface in many aspects by people in the United States who are unaware of the differences and lump all Latino/Hispanic under one fit for all. Some individuals would say: "Stop speaking Mexican" or "What part of Mexico are you from?" almost implying that there aren't any other Spanish speaking countries in the world other than Mexico.

Azara Rivera- Santiago talks about acculturation and how this plays an important role in the psychological adjustments of *Latinos*. Acculturation is defined by Marin as: "A process of attitudinal and behavioral change undergone by individuals who reside in multicultural societies...or who come in contact with a new culture due to colonization, invasion or other important political changes." (Rivera-Santiago 18) Acculturation has been a process that has deeply affected *Latinx* identity. Keeping in mind the involvement of cultural mixing due to immigration and cultural mixing due to colonization, mixing of ethnic cultures can and will influence your individual identity. There is the blend of the white culture with the combination of their own practices that they bring from abroad when they migrate to the United States. But there's also a fusion of cultures within the United States from the children of immigrants who are born here and grow up in a mixed culture household, which ultimately influences their identity.

Today youth tend to identify themselves based on the ethnicity their own parents come from and this has become more accepting in society. For instance, my children were born in the United States. My husband is from Mexico and I was born in Costa Rica, but if someone asks my son where he is from he would answer by saying he is Mexican, Costa Rican, and from the United States. He wouldn't say I am *Latino/ Hispanic*, instead,

he would reply with the national origin of his parents. That is why I believe youth today are more accommodating to the specificities in which *Latino* identity is constructed, and thus generating a more fluid and porous notion of being Latino. The development of generational differences among immigrants should be considered when it comes to the development of *Latino* ethnic identity. Rivera- Santiago gives an outstanding example that strengthens my argument:

For example, Rogler, Cooney, and Ortiz found that Puerto Rican children who had a longer exposure to U.S. culture and society showed less identification with the Puerto Rican culture than their parents. However, the most striking finding was that the majority of these children perceived themselves to be either bicultural or identified themselves solely as Puerto Ricans opposed to complete identification with “American” culture. (Rivera-Santiago 20)

Of course, we have to consider that certain experiences within their community can affect this idea of perceiving how children can identify themselves. One being the parents' involvement in maintaining their cultural practices and traditions in the household and also teaching their children their Latino culture or living in a community that is mostly community influenced (living in a high population of Latinos) can also play a role. For example, in Florida there is a high population of Cubans so a lot of restaurants in the community permit younger generations to experience their Cuban culture.

The *Latino/Hispanic* youth who are born in the United States are currently shaping their own identity which is very much influenced by their parents' cultural traditions, language, and ethnic identification. In my personal experience, I was born in Costa Rica and moved to the United States when I was ten years old. My parents' concern was for my sisters and I to learn English, but it was still very important for us to maintain our native tongue, traditions, and culture. After having my own children, I am able to see how my

culture and my husband's culture plays an important role in my children's own identity. They are aware of our *Latino/Hispanic* identity, the traditions that we teach them at home, language, culture all play an important role in their ethnic identification. My daughter and son were both born in the United States, but if asked where they are from they will answer that they are Costa Rican and Mexican.

I think it is worth mentioning that *Latino* Identity varies greatly by what type of *Latino* you are considered. Tammelleo affirms that "Being a *Latino/a* in the USA has a radically different meaning from being *Hispanic* in a Latin American country." (Tammelleo 548) As a *Latina* immigrant myself I can attest that this is true of my experience in the United States as a Latina woman. When I was younger growing up in a community that was predominantly white there was definitely an emphasis in maintaining my *Latino/Hispanic* roots, but also a need not to flaunt those roots outside of our home. A lot of that was a way for my parents to protect my sisters and I from discrimination. My family and I moved to a small rural town in Frederick County. We were the first Latino/Hispanic students in the area, and we did not speak any English when we moved here. My classmates were surprised to meet someone who didn't speak English and my experience at school overall was positive when I was younger. Differences did not truly surface until I was in high school. When identifying myself as a Latina adolescent in a white community, it became apparent that not all community members were comfortable with a diverse population. This did not deter me from being proud of my ethnicity, instead I felt it was my driving force to prove to others that I was not just another stereotype.

Christina Spears and Hui Chu did a study on immigrant children and examined ethnic identity and the impact of their academic performance. In their study they

mentioned, “Latino immigrant youth may face ethnic discrimination that puts them at risk for academic disengagement but may also hold positive, important ethnic identities that help maintain positive attitudes about school.” (Christina Brown and Hui Chu 1478) I can’t speak for every *Latino/a* immigrant when it comes to discrimination whether in the workforce or in education, but I can say that my own personal experiences as a *Latina* immigrant living in the United States for twenty-two years I have learned to embrace my Latino heritage. I have always been proud of my cultural background, but I don’t think I truly appreciated where I came from until I lived here in the United States. It was important for me to keep my cultural traditions alive. Today, I am able to share my culture in my own classroom and through that process connect at a deeper level to my *Latina* identity.

After analyzing and reading all the different definitions of what a *Latino/Hispanic* is, my opinion of the matter is that *Latino* identity is a term that has different meanings and can be defined according to the generation and the experiences of a particular time. I understand *Latino* identity is evolving and with its growth a new term has come into play to better define those who felt underrepresented. Paola Ramos author of the book *Finding Latinx* defines the shift of *Latino* to *Latinx*. Ramos seeks to expand on the limits of the *Latino* definition and how it has changed throughout the years. At the turn of the twenty-first century a new term was coined by many “Latinas” who did not feel identified with the term *Latino* because of gender exclusion. The term *Latinx* emerged as a new concept that allowed those who felt alienated politically in the required census response having to check boxes under the category *Latino/Hispanic*. Ramos analyzes the reason for the shift from *Latino* to *Latinx*: “Around 2004, coinciding with the Internet’s explosion, *Latinx* started popping up in online communities of queer Latinos. They were inserting the “x” as

a way to express their breaks with gender binaries and welcome gender nonconforming folks into the conversation.” (Ramos7) Ramos further examines that the shifting of the definition from *Latino* to *Latinx* was a strong motivator to those who felt they did not fit the criteria of a *Latino* or *Hispanic*.

Citizens of the United States should be educated in the term *Latino* and acknowledge that *Latinx* identity is a broader term where many factors come into play. *Latinx* identity is not just one category where all individuals who are of Latino descent should be clumped together as one. Though language does unite us as Latino it does not determine “membership” of *Latino* identity. It also should be noted that Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, or Mexicans share pride of where they come from and that *Latino* identity is only a construct in the US territory.

La Movida Movement and its influence in Neo Baroque Spanish film

La *Movida Madrileña* movement in Spain's post dictatorship of Francisco Franco became an explosion of open creativity to reclaim cultural identity after having lived thirty-six years of dictatorship; It became the main theme in many popular forms of art. This cultural movement that began in Madrid from 1976 to 1986 was part of the "lifting of the lid" that occurred partly during the transition to democracy after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. The *movida* began as an underground movement and later became an open involvement of artists displaying a new form of architecture, art, dance and film and a very brazen life. John C. Hawkins, an English professor from Loyola University, in *Displaced Persons and Returning Mothers: Flannery O'Connor, Pedro Almodóvar, and the Post-Fascist Baroque* explains: "The emphasis here is not so much on the baroque as a category of resistance to Fascist regimes as it is on the post-Fascist baroque as a strategy for recovery from and reflection on the wounds they enacted (Hawkins 512)". The *Movida* became the new form of political marketing tool. The images in their artwork, films, fashion, and performances created narratives that helped the Spaniards to construct their renewed identity.

Cinematography was the strongest marketing tool during the movement. By using films, Pedro Almodóvar and many other famous film makers campaigned to bring their attention to the political issues and arguments to a large mass of people. Many Spaniards were influenced by the different films coming out during the movement created by directors such as Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu and Maria Novaro. Jorge Marti, an associate professor of contemporary Spanish cultural studies and film in the

University of North Carolina State University states in his article *La Movida Como Debate*: “Javier Escudero has described the *movida* as a “rejection of all transcendent and political commitment,” expression purely hedonistic of “a youth disenchanting before the social and political problems, scarce working future, and in general back turned from all intellectual and spiritual concerns.” (Marti 127) Many of the various films analyzed the fears and expectations that traversed the end of the 20th century through a fragmented form, a story line that is always evolving and rapidly changing, and overall highlighting the struggle of the middle class. Kinder explains this notion:

Almodóvar’s films have a curious way of resisting marginalization. Never limiting himself to a single protagonist, he chooses an ensemble of homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, dooper, punk, terrorist characters who refuse to be ghettoized into divisive subcultures because they are figured as part of the “new Spanish mentality”—a fast-paced revolt that relentlessly pursues pleasure rather than power, and a post-modern erasure of all repressive boundaries and taboos associated with Spain’s medieval, fascist, and modernist heritage (Kinder 33).

Almodóvar uses these marginalized characters to break free from the traditional gender roles that were expected during Franco’s regime and highlight the fast improvement of women’s social possibilities after his death. The Spaniards’ middle class who was constantly marginalized by the upper class were constantly living their life in a dream-like state wanting to be someone else, and always jealous of those who were different, always desiring and constantly feeling frustrated.

Cinema during the time of the *movida* incorporated many characteristics associated with the baroque style, displaying the presence of an auteurs’ flair in the films of specific directors such as Pedro Almodóvar. In most cases, the term “baroque” is used

loosely to describe a formal quality that flows "freely" and "excessively" through films. The concept of the baroque implies losing control and to be baroque was considered a way to give voice to artistic freedom and flight from the norm. The neo-baroque shares a baroque delight in spectacle and sensory experiences. Neo-baroque, however, had more of a contemporary audience with new baroque forms of expression that are aligned with late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century concerns.

The neo-baroque combines the visual, the auditory, and the textual in ways that parallel the dynamism of seventeenth-century baroque form, but that dynamism is expressed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in technologically and culturally diverse ways. Underlying the emergence of the neo-baroque are transformed economic and social factors. Film provided the perfect media to express the neo baroque style of the 17th century into the postmodern era through the combination of visual, auditory, and textual elements especially during the time of the *movida*, because of the current change in political power and cultural influences.

The Father of Neo Baroque Film

Pedro Almodóvar became the most prominent director who utilized his films to criticize the government. Almodóvar expresses his views on societal values that he is not in agreement with, particularly after many years of censorship on films during Franco's regime. In his interview with reporter Marsha Kinder *Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality: A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar*, he states:

Paying tribute to the *madrileña* culture of the beginning of the eighties, of our music, our esthetic, and our endless thirst for pleasure and fun, I wanted to remind them [those who were present] that they were given tribute to the access of Spain to freedom and democracy. Nothing that they had

seen, not one of the images in my movies would have been possible if Spain had not lived in freedom.² (Kinder 34)

Almodóvar films have been associated with the unique characteristics of neo baroque, particularly creating films that go beyond the norm of expression and their melodramatic style focusing on the excess spectacle of the Catholic Church. Almodóvar declares in his interview with Marsha Kinder:

“I always try to choose prototypes and characters from modern-day Madrid, who are somehow representative of a certain mentality existing today. I think that since Franco died new generations have been coming to the fore, generations that are unrelated to former ones, that are even unrelated to the 'progressive' generations that appeared during the last years of the dictatorship. (Kinder 34)

Spanish film directors like Almodóvar, Luis Buñuel, Juan de Orduña, Ventura Pons and Vicente Aranda, to name a few, used neo-baroque as a potent weapon that could counteract the mainstream and this audience embraced the neo-baroque for its inherent avant-garde characteristics.

Pedro Almodóvar was born in Ciudad Real, and his life was marked by strong female characters. He was born to an extremely poor family with his parents and siblings. Almodóvar has stated in many interviews that his films are inspired by his own firsthand experiences and vision of the world. The viewer can see a bit of Almodóvar in all his films and within them we can see pieces of the society he grew up in. Almodóvar was educated in a catholic school where he developed his knowledge of religion which later shaped several characters throughout his feature films. His films are fueled with the aesthetics of baroque churches which derived in forms of kitsch as his main style. Alejandro Varderi

² (Translation is mine).

defines kitsch in his article *Kitsch and film in the construction of the Francoist nation as* that which “steals themes and elements indiscriminately, regardless of the original source. It recycles classic, medieval, modern, and popular culture aiming to reproduce not the essence of the original but its effect.” (Varderi 63)

In the movie *Tie me up or Tie me down* by Pedro Almodóvar the plot is about Ricky, a twenty-three-year-old psychiatric patient, who has been deemed cured and is released from a mental institution. Until then, he had been the lover of the woman director of the hospital. Ricky was an orphan, free spirited, and alone with his only goal to have a normal life with Marina Osorio, an actress who was a former porn star, and recovering drug addict, whom he once slept with during an escape from the asylum. He believes his destiny is to marry her and father her children.

After Ricky is released from the asylum he goes in search of Marina and kidnaps her and ties her to a bed to convince her to fall in love with him. Marina is suffering from a horrible toothache, so Ricky runs out to the plaza to obtain the painkillers in the black market. There he steals the medication and runs back to Marina who is still tied up in the room of her home. Oddly enough, she ends up falling for Ricky, proving Stockholm syndrome can sometimes work in your favor.

Stockholm syndrome is a psychological response. It occurs when hostages or abuse victims' bond with their captors or abusers. This psychological connection develops over the days, weeks, months, or years of captivity or abuse. With this syndrome, hostages or abuse victims may come to sympathize with their captors. This is the opposite of the fear, terror, and disdain that might be expected from the victims in these situations.

Over time, some victims develop positive feelings toward their captors. In the movie Mariana is sympathetic with Ricky after he comes back from being beaten up by the people, he had stolen the medication from for Mariana's toothache. Almodóvar connects idolatry to many of his films and uses Marina's example of falling in love with her capture, starting to see him in another light even though he had her tied up. His obsession towards Mariana and his idolatries of the perfect life he imagines with her also contrast idolatry. Antoni Bentu, a retired professor of Theology who graduated from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Strasbourg explains in his article *Utopia y Idolatria* what idolatry consist of: "Idolatry has the least risk of consecrating an unrealistic persistence, blocking all possible calls of free consciousness that could give rise to human decisions tending to overcome the egocentric instinctive determinisms." (Bentu 26) Ricky's obsession with Marina can be seen as him worshiping Marina for Ricky there is no one other than Marina. Ricky being an orphan also plays a role in his obsession with having a family and not being alone his extreme obsession towards Mariana is a strong example of idolatry. Idolatry is a theme present in many Almodóvar films. But the film that displays the strongest definition is *High Heels* (1991). The story unfolds as a young little girl who is obsessed with her mother's acceptance. Her mother Becky del Paramo, a well-known actress and singer leaves her daughter with her father after her second husband dies (her daughter Rebecca kills him) to move to Mexico to work on an acting project. She leaves her daughter for fifteen years and upon her return learns that her daughter has married a former lover. She takes her mother to see a transvestite show of one of her mother's works and is unfaithful to her husband with the actor portraying her mother.

Tensions mount when she finds her daughter Rebecca was married to one of her ex-lovers and when he suddenly turns up dead, it casts suspicion on the two.

An example of rapture images is during the Pedro Almodóvar film *High Heels*, where Lethal is dressed as Rebecca's mother performing one of her shows. The following scene he goes to the dressing room and asks Rebecca to undress him where they become sexually involved while he is still in full costume. This physical sexual perversion and full display of desire is a very neo baroque characteristic and very much Almodóvar style. Hawkins explains in his article *Displaced Persons and Returning Mothers: Flannery O'Connor, Pedro Almodóvar, and the Post-Fascist Baroque*, "The over-the-top theatricality of the performances in his films and his relentless insistence on the joyously obscene fluid and skin of the human body results in a baroque confrontation with sanitation and purity." (Hawkins 512) Almodóvar uses the human body as representation of tearing down social barriers. What could have been censored and obscene during the dictatorship, he opposes by freeing the image of the human body and embracing sexual nature. Almodóvar breaks the stereotypes of what femininity and masculinity represent by inverting the roles of gender within his characters. His characters such as Lola in his movie *All about my mother* is a male by biological nature, but later we find out that he is a transvestite who has gotten a boob job done and fathered several children with women.

Almodóvar has been known for his films with strong female characters. *All About My Mother* is not an exception. The movie begins after a conflict of the death of Esteban, Manuela's son. Manuela is a single parent whose son Esteban wants to become a writer. Since he was young, he wanted to meet his biological father, but his mother never wanted to tell him about his father. When he is tragically killed on his birthday after watching a

show at the theater Esteban dies in a car accident. Manuela travels to Barcelona to track down his dad, a transgender woman named Lola and tell him the tragic news. Along the way, she links up with a trans sex worker named Agrado, a pregnant nun Rosa and a famous stage actress Huma all of whom are suffering their own crises.

As the story evolves the pregnant nun reveals who the father of her unborn child is. He is Manuela's old lover and Esteban's father. Unfortunately, not only did he father her baby, but he also transmitted her AIDS. Agrado tells Manuela what Lola did to her when she was out working at night. Lola had stolen all her money and she needed work. They decide to go to the convent to ask for help. Agrado tells Manuela: "These nuns only help whores and transvestites. Manuela: Is that a real Chanel? Agrado: No! How could I have bought a real Chanel with all the hunger in the world! All I have that is real are my feelings...and these pints of silicone that weighs a ton." (0:47:54) Almodóvar pushes boundaries with this movie and its characters. Guido Riggs, an associate professor from the University of Cambridge mentions in his article *En Busca de Nuevas Formas Barrocas: El Cine Español y Latinoamericano Contemporáneo* says: "The main argument is that Almodóvar knows how to expand and complement the traditional concepts through his alternative proposal, that cross imaginary boundaries between femininity and masculinity." (Riggs 195)³ A fitting example of Almodóvar crossing boundaries between femininity and masculinity is his characters like Agrado, Lola, Lethal *from High Heels*, Almodóvar use of proposing this alternative idea of what a female and male role are in Spanish society.

³ (Translated by me)

In the movie *All about my mother* there is a character, Lola, that is connected to all the other characters in the story. Lola is the main perpetuator of all the events occurring to Manuela, Agrado, Rosa, and Huma. Lola is supposed to be the father of Enrique who ran off and came back after getting a boob job with Agrado. Manuela is married to Lola and decided to give her husband a chance after he makes the decision to become a woman. Manuela expresses that deep down all women have a desired for the same sex and though her husband “has bigger tits than me,” Manuela continues her relationship with Lola. John C. Hawkins explains in his article *Displaced Persons and Returning Mothers: Flannery O’Connor, Pedro Almodóvar, and the Post-Fascist Baroque*, “Most importantly, in the face of a gendered essentialism, a repressed sexuality, and a pre-scripted cultural identity, Almodóvar embraces the Bakhtinian laughter of camp.” (Hawkins 521) Almodóvar breaks down the image of what a housewife is supposed to be. A traditional Spanish wife would have stayed home taking care of the children and cooking for their husband. But instead, we have a strong female lead, Manuela; who works as a nurse and is a single mom to Enrique since the father is a drug addict and completely useless. Almodóvar breaks off those stereotypical images of a homemaker by showing off the female strength and perseverance. At the same time, he mocks the male characters that eventually are turned into female characters. But not only does he break the stereotypes of Spanish women in society, but also breaks the stereotypes of the body and the freedom of expression using the body and sexuality.

In the movie *What have I done to deserve this?* Almodóvar tells of Gloria the main character, a housewife that earns her living by being a housekeeper. She is living stuck in an unhappy marriage with her husband who is a taxi driver. He is the definition of a

stereotypical Spanish chauvinist husband of the time, insensitive and ungrateful. The moment he steps foot in his home all he does is complain. Antonio is spiteful that Gloria is working. He thinks it is “indecent” for a woman to work outside of the home. Even though, their current living situation and his job do not provide enough income to sustain a living. Gloria is pressured to provide for the household and is angry at the position she has been driven to; she becomes addicted to pills which change her mood to extremes never seen in a Spanish homemaker. Gloria and Antonio have two sons. Gloria's older son, Toni, who is fourteen, wants to become a farmer and is saving up enough money to buy a farm by being a drug dealer. The younger son, Miguel, who is twelve, sleeps around with older men, one being his best friend's father and has an affair with the mother. Almodóvar breaks true barriers with the character of Miguel. Miguel is known for being a “*chapero*” a male prostitute. Gloria, being a desperate mother sold her son to his dentist since she did not have enough money to cover the dentist treatment. Miguel stays with the dentist for a while, but eventually returns to his home after his father dies. The character of Miguel can be interpreted in many ways one being the desperation of the challenging times that the people of Spain were going through to the point that Gloria uses her son as payment. Miguel can also be interpreted as Gloria's support he was willing to prostitute himself to be able to help his mother out of a tricky situation. Gloria's mother-in-law also lives in the household. She is addicted to carbonated water and sweets and shares the same dream of returning to her native village. Gloria's friends are her two neighbors Cristal and Juani. Cristal is a prostitute who is kind and caring. Juani, is a bitter woman obsessed with cleanliness and vulgar ornaments, her daughter, Vanessa, has telekinetic powers, which she uses to destroy their apartment.

Gloria finds herself at wit's end and is pushed over the edge when an argument with her husband leads to his accidental death. As Gloria deals with the morbid matter of killing her husband the people surrounding her only add to the craziness. In this film Almodóvar uses Gloria's character as a woman who wants to break free from the males' "macho" attitude. He highlights the importance of Gloria's emotions and carnal desires, but her search for freedom and peace. Almodóvar use of comic relief in situations that are considered culturally inappropriate are a staple characteristic of breaking boundaries. Javier Escudero mentions in his article *Rosa Montero y Pedro Almodóvar: Miseria y Estilización De La Movida Madrileña*:

"Almodóvar presents not only in this movie, but other films a series of women—housewives, professionals or young women who are unemployed—that fight for freedom of the emotional dependence of the men, but if they reach their goal, they sentence themselves to a life of solitude or confinement (Escudero 155)".³

This is featured in *What have I done to deserve this?* The main reason for Gloria's desire for freedom from her husband's macho ideals and demands was to break free. She finds herself in an identity crisis once she can obtain the freedom that she so desires. This scene has been compared to the Spanish state of identity limbo after the dictator passed away. Many Spaniards found themselves lost and unsure of what to do with their freedom after living in a state of total control for thirty-six years.

The central characteristic of the baroque is this lack of respect for the limits of the frame. Almodóvar changes the closed forms and replaces them with open structures that favor a dynamic and expanding the centers of authority or importance. Stories refuse to be contained within a single structure, expanding their narrative universes into further sequels and serials present in many of Almodóvar films such as *What have I done to*

deserve this? and *High Heels*. Plain media crosses over into other media and is influenced by other media forms. Almodóvar seeks to expand his films, collapsing traditional boundaries and engaging in multimedia conglomerate operations. Neo baroque form relies on the active engagement of the audience members, who are invited to participate in a self-reflexive game involving the social limitations of women. It is the audience that makes possible an integral feature of the baroque aesthetic: the principle of virtuosity. The use of exhibitionism displays the great skill of Almodóvar to reflect the desire of taking a film form to new limits.

*We are them in the past, and we are them in the future,
and we are others at the same time. We are others and we are
the same as always. Women in search of justice,
Exhausted women, and together.
Cristina Rivera Garcia*

#NiUnaMenos #Justice

For many years Latin American women have battled the everyday fear of becoming one of the many victims of femicide currently happening in various Spanish speaking countries. The violent death of women for reasons of gender are typically categorized in our penal system as femicide; it is the most extreme form of violence towards a woman and a larger manifestation of discrimination towards them. Alice Driver, a photojournalist and author of the article *We want to stay alive*, defines femicide as: “Femicide often involves sexual violence and is defined as the murder of a woman based on misogynist ideas like honor, shame, and control of women’s bodies. It is a term that recognizes the sexual politics of homicide.” (Driver 40) Violence against women has spread throughout Latin America and many other parts of the world and women are protesting openly in the streets to those in power to make changes.

In my research I will be diving deeper into cases, particularly, in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina where the *Ni una Menos (Not One Women Less)* movement has spread internationally, fighting for justice for all those victims of femicide. This movement was established to awaken the conscience of those who are not aware of the horrible and dangerous crimes and the injustice involved with the cases who are being forgotten. The

movement began in the streets of Argentina and eventually spread throughout other countries in South America, Central America, and Mexico.

Jaclyn Diaz, a reporter from National Public Radio (NPR), explains in her article *How #NiUnaMenos Grew from the Streets of Argentina into a Regional Women's Movement*. "*Ni Una Menos* started out as a slogan, merged into a viral hashtag used online, and eventually a regionwide movement." (Diaz 2) This movement encouraged many women-led demonstrations around the world who are also suffering from high rates of femicide. It also inspired the singer and songwriter to create the *Ni Una Menos* anthem called "*Canción sin Miedo*" by Vivir Quintana (The Song without Fear). The powerful song has more than eighteen million views on YouTube since it came out in 2020.

The lyrics are a powerful call to action to those in high positions in the government to bring justice to the thousands of femicides that are happening every day. Vivir Quintana says in her song: "Every minute of every week, they steal friends from us, they kill our sisters. They tear their bodies apart, they disappear them. Don't forget their names, please, Mr. President."⁴The song continues demanding justice for those women whose cases have been buried and overlooked in the penal system. Women are tired and frustrated that more and more deaths are recorded, but investigations are cut short or even brushed under due to a corrupt system. Wilson says: "Male aggression toward women begins in small ways, with insinuations and insults, then objectification and exploitation, and moves on to greater violence, from intimate partners to others." (Wilson 7) Manipulation plays a huge role, and consequences of minor aggressions can later on turn into more severe acts of violence. *Machista* teachings at a young age have infiltrated

⁴ Translation is mine

older generations thereby teaching their children that women's sole purpose is to bare children and take care of men.

Argentina

The Not One Women-Less movement was inspired in Argentina by the internationally known organization of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. A group of mothers who in the most repressive years of the military junta gathered outside the presidential palace demanding that the children be returned: “*Alive they took them, alive we want them*”, as they marched with their white scarves with the names of the “disappeared”. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo were the only voice that openly confronted the power of the military by “circling” around the square since the security forces would not allow them to stand in protest. This ritual continues to the present even though many mothers and grandmothers are no longer present. Nora Amalia Femenia states in *Argentina’s Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: The Mourning Process from Junta to Democracy*:

The Mothers persisted in demanding the truth. They gathered in the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Casa Rosada, the headquarters of the Argentine government in the center of Buenos Aires. Passers-by were confronted with the spectacle of mothers and grandmothers displaying the names and photographs of their loved ones who were among the disappeared. Later, they resolved to demonstrate in the plaza every Thursday, thus keeping the issue visible in a public space in the heart of the country's governmental and financial district. (Femenia 14)

After femicide cases began to rise in Argentina, once again women took to the streets to demand answers and justice to gender violence. The data collected by Adriana Marisel Zambrano, the coordinator of the Civil Association the Meeting House in Argentina conducted a report of femicide cases, which covers the period from January 1 to December 31, 2011. Her findings were: “There were 260 femicide cases in Argentina,

160 correspond to intimate femicide, of which only 28 were committed by husbands or ex-husbands, which gives a proportion nine times lower than that of femicides committed within the couple.” (Vera 48) One of the cases that was nationally publicized was the case of Chiara Páez. This case sparked the Women-led *Ni Una Menos Movement*. Chiara Paez was a fourteen-year-old girl who was pregnant during the time of her death. Her sixteen-year-old boyfriend shot her and buried her body at his grandparent’s backyard. Romina Accossatto and Mariana Sendra from the National University of Cuyo in Argentina talk about some of cases that led the movement in their article, *Ni Una Menos movement in Feminist Movements in the Digital Era. The Communication Strategies of the Ni Una Menos Movement*. Accossatto and Sendra explain: “The second trigger event occurred on May 10 when the lifeless body of Chiara Páez, a 14-year-old adolescent who was pregnant and was murdered by her boyfriend, was found. (Acossatto et al 121). Thousands of Argentinian women old and young went to the streets to protest the violence against women wearing green clothing and messages of Not- One Less waving green flags and handkerchiefs. The movement began as a protest against femicide cases and later extended as far as legalization of abortion in Argentina.

Jaclyn Diaz explains: “Latin America is home to fourteen of the twenty-five countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world. In Argentina, the Women's Office of the Supreme Court of Justice, affirms that “one woman is killed every 32 hours.” (Diaz 2021) Women in Argentina began the movement Not One Women- Less after the continuous crimes of gender violence happening around the country and to protest against the injustice of these cases. Tamar Diana Wilson, a researcher affiliated of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Missouri talks about gender violence in

her article *Violence against Women in Latin America* and states: “Women in Latin America have been subjected to various gendered violence, among them torture and rape during civil war or under military dictatorships, femicide, and domestic abuse linked to machismo.” (Wilson 4) The protesters that started the movement of #NiUnaMenos main focus was to demand better policies by the state to prevent, assist and eradicate sexist violence. The protest in the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires sparked many other protests around the country and even expanded internationally. The movement began in Argentina, but quickly spread nationwide by the use of social media.

Chile

In Chile the feminist movement began with the university students who were seeking equality in the classroom. The massive protests of students happen quite frequently. They mainly demand a series of social reforms to reduce inequality. Tamar Diana Wilson analyzes structural violence as:

Structural violence may also take the form of patrimonial violence, informed by patriarchal norms, under which men are favored over women or even their male off springs in inheritance and the distributions of land and other property. (Wilson 4)

This disparity has been seen for many years where education or workforce is dominated by males. As Wilson suggests: “Structural violence may rest upon (neo) patriarchal practices incorporated into state legislation or result from economic processes such as neoliberalism and globalization that are inherent in the workplace and have gendered effects.” (Wilson 11) The continuous inconsistencies of educational institutions and workplaces is seen across the world, but many movements by feminist groups are working towards equality in education for women and in the workplace.

Their efforts for change and their drive to fight for justice has not been unnoticed and they have become the driving force of the current movement Not One Women-Less. Thousands of Chilean female students are seeking for educational institutes to stop sexism and for such institutions to apply firmer punishments against sexual abuse and harassment. But also, to change the institution's structural views and allow women to voice their opinions. In *A Look into the Feminist Movement in Chile* Ubilla expresses the problems with educational gender discrimination:

The sexism in superior education shows for problematic points: access to university conditioned of gender socialization that dispose of preference of men and women for areas of study; the distant expressions of gender violence particularly sexual harassment, with more incidents in the universities.⁵(Ubilla et al 224)

The continuous cases of sexual harassments of students in the universities drove large masses of protest to vocalized to the different educational institutions to finally stop these aggravations and to also bring to justice those who were committing these transgressions. Chile was also seeing a rise in femicide cases and also prompted women to march not only for gender equality, but also to stop the violence towards women. Accossato and Sendra state:

In Chile, too, the march was called by different feminist groups, among which were the Chilean Network Against Violence, Pan y Rosas Teresa Flores, Feminist Articulation, Alzada Libertarian and others. In this case, the femicides of 28 women that occurred in the first half of 2015 were repudiated. With this objective, the authorities were asked to implement public policies to curb this growing problem in Latin American countries.⁶ (Accossato et al 222)

⁵ Translation is mine

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Ni Una Menos Movement massively spread through social media as a fundamental strategy to organize a wider collective audience. In Chile the hashtag #Ni Una Menos was being used widely in social media which prompted the movement to spread to an even larger audience. The massive protest has moved from the streets to a wider virtual space.

Mexico

Mexico is a country who is well aware of the femicide cases that only keep piling up every single day. Cristina Rivera Garza author of *El Invencible Verano de Liliana (Liliana's Invincible Summer)* points out in her autobiographical novel the continuous problem of femicide cases in Ciudad Juarez and her personal journey to search for answers of her sister's murder: "In Mexico there is ten femicide acts committed each day and with each passing year this news has been normalized, the rape of adolescents perpetrated by members of the local police inside their own official patrol triggering the indignation of each new account." (Rivera 16) Rivera Garza tells the story of her sister Liliana Rivera Garza who was a victim of femicide in Mexico. In her book Rivera Garza mentions that it has taken more than thirty years to find any information on her sister's case and she is doing everything in her power to recuperate the sealed record.

Stories such as Liliana's are not uncommon and continue to occur today in various parts of Mexico. Benjamin P. Russell, a reporter of The New York Times conducted an interview with Rivera Garcia about the book and the new lead that sprung about Liliana's case. In his article *An Author Wrote About Her Sister's Murder It Led to a Breakthrough* he mentions: "Justice of any kind has been hard to come by for women like Liliana. In Mexico, more than 1,000 murders last year were officially classified as femicides — the killing of women and girls because of their gender." (Russell 2022) Various feminist

groups started forming around the country protesting for justice of cases such as Liliana's that have been forgotten or swept under the rug by corrupt forces. Ciudad Juarez has been one of the states with the highest number of femicide cases. According to Wilson:

Concerning the more than 300 young girls and women, some as young as five years old who have been killed in Ciudad Juarez between 1993 and 2003 reports that their bodies were found strangled, mutilated, dismembered, raped, stabbed, and torched; some were so badly beaten, disfigured, or decomposed that their remains could not be identified."

(Wilson 8)

In many cases violence can be caused by the victim's partner, but a higher percentage are acts committed by men that are not acquainted with the victim. The biggest issue with the femicide cases that occur in Mexico is the lack of possible suspects that are often in cahoots with corrupt police officers. Rita Laura Segato, a lecturer in Anthropology and Bioethics in the UNESCO Chair states in her article, *The Writing on the Body of the Murdered Women in Ciudad Juarez: Territory, Sovereignty and Second State Crimes* that: "The crimes remain unclear. And since impunity generates more impunity, corpses continue to appear. At an average of two murdered per month, misogyny taken to the most terrifying level of cruelty continues to feed on the bodies of women from the border." (Segato 78) The victims' family members have a distrust of the police who are often corrupt and do not follow through with proper protocol to investigate the cases.

In Mexico they have also seen a spike in cases of femicide. Driver says in her article: "According to the National Citizen Femicide Observatory, a coalition of 43 groups that documents femicide, six women are assassinated every day in Mexico." (Driver 40) The impact of isolation brought more domestic disputes and the mandatory quarantine cut a lot of communication for the victims. Jaclyn Diaz mentions in her article: "In Bahillo's

home country of Argentina, in the first week of the pandemic, there was a 120% spike in calls reporting domestic violence cases.” (Diaz 2021) Unfortunately, because of the situation of being quarantined the data could be even higher than what has been reported. Since many cases were not reported due to living under the same roof as the abuser, the circumstances made it difficult to report any domestic abuse. Wilson explains the reasons why cases are underreported, “The incidence of violence against women and girls is underreported, according to this report, because police and health service personnel have not been trained to keep adequate records and because women’s “shame, fear of reprisal, lack of confidence in the legal system, and legal cost.”(Wilson 3) The pandemic not only affected the physical health of individuals, but also spread at a rapid rate the violence of women generating obstacles for women to exercise their fundamental rights of health, liberty, and security.

Conclusion

Dictatorship brings the darkest time of any society and with war many atrocities are committed. Colonial and criollo society in Latin America has developed through modernity as mainly a patriarchal structure. The state's use of violence to maintain control has normalized and engrained the spread of brutality in society. Wilson exclaims that during the war common acts such as sexual violence was a common form of punishment for the need of control and dominance over their victims she says: “From the perspectives of patriarchal ideology that considers women as sexual objects and bearers of family honor, rape, sexual torture, and mutilation are mechanisms for attacking enemy men.” (Wilson 9) This barbaric act of dominance can be considered an act of war. Not only is the woman physically hurt, but also psychologically damaged. Gender violence has been

around for centuries, but unfortunately until now we are seeing the effects of these practices still occurring today. Violence takes away from its victims any possibility of action, it diminishes them, and destroys their inner core.

The changes that have sparked the Not One-Less movement and the Green Wave Movement (Abortion Rights Movement) can be celebrated around the world, since these have opened up discussions about the changes that need to be made to stop these violent gender related crimes. Green became the color to represent abortion rights, women around the world displayed their support by marching and chanting with green bandannas around their necks. Women in Latin America have worn green for abortion rights for nearly two decades. The green bandanna has become a universal symbol of abortion rights and a sign of solidarity among women-led movements across Latin America and other parts of the world. The idea was inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina who wore the white scarves made out of cloth diapers.

There is power in numbers and women-led movements have proven that the masses are demanding attention and they are seeing that their efforts have not been in vain. Diaz says, “Ni Una Menos and its sister Green Wave movement is a success story in progress. Women see that it is working, that the protesting, reaching out to their authorities and now having a sense of belonging—not so much as a Mexican, an Argentinian, or a Chilean, but as Latin American women—I think that has given women a lot of power.” (Diaz 2021) The empowerment of collective support has helped elevate the movement much larger than they expected and as a result it has pushed the authorities to take a closer look at the cases and create more awareness not only in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, but around the world.

The movement has awakened women to look at their own rights within the countries they live in. The rise of consciousness of gender violence would be the biggest ally to educate the world in the current issues of femicide. To stop historical practices that have been condoned normal in times of the Civil War and to voice the injustice of women who can no longer make their voices heard. But in order to do that the news needs to do a better job in reporting these cases that are happening every day without normalizing its brutal acts.

There are still many things that as a society we can do to put an end to gender violence not only in Latin America, but around the world. According to the United Nations there are three pillars for action: prevention, protection, and provision of services. The call to action to leaders in power to provide reassurance for women to live free of violence. Leaders can begin by protecting women's rights and to guarantee those rights and eliminate any form of discrimination towards women. Not only protecting their rights, but also following the laws and putting an end to any impunity and judging fairly those who are guilty of committing gender violence. Continue fighting as a united organization for women's rights through protesting for those in power to provide judicial services and more women representation in police forces. We need to gather forces and not allow history to repeat itself.

As a society we need to stop normalizing gender violence and stop creating an alternative world where these horrible acts will not occur, because as long as it's not me or my family I do not need to worry. This sort of thinking only creates more problems; instead, we need to unite as one, because we want to fight for those names that have been forgotten, but also because we don't want our loved ones to join as another name.

There is power in numbers and there is also power in educating ourselves of these issues to be part of a bigger cause, not only for ourselves, but for the future generation of young girls.

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