Silent Genocide?

Femi(ni)cide in Central America and the Role of Advocacy and Policy Work of Local (Humanitarian) Women’s Organizations

– A Multiple-Case Study

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Date: January 2013
“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture, or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.”

UN Ex-Secretary General Kofi Annan, 1999
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to several people who have supported me during my thesis research. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Joost Hermann who took time out of his busy schedule to assist me in my research with helpful and constructive feedback. My gratitude further goes to Elena Pletjugina and Amaranta Luna at NOHA Groningen who have guided me through the often challenging administrative procedures prior to my thesis.

Secondly, I owe great thanks to my colleagues at the Christliche Initiative Romero who have put me into contact with femi(ni)cide experts in Central America and have provided me with valuable information and literature. I would additionally like to cordially thank Anne Nibbenhagen and Sabine Broscheit for supporting me during my research stay in Nicaragua.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Central American experts I interviewed for taking the time to share their experience with me and thus providing essential information for my thesis.

I am also indebted to my NOHA friend Marien for putting me into contact with key-informants in her home country Guatemala, to my American friend Sean who was so kind as to proof-read my thesis, and to my great friend Nynke who has provided endless encouragement!

I would like to thank my family for enabling me to take part in the NOHA program in the first place and my boyfriend for not losing his patience with me. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my father, Walter Eink, for critically reviewing my thesis and for the consequent motivation.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CCPDH</td>
<td>Consejo Centroamericano de Procuradores de Derechos Humanos (Central American Council of Human Rights Ombudsman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICIG</td>
<td>Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala)</td>
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<td>CIR</td>
<td>Christliche Initiative Romero (Christian Initiative Romero)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONAPREVI</td>
<td>Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y contra las Mujeres (National Coordinator for the Prevention of Violence within in the Family and against Women)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPI</td>
<td>Global Peace Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIHR</td>
<td>Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISDEMU</td>
<td>Instituto Salvadoreño de Desarrollo de la Mujer (Salvadoran Institute for Women’s Development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUMUSAC</td>
<td>Instituto Universitario de la Mujer, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (University Institute of Women, San Carlos University Guatemala)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Movimiento de Mujeres Maria Elena Cuadra (Women’s Movement MEC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHC</td>
<td>Population of Humanitarian Concern</td>
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<tr>
<td>REDNOVI</td>
<td>Red de la No Violencia Contra las Mujeres (Network of No Violence against Women)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPREM</td>
<td>Secretaria Presidencial de la Mujer (Presidential Secretary of Women’s Affairs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence against Women</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide in Central America and the role of advocacy and policy work of local (humanitarian) women’s organizations in fighting the misogynous practice and in empowering women.

In this first chapter the overarching research questions as well as several sub-questions, which guide the research, are presented. After that, the objectives and the academic and practical relevance of this research are addressed. Finally, the structure this thesis follows is briefly explained.

1.1 Problem Statement

Femicide or feminicide is “the killing of females by males because they are female” and probably the most extreme and cruellest form of violence against women (Russell). Femi(ni)cide is a phenomenon of global dimension posing a threat to health, safety and lives of women and girls in many different parts of the world (UN Gen. Assembly 2). First reported in 1993 in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, (Prieto-Carrón, Thomson and Macdonald 25) femi(ni)cides have been specifically on the rise in Central America recording some of the highest numbers worldwide (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 119-120).

For various reasons violence against women (VAW) is both recurrent and systematic in nature; it is deeply rooted in the public as well as the private sectors of society in the Central American region. In recent years this so called gender-based violence (GBV) has more and more frequently resulted in femi(ni)cide – the intentional and violent killing of women and girls (CCPDH 23). Femi(ni)cide and GBV are some of the most systematic and most frequent violations of human rights in Central America (Central Amer. Council of Hum. Rights 29-30). But while the numbers of femi(ni)cide as well as the brutality used in committing these crimes steadily increases, the numbers of prosecuted offenders is disproportionately low. Impunity is one of the major reasons inhibiting a decrease in the killing of women (Latin American Regional Report 3-4).

The Central American state of El Salvador for example has one of the highest crime rates worldwide and is the country with the world’s highest annual average of violent deaths – and it also ranks among the countries with the highest femicide rates worldwide (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 53 and 120). From 1999 to 2010 killings of women have tripled. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 647 women were killed in El Salvador in 2011.

While femicide is defined as “the killing of females by males because they are female” (Russell); the parallel term feminicide adds the element of impunity and institutional violence caused by a lack of State accountability (Espósito). The latter is nowadays more often used in Latin America. In this thesis both terms will be used according to their distinct meanings. Where a distinction is not relevant or cannot be made, femi(ni)cide will be inserted. More detailed definitions can be found in chapter 2.1.
because of their sex. In the first quarter of 2012 alone – between January and April 2012 – 186 individual cases of feminicides were registered (El Mundo).

In its neighboring state Guatemala the numbers are similarly shocking with two women being murdered on average per day (UN Women).

Finally, in Nicaragua the numbers are comparatively low but nevertheless also on the rise. While in 2011 according to official data by the National Police 33 women were killed because of their sex, the same number was already reached in the month of October this year. However, the numbers vary depending on the sources: The Network of Women against Violence (Spanish: Red de Mujeres contra la Violencia) registered 56 cases of femicide in the same time period in 2012 (RMCV, Informe Nonestral 2012).

With this in mind, affected states as well as the European Union, the United Nations and the International Community have to face their responsibility and intensify their actions in order to effectively combat gender-motivated violence and killings, promote women’s rights and empower women and girls in Central America.

Many researchers, academics and activists consider impunity one of the main causes of the increase in femi(ni)cide. Impunity results from the lack of a solid legal basis on which juridical cases against offenders can be built and which allows victims to report the act of such atrocity. Therefore suggestions, regarding legislation focusing on women’s rights and including the definition of different forms of violence against women, are numerous.

Civil society and in particular the strong women’s and feminist movements in Central America have also identified the lack of laws against gender-motivated violence as an immense obstacle for the fight against VAW and even as a major instigator of said crimes.

This is where advocacy and policy work comes in. Advocacy work has long been an essential tool used by actors from the field of development cooperation but is also taking on an important role in situations of humanitarian concern (Nyamugasira 297). It is primarily applied in order to target problems that are aggravated by missing laws and policies – which is very often the case, particularly in unstable or failing states where humanitarian crises tend to be especially grave. Consequently, advocacy aims at changing or implementing laws, policies and practices that improve the position and situation of a disadvantaged group of society (Holloway 1). It is therefore consistent that in Central America – where impunity and a lack of laws against GBV were identified as one of the main causes for an increase in femi(ni)cide – many developmental and humanitarian women’s organizations actively engaged in putting an end to misogynous practices, have placed advocacy and policy making at the top of their agenda in recent years.
However these organizations had and still have to face several setbacks and numerous obstacles in their activism, such as a prevailing patriarchy, a strong machista attitude of society which goes along with a depreciation of women, inefficient state institutions and a lack of political will. Nevertheless, up to now femi(ni)cide has been incorporated in the criminal codes of seven countries of Latin America: Mexico, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua (Laporta). By setting up a draft law and introducing it in parliament, by taking part in governmental discussions over many years, by raising awareness and by mobilizing the public to demand improved legislation, women’s organizations have played a major role in the passing of the laws in all these countries, and thus, enforcing women’s right.

However, there are also activists as well as politicians and experts on gender law, who doubt that advocacy of women’s organization, aimed at influencing legislation concerning women’s rights, and more specifically at incorporating femi(ni)cide as a criminal act, is the key to preventing the killing of women and girls (Valente). They also consider the wide-spread impunity, from which the Central American region suffers, a fundamental cause of GBV, and ultimately femi(ni)cide. Instead these experts suggest that rather than passing a law introducing a new and difficult to determine type of crime, states’ response to attacks on women should be enforced and an official record should be kept of these murders making femi(ni)cide more publicly visible (Latin American Weekly Report 16). Statements of skeptical individuals or organizations and institutions such as the Commission against Femicide of Honduras are fueling the debate centering on the effectiveness of strengthened national legislations to defend women’s rights: “(...) what is needed, rather than laws that are not observed, is real interest and commitment on the part of those who run the country, of the officers of the law and of those who are supposed to ensure the people’s safety” (Social Watch).

Against the background of this ongoing debate this research aims at investigating the role that advocacy and policy work of Central American women’s organization plays in the fight against femi(ni)cide. It looks into the actual contribution of these instruments in empowering women, increasing their resilience and in preventing femi(ni)cide. A special focus is placed on the activities of local women’s organizations addressing political and legislative changes. The research focuses on the three Central American countries of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala – countries with active women’s movements, organizations and networks, and countries in which laws typifying either feminicide or femicide were passed in the past four years as a result of enhanced advocacy activities by women’s organizations.

Traditionally, femi(ni)cide and gender-motivated violence is intrinsically linked to structural problems of sociological nature and to inequality between men and women. It is therefore almost exclusively addressed in the field of development cooperation. However, a second aim of this empirical research is to analyze whether one of the determinations or concepts of a humanitarian
crisis (as opposed to developmental issues) established in the academic discourse in the field of humanitarian aid might apply to femi(ni)cide in Central America.

Obviously, violence against civilians is a core topic of humanitarian concern. However, humanitarian aid as a reaction to violence is usually provided in situations of armed conflicts which constitute “classic” humanitarian crises. While gender-based war techniques such as systemic rape of women and girls do receive increasing international humanitarian attention, the wide-spread phenomenon of VAW in turn – not necessarily afflicting exclusively war-torn or conflict regions – does currently not occupy a significant position on the humanitarian agenda. With violence and social conflicts taking on ever new forms it becomes increasingly challenging to identify which forms are of humanitarian concern (Medecins Sans Frontieres).

By investigating the impacts of VAW and femi(ni)cide on the society, and in particular on women and girls in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, this thesis will try to determine whether the phenomenon is or rather should be of humanitarian concern, and more specifically of concern to humanitarian organizations.

Looking at the alarming proportions VAW and femi(ni)cide have reached in Central America, the risk posed to women and girls and the immense social and structural impacts that a large scale crime such as femi(ni)cide inevitably has, discussing VAW and femi(ni)cide in the region from a humanitarian angle might be well called for. It is a new perspective, but seems rather appropriate given the ongoing escalation of femi(ni)cide in Central America. Against this background it is an interesting fact that it is not uncommon among activists to refer to femi(ni)cide in the region as a silent genocide (Valente). While genocide refers to the rising numbers of femi(ni)cide along with the increasing brutality with which the murders are committed, silent refers to the comparatively little international attention this phenomenon receives.

1.2 Research Questions

According to Punch (4) all empirical research has a pre-empirical stage where question development takes place. Research questions are “the goal of the pre-empirical stage of the research; they provide the backbone of the empirical procedures; and they are the organizing principle for the report” (Punch 4). The above outlined problem statement leads to the two following research questions:

- Does femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala constitute a humanitarian crisis?
- To what extent does advocacy and policy work of (humanitarian) women’s organizations contribute to the fight against femi(ni)cide – at the examples of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala?
Another essential element in the pre-empirical stage lies in clarifying and disentangling the different issues and in restating the original problem as a series of empirical research questions (Punch 4). Consequently, to be able to answer the main research questions above the following sub-questions have been formulated:

Regarding the first of the two main research questions:

1. What exactly is homicide and feminicide?
2. How high are the femi(ni)cide rates in the three investigated countries?
3. What are the causes of femi(ni)cide in Central America?
4. What are the effects of femi(ni)cide and gender-motivated violence on Central American society?
5. Does the Pressure-and-Release-Model by Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon apply to the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide in the three investigated countries?

Regarding the second main research question:

6. What can be understood from advocacy and policy work of (humanitarian) women’s organizations combating femi(ni)cide in Central America?
7. Which actors are involved in these processes?
8. Which conditions/parameters need to be fulfilled for the effectiveness of advocacy and policy work?
9. To date what has been the impact of advocacy and policy work regarding femi(ni)cide carried out in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala?

1.3 Objectives and Relevance of Research

The formulation of the main research question based on the issue-actor-process-triangulation (issue: femi(ni)cide, process: advocacy and policy-promoting measure, actor: women’s organization in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala) leads to two general objectives of this research: Firstly, to find out whether femi(ni)cide in Central America constitutes a humanitarian crisis, and secondly, to determine the benefit of advocacy and policy making measures of women’s organization in empowering women and fighting femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Specific objectives of this study are:

- Raising awareness of the often neglected phenomenon femi(ni)cide of global dimension
- Contributing to the scarce body of academic knowledge on femi(ni)cide
• Looking at femi(ni)cide from a humanitarian perspective
• Identifying and reflecting on successes of and shortcomings in previous advocacy and policy approaches in the three Central American countries
• Developing recommendations regarding future advocacy and policy projects of (humanitarian) women’s organizations aimed at fighting femi(ni)cide in Central America
• Promoting a more prominent position of VAW and femi(ni)cide on the humanitarian agenda

As for the academic relevance of this thesis, despite a slowly but steadily growing body of knowledge regarding femi(ni)cide in recent years, there is still a palpable lack of academic literature and research about femi(ni)cide in Central America – and in particular of English language material bridging the language divide. With one exception: The gender-motivated killings of women in Mexico, and especially in Ciudad Juarez, have received widespread attention and were vastly covered by both scholars and the media.

Along with the increase of femi(ni)cide in the Central American region, feminists and feminist organizations have published many reports and articles on femi(ni)cide in order to raise awareness, however, this mostly gray literature is almost exclusively written in Spanish and is rarely accessible to a larger academic readership on an international level.

Furthermore, despite the growing desire of donating organizations and institutions to measure effectiveness of funded NGO activities (including advocacy and policy work), little publicly accessible, empirical knowledge exists on the impact of advocacy and policy work targeting femi(ni)cide (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 1ff). In order to increase the empirical knowledge about these activities, the author has conducted a case study on Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador which makes use of a methodological combination of literature review and interviews with key informants.

By providing an assessment of advocacy and policy making to the end of fighting femi(ni)cide, this research additionally contributes to the ongoing debate centering on the effectiveness of strengthened national legislation against femi(ni)cide.

In terms of a more practical as well as societal relevance: By researching the benefit of advocacy and policy work currently carried out by Central American women’s organizations, this study could be of practical utility as it has the potential to provide recommendations to women’s organizations engaged in putting an end to femi(ni)cide in their countries.

Given the geographic scope of this study, conclusions and recommendations drawn from it will primarily be beneficial to civil society organizations and particularly to women’s organizations in Central America. On the other hand, femi(ni)cide anywhere in the world represents the peak of
GBV/VAW, is intrinsically linked to unequal power relationships between women and men, and therefore calls for action by both the State and the civil society. Due to these general characteristics of femi(ni)cide on a global scale, the recommendations’ general tendencies might also be applicable to the many other regions in the world afflicted by femi(ni)cide – despite geographic and cultural differences.

Finally, this research not only aims at raising awareness of the often ignored phenomenon, but also attempts to add a new perspective by looking at femi(ni)cide from a humanitarian angle. Until now gender-motivated violence and femi(ni)cide have almost exclusively been addressed in the realm of development work. Thus, this research hopes to take one small step in finally turning femi(ni)cide and VAW in Central America into a topic receiving more attention in the field of humanitarian aid.

1.4 Chapter Content and Structure

The following chapter is dedicated to providing the theoretical framework of this thesis as well as a literature review which firstly explains the definitions, manifestations and causes of femi(ni)cide and secondly establishes a framework for analyzing whether femi(ni)cide constitutes a humanitarian crisis in the three case countries of this research. The chapter further defines advocacy and policy work and provides another framework including benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of such activities. Chapter three constitutes the methodology section of this thesis and presents in detail the applied research methods. Chapter four makes up the core of this thesis as it contains the three case studies on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala which include the main research findings and answers most of this research’s sub-questions. Chapter five is dedicated to final conclusions and thus presents a summary of the most important findings, while chapter six lists practical as well as academic recommendations. The seventh and last chapter presents the limitations and constraints of this research. Finally, a works cited list and an annex (including a list of interviewees) is provided.
2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter provides the theoretical and conceptual framework representing the foundation of the entire research. It presents core definitions and concepts used in this study, and explains how these are tied to answering the research questions. This theoretical chapter will additionally address some of the more general research’s sub-questions presented in chapter 1.2: By defining the key concepts of this research – femicide and feminicide – sub-question number one will be answered. Further, by looking at common definitions and characteristics of humanitarian crises and their applicability to the situation of femi(ni)cide, sub-question five will be touched upon. Furthermore, by laying out what can be understood as advocacy and policy work in this research, sub-questions six and seven are dealt with. Finally, approaches to determining the effectiveness of advocacy and policy work will be introduced and discussed, thus addressing sub-question eight.

The literature explored in this chapter consists of academic literature, policy documentation by the UN and reports and studies from Central American NGOs and human rights institutions. These publications, even though often not commercially published, are highly valuable sources of information taken into account in this thesis as they provide in-depth and authentic information by experts who live and work at the very center of Central American femi(ni)cide.

2.1 The Concepts of Femicide and Feminicide

Femicide and feminicide are key concepts applied in this research and therefore require thorough clarification. Existing definitions of the terms from academic literature are explored and discussed critically. Additionally, femi(ni)cide is placed in its Central American context by presenting typical types of the misogynous phenomenon as well as by reviewing (structural) causes and characteristics of femi(ni)cide in the region. Finally, a framework for assessing femi(ni)cide in a humanitarian context is developed.

2.1.1 Defining Femicide and Feminicide

There is no universal definition of femicide. The term has been redefined over the years by various scholars and activists; several definitions appear in the literature. What is known with certainty is that the term femicide was coined by the feminist movement in the 1970s as an alternative to the gender-neutral term “homicide” (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 116) and has up to now developed into an overall concept of feminist theory. Diana Russell, an acclaimed author and researcher in the field of violence against women, publicly introduced the term at the first International Tribunal on Crimes against Women, in Brussels, Belgium, in 1976. However, she did not explicitly define the term at that time. Instead she made the following statement: "From the burning of witches in the past, to the more recent widespread
custom of female infanticide in many societies, to the killing of women for so-called honor, we realize that femicide has been going on a long time” (Russell). About two decades later in 1992 Russell and Radford co-edited their famous book *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing* which finally defines femicide as “the misogynous killing of women by men” (Radford and Russell 3). To this day many researchers apply the said definition which includes a range of specific types of femicide such as intimate femicides committed by a partner or a spouse, rape murders or dowry-related killings. Over the years Russell continued making changes to her definition. Her final and very simple yet broadened definition dates back to 2001 and her second book on femicide, *Femicide in Global Perspective* by Diane Russell and Roberta Harnes. It reads: "The killing of females by males because they are female" in order to include “all forms of sexist killings” with a view to capturing the socially constructed and perceived right to do so. She uses the term “female” instead of “women” to underline that the definition is not limited to adults (Russell).

In Latin America the term “femicide” (femicidio) was introduced in the 1990s in order to draw attention to the strong increase of violent murders of women and girls, especially in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico (UNGA Human Rights Council 4). Around 2004 the term “femicide” (based on the work of Russell and Radford in 1992) was adapted by the Mexican anthropologist and leading feminist Marcela Lagarde. While the actual Spanish translation of femicide is femicidio, Lagarde translated Russell’s term into feminicidio. She justified this adaption by stating that femicidio in Spanish is simply an alternative to the gender-neutral term homicidio and thus solely denotes the killing of women. Latin American authors, however, defined femicidio as a hateful crime against women. According to Lagarde this definition did not sufficiently represent the crime’s reality, particularly not in Mexico. By introducing the term feminicidio (feminicide) she added another factor to the definition: the non-existence or debility of the state to prevent and sanction the misogynous killings of females by males (Espósito). Lagarde argues: “(...) I preferred the term feminicidio and by this nominating the totality of offences against humanity these crimes (feminicidios) entail (...) against the background of an institutional collapse” (Espósito). According to Lagarde feminicidio contains the meaning of a fractured state which favors impunity and she even affirms that “feminicidio is a crime of the state which tolerates the murders of women and neither vigorously investigates the crimes nor holds the killers accountable” and which occurs both in times of war and peace.

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2 More information on different examples and categories of femicide will be given in subchapter 2.1.2.

3 Marcela Lagarde: “Por eso, para diferenciar los términos, preferí la voz feminicidio y así denominar el conjunto de delitos de lesa humanidad que contienen los crímenes, los secuestros y las desapariciones de niñas y mujeres en un cuadro de colapso institucional.”
She states further that “feminicide is when the state offers women no guarantees and creates no conditions of security for their lives in the community, at home, not even in work or recreational areas. Even worse, authorities do not even do their job efficiently” (qtd. in Widyono 11).

Scholars, researchers, activists, and also politicians of many Latin and Central American countries have adopted the term feminicidio given that a lack of state accountability very often plays a role in the killings of females in the region. However, there is also a great group of people, institutions, and NGOs who chose to use the term feminicio. The application of the different terms has triggered a long and heated debate in Latin America – especially forcing a wedge between feminists. Russell, who initially agreed to Lagarde’s adaption of the term coined by her, regrets that the intense dispute among feminists in Latin America who choose to use feminicio and those who opt for feminicidio hampered the solidarity that should exist between feminists fighting the same kind of misogynous killings. Russell also criticizes the term feminicio in contrast to feminicide, because cases which end with the prosecution and/or sanction of perpetrators are no longer considered feminicides (Russell). On the other hand, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences just recently (May 2012) acknowledged that “adopting feminicide in English could prove useful when State accountability was at stake” (UN Gen. Assembly Human Rights Council 4).

Progressively the definition of feminicide has become watered down. Much literature nowadays makes use of the term feminicide meaning any killings of women – regardless of a gender-motivation (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 116). This development is mostly linked to Jacquelyn Campbell and Carol Runyan who have redefined feminicide as “all killings of women, regardless of motive or perpetrator status” (348). They argued that this redefinition avoids “having to make interferences about the motives” of the killers. Another directly related reason for broadening the concept might be the wish to gather quantitative data on feminicides. Since it is often very difficult to determine whether the killing of a female was motivated by her gender or not and since considerable political will would be required in collecting data, reliable statistics on misogynous killings of females in contrast to any other killings of females is scarce. Unfortunately, such dilution of the concept goes along with a depoliticization and fails to pay respect to the longstanding efforts of the feminist movement to introduce a category which explicitly emphasizes the misogynous component of female killings by males.

Generally, the author considers the usage of the term feminicide instead of homicide highly valuable when referring to gender-motivated killings of females. The invented term feminicide in its

4 Marcela Lagarde: “Por ello afirmo que el feminicidio es un crimen de Estado. Es preciso aclarar que hay feminicidio en condiciones de guerra y de paz.”
original sense allows for no confusion with any other homicides/killings of women and emphasizes the gender-motivated element of the murder. Moreover, due to this differentiation and the word’s new sound, the term has the potential to generate higher public and policy awareness and attention concerning the phenomenon femicide.

Concluding, this research will address the term femicide in its strict sense defined by Russell in 2001 (as already done in the introductory chapter to this research) in order not to lose its original political connotation. Such application of the term makes a distinction between misogynous killings of females and any other killings of females that do not relate to the sex of the victim. Additionally, this study will differentiate between femicide and feminicide. The term feminicide will be used whenever states or states’ institutions fail to provide access to justice, tolerate or even commit the killings of females. Despite Russell’s criticism of this term, the author considers the implied political and institutional dimension it contains to be of high importance – particularly in the Central American context where impunity and a lack of state responsibility regarding femi(ni)cides is a sad reality. Where a distinction between femicide and feminicide is not relevant or cannot be made, femi(ni)cide will be inserted.

2.1.2 Examples and Categories of Femini(cide)

Femicide is not a problem occurring exclusively in Central America. On the contrary: It is of global extent. About 66,000 women and girls are violently killed every year, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of all victims of intentional homicides (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 114). As femicide in all countries represents the peak of VAW, VAW and femicide are intrinsically linked. In the 1993 UN Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women, article 1, VAW is defined as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (qtd. in UN Gen. Assembly Sec. Gen. 15-16).

In 2007 the UN Resolution 61/143 Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence against Women highlighted the global dimension of VAW by recognizing “that violence against women and girls persists in every country in the world as a pervasive violation of the enjoyment of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality, development and peace”.

Parallel to this, gender-motivated killings of women are committed all over the world, but take on different manifestations in different places. Consequently, some authors argue that femicide

\[5\] Nota bene: This data is based on a definition of femicides as “homicides with female victims” neither taking into account a possible misogynous dimension of the murder nor the sex of the perpetrator!
encompasses different forms of lethal VAW. As this thesis applies the term femicide as (re)defined by Russell in 2001, it also acknowledges the different examples of femicide identified by her:

Examples of femicide include the stoning to death of females (which I consider a form of torture-femicide); murders of females for so-called "honor;" rape murders; murders of women and girls by their husbands, boyfriends, and dates, for having an affair, or being rebellious, or any number of other excuses; wife-killing by immolation because of too little dowry; deaths as a result of genital mutilations; female sex slaves, trafficked females, and prostituted females, murdered by their "owners", traffickers, "johns" and pimps, and females killed by misogynist strangers, acquaintances, and serial killers.

Femicides can be committed by one or more male murderers and can refer to the killing of one or more females. According to Russell’s definition, femicide also includes “covert” forms such as when patriarchal governments or religions ban the use of contraception. As a consequence, many pregnant women die due to inadequate attempts at abortion. In Nicaragua (one of the cases dealt with in this thesis), where abortion – including therapeutic abortion – is prohibited by law under the Ortega-government, this type of covert femicide is of particular significance. (In contrast to some other scholars, Russell does not consider the practice of aborting female fetuses, particularly carried out in China and India, as a form of femicide. According to her this type of abortion is correctly denominated as female feticide.)

Most Central American activists refer to a categorization of femicides developed by Carcedo, Spanish feminist, and Sargot, Costa Rican anthropologist, including three categories:

- **intimate femicide** – those killings perpetrated by men with whom the victim used to have or had an intimate, family or household or similar relationship;
- **non-intimate femicide** – those killings perpetrated by men with whom the victim had no intimate, family, household, or other similar relationship. Non-intimate femicide frequently involves the victim’s sexual assault;
- **femicide by association** – Reference is made to women who were killed “in the line of fire” of a man trying to kill a woman. Such cases include female relatives, girls, or other women who intervened to prevent an act of femicide or who happened to be in the way of the femicide action (CCPDH 39-40).

The majority of femi(ni)cides committed in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala belong to the category of intimate femicide (ORMUSA Observatorio; RMCV).

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6 It was found that there is no consistent use of the terms type and typology (of femi(ni)cide) in subject-related literature. While some authors speak of types, others refer to forms or categories.

7 Carcedo’s and Sargot’s categorization is only available in Spanish. The study of the Central American Council of Human Rights Ombudsman is quoted as it provides an English translation.
2.1.3 Explaining Femi(ni)cide in Central America

Identifying causes of femi(ni)cide is a complex and challenging task which cannot be carried out extensively within the constraints of this thesis. Hence, this sub-chapter gives a brief overview of the structural context in which femi(ni)cide occurs as well as of the main factors which aggravate the phenomenon.

Two key words in explanations of femi(ni)cide by Central American feminists are misogyny and patriarchy. In order to fully grasp the repercussion of misogyny in the Central American society, one has to be familiar with the concept of patriarchy – another societal reality in the region. According to Lerner, a pioneer in women’s studies, patriarchy means “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general (Lerner 238). Essentially, patriarchy is based on the view that men and women are different by nature and that these differences cannot be overcome. Women are considered inferior to men (regarding their intellect, their strength and their rationality), which goes along with a depreciation of the female sex. In patriarchy VAW is legitimized and regarded as a means of maintaining power and control over women. Thus, VAW helps to guarantee the status quo of male authority (Urquilla and Vaquerano).

The second key word, misogyny, means hatred of women and has its roots in a patriarchic system. The Salvadoran law for a life free from violence for women defines misogyny as “all conducts of implicit or explicit hatred of everything feminine, such as rejection, aversion and depreciation of women”. Just as patriarchy, misogyny is founded on the assumption that women are inferior to men – in physical, moral and intellectual aspects. Since all these inferiorities are created by nature, acting against them would mean acting against nature. Consequently, women are not able to occupy any public role – be that in the governmental, economic or political sphere. Their only natural role is to take care of other people in private; but always under the supervision of a man. Such misogynous attitudes are manifested in different practices. Sexism, VAW and femi(ni)cide in their various forms are the most extreme ones(Urquilla and Vaquerano).

Within the realm of patriarchy and misogyny social and cultural norms and practices as well as state actions and policies exist, which manifest and entrench the subordinate status of women. The two Central American realities of misogyny and patriarchy can be described as the foundation of VAW and its maximal expression which is femi(ni)cide.

The high rates of violence in all three investigated case countries are often referred to as the legacy of long standing, bloody civil wars which were waged in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.
stretching from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. An ongoing consequence of these wars is the existence of firearms and weapons in the hands of people or groups formerly related to the armed conflicts. The 2008 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* found that firearms play an important role in VAW – especially in intimate relationships. Moreover, in countries with high femicide rates (such as El Salvador and Guatemala) the use of firearms is frequent (Geneva Decl. on Armed Violence and Development 131-132). Nevertheless, the possession of weapons is not seen as a cause of femicide but a factor “constituting the backdrop in which it develops and aggravates” (Central Amer. Council of Human Rights Ombudsman 13).

Other aggravating factors in the three case countries are severe poverty and unemployment rates as their implications pose a threat to the traditional role of men as providers for the family. On the other hand, a lack of economic opportunities reduces women’s independence and makes them more vulnerable to male violence. However, due to the generally dire economic situation of families in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, more and more women take on jobs to sustain their family, and thus acquire a new role in the family structure, which once again leads to frustration and anger on part of men. When these emotions escalate, they often result in VAW and ultimately femi(ni)cidie (UNGA Secretary General 31-32).

If the reaction to such cases is impunity – which is yet another aggravating factor – the subordination and powerlessness of women is intensified. Moreover, by failing to rigorously address gender-motivated crimes, the state plays a vital role in normalizing VAW. Impunity sends a message to society saying that VAW and femi(ni)cidie are acceptable, or even worse, inevitable (UNGA Secretary General 28-30). In fact, a gender-violence prevention campaign organized by NGOs in El Salvador in 2005 found that 56.4 percent of the Salvadoran population considered the practice of men attacking women to be normal (CCPDH 42). The Central American feminist movement is the first collective to ever question the systematic gender domination of men over women – in the private as well as in the public sphere.) Lack of political will in prosecuting male perpetrators linked to a lack of state response to crimes against women has been identified in all three case countries.

Lagarde, responsible for introducing the term *feminicidio*, provides a concise explanation of femi(ni)cidie which takes into account most of the above outlined concepts and factors:

The explanation of femicide can be found in the gender domination: characterized both by masculine supremacy as well as by oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and above all, social exclusion of girls and women (...). All this legitimized by a depreciating, hostile, and degrading social perception of women. Arbitrariness and social inequality become stronger with social and judicial impunity regarding offenses against women. That is to say, violence is present in different forms throughout women’s life before homicide. After homicide occurs,
it continues as institutional violence through the impunity that characterizes particular cases (…) (qtd. in CCPDH 36-37).

Summarizing, femi(ni)cide is the maximal expression of VAW and misogyny and the result of an interplay of structural factors on social, economic and political levels, deeply rooted in the patriarchic societies of not only Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, but of entire Central America.

2.1.4 VAW and Fem(i)nicide: Humanitarian Concerns and Humanitarian Needs

Given the excessive dimensions of VAW in Central America (with femicide being the maximal expression of VAW), VAW is often referred to as an epidemic by the media and the women’s movement (e.g. Alvarado). An epidemic in a humanitarian context is:

The occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness, specific health-related behaviour, or other health-related events clearly in excess of normal expectancy. The community or region and the period in which the cases occur are specified precisely. The number of cases indicating the presence of an epidemic varies according to the agent, size, and type of population exposed, previous experience or lack of exposure to the disease, and time and place of occurrence (Relief Web).

Epidemics are of significance to humanitarian research as they may involve or lead to humanitarian crises:

A crisis is an event or series of events representing a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community, usually over a wide area. Armed conflicts, epidemics, famine, natural disasters, environmental emergencies and other major harmful events may involve or lead to a humanitarian crisis (WHO 7).

According to the United Nations system-wide work program populations of humanitarian concern (PHC) include “rape survivors and females at high risk of sexual violence in crisis settings” (FAO 7).

2.1.4.1 Impacts of VAW on Safety/Security and Livelihoods

A central element of humanitarian and violence research is the impact of violence on (civilian) livelihoods. Protecting and rebuilding livelihoods is one of the responsibilities of humanitarian assistance. One widely-used definition of livelihoods from humanitarian literature is the following:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with, and recover from, stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation (qtd. in Jaspars, O’Callaghan and Stites 2).
Impacts on livelihoods are mainly located on two levels: household level and broader livelihood and political economic context (Jaspars, O’Callaghan and Stites 9). Apart from this important general understanding, there still is much room for knowledge regarding the impact of GBV/VAW on livelihoods. A progressive Guidance Note by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) from 2010 focuses on the impacts of GBV on rural livelihoods, but allows for drawing conclusions regarding the general impact of GBV or VAW on livelihoods – regardless of the environmental setting. VAW can have negative impacts on various elements of (female) livelihoods. These are:

- skills, knowledge, health and ability to work;
- networks and relationships of trust;
- land, property and resources;
- basic infrastructure and producer goods and
- available and incoming incomes (FAO 11-19).

The most remarkable consequences of VAW affect women’s health (physical and psychosocial), self-esteem and the capacity to provide for themselves. These effects are especially severe as all listed factors are vital in developing a strong resilience.

In the context of (systematic/reoccurring) violence protection needs are likely to arise. The following violations and deprivations occurring in the realm of femi(ni)cide give rise to protection needs:

- Discrimination as a result of age, socio-economic group, ethnicity, religion, education, gender and sexual orientation.
- Deliberate killing, wounding, displacement, destitution and disappearance.
- Sexual violence, rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, early marriage, bride price.
- Torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.
- Deliberate discrimination and deprivation in health, education, property rights, access to water and economic opportunities.
- Violence and exploitation within the affected community.
- Forced or accidental family separation.
- Restrictions on political participation, freedom of association and religious freedom (adapted from Jaspars, O’Callaghan and Stites 8).

Concluding, protection and livelihood needs tend to be linked in humanitarian contexts of VAW.
2.1.5 Femi(ni)cide as a Humanitarian Crisis

In order to assess whether the phenomenon of femi(ni)cide, in Central America might constitute a crisis from a humanitarian aid perspective, a conceptual framework for this assessment has to be developed. The academic knowledge body in the field of humanitarian aid does not comprise a single categorization of a humanitarian crisis but contains several definitions, concepts and models regarding natural or man-made disasters and emergencies leading to a crisis. Placing the assessment of femi(ni)cide from a humanitarian angle in this academic discourse and applying humanitarian terminology is a rather delicate process. One of the most obvious reasons for this is that femi(ni)cide, a social phenomenon, does not represent a “classical” humanitarian crisis clearly resulting for instances from an earthquake, a famine or a war. Therefore a broader approach, closely looking at the socio-political causes and dimensions of the potential crisis of femi(ni)cide, has to be found.

A concept which has played a vital role in explaining disasters and emergencies for more than three decades now, regards vulnerability. In the context of femi(ni)cide the aspect of vulnerability is highly relevant as it represents an interaction of economic, political, social and institutional factors. In order to fully understand the term vulnerability it can best be defined in the realm of the so called “disaster terminology”:

A standard definition of a disaster is the following: “What occurs when the impact of a hazard on a section of society (causing death, injury, loss of property or economic losses) overwhelms that society’s ability to cope” (Twigg 13). A hazard is being defined as: “A potential threat to humans and their welfare. Hazards can be natural (such as earthquakes or droughts) or induced by human processes (such as industrial accidents)” (Twigg 12-13). One can deduce from the disaster definition that the impact of a disaster depends on the vulnerability of the section of society in question, once again demonstrating the importance of the concept. Vulnerability is commonly defined as: “The extent to which a person, group or socio-economic structure is likely to be affected by a hazard (related to their capacity to anticipate it, cope with it, resist it and recover from its impact)” (Twigg 13). Lastly, risk, another key term in the disaster terminology, is being defined as: “The likelihood of a specific hazard occurring and its probable consequences for people and property” (Twigg 13). A simple equation making use of this disaster terminology says that hazard multiplied by vulnerability equals risk (hazard x vulnerability = risk). The disaster occurs with the realization of the risk (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 49).

Bearing these key terms in mind, since the 1970s many approaches to analyzing and explaining (possible) disasters (and to organize effective disaster risk reduction (DRR)) consequently center on the investigation of vulnerability of a section of society. Adger summarizes the importance of the vulnerability concept as follows:
The concept of vulnerability has been a powerful analytical tool for describing states of susceptibility to harm, powerlessness, and marginality of both physical and social systems, and for guiding normative analysis of actions to enhance well-being through reduction of risk (268).

By developing the well-known Pressure and Release-Model (PAR-Model) Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon introduced a holistic approach to explaining disasters which focuses especially on the “human factor” in disaster studies (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 11).

**The progression of vulnerability**

The model shows how a disaster occurs “when a significant number of vulnerable people experience a hazard and suffer severe damage and/or disruption of their livelihood system in such a way that recovery is unlikely without external aid”. Recovery is defined as the “psychological and physical recovery of the victims, and the replacement of physical resources and the social relations required to use them” (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 50).

The model displays pre-conditions for a disaster in a hierarchic structure of causal factors. The model shows a progression of vulnerability in three levels: root causes (most underlying causes, most remote influences), dynamic pressures (channel root causes into forms of insecurity) and unsafe conditions (specific forms in which a population is expressed in time and space in conjunction with hazard). The disaster is the intersection of two opposing forces: on the one side the process generating vulnerability and the exposure to hazard on the other side – representing the ‘Pressure’ element. The ‘Release’ element is based on the fact that in order to release the pressure resulting...
from the disaster, all causal factors (= vulnerability) need to be addressed (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 50-52).

Resilience is closely linked to the concept of vulnerability and generally speaking determines the capacity of an individual, a group, a community or a society to cope with and endure disruptions of everyday life. One definition of community resilience is “the capacity to absorb (recurrent) disturbances and to reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks” (qtd. in Berkes 284). The resilience of a person is defined as “the ability to cope well with or at least recover well from stressful life circumstances” (qtd. in Tweed and Conway 25). Resilience is commonly classified into two categories: cognitive (self-esteem, self-efficacy) and social (social support, functional emotional relationships) (qtd. in Williams and Mickelson 284). A study involving 100 impoverished women from urban and rural environments who had experienced violence found that resilience is not a static state but one that is influenced by the social world and that resilience can be impaired as well as enhanced. Poverty was one of the factors closely connected to impaired resilience and high levels of violence (Williams and Mickelson). Violence in turn was associated with impaired self-esteem, the strongest cause of a lowered resilience of women (Williams and Mickelson 286-290). As resilience is a dynamic process which can positively impact on vulnerability, it is recommendable to bear in mind the concept of resilience in a holistic analysis of vulnerabilities in the case study chapters of this thesis.

The enormous benefit of applying the PAR-Model to analyze femi(ni)cide in Central America lies in the fact that the PAR-Model emphasizes the significance of taking into account the social, political and economic environment causing disasters (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 4-5). Another advantage is that vulnerability is defined as a factor determined by social systems and power (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 7). Social, political and economic factors are vital in the assessment of femi(ni)cide. An assessment of the vulnerability context was also found to be useful in order to fully understand the livelihood of individuals or groups (FAO 7). Furthermore, as the model also takes into account a release-element, it might facilitate drawing conclusions which can be turned into recommendations for future projects aiming at preventing or fighting femi(ni)cide. (Providing recommendations is one of the objectives of this thesis.) Summarizing, the model looks at disasters not as sudden events but as longer-term problems with deeply rooted causes.

On the other hand however, Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon have restricted their PAR-Model to natural hazards and do not consider human-created hazards (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 38). Consequently, to more adequately match the realities and underlying causes of femi(ni)cide in this thesis, the model will be modified to include man-made hazards. (This modification does not have any consequences on the application of the model.) According to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) man-made hazards are: “events that are caused by
humans and occur in or close to human settlements. This can include environmental degradation, pollution and accidents. Technological or man-made hazards include complex emergencies/conflicts, famine, displaced populations, industrial accidents and transport accidents” (IFRC). Femi(ni)cide is best described as a man-made socio-political hazard.

Summarizing, in order to holistically analyze whether femi(ni)cide in Central America constitutes a humanitarian crisis, a slightly modified PAR-Model by Wisner et al will be referred to. The situation of femi(ni)cide in the three case countries Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala will be analyzed by making reference to the main characteristics (such as the three elements of vulnerability) presented in the PAR-Model. The model itself, however, will not be explicitly applied. This conceptual framework for answering the first main research question will be applied in the case study chapters of this thesis.

2.2 Defining Advocacy and Policy Work

In order to carry out the multiple case studies and to build a basis on which to answer the second of the main research questions it is necessary to establish what is considered advocacy and policy work in this research. Therefore this sub-chapter draws upon definitions from existing scholarship plus corresponding information taken from interviews with key informants from Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador as members of local women’s organizations were specifically asked which of their activities belong in the category of advocacy and policy work.

Advocacy has become a growing task of NGOs from both the humanitarian and development sector (Nyamugasira 297). One of the main reasons for this ongoing trend is the increasingly democratic order of states facilitating the involvement of civil society actors in the political and legal sphere. Another is that existing or missing policies are often the root causes for social problems.

There are as many different ways of conceptualizing advocacy as there are motives of advocacy. The following, very general definition of advocacy, however, shows that the common essence of all advocacy measures is to champion an idea or cause in front of others: "Advocacy is pleading for, defending or recommending an idea before other people" (Sharma 4). This research will look at advocacy which is “directed at changing the policies, positions or programs of any type of institution” (Sharma 4). The emphasis on policy changes as the goal of advocacy is also made by Prakash and Gugerty (1-2) who state that: “The term advocacy suggests systematic efforts (as opposed to sporadic outbursts) by actors that seek to further specific policy goals. Advocacy is integral to politics and not restricted to any particular policy domain.”

In contrast to much advocacy carried out by lobbying firms retained by businesses or governments, advocacy practiced by NGOs follows (or should ideally follow) certain social norms and values. NGO advocacy efforts ought to represent the rights and/or needs of a specific group of
citizens towards leaders, decision-makers or other people of influence. In particular, the primary stakeholder of NGO advocacy is usually a disadvantaged or marginalized group of society. Based on these characteristics Holloway (1) provides the following definition of NGO advocacy: "a systematic, democratic, and organised effort by NGOs to change, influence, or initiate policies, laws, practices, and behaviour so that disadvantaged citizens in particular or all citizens in general will be benefited"

According to the aforementioned sample definitions of advocacy, policy work can be considered immanent to the category of advocacy. However, in order to indicate this research’s special focus which will be placed on NGO activities targeting legislative decision makers and policy makers in order to bring about changes in law and policy (as opposed to other advocacy methods such as mass mobilization campaigns etc.), policy work is mentioned additionally to advocacy work in the second main research question.

In the cases of this research the investigated advocacy and policy methods aim at furthering the rights of women in the context of VAW and femi(ni)cide in Central America. To this end the advocacy and policy efforts of investigated Central American women’s organizations are based on a human rights approach to influence decision-makers. This methodology requires NGOs to diligently document women’s rights abuses, to demonstrate state accountability for those abuses, and to effectively expose those abuses on a national and/or international level (Thomas 83). Thus, collecting evidences of abuses is a key element of such advocacy which is therefore also called evidence-based advocacy. According to Widyono “strong, rigorous evidence” is a precondition for successful advocacy against VAW and femicide (Widyono 12). Thus, for the purpose of evidence-based advocacy, data bases of rights abuses are established (through surveys, qualitative studies, monitoring) and used for policy changing. One of the advantages of this kind of advocacy is that it takes into account the information needed by policy makers and reinforces the importance of the advocated topic by providing reliable data. Another advantage is that presenting research data has the potential to increase the NGO’s credibility in the eyes of the addressed decision-makers (Sharma 20).

The interviewed members or directors of local Central American women’s organizations in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala were asked which advocacy and policy methods they carried out and which actors were involved. Their answers are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy and policy methods</th>
<th>Actors involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processes of formation and training of State functionaries</td>
<td>Women’s organizations, state functionaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting rights abuses</td>
<td>Feminist and women’s organizations, victims, police, juridical officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with and pressuring decision</td>
<td>Women’s and feminist organizations, women’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since there is no universal agreement on methods that constitute advocacy and those that do not, the multiple case study included in this research will take into account the ones identified by the women’s organizations in question and, as already mentioned, concentrate specifically on those methods immediately linked to changes in legislation and policy (highlighted in **bold** letters). By specifically looking at measures that have been carried out in the case study countries instead of looking at broad categories of activities belonging to advocacy and policy work, the practicability of this investigation is enhanced.

The increasing involvement of NGOs in the political and legal sphere – especially via advocacy means – constitutes a controversial topic which found its expression in the academic literature. The key word of this discussion is “legitimacy”. One of the leading scholars in this field is Anton Vedder, a senior professor of Ethics and Law, who discusses the reasons why NGOs “can and cannot be considered to legitimately display power and legitimately affect the lives of many people” (Vedder). However, the controversial legitimacy of NGOs as political actors exclusively refers to their involvement in international politics and global governance and is mostly attributed to transnational NGOs. This research investigates the political and legal efforts of national NGOs trying to improve the situation regarding VAW and femi(ni)cide in their own countries and sometimes extending to the regional level of Central America. In the face of rising GBV and femi(ni)cide rates in these countries as well as inadequate state responses to the crimes and the lack of state accountability, their efforts in shaping the legislative and political environment in order to improve the living conditions and safety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy and Policy Activities of Research Relevance. (Source: own table)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>makers to change policies and laws on local, regional and national level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Processes of sensitization and awareness-raising</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social monitoring of compliance with legislation in force and monitoring of concrete (court) cases</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formulating and promoting laws</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forming alliances/networks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication/media campaigns on femicide (Including media activities, public talks and protests, municipal forums etc.)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mass mobilizations and public protests</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
of women and girls is not considered controversial or an act outside of their competence, but a highly welcome and needed societal commitment.

2.2.1 Benchmarks for Advocacy and Policy Work

Now that the concept of advocacy and policy work in this thesis has been explored, benchmarks or criteria have to be established to make qualitative evaluations possible, in order to assess the contribution of advocacy and policy work of local women’s organizations in the fight against femi(ni)cide in Central America (and thereby answering the second main research question).

In the realm of evaluating activities of humanitarian or developmental NGOs, the evaluation of advocacy and policy work is especially challenging and complex. One of the complicating factors is that many goals of advocacy and policy (such as legislative or social changes) are long-term effects which often require the evaluator to remain committed for several years. However, donors or funders usually demand evaluations within a shorter period of time (one to two years). Additionally, advocacy and policy work takes place in ever changing political and social contexts and deals with changing stakeholders (e.g. due to staff changes in state offices) requiring NGOs to constantly adapt their strategies to alternating environments (Guthrie, Louie and David 7-9).

Some of the approaches developed by Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak in 2007 in an effort to make advocacy and policy work measurable are highly applicable to this investigation as they take into account the aforementioned evaluation challenges. Based on a wide range of outcomes and indicators from numerous evaluation reports, expert interviews and literature about advocacy and policy, Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak have identified six so called “outcome categories” which stand for the significant changes in lives, community conditions, institutions and systems resulting from advocacy and policy work (16). In short these are:

- Shift in social norms;
- Strengthened organizational capacity;
- Strengthened alliances;
- Strengthened base of support;
- Improved policies;
- Changes in impact (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 16-20).

Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak suggest that advocacy and policy work can be viewed against the background of one or more of these categories (20). The advocacy and policy methods which will be investigated in this thesis are listed in chapter 2.3. As they contain methods such as formulating and promoting laws aimed at changing policies and legislation, as well as media campaigns aimed at raising awareness for femi(ni)cide and the situation of women and girls, and the coordination and construction of alliances aimed at strengthening capacities, the outcome
categories one (shift in social norms), three (strengthened alliances), five (improved policies) and six (changes in impact) seem to represent the most appropriate background for this research.

Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak emphasize that the broad outcomes need to be further refined to determine specific outcomes for measurement (20). The specification of outcomes of the investigated advocacy and policy activities will be carried out in the case study chapters of this thesis. Practically this means that the investigated activities falling under one of the four selected outcome categories will be linked to more specific outcomes. To clarify this process an example will be given: The advocacy method of (strategically) cooperating with e.g. other NGOs falls under the outcome category three – strengthened alliances. According to this method a formal meeting on femi(ni)cide of several women’s organizations from different Central American countries was organized. A specific outcome element of this meeting could be an increase in information exchange on the topic of femi(ni)cide between the NGOs.

Additionally, the authors propose five different practical approaches to measuring advocacy and policy work. In order to investigate the benefit of advocacy and policy work in the three investigated Central American countries, the case study chapters will adopt a combination of two of these approaches in order to answer the second main question of this research:

- identification and measurement of core outcome areas related to social change or policy change, plus
- case study documentation of process and impacts.

The first approach is especially beneficial when looking at longer-term policy and advocacy efforts as it is the case with the activities to be investigated in this thesis. A case study approach documents, describes, reflects and analyses the efforts and their effects and is especially suitable in this case as it allows drawing conclusions for future advocacy and policy methods (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 25-26). Developing recommendations regarding future advocacy and policy projects of women’s organizations aiming at fighting femi(ni)cide in Central America is one of the specific objectives of this thesis (see chapter 1.3).

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the key concepts of this thesis, namely femicide, feminicide and advocacy and policy work, have been explored. The explanations provide the theoretical and conceptual background of this thesis. Furthermore, by outlining the PAR-Model and how it will be applied to femi(ni)cide, a conceptual framework for answering the first main research question has been built. Finally, by presenting outcome categories that allow measuring advocacy and policy work of NGOs, a conceptual framework for answering the second main research question has been established. Both frameworks will be applied in the case study chapter four representing the core of this thesis.
3 Methodology

This chapter explains in detail how the research was designed, which methods of data collection and analysis were used and which principles of sampling were applied. In order to answer the main research question as well as the presented sub-questions this research employs an in-depth multi case study-approach of qualitative nature combining the methods of literature review and key informant interviews. Thus, empirical knowledge is generated regarding the individual and societal impacts of femi(ni)cide and the benefit of advocacy and policy work in the context of this crime.

3.1 Research Design

This research aims at answering two different main research questions. The main research model used in this research is the case study and in particular the multiple-case study as it looks at the social phenomenon femi(ni)cide in three different Central American countries. The multiple-case design follows the methodology proposed by Robert K. Yin (2009). According to Yin a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundary between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin 18). Yin explains that case studies are of particular advantages when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin 13). All these criteria apply to this thesis. Yin explains further more that the strength of case studies lies in their ability to include “a full variety of evidence” (11). The sources for the case study chapters of this thesis are academic literature, law/policy documents, policy literature (from many relevant NGOs and from United Nations agencies), human rights reports and a series of 12 in-depth interviews with key informants.

3.2 Case Selection and Sampling Methods

The basis of this research are cases in which the research topic consisting of two elements is explored: firstly, the dimensions of femi(ni)cide as well as the impact of the crime on society, and secondly, advocacy and policy work of local (humanitarian) women’s organization in the context of femi(ni)cide in Central America. The selection of the three cases of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala has been primarily guided by three factors: typicality, relevance and accessibility (Sarantakos 213).

As for typicality and relevance to the research topic: All three cases represent countries afflicted by femi(ni)cide – and countries in which the phenomenon has even experienced a (strong) increase in the 21st century. In addition; Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala have incorporated femi(ni)cide in their national crime codes in recent years representing a growing trend in countries
with high femi(ni)cide rates. All three countries have a rather strong feminist movement at their disposal and women’s organizations played a significant role in the strengthening of national legislations. And lastly, all three countries are post-conflict countries having experienced long standing civil wars in the 20th century and therefore share similar social, cultural, economic and political characteristics to this day. All these factors allow for methodological comparison of the cases and increase representativeness. Nevertheless, according to Stake (8), “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization.”

The high accessibility to these cases was established through the researcher’s involvement with a German NGO called Christliche Initiative Romero (CIR). This initiative from the sector of development and humanitarian aid has close relationships to five Central American partner countries including Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. For more than 30 years the CIR has actively supported people and organizations in Central America trying to build a fair and sustainable society. From the end of 2010 to the beginning of 2012 CIR also led a Europe Aid-funded project involving four women’s organizations from four different Central American countries (namely Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) aiming at developing strategies and actions against feminicide and violence against women in Central America. The project is called: “Developing strategies and actions against feminicide and gender-based violence against women in Central America” (Spanish: Construyendo estrategias y acciones frente al feminicidio y la violencia de género contra las mujeres en Centroamérica). Through this link the researcher had access to a plethora of expert knowledge and literature consisting of regional studies, evaluation reports and background information concerning femi(ni)cide in Central and Latin America. On top of that, through the link to the CIR the researcher also had the great possibility to establish contacts to important women’s organizations in research relevant countries.

Due to time and volume constraints to this research, the advocacy and policy efforts to be investigated had to be limited. The main practical factor determining this limitation was once again accessibility. Thus, this research will mainly, but not exclusively, focus on advocacy and policy methods that were carried out in the context of the above mentioned Europe Aid-funded project.

The selection of interviewees for this qualitative research followed a combination of two principles of sampling belonging to the non-probability category: purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Sarantakos 163). Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental sampling as the choice of respondents is based on the judgment of the investigator (Sarantakos 164). First purposeful contacts to women’s organizations in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, who took part in the Europe-Aid project, were established based on CIR-contacts. In a second step the researcher continued finding experts for key informant interviews by means of snowball sampling – via personal consultation during a research trip to Nicaragua, as well as via digital communication making use of phone and
emails. The researcher is particularly interested in advocacy and policy work carried out by women’s organizations and consequently decided to interview key informants who could give a close insight into this topic due to their expertise. Chiefly these people were coordinators, directors or activists of national women’s NGOs engaged in the fight against femi(ni)cide on both a national and regional level. Three of the interviewees are members of women’s organization that took part in the aforementioned Europe Aid-funded project. Additionally, the coordinating lecturer of gender-studies and feminism at the Women’s Institute of the San Carlos University in Guatemala (Instituto Universitario de la Mujer, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, IUMUSAC) as well as the secretary of the Presidential Secretariat of Women (Secretaria Presidencial de la Mujer, SEPREM) in Guatemala, a governmental ministry for women’s affairs and rights, were interviewed. All of the respondents were able to provide an insider’s view on the examined dynamics providing a highly valuable source of information for this research.

The term femi(ni)cide has its roots in the feminist movement. Given the gender-dimension of the addressed issue and the fact that the strong feminist movement in Central America is to a large part composed of (humanitarian) women’s organizations, the interviewees were exclusively female. A list of the interviewees can be found in the appendix of this research.

3.3 Research Process

After identifying the main topic of this research, the cases were selected based on extensive literature research and consultation with CIR colleagues and experts in Central America. In October 2012 the researcher flew to Nicaragua to conduct individual and focus group interviews in the field with members of women’s organizations and additionally to participate in two public talks on the implementation of a new law to fight violence against women. The meetings with interviewees were scheduled prior to arrival and led the researcher to travel half the country. Key informants were mainly interviewed in the official setting of their offices and workplaces but sometimes also in public places within local communities where the NGOs worked. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed after returning from this visit.

Due to limited financial and temporal resources the researcher was able to visit Nicaragua only. Upon return from the research stay, interview questions were sent to previously selected experts in the remaining two cases of Guatemala and El Salvador which were usually answered within the next calendar month.
3.4 Methods of Data Collection

The methods used in this research are literature review and semi-structured interviews. By combining two methods a wider range of qualitative data was collected and compared.

For the literature review the library of the Rijksuniversiteit of Groningen and the library of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster as well as their various medium- and discipline-based catalogues were used. Additionally, the collection of material and publications found at the NGO CIR relevant to the research topic was consulted. Given the occurrence of femi(ni)cide in Latinamerica a considerable amount of relevant literature is only available in Spanish. Citations from Spanish works are translated into English in order to include them in this thesis. While the literature provided sufficient information on the theoretical concept of femi(ni)cide, the existing knowledge on advocacy and policy work in the context of femi(ni)cide and the actual implications of femi(ni)cide for the Central American society was scarce. Hence, the interview questions aim at bridging this lack of (academic and theoretical) information.

The interviews were of a semi-structured nature and mostly conducted individually, with only one respondent at a time, and four times with an entire focus group (see appendix for list of interviews). The advantages of the qualitative, semi-structured interviews lie in the “primacy of the respondent” and the “absence of standardization” (Sarantakos 270). Respondents are prioritized and given the freedom to speak their mind without external limitations (Sarantakos 270-271). Interviews with key informants which were conducted personally by the researcher in Nicaragua were audio recorded and have been partially transcribed and translated into English. The interviews with key informants from Guatemala and El Salvador have been conducted electronically via e-mail and also transcribed and translated in a partial manner. In some cases several e-mails with questions and answers were exchanged adding to the semi-structured nature.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research process and methodology applied in this research. In the next chapter an in depth- qualitative case study will be carried out generating empirical research. The three-part case study chapter will present the findings of the data collection.
4 Case Study Research

This case study chapter consisting of three case studies represents the core of this thesis. By using information mostly from recent human rights reports as well as from key-informant interviews the case studies try to answer the sub-questions of this research and thus provide the basis on which to answer the two main research questions in the subsequent conclusion-chapter.

All three case study chapters are divided into two sub-chapters plus respective conclusions in accordance with the two main research questions. The first sub-chapter firstly gives an overview of the dimensions of femi(ni)cide in the respective case country – primarily based on the most recent national statistics and news articles. Secondly, the situation of femi(ni)cide in all three case studies is analyzed based on the main components of vulnerability (root causes, dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions) included in the PAR-Model (framework presented in chapter 2.1.4)– drawing on human rights reports, CIR project documents and policy literature as well as on in-depth interviews. Hence, the first sub-chapter of all case studies target sub-questions number two, four and five.

The second subchapter focuses on advocacy and policy work and analyzes results of recent and current NGO activities – once again based on NGO surveys and studies as well as on CIR documents, academic and policy literature, and finally in-depth interviews. In a further step the advocacy outcome categories presented as part of the framework laid out in chapter 2.2.1, namely shift in social norms, strengthened alliances, improved policies and changes in impact, are reviewed based on the prior analysis of advocacy and policy work. Consequently, sub-questions number eight and nine are addressed.

Clarifying remark: Finding reliable Central American statistics on femi(ni)cide is a challenging task. For decades official state bodies had not registered gender-based killings of women. In order to bridge this gap and to establish a data foundation for their advocacy work, women’s organizations have started to collect data and document cases – often based on information given in news articles and on information gathered in communities NGOs work in. Recently the police have started to keep their own records but their data tends to differ significantly from that collected by women’s networks. But not only does official state data not equal data published by women’s organizations or networks, different women’s organizations also publish different data. One reason for these discrepancies lies in the nature of the crime femi(ni)cide: In order to determine whether a killing of a female constitutes a homicide or a femi(ni)cide, a thorough investigation has to be carried out. In countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala where impunity and misogyny prevail, (diligent) investigations are rare. Additionally, owing to different agendas women’s rights activists tend to interpret crimes against women differently than the police or judicial or forensic experts. As
recordkeeping systems in all three case countries are still weak and imprecision is not uncommon, statistics can only indicate trends and not be taken as absolutely exact accounts of reality. These limitations have to be kept in mind when working with femicide data in the case studies.

4.1 Case Study of Nicaragua

Given that the researcher flew to Nicaragua in order to conduct key-informants interviews (as outlined in chapter three), the seven individual and focus-group interviews personally conducted in Nicaragua go more into depth than the five e-mail interviews with Salvadoran and Guatemalan experts (see annex 1 for more information on the interviewees). Thus, the case study of Nicaragua represents the most extensive of all three case studies.

4.1.1 Femicide in Nicaragua

For the purpose of assessing femicide in Nicaragua, one needs to know its dimensions. Thus, the first part of this chapter provides statistical data on the phenomenon.

4.1.1.1 Facts and Figures

\[\text{Fig. 3: Number of Femicides in Nicaragua (2009-2012). (Source: Figures for 2009-2011 adapted from RMCV Informe Anual 2011 and Informe Nonestral 2012, figure for 2012 adapted from Católicas por el Derecho de Decidir)}\]

Femicide is not a new phenomenon in Nicaragua but has only recently attracted more general attention. Thus, annual figures on femicide unfortunately only cover the past four years. The graphic shows that the number of femicides in Nicaragua has not varied significantly between 2009 and 2012.

According to the Nicaraguan Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV; English: Network of Women against Violence), which established its own observatory of VAW, 55 women were killed in...

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9 Since some Nicaraguan NGOs speak of feminicides and others of femicides, this case study uses the term feminicide only when the element of impunity is involved.
Nicaragua in the first nine months of 2012. 39 of these killings belong to the category of intimate-femicide, 16 to the category of non-intimate femicide. In their respective districts 13 of the 55 women killed had reported suffering from violence, but according to the RMCV the police did not introduce precautionary measures to protect the lives of the victims. 15 of the 55 women had never reported their aggressors. 13 women were raped before being killed. Two girls were abducted and tortured before being killed. Their bodies were found partly-buried on deserted properties – offenses which show immense hatred and depreciation of the children’s lives.

The RMCV sees impunity in 32 cases. According to their report, “the poor state response to the crime allowed 28 perpetrators to flee the justice system”: 10 of these perpetrators are still unknown to the police and 18 fled the country. Another four committed suicide. Finally, only 22 perpetrators are in prison awaiting legal proceedings (RMCV, Informe Nonestral 2012).

In the RMCV’s effort to make femicide more transparent and to make visible the magnitude of the problem to both the media and society, additional statistics on femicide are provided. These reveal that most femicides in 2012 targeted young women aged 21 to 30 years, followed by girls of 11 up to 20 years. The three most common weapons used in femicides were cold weapons, firearms and physical force: 20 females were stabbed to death, 19 were shot and 13 were strangulated. The private household was the least safe place for females in 2012 with 29 females being killed at home. Households are closely followed by public spaces with 21 females being killed in the streets. Only two were killed in bars or similar locations, three were killed in their workplace. 15 perpetrators did not know their victims; the remaining 40 had a relation to the victim. Most commonly women were killed by their ex-partner, their current partner or their husbands.

Another Nicaraguan NGO called Católicas de Nicaragua counted 79 females killed in all 12 months of 2012. The number is based on information in press articles. 71 women and three girls were killed in Nicaragua; 3 Nicaraguan women and two Nicaraguan girls were killed abroad (Católicas por el Derecho de Decidir).

The statistics published by the National Police of Nicaragua contradict the figures of the RMCV and the Católicas de Nicaragua. According to the police “only” 34 femicides were committed between January 2012 and October 20, 2012 (Sin Embargo). Femicide numbers for October, November and December 2012 were not available before the deadline for submission of this thesis.

In 2011 (January - December) the RMCV registered 76 killings of women: 53 intimate femicides, 19 non-intimate femicides and four femicides by association. 24 of the 76 perpetrators fled the justice system, 27 were prosecuted, seven did not receive any response, four committed suicide and one perpetrator was killed by the victim’s husband in an act of revenge. Only six perpetrators were sentenced to imprisonment. The statistic is silent on the remaining seven cases.
Just like in 2012 most women killed aged from 21 to 30 years. The killings showed excessive rage and brutality: Most victims were burned to death, raped and dismembered, followed by death through gun shots and death through physical force and strangulation. Thus, cold weapons dominated fire arms and physical force. Almost 40 females were killed in households, a few less in streets and less than five in bars or similar locations. Most perpetrators were husbands of the victim, closely followed by perpetrators who did not have any relation to their victim (RMCV, Informe Anual 2011).

Católicas de Nicaragua counted 75 females killed in 2011 (one killing less than compared to RMCV data). According to press articles, 58 women and four girls were killed in Nicaragua; 12 Nicaraguan women and one Nicaraguan girl were killed abroad. Looking only at the statistics from Católicas de Nicaragua the total number of femicides has slightly increased (b 5 killings) from 2011 to 2012. The number of women killed in Nicaragua has risen by 13, and the number of girls killed has decreased by one. The number of Nicaraguan women killed abroad has decreased by nine (Católicas por el Derecho de Decidir).

Once again the data from police registers differs significantly: The National Police registered 33 killings of women from January to December 2011 – instead of 76 registered by the RMCV.

These sizeable discrepancies in data complicate an objective assessment of the dimensions of femi(ni)icide in Nicaragua and are proof of a difference in sources of information as well as differences in will and diligence. Oddly enough, the RMCV data from 2012 was nurtured by official statistics from the Comisaría de la Mujer y la Niñez – a state institution forming part of the national police!

4.1.1.2 Components of Vulnerability

Notwithstanding the notable variations between police and RMCV data, the data does allow some conclusions with reference to the components of vulnerability included in the PAR-Model. The following part of this chapter is dedicated at looking at the main components of vulnerability concerning the hazard femi(ni)icide in Nicaragua. Thus the vulnerability elements root causes, dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions are explored (in accordance with the PAR-Model structure). Numerous elements constituting vulnerability are highly interlinked and might fall under more than one component category.

4.1.1.2.1 Root Causes

In chapter 2.1.3 it was established that patriarchy and misogyny are the root causes of femi(ni)icide in Central American countries. As such they also represent the root causes of vulnerability – according to the PAR-Model which sees root causes of vulnerability as wide-spread and general societal processes which are profoundly bound up with culture and ideologies (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 52-53). The inequality between men and women and the comparatively little
access of women to power and resources (as consequences of misogynous and patriarchic ideologies) belong as well to the root causes category. As a result of misogynous and patriarchic ideologies women represent a lower priority for the (patriarchic) state: “In terms of priorities women have always come last. The topic of violence has never been a priority to the authorities” (RMCV, Informe Anual 2011). Not only does VAW not seem to be of high concern to the government, interviewees unanimously agree that VAW is a taboo topic hardly spoken about in society.

When will come the day when the government promotes awareness of violence and cruelty against women? These things are neither in the mental budget nor in the financial budget of mayoralities. The mayors know that half of the population is female and that it is the women who suffer from the impact of violence (interview Altamirano).

An example which clearly shows how deeply rooted patriarchy and VAW are throughout all classes of society refers to the substantiated yet dismissed charges of incest and sexual abuse of a child against current Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega. In 1998 his stepdaughter pressed charges due to sexual molestation abuse and rape by her stepfather, starting when she was only eleven. Despite credible witnesses the case was dismissed as it was not reviewed before the statute of limitations on rape had expired (UN Watch).

As outlined in chapter 1.2.3 Nicaragua has experienced a longstanding civil war in the 1980s. A past war is generally considered a root cause of vulnerabilities to hazards by Wisner et. al. as it can lead to increased levels of violence and a lack of trust in governments even decades after the end of the war (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 62). While these general consequences of wars definitely apply to Nicaragua, more specific current consequences are difficult to identify – in particular in the realm of this research.

Another typical root cause of (increased) vulnerabilities to hazards in developing countries is poverty – poverty as a general societal process in contrast to current economic trends which constitute dynamic pressures according to the PAR-Model (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 52-54). Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America and the second poorest in the hemisphere; underemployment is widespread. In 2005 almost half of the population (46.5%) lived below the poverty line (Central Intelligence Agency). Structural poverty negatively impacts the vulnerability of women and girls (UNGA Secretary General 35) in various ways which will be described in the following paragraph on dynamic pressures.

10 “Las mujeres seguimos siempre en último lugar en cuanto a prioridades...El tema de la violencia nunca ha sido prioridad para las autoridades”.
11 “¿Pero cuándo va a ser el día en que se van a sensibilizar por la crueldad hacia las mujeres? Son cosas que no están dentro del presupuesto mental ni en el presupuesto financiero de una alcaldía donde se sabe que la mitad de la población son mujeres y son quienes que sufren los efectos de la violencia.”
4.1.1.2.2 Dynamic Pressures

One of the consequences of structural poverty in Nicaragua is an insufficient access to health. While medical care remains free of charge in Nicaragua, the access to medical care in rural or remote areas is insufficient: Physicians density is very low with 0.37 physicians per 1,000 residents. The hospital bed density is at 0.9 beds per 1,000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency). According to a report on human rights and explosiveness/conflictivity in Central America between 2011 and 2012 compiled by eight regional human rights organizations, health campaigns result in extended access only in times of electoral campaigns or emergencies caused by natural disasters (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica 57). Furthermore, only 7% out of 26% of VAW victims who look for assistance at an organization or an institution go to see a doctor in a practice or in a hospital (UNFPA, Salud y Justicia 12). Limited access to health centers and medicine decreases the resilience of women and girls to femi(ni)cide as healthy people are more fit to cope with exceptionally stressful situations.

Another consequence of structural poverty is a limited access to education. In 2003 more than 30% of the female population age 15 and over could not read and/or write. A poor education and literacy presents a huge obstacle to women and girls in learning about their rights, about relevant social services and VAW (FAO 14). A poor or non-existing awareness of rights and a lack of information in turn once again decreases their resilience to VAW and femi(ni)cide. Additionally, women with little access to education are less able to develop skills to diversify their livelihoods in crisis situations (FAO 14).

Furthermore, Nicaragua records the highest deficit of decent housing in Central America. 78% of all Nicaraguan families are homeless or live in informal housing. Informal housing is defined by a lack of access to basic infrastructure, an absence of electricity or water connections and/or to houses made of inadequate materials, and/or to houses with soil floors or other conditions which are unfavorable to the health of its occupants and finally by a lack of official ownership (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo). A lack of decent housing usually results in a lack of shelter and a weak livelihood. Both factors once again negatively impact resilience.

4.1.1.2.3 Unsafe Conditions

Unsafe conditions are specific forms in which the vulnerability of a population is expressed and most of all relate to physical environments and social relations (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 55). Therefore special groups at risk, dangerous locations and the general aspect of safety as well as the response of public actions and institutions to the hazard are analyzed in the following.

12 Comparable figure for Germany: 3.531 physicians /1,000 residents and 8.17 hospital beds/1,000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency)
As introduced in the above-sub-chapter on facts and figures, young women between the ages of 21 and 30 were threatened by the highest risk of being assassinated in 2011 and 2012 for gender-motivated reasons (RMCV, Informe Annual 2011; Informe Nonestral 2012). The risk of experiencing sexual abuse is many times higher: In 2011 3,660 cases of sexual abuse were recorded. 453 girls between the age of 10 and 14 were raped (Silva). The term risk was mentioned many times during the expert interviews conducted for this thesis. “Women in almost all countries of Latin America are placed at a continuous risk”, says Altamirano. According to the interviewees most women are aware of the risk of becoming a victim of VAW and try to adapt their lifestyles accordingly by e.g. avoiding public spaces (the second least safe place for females) after 8 pm. However, as most femicides belong to the category of intimate-femicide, the private household is the least safe place for women and girls – a place which is logically harder to avoid than public spaces – a fact that represents a considerable threat to the very heart of their livelihoods. As decent housing is rare and unemployment is high, the dependence of women and girls on their partners or their family respectively is often significant. “In cases of domestic violence the majority of women affected are unable to leave their family or their houses for dependence reasons. They have to live under the same roof as their aggressor” (interview Aguas Bravas, Hausschild). If women find the courage to leave their violent husband, they often lose their house or land (and thus also shelter and their main source of livelihood and welfare), as the husbands usually legally owns the marital home. This process is referred to as “property grabbing” (including the loss of land, house, shelter and other belongings) and is recognized as a recent form of socio-economic VAW (FAO 11).

Despite the alleged awareness of risks uttered by the interviewees, only every third person in Nicaragua (38.5%) considers VAW to be “very serious” for the society, and 12.7% claim not to notice VAW – figures taken from a diagnostic carried out by the Nicaraguan Centro de Mujeres Ixchen (Baltodano). Interviewees see the “privatization of violence” as one of the main causes for the above results. “Nicaraguans consider violence to be a private problem of no business to others. And the majority of violence is invisible as it takes place in the households, in the families” (interview Xochilt-Acalt).

In Nicaragua the total fertility rate is at 2.08 children born per woman (Central Intelligence Agency) and women start having children at rather early ages. 34.3% of mothers in urban areas are single mothers from the age of 15 on; in rural areas 19% of all mothers are single (Ardón). If

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13 “Pues, las mujeres en casi todos los países de Latinoamérica (...) viven en un riesgo continuo.”
14 “En el caso de violencia intrafamiliar la mayoría de las mujeres no puede salir de su familia o de su hogar por dependencia. Tienen que vivir bajo un techo con sus agresores.”
15 “Los y las nicaragüenses consideran la violencia un problema privada. Uno no se meterse. Y la mayoría de la violencia es invisible porque tiene lugar en los hogares, en las familias.”
perpetrators of femicide take away a mother from their children, she is not the only victim. Her children (secondary victims and referred to as “orphans of domestic violence”\textsuperscript{16}) have to harshly suffer the loss which puts a strain on their livelihoods as well – often from a very early age on. Therefore vulnerability does not only regard women and girls (as potential victims of femicide), but also children – who are generally the most vulnerable members of society; especially if they are not raised by both parents. The risk of reproducing similar situations of violence for those children is not negligible. In a society which experiences violence as a daily phenomenon, however, the cycle of violence does not only apply to secondary victims of femicide. Interviewed members of Aguas Bravas, a Nicaraguan NGO providing psychological assistance to female victims of GBV, estimate that 80 percent of the Nicaraguan population has experienced sexual violence and or abuse as a child (interview Aguas Bravas). Negative impacts of experiencing sexual violence on the emotional development of a child are obvious: “Girls are unable to develop the capacity to trust if they are being abused by their very father” (interview Aguas Bravas, Hausschild).\textsuperscript{17}

According to the Global Peace Index which lists 158 countries according to their “absence of violence” Nicaragua has fallen from position 72 in 2011 to position 81 in 2012 – 11 positions in the course of just one year (Institute for Economics and Peace). (Somalia is the least peaceful country holding position 158.) The decline in peace diagnosed by the Global Peace Index goes hand in hand with the lack of security complained about by the interviewees. Interviewees believe that VAW takes on “epidemic dimensions” and is related to a “social decomposition” (interview Axayactl and Xochilt-Acalt). Despite these trends, Nicaragua remains the safest country in Central America – a piece of information the National Police takes great delight in highlighting. Interviewees consistently spoke about the governments increased tendency to make public safety a subject of discussion. The alleged safety is strongly questioned by the interviewees.

Public safety is currently a much discussed topic. But femicide is closely related to public safety. The director of the National Police says that there is safety in Nicaragua and that Nicaragua is the safest country in Central America. But can we really talk about public safety if women are dying? Plus, women experience violence in the streets on a daily basis (interview Xohilt-Acalt).\textsuperscript{18}

The feeling of insufficient security expressed by the interviewees can be linked to – among other things – to the high amount of reports regarding VAW filed at Nicaraguan police stations: an

\textsuperscript{16} Huérfanos de la violencia doméstica (RMCV, Informe Anual 2011)
\textsuperscript{17} “Ninas no pueden desarrollar la capacidad de confianza si el padre es el abusador!”
\textsuperscript{18} “Ahora se habla más de la seguridad ciudadana. Pero el femicidio tiene mucho que ver con la seguridad ciudadana. La jefa de la policia por ejemplo habla que hay seguridad; que Nicaragua es el país más seguro de Centroamérica. ¿Pero podemos decir que hay seguridad ciudadana si están muriendo las mujeres?”
average of 100 reports per day in 2012 (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica 14).

From the RMCV data and from interviewee’s statements one can conclude that impunity remains the rule, not the exception: The majority of perpetrators are not prosecuted; reports of GBV do not receive adequate responses. “Impunity is a practice maintained, driven and nurtured by the government. And it keeps on growing. It is beneficial to the government as well as to the people close to it” (interview Altamirano).¹⁹ As a consequence of impunity in Nicaragua, women neither feel that they are adequately protected nor that their needs are recognized by the government. While inconsistencies can be found regarding femicide statistics, all interviewees agree that state response to the phenomenon is insufficient and that political will is lacking. Looking at femi(ni)cide as a disaster, one can say that a lack of disaster preparedness prevails (which constitutes an unsafe condition according to the PAR-Model). Not only are reports by victims of VAW rarely translated into precautionary measures, important state institutions do not adequately take into account the needs and risks of women. According to Altamirano from the NGO Colectiva de Mujeres in Masaya women might even be placed in danger when waiting in front of police stations to make their reports:

I went to the police station in Masaya – waiting ten minutes outside the door until they came to open it. A woman who is desperate and wants to file a report arrives at the police and has to wait in the streets. It could be that the aggressor is following her. In fear she will leave quickly and won’t wait.”²⁰

Another example for the inadequate institutional assistance given to victims of VAW was presented by Pineda from the NGO Xochilt-Acalt: “At local level we finally have a police station especially for women. But who attends to the women there? In some shifts it is women, but male staff works there as well. Consequently, women stopped going to the police” (interview Pineda). ²¹

Interviewees also generally complained about the lack of institutional assistance to victims of VAW, and about the poor quality of the little assistance there is: “Infrastructure providing support for women in crisis situations hardly exists in Nicaragua. Awareness of sexual abuse or violence being the

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¹⁹ “Es que la impunidad es una práctica que el gobierno la ha mantenido, impulsado, alimentado. Y crece más. Y se beneficia tanto al gobierno como a la gente que está acercana”.

²⁰ “¿Que pasa cúando una mujer entra? Por que yo estuve – diez minutos en la puerta esperando que ellos lleguen para abrir la puerta. Una mujer que está desesperada, que quiere poner una denuncia, llega y espera allí por que está en la calle y puede ser que el agresor te persiga o cualquier cosa. Después de poco tiempo se va.”

²¹ “Ahora contamos con una Comisaría al nivel local. Pero en la Comisaría quién les atendía a las mujeres? Eran mujeres que les atendían en algunos casos en el horario, pero también atendían hombres que son policía. Entonces, las mujeres no llegaban.”
root causes of problems experienced by women consulting health centers is non-existing” (interview Aguas Bravas, Hausschild).22

Revictimization of VAW victims as a consequence of incompetent and/or insensitive care or assistance by doctors, psychologists, police officers or lawyers is a much discussed topic of high concern among the interviewees. Revictimization and lack of competence seem to be especially dominant in the psychology sector. According to Nora Ligia only four to five female psychologists in Nicaragua provide high quality psychological care to VAW victims. Ligia believes that high quality in this field derives from an approach based on gender aspects and human rights. Furthermore, VAW and in particular sexual abuse do not constitute vital topics in university studies of psychology (interview Aguas Bravas).

Generally, poor state response through inadequate laws and policies as well as through lacking awareness and sensitivity on part of state functionaries/service providers presents a risk factor for violence (UNGA Secretary General 34).

4.1.2 Conclusion

The analysis of vulnerabilities paints a rather grim picture for women and girls in Nicaragua. Vulnerability factors are numerous and the risk of becoming a victim is high, given the growing rate of VAW in Nicaragua. High vulnerabilities relate in particular to psychosocial conditions and the livelihood and property of women and girls. Resilience of females, highly relevant in coping with a disaster, cannot easily develop owing to a lack of protection of women and girls both in private homes as well as in public places and a limited access to health and education. Insufficient and incompetent psychological care puts a further strain on the development of resilience.

In the face of rising VAW rates, the socio-political hazard femi(ni)cide is present in the daily lives of women and girls. Against the background of rising VAW rates and a possible increase in femi(ni)cides (statistics are contradictory on the development of femi(ni)cide), a lack of access to justice (prevailing impunity), and a lack of precautionary measures and protection,” a climate of defenselessness and mistrust on part of the victims and of women in general is generated”; as described in a RMCV press statement from October 2012 (RMCV, Ultimas Noticias). Social decomposition, insecurity and a growing sentiment of fear amongst the population (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica) seem to be further impacts on society caused by VAW and femi(ni)cide. The statements of the interviewees leave no doubt regarding the inefficiency of state response to encounter these deficiencies, both to the crime itself

22 “La infraestructura para apoyar a mujeres en situaciones de crisis apenas existe en Nicaragua. La consciencia de que muchos de los problemas de las mujeres que llegan a los centros de salud tienen sus raíces en el abuso sexual y la violencia sexual no hay.”
and the victims. Consequently, the interviewed NGOs feel a huge responsibility to defend women’s rights and protect their lives.

4.1.3 Results of Advocacy and Policy Work

All interviewees (in seven interviews) consider advocacy and policy work to play an important role in combating femi(ni)cide. Promoting better policies and improved legislation is seen as essential, especially in the face of insufficient state response to femi(ni)cide. Not a single interviewee seems to be content with the government under President Daniel Ortega, but the discontent is of different intensity. Vilma Nuñez, director of the well-known Nicaraguan human rights organization CENIDH, directly links an increasing deterioration in the respect of human rights in Nicaragua to the Ortega-government: “An almost systematic violation of civil and political rights is taking place; something that did not exist in previous governments. Of course there had been general violations, but not in such a systematic manner” (interview CENIDH, Nuñez). Another politically worrying development to some of the interviewees is the deterioration of state institutions. According to CENDIH, the Ortega-family controls three important state institutions: the Supreme Electoral Council, the Ministry of Finances, and the Supreme Court. Leading functionaries of these institutions were employed by Ortega himself, who is also said to control the budgets of all institutions, thus increasing dependence. Verifying such highly political information is challenging. It is however a fact, that Ortega managed to abrogate a law prohibiting the serving of two consecutive terms. Ortega currently serves his third term, after one in the 1980s and another from 2007-2011. The Supreme Court even issued their permission. Additionally, he increased his influence over the news media by controlling important newspaper media, by owning the official Radio Nicaragua as well as by systematically intimidating those journalists in favor of the opposition, and by favoring those loyal to the ruling party (Freedom House). On top of that, Ortega inhibits the work of autonomous civil society actors by e.g. not having granted human rights NGOs access to prisons in over three years. Against the background of institutional weakness and Ortega’s striving for presidential omnipotence, advocacy and policy work by civil society appears ever more important in empowering women and in defending their rights.

When asked about the biggest advocacy success in recent years, all interviewees unanimously mentioned a new integral law against VAW (Ley No. 779: Ley Integral Contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres y de Reformas a la Ley No.641 “Código Penal”). The law was passed on the 26th of January 2012 and came into force in June 2012. The law is celebrated by the women’s movement as an immense success in the fight against misogyny and VAW in Nicaragua as it explicitly

23 “Existe una violación casi sistemática a los derechos civiles y políticas. Cosa que no existía en los anteriores gobiernos. Claro que había violaciones generales, pero no de manera tan sistemática.”
typifies femicide (not feminicide!) as a crime, contains precise and intensified sanctions for various forms of VAW, enforces state responsibilities, and establishes new instruments and protocols for the prevention of femicide and VAW and for the integral assistance provided to victims (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 81; MEC). The recognition of several forms of VAW as crimes, which society used to consider normal practices (such as psychological violence, intimidation and threats and patrimonial violence), generates a potential for achieving a change in attitudes, behavior and more generally in social and cultural norms (outcome category one).

The women’s movement played a remarkable role in the passing of the law; and in particular the Movimiento de Mujeres María Elena Cuadra (MEC), a NGO interviewed for this research. MEC and 21 other NGOs introduced a draft law into parliament in October 2010 and successfully demanded its participation in all judicial consultation and discussion processes. The draft law took into account experiences and realities from other countries in the region with existing similar laws which demonstrates the high level of interaction and alliances among regional women’s organizations. Apart from the already strong connectedness between NGOs from the Central American region engaged in fighting femi(ni)cide, the entire process revolving around formulating and passing the new law 779 has enforced the alliance among the individual NGOs and women’s movements. As such the level of collaboration as well as the level of participation for the same cause has increased – positive outcome which fall under outcome category three (strengthened alliances).

After one and a half years of constant participation and the exercise of pressure by MEC during consultation processes as well as of unprecedented mass mobilization in public protest s— especially during the final stage before the passing of the law - the law was passed in January 2012. Shortly before the final passing, the law was passed by the National Parliament on the 30th of November 2011 with 68 votes in favor, zero votes against and not a single abstention. It is an unprecedented event in the parliamentary history of Nicaragua that a law reached unanimous consensus despite differences in political ideologies and agendas. On top of that, it is remarkable that more than 80% of the law’s articles reflect the content of the initial draft law introduced by the alliance of NGOs (interview and forum discussion MEC).

Given its innovative character and its topicality the law was a very present subject during the interviews conducted in October 2012 in Nicaragua. All interviewees think that Nicaragua now has a good legislative basis concerning the rights of women. However, all but two interviewees are concerned about the implementation of the law due to lack of political will and lack of financial means: The law was passed and came into force without a prior allocation of a determined budget for its implementation. This disillusioning fact gives some of the interviewees the impression that the law was not passed with the right intentions but as a kind of gift to the women’s movement shortly before the International Women’s Day on the 8th of May. “The law was passed as a treat to the
women’s movement after their longstanding fight for it. There was no real political will behind it” (interview Altamirano). Political will is questioned by almost all interviewees: “The law itself is very good, but a budget is missing. This has to do with the state. Political will is linked to the allocation of budgets” (interview Axayacatl).

In the face of doubted political will, all interviewees, without a single exception, agree on the importance of monitoring the implementation of the new law and feel responsible for this task: “We always have to stay on top of the implementation process. We have had too much patience, which has brought us to where we are now. The current task is to monitor!” (interview Altamirano). As mentioned before, the RMCV has its own observatory which has already taken on the task of observing and monitoring the law’s implementation. In cases of rights abuses or the non-compliance with rights, duties and responsibilities set out in law 779, it publishes press releases and confronts the respective state institutions demanding clarification etc. Some cases have even been presented in front of the Interamerican Court (interview Altamirano and Axayacatl). Public forums have been organized in different municipalities to follow up on the local implementation of the law (interview Axayacatl). This watchdog function is regarded as a strategy of NGOs to achieve positive outcomes falling under outcome category five (improved policies) (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 19).

Another remaining challenge for NGOs is to disseminate the content of the new law. In this respect the NGO alliance, and MEC in particular, managed to reach high coverage in the media and strong participation in public discussion forums (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 92). It additionally disseminates copies of the law at community level. Other interviewed NGOs are also actively carrying out dissemination campaigns in their communities by e.g. organizing public information gatherings centering on the law or by distributing popular versions of the law in communities and in their training or self-help groups directed at women (interview Palacios Chiong, Axayacatl, Colectiva de Mujeres, Xochilt-Acalt). “Nicaragua has many laws concerning the security of women, but they are not published. Women do not know their rights. There is a lack of dissemination. Lots of work has to be done. We, the NGOs, are engaged in the dissemination of laws so that women know their rights and are able to claim them” (interview Xochilt-Acalt).

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24 “La ley fue aprobada como un dulcito para el movimiento de mujeres. Voluntad política faltó.”
25 “La ley esta muy bien pero falta presupuesto. Y eso tiene que ver con el Estado. La voluntad política tiene que ver con la asignación de recursos.”
26 “Hay que estar encima del proceso de implementación siempre. Paciencia hemos tenido demasiada, por eso estamos donde estamos. Estoy convencida que el asunto es monitorear.”
27 “En Nicaragua hay muchas leyes sobre la seguridad de las mujeres pero no son publicadas. Las mujeres no saben de sus derechos. No hay divulgacion. Falta mucho trabajo. Y nosotras las ONGs trabajamos para que las mujeres conozcan y reclamen sus derechos.”
One interviewee said that a short-term impact of the new law was the strong public discussion of it. “It is the first time that people are informed about the passing of a law and interested in its content, people talk about it in the streets” (interview Palacios Chiong). 28 This development undoubtedly stems from the public campaigning efforts made by NGOs.

Despite the advocacy and policy success represented by the existence of law 779, impunity rates remain extraordinarily high, as was described in chapter 4.1.1. As impunity is directly linked to inefficient state response, political will is once again questioned. The high average of reports on VAW filed by women at police stations hints at an extraordinarily high level of VAW – especially in the domestic sphere – but can also be seen as a sign for an increased empowerment and capacity of women to finally claim their rights in the face of the new law. Trends regarding the decrease or increase of reports as a consequence of law 779 are not definite yet. While some interviewees talk about a strong increase of reports directly after the passing of the law, others say that many women now fear reporting VAW as the reporting process has been made stricter by the new law allowing fewer possibilities for withdrawing an initial report (Xochilt-Acalt). Another interviewee said that women are now afraid to file reports as the new law explicitly obliges public officials to implement precautionary measures as a reaction to reports of VAW. Women are additionally aware that under the new law the possibility of their perpetrators being incarcerated is very high. Not all women want to see their perpetrators, who are often members of their own family, in prison (interview Club Infantil). Little hope arises as to the success of this law when looking at figures of sexual VAW: 1.873 cases of sexual VAW were reported in the first half of 2012; 1.050 victims were less than 14 years old (Silva). In 2011 3.660 crimes of sexual VAW were recorded. These numbers do not indicate a decline in VAW after the passing of law 779.

All interviewed NGOs have collaborated with state functionaries on municipal levels by e.g. training state lawyers or other officials in the justice system in gender-sensitivity. On top of that the new law establishes a set of new means of attention and prevention. The most significant novelty is probably the creation of a national inter-institutional commission on the fight of VAW consisting of state institutions such as the public ministerial offices for health, education, women affairs and labor as well as the Supreme Court and the judicial department of the national police (MEC). However slowly, the quality of assistance consequently will rise, while the risk of revictimization caused by incompetent institutions will decrease. These slowly improved services offered to victims of VAW as a consequence of advocacy and policy work constitute outcomes falling under outcome category six (changes in impact).

28 “Ha sido la primera ley de la cual todos están enterados y la gente se ha interesado por conocerla (por sí sola); se habla de ella en las calles.”
An outcome of advocacy and policy work applying to outcome category five (improved policies) is definitely the passing of the new law 779 itself. It represents a huge improvement on the legislative level in terms of women’s rights and protection. Additionally, numerous paragraphs of the law envisage an improvement of public policies. Of course the efficiency of both new laws and policies depends on the effective and timely implementation of the law. The current lack of governmentally allocated financial means for this implementation generates skepticism.

The enormous risk posed to the livelihoods of women in cases of VAW (identified in the previous chapter) is decreased by paragraphs of the law dedicated to housing and property in patrimonial relationships. For instance, the common practice of property grabbing by husbands is ruled out. Outcomes regarding this legal novelty fall under outcome category six (changes in impact) as conditions regarding equality and property are improved (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 18-19).

4.1.4 Conclusion

The implementation of the law 779 is still in its initial stage. From an optimistic point of view one could conclude that the enormous mobilization and sensitization campaign launched by a united women’s movement has initiated a beginning shift in social norms (outcome category one) which can be traced back to an unusually high public interest in the law and its paragraphs as well as the high media coverage on the subject. From a more cautious point of view though, one concludes that a considerable and widespread shift in social norms can only be achieved if the government works as a motor of said normative and ideological change and therefore acts accordingly. The current level of governmental deinstitutionalization, impunity and ignorance does not inspire hopes regarding a decrease of depreciation of women in the near future. The efforts of the united women’s organizations are undoubtedly impressive and have led to important steps in the empowerment of women. However, the responsibility to advocate improved policies and laws, sensitize and mobilize society, train state functionaries and monitor for compliance in an adverse political context, cannot solely rest on the shoulders of civil society actors.

While the passing of the law, especially given the historical consensus achieved by all members of parliaments, could be seen as a sign of a changing governmental approach to women’s rights and security, the simultaneous existence of one of the most restrictive abortion bans worldwide (implemented by the Ortega government) does nothing to challenge cultural and normative conventions, but legislatively manifests the depreciation and degradation of females. Such legislative contradictions once more raise doubts regarding the government’s intention in passing law 779.
In terms of vulnerabilities analyzed by the PAR-Model, if implemented and disseminated effectively, the new law has the potential to significantly increase resilience on part of the female population. This decrease in vulnerabilities especially refers to revictimization, the loss of property and fragile livelihoods and empowerment by knowing one’s rights.

Concluding, a major part of the development of VAW and femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua depends on the quality of implementation of the law. As a result of united advocacy and policy forces by the Nicaraguan women’s movement, Nicaragua now holds the necessary legislative instruments to enforce women’s rights and protections. As the implementation of the law is still in its initial phase, evaluations regarding the impact of the law still lack precision. What seems to be certain from the findings is that without ongoing advocacy and policy campaigns by NGOs involving monitoring, exercise of pressure, awareness raising and capacity building, the immense potential of the new law (regarding an impact on women’s resilience and empowerment) will be not be realized fully.

4.2 Case study of El Salvador

As described in the methodology section of this thesis, three interviews with experts from Salvadorian (humanitarian) women’s NGOs were conducted via email (see annex 1 for more information). The information from these interviews is an important element of this case study.

4.2.1 Femi(ni)cide in El Salvador

Parallel to the structure of the case study of Nicaragua, firstly statistical data on feminicide is provided establishing an overview of the dimension of the crime in El Salvador.

4.2.1.1 Facts and Figures

![Number of Feminicides in El Salvador (2008-2012)](image-url)

Fig. 4: Number of Feminicides in El Salvador (2008-2012). (Source: All figures adapted from ORMUSA Observatorio)
The graph shows the development of feminicide in El Salvador from 2008 to 2012. It is plain to see that feminicides have risen significantly between 2008 and 2009 and have not decreased until 2012. The scale of feminicide in El Salvador is many times higher than in Nicaragua and effects on females and the society in general are therefore more severe. The figures are adapted from the observatory of ORMUSA, a well known Salvadoran NGO (which was interviewed during the research phase of this thesis) dedicated especially at promoting equality between women and men. The observatory publishes feminicide statistics as well as VAW statistics (including social violence, sexual violence and domestic violence) on a monthly basis and additionally presents recent cases of VAW in a detailed manner. (Their feminicide statistics for 2012 and 2012 were nurtured by data from the National Police of El Salvador.)

From January to December 2012 the National Police registered 320 feminicides. In the first ten months of 2012 286 females were killed: five girls below the age of 11, 31 girls aging between 12 and 17 years, 70 young women aging between 18 and 25 years, 132 women aging between 26 and 59 years and 20 women older than 60 years were killed. In 28 cases age could not be determined (ORMUSA Observatorio).

In accordance with the fact that intimate-femicide is the most common category of femicide in Central America, feminicides in El Salvador are often the products of a systematic cycle of violence, and the vast majority of perpetrators were the (ex-)partner or the husband of the victim (Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos 27 and ORMUSA Observatorio).

In 2011 628 feminicides were registered in El Salvador (an average of 1.7 killings per day) – representing the highest number of feminicides in the last decade! From 2011 to 2012 the number of feminicides was reduced by about 50%.

In 2011 412 disappeared women were registered in metropolitan areas only. From January to November 2011 581 females were killed: seven girls below the age of 12, 80 girls below the age of 18, 142 young women aging between 18 and 25 years, 139 women aging between 25 and 35 years, 151 women aging between 35 and 60 years and 27 above the age of 60. In 35 cases the age could not be determined (ORMUSA Observatorio).

2011 is considered the most violent year since the Peace Agreements in 1992 in terms of homicides (including feminicides): 4,368 homicides were registered – an average of 12 killings per day and a rate of 70.2 homicides per 100,000 residents (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica 9).

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29 The majority of civil society organizations and state institutions in El Salvador speak of feminicide instead of femicide. A law concerning VAW also uses the term feminicide (in contrast to Nicaraguan law). Hence, the term feminicide will be used consistently in this particular case study.
Despite the considerable reduction of feminicides in 2012, only two out of all 14 Salvadoran departments register less than ten feminicides per 100,000 female residents (Tornay). According to criteria from the WHO 10 or more homicides/feminicides per 100,000 residents/females are a sign of an epidemic or a pandemic – depending on the occurrence within a country or across borders.

Women’s organizations highlight that despite the decrease of killings of females, feminicides continue to involve an extreme level of cruelty. According to a police investigator the majority of women were killed with cold weapons such as sabers or stones, unlike homicides which are often committed with firearms (Membreño).

Impunity regarding feminicide seems to be a major problem in El Salvador. Between 2001 and 2010 3,624 feminicides were registered. In November 2011 only 22 of these cases had been condemned. From January to November 2011 583 cases of feminicide were registered. 60 to 70% of these cases were met with impunity, according to a press article from the 29th of November 2011 (Aguilar). While press reports, reports from women’s organizations and human rights institutions and the experts interviewed for this thesis overwhelmingly agree on a lack of state response and the prevalence of impunity, more detailed and recent statistics on the condemnation of perpetrators of feminicide in El Salvador could not be found.

In terms of reports, police statistics confirm an increase of 45.7% in reports concerning sexual violence (mainly against women and minors) compared to 2011. The average of cases of sexual violence is higher than the average of homicides. Seven people are raped or sexually abused every day in El Salvador (Membreño).

Together with Guatemala and Honduras, El Salvador is one of the countries with the highest levels of violence (including political, juvenile and domestic violence, as well as general crime and organized crime) (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica 9). According to the WHO more than 10 homicides per 100,000 residents are considered to be at epidemic levels. Between 2004 and 2009 El Salvador ranked first in the world with 62 homicides per 100,000 residents (Roberts).

Nevertheless, VAW in El Salvador should not be seen as part or consequence of the high levels of general criminality or social violence in the country. Óscar Humberto Luna, Ombudsman for the Defense of Human Rights in El Salvador, highlights the gender-based motivation of feminicide: The cruelty and the objectification which can be observed on the bodies of the victims are signs of hatred and violence which play an immense role in the killings of females in El Salvador (Tornay).

Women’s organizations, including ORMUSA, are preoccupied by the level of violence and cruelty with which women are being killed, the impunity of feminicide crimes and the high levels of
homicides in the country. Their central demand is more security from the state (ORMUSA Observatorio).

4.2.1.2 Components of Vulnerability

The following part of the case study is dedicated to assessing the various elements of vulnerability in accordance with the structure given in the PAR-Model by Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon.

4.2.1.2.1 Root Causes

Parallel to the explanation given in the case study on Nicaragua, misogyny and patriarchy also constitute the root causes of feminicide in El Salvador. As such these two ideologies make up the root causes of vulnerability. All interviewees mention the machista culture and misogynous attitudes as the main causes of feminicides in El Salvador. An implication of a patriarchic and misogynous culture described in chapter 2.1.3 is that violence against women carried out by men is often not considered violence, but legitimized as a rightful means of men to maintain the subordinate status of women. Empirical research on violence in El Salvador, which identified men as having “more ‘right’ to use violence than women”, confirms this implication (Hume 66).

The armed conflict in El Salvador (1979-1992) is another factor falling under the root cause category which continues to have an impact on the current perception of violence and on gender roles. The research carried out by Hume found that the constant insecurity and every-day violence during the civil war shaped what the population considered normal. “The context shapes and transforms what is considered ordinary, increasing people’s threshold for tolerating violence and dictating their responses” (Hume 70). Interviewee Jeanette Urquilla, ORMUSA, confirms this evolution and legitimization of violence: “Violence against women has been historically naturalized and justified, so that it was never identified as a problem.”

During the civil war silence and non-reaction to violence became a strategy for survival. “Individuals and communities learned that silence was the only option when no one could be trusted and violence was an ever-present possibility” (Hume 71). Misogyny and patriarchy as well as the longstanding and bloody civil war (partly) explain why VAW is up to now mainly met with silence and not talked about in public, nor considered a topic of public concern at all.

Moreover, Hume found that the constant insecurity resulted in a lack of trust in the state which is only deepened by the prevailing impunity reigning in contemporary El Salvador (70). Females at risk of VAW or victims of VAW who mistrust governmental authorities and institutions are

30 “(...) La violencia contra las mujeres ha sido históricamente y socialmente naturalizada y justificada, de tal manera que no era un problema identificado.”
less likely to report violence and to receive adequate care which results in an increased vulnerability regarding further violence.

Just like in Nicaragua women occupy a weak(er) position in society and have less access to justice, power and resources than men, which affects their capacity to cope with and to defend themselves against VAW. 36.5% of the Salvadoran population lived below the poverty line in 2010 (Central Intelligence Agency) – 10% less than in Nicaragua.

4.2.1.2.2 Dynamic Pressures

Access to health is significantly better than in Nicaragua with 1.595 physicians per 1.000 residents and a hospital bed density of 1.1 beds per 1.000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency). However, the impacts of VAW on female health are generally profound. VAW including sexual violence can negatively affect women’s and girl’s health at long term and increases their risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (UNFPA, Salud y Justicia 12). Just like Nicaragua, El Salvador has one of the most restrictive abortion bans worldwide which sanctions the interruption of a pregnancy under all circumstances. Hence, women and girls cannot access safe and legal abortions and are put at risk of informal and botched procedures. Revictimization and social stigmatization are common consequences. Health implications are especially severe since only very few victims of VAW consult a doctor: only 14% out of 36% of VAW victims who look for assistance at an organization or an institution go to see a doctor in a practice or in a hospital (UNFPA, Salud y Justicia 12).

Access to education by females is higher in El Salvador than in Nicaragua79.6% of the female population older than 15 could read and write in 2007 (Central Intelligence Agency). A governmental plan on education initiated in 2009 has improved the general access to education which means that female resilience is less likely to be impaired by reasons linked to poor education or illiteracy.

The housing deficit in El Salvador is not as high as in Nicaragua, but still remarkable: 58% of all Salvadoran families are homeless or lack decent housing (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo). The high amount of families forced to live in informal housing lack proper shelter and a solid livelihood basis. Furthermore, these families are often more exposed to crime and violence than occupants of formal houses as informal houses tend to be located on the outskirts of cities or in marginalized areas where violence and crime rates are generally higher.

31 Comparable figure for Germany: 3.531 physicians /1.000 residents and 8.17 hospital beds/1.000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency)
4.2.1.2.3 Unsafe Conditions

Following the structure of the Nicaraguan case study this part assesses factors falling under the categories physical environment (dangerous locations), social relations (special groups at risk) and public actions and institution (state response and safety/security).

Almost all explanations regarding special groups at risks (females as primary victims and children as secondary victims) and dangerous locations (private spaces followed by public spaces) given in the case study of Nicaragua also apply to the situation in El Salvador. With a few exceptions: The age group which faces the highest risk of being assassinated for gender-based reasons is slightly different in El Salvador. From the statistics provided above one can deduct that girls and women aging between 18 and 25 years as well as women aging between 35 and 60 years are threatened by the highest risks of feminicide. The private household is once again the least safe place for women and girls – especially in urban areas. The majority of women and girls are killed by their partners or husbands. In contrast to Nicaragua, however, the territorial conflict between different gangs in El Salvador, which has taken the lives of thousands of people, is also responsible for the deaths of many women (interview Urquilla).

According to the interviewees the impact of the continuous VAW and feminicide in El Salvador on the individual level is severe as both phenomena weaken and destabilize the family structures (interview Urquilla). Cheyne adds: “The impact on the family and household level is profound because young women are forced to limit their individual freedom in order not to become a victim. They cannot fully live their sexuality; they refrain from visiting public places of entertainment up to quitting their studies” (interview Cheyne). 32 Despite these limitations of the lives of females in El Salvador, Deysi states that many people seem to think that women are killed because they “did not take great enough care.” “This means that they are made responsible for their own death” (Cheyne). 33

Interviewee Delia Cornejo, Las Mélidas, highlighted that the numerous cases of feminicide terrorize females: “The impact of feminicide is one of terror; the way in which women are killed sends messages to all women (...).” 34 The repercussions of the very high level of feminicide on society were of special concern to all interviewees. “The most severe thing happening is that organized crime in this country is making use of the bodies of women in order to terrorize communities. In the

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32 “El impacto es muy grande a nivel de las familias y hogares porque las mujeres jóvenes son obligadas a privarse de sus libertades individuales para no caer en este riesgo. Eso impide vivir su sexualidad con muchas restricciones, privarse de espacios de diversión y hasta dejar de estudiar.”

33 “Es decir, las culpan a ellas de su propio exterminio.”

34 “El impacto que tiene el feminicidio es de terror, la forma en que se asesina a las mujeres son mensajes para todas (...).”
past couple of months many young women were killed in a barbarous way. First they disappeared and later their bodies were found” (interview Cheyne).

Consequences of the phenomenon feminicide on society are interrelated with the level of safety and security in a country. According to the Global Peace Index El Salvador has fallen from position 102 in 2011 to position 111 (out of 158; same position as Egypt) in 2012. The low GPI rank can be related to the finding that 51% of the Salvadoran population thinks that crime, violence and gangs constitute the greatest problem of their country, according to the Latinobarómetro on public safety and security conducted in 2012 (Corporación Latinobarómetro). Urquilla describes El Salvador as a country “caught in fear and insecurity”. All interviewees are convinced that feminicide profoundly weakens the security and stability of communities and the society in general. While the significant decrease of feminicides between 2011 and 2012 indicates a positive development regarding security, reports of VAW have almost doubled – despite distrust in state institutions (interview Cornejo; article Membreño).

The facts and figures on impunity given in the introduction of this chapter demonstrate the severity and systematicness of impunity regarding cases of feminicide in El Salvador. In terms of state response, interviewees also spoke about the existing difficulty experienced by state actors in determining whether the killing of a woman constitutes a feminicide or a homicide. Cheyne and Urquilla attribute this difficulty to a lack of qualification of police investigators and prosecution attorneys. “If we had mechanisms for an efficient judicial investigation, it would not have to be difficult. The biggest problem here is that investigation is close to zero and the majority of feminicides is met with impunity. The main reason for this is that executive authorities keep on thinking of feminicides as crimes of passion which do not deserve to be investigated. A gender-analysis of each case would let you know that a feminicide occurred” (interview Cheyne).

A recent survey found that about three out of ten Salvadoran women who experienced violence do not talk about their experience nor look for assistance. Almost half of them did not find it necessary. A quarter refrained from telling or getting help out of fear for consequences or more violence. Other slightly less dominant reasons were lack of trust, fear of being criticized, or feelings of

35 “Lo más grave que está ocurriendo es que el crimen organizado en el país, está haciendo uso del cuerpo de las mujeres para aterrorizar a las comunidades. En los últimos meses hay muchas mujeres jóvenes asesinadas salvajemente que primero son desaparecidas y luego aparecen sus cadáveres.”

36 “un país secuestrado por el miedo y la inseguridad”

37 “Si tuviéramos mecanismos para la investigación judicial eficaces, no debería ser difícil. El mayor problema en este campo es que la investigación es casi nula y la mayoría de los casos quedan en la impunidad. Sobre todo porque los aplicadores siguen pensando en crímenes pasionales que no merecen ser investigados. Al hacer el análisis de género de cada caso concreto, te das cuenta que ha sido un feminicidio.”
shame (UNFPA, Salud y Justicia 13). An incompetence of state officials providing services to women experiencing VAW might well be one reason for the avoidance of assistance.

An inadequate state response is also given to disappearances of women and girls. The Salvadoran ombudsman of human rights is alarmed by the lack of diligent investigations concerning disappearances. Between January and July 2012 255 cases of disappeared females were identified. Many resulted in feminicides which could have been prevented “if they had had received the necessary attention and importance” (Tornay). Procedural and investigative errors present risk factors for violence, facilitate impunity of aggressors and increase the vulnerability of females in El Salvador.

4.2.2 Conclusion

Just like in Nicaragua vulnerability factors are numerous, but seem to be even more severe in El Salvador. Despite a significant decrease of feminicides in 2012 of about 50% compared to 2011, feminicide rates remain a lot higher than in Nicaragua and have reached epidemic levels according to WHO criteria. An enormous use of violence and cruelty in the commitment of feminicides as well as the involvement of gangs, might even justify the term “terror” used by interviewees in relation with gender-based killings of females in El Salvador.

Unlike in Nicaragua resilience of women and girls is less threatened by a lack of access to education and health, but all the more threatened by psychological consequences of widespread fear and insecurity.

The population of post-conflict El Salvador shows a strong distrust in state actors which is only intensified by the very poor state reaction to feminicides and VAW. The fact that VAW is not publically discussed and all too often considered normal or legitimate, makes it harder for women to defend their right to a live free from violence.

4.2.3 Results of Advocacy and Policy Work

All three interviewees attribute a high importance to advocacy and policy work in the fight against feminicide in El Salvador. “It is a key strategy in ensuring that the state assumes responsibility for the phenomenon” (interview Cheyne). They furthermore believe that policy changes have the potential to transform societies. Urquilla states: “Advocacy as a strategy of influencing others and in particular decision makers is of immense importance to feminist organizations in order to draw attention to topics such as gender inequality, violence against women and feminicide on the public...”

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38 “Es una estrategia clave para que el fenómeno sea asumido por el Estado como su responsabilidad.”
agenda of key actors. In this way public politics at national and regional level can be generated which contributes to a transformation of images and legal frameworks of society.\textsuperscript{39}

Parallel to Nicaragua the biggest and most recent advocacy success in El Salvador was the passing of a law called Ley Especial Integral para una Vida libre de Violencia para las Mujeres en El Salvador (Integral law for a life free from violence for the women in El Salvador). The law was passed in November 2010 and came into force on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January 2012. ORMUSA set up the draft law and advocated for its passing – in alliance with the Red Feminista Frente a la Violencia contra las Mujeres (Feminist Network against Violence against Women).

It (the passing of the law) really was a great success for ORMUSA because of all the work dedicated to its formulation and the promotion of the passing. But it has also been well received by all organizations; by those that were directly involved and by those that were not, because they now possess a new instrument in the fight against violence (interview Urquilla).\textsuperscript{40}

The law is integral as it contains components of prevention, specialized attention, prosecution and sanctions of gender-based crimes against women. It can be considered a progressive law due to the acknowledgement of feminicide (instead of femicide) and the emphasis that feminicide is based on unequal gender relations. The law additionally typifies aggravated feminicide. Examples of aggravated feminicides include feminicides committed by state officials, by two or more people or feminicides committed in front of family members of the victim.

The collaboration of ORMUSA and a feminist network in the promotion of the law falls under outcome category three (strengthened alliances). Additionally, after the presentation of the law in parliament strategic alliances between public instances and NGOs were formed (especially with the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women, ISDEMU) for advocacy as well as for discussion and consultation purposes (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 77).

After the law came into force NGOs (including the interviewed NGOs) actively engaged in trainings of police and public attorney staff – advocacy activities aimed at bringing about a shift in social norms (outcome category one) and at changing the impact by providing improved services to women and girls (outcome category six). ORMUSA for instance carried out a workshop for forensic

\textsuperscript{39}La incidencia política como estrategia para influir en otras y otros particularmente tomadores de decisiones es para las organizaciones feministas de suma importancia para en un primer momento colocar temas trascendentales como las desigualdades de género, la violencia contra las mujeres y el feminicidio en la agenda pública de actores clave y en esa medida generar políticas públicas a nivel nacional y regional, con lo que se contribuye a transformar las sociedades en sus imaginarios y marcos legales."

\textsuperscript{40}“Sí, realmente fue un gran logro para ORMUSA por todo el esfuerzo que habíamos dedicado en formulación y promoción para la aprobación; pero también ha sido bien recibida por todas las organizaciones, las que se involucraron directamente y las que no, porque ahora se cuenta con un nuevo instrumento para la lucha contra la violencia.”
doctors providing them with scientific foundations and practical tools in order to improve the capacity of justice officials in the investigation of cases of VAW and feminicide (ORMUSA Observatorio). A second aim of this method is to improve women’s access to justice and thus their resilience.

However advocacy concerning public services on the municipal level remains fragile due to the high rotation of staff (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 98). Despite this difficulty all interviewees underline the importance of trainings of public officials as trained and sensitized staff could potentially become important allies to women’s organization enforcing their fight against feminicide.

Parallel to the situation in Nicaragua the implementation of the law is subject to many challenges. One difference compared to the situation in Nicaragua is that the new Salvadoran law envisages the creation of a national plan concerning the implementation of the law. This plan has not been introduced so far by the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women (Spanish: Instituto Salvadoreño de Desarrollo de la Mujer, ISDEMU), the leading authority responsible for the implementation of the law, which is one of the reasons why attorneys and judges have not yet started to apply the law (interview Cheyne). On top of that the law requires the founding of a technical inter-institutional commission which is still in its installation phase. Cheyne and Cornejo consider the implementation process lagging:

The implementation of the law is very slow. Institutions supposed to apply the law, do not always know the law’s content. But we believe that small changes have been made in the thinking of society, and in particular in that of women who started to report violence more frequently (interview Cornejo). 41

Rising numbers of reports of VAW could be a sign of an increase in female confidence and the capacity to defend themselves and thus represent a first success brought about by the law. In order to promote a faster paced implementation, NGOs are in contact with ISDEMU and advocate for the speedy introduction of the national plan the law calls for (interview Cheyne).

Two interviewees also complained about a lack of financial means for the effective implementation of the law (Cheyne and Cornejo), but these complaints were not nearly as dominant as in interviews with Nicaraguan experts. Urquilla is less negative but also believes that more widespread results of the law will need years to develop. However, she already sees positive advances especially concerning a growing societal awareness of VAW and feminicide due to the new law. This information can also be linked to the awareness and dissemination campaigns carrying out

41 “La implementación de la ley va muy lento, las instituciones que deben aplicarla no la conocen; pero creemos que hay unos pequeños cambios en el ideario de la población, en especial en las mujeres que han denunciado más la violencia.”
by various actors in the context of the law. “We are training women so that they know the law. Popular versions of the law have been published for the women to understand it more easily; and we let them know that state institutions are responsible for the application” (interview Cheyne).\footnote{“Estamos capacitando a las mujeres para que la conozcan, se han hecho publicaciones en versión popular parar que la entiendan fácilmente, y damos a conocer que instancias del Estado son las responsables de su aplicación.”} All three interviewees mention the dissemination of (popular) versions of the law as key measures of the dissemination process. Urquilla mentioned that ORMUSA has established alliances with the universities for the law to be introduced there (outcome category three – strengthened alliances). Cheyne adds further that ISDEMU is carrying out a mass media campaign involving TV and radio channels which encourages women to report violence. ISDEMU was even successful in ensuring the participation of the president of El Salvador. Even though one interviewee expressed discontent concerning the campaign, such prominent participation is a potentially big step in achieving a shift in social norms (outcome category one). NGOs engaged in the fight against femicide try to establish contacts to the media arguing for a different take on reports about VAW and femicide cases which does not revictimize women and their families but educate society (interview Cheyne). In the long term such advocacy measures are aimed at bringing about a shift in cultural and social norms and raised awareness (outcome category one).

As impunity remains strong, all interviewees are engaged in monitoring the implementation of the law. Their monitoring activities are equal to the ones presented in the case study on Nicaragua and apply to outcome category five (improved policies). The Salvadoran ombudsman sees the prevalence of impunity and the fact that most perpetrators of VAW and femicide had intimate relationships to their victims as signs of an inefficiency of state authorities (despite important legislative progresses) and a lack of diligence and seriousness in the handling of VAW and femicide cases (Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos). All interviews are convinced that an efficient application of the law requires a permanent social control of the actions of relevant public officials as well as the immediate reporting of rights abuses. “Based on the Salvadoran experience I am convinced that the state will always require a lot, a lot of social pressure, vigilance and social control. If there is no such control the social functionary will lean back and do nothing (...) for a lack of sanctions for public indifference” (interview Cheyne).\footnote{“Por la experiencia salvadoreña, estoy convencida de que el Estado siempre va a requerir mucha, mucha presión social, vigilancia, contraloría social; de otra manera, el funcionariado se acomoda a casi no hacer nada (...), porque no hay sanción para la indolencia publica.”}
4.2.4 Conclusion

Just like in Nicaragua, a (rather) new law typifying, preventing and sanctioning VAW and feminicide represents the most significant result of recent advocacy and policy measures of women’s organizations in El Salvador. Even though the law came into force more than one year ago, impacts are still few as necessary steps for a full application are pending.

If implemented and applied fully, the law could have strong and positive repercussions on the resilience and empowerment of women and girls in El Salvador, given that the law provides a useful tool in defending women’s rights and envisages the improvement of specialized care to victims of VAW. Nevertheless, actors of civil society once again seem to be more engaged than the state in the fight against feminicide. Against the backdrop that all interviewees stated political will as one of the preconditions for efficient advocacy and policy measures, this is a bitter pill to swallow.

While political will is undoubtedly essential, Urquilla is convinced that in order to create political will campaigns involving mobilization, trainings, awareness raising, sensitization and education are necessary.

Indeed, dissemination and mass media campaigns resulting in an awakened interest in the law and its context of VAW and feminicide in the Salvadoran society can be seen as first small successes. The overall aim of advocacy and policy work according to one of the interviewees is to “denaturalize” violence, to generate a “social sanction” of violence and to turn violence into an issue of public and not just private concern. It is questionable whether the discussed activities can reach such sophisticated goals and in particular whether they are sufficient to break the silence around and legitimization of VAW which has a long-standing tradition in El Salvador and was especially intensified during the civil war.

Despite these doubts the new legislation generates a framework of sustainable action for future institutional changes regarding prevention, assistance and sanction of VAW and therefore presents an important and highly-valued tool to women’s organizations in El Salvador.

4.3 Case study of Guatemala

Two key-informants interviews from Guatemala in addition to human rights reports and surveys build the foundation for this case study. The nature of these interviews is different than that of the Nicaraguan and Salvadorian interviews as instead of NGO members, the coordinating lecturer of gender-studies and feminism at the Women’s Institute of the San Carlos University in Guatemala (IUMUSAC) as well as a member of the Secretary of the Presidential Secretariat of Women (SEPREM) in Guatemala, a governmental ministry for women’s affairs and rights, were interviewed. (Approached members from Guatemalan women’s NGOs could not reply as an intense earthquake
struck the country during the research phase of this thesis – for more information see chapter seven).

4.3.1 Femi(ni)cide in Guatemala

In accordance with the structure of the previous two case studies, the following statistical data establish an overview of the dimension of femicide in Guatemala.

4.3.1.1 Facts and Figures

The graph shows the development of femicide in Guatemala between 2009 and the first nine months of 2012. (Numbers for the entire year 2012 were not available prior to the submission of this thesis.) The scale of femicide is alarming and even broader than in El Salvador. While femicides have decreased slightly between 2009 and 2010, the number increased again in 2011. The first considerable reduction can be seen in 2012.

In the first quarter of 2012 the Guatemalan Ministry of the Interior created a commission supposed to study, analyze and determine the causes of femicide in Guatemala. According to the Comisión Presidencial para el Abordaje del Femicidio (english: Presidential Commission for the eradication of femicide) 526 femicides occurred in Guatemala between the 1st of January and the 25th of October 2012 (Alarcón).

In 2011 711 femicides occurred according to the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses (English: National Institute of Forensic Sciences). Oddly enough the national police speak about 604 femicides.

In Guatemala the gender-based killings of women are consistently referred to as femicidios (femicides) instead of feminicidios (feminicides). Hence, the term femicide(s) will be used consistently in this particular case study.
femicides in 2011 – a difference of about 100 killings (Vásquez and Lara). Despite these differences, it is obvious that femicides have dropped considerably in 2012 for the first time in years.

The vast majority of victims were killed with firearms followed by cold weapons. 80% of femicides respond to cases of domestic violence and the rest is linked to organized crime including gang crime of the so called “maras” (Siglo21).

In the period from 2000-2010 more than 5.200 women were killed in Guatemala; the majority was sprayed with bullets (Valladares, Guatemaltecas Huyen de su País). Other sources speak of 7.172 femicides from 2000 to 2012 (Telesur). According to a UN report from 2012 Guatemala is the country with the second highest femicide rates worldwide (92.94 femicides per 1.000 residents), while El Salvador ranks first and Lithuania third (El Nuevo Diario). The women’s movement is not only worried by the high femicide rates but also by the high level of cruelty – a special characteristic of femicides in Guatemala. According to Gladys Acosta, UN Women Director for Latin America and Caribbean, numerous stab wounds and dismembered bodies are not rare in femicide victims and display a gruesome hatred against women (Valladares, Guatemala Escucha los Gritos).

Furthermore, Guatemala is notorious for its reign of impunity. The level of impunity in Guatemala even exceeds impunity in the other two case countries. Impunity in cases of VAW is at 97%, according to a network of 50 Guatemalan women’s organizations. In 2012 14.119 reports of VAW were made and only 3.18% (449 cases) of these cases resulted in a sentence (Telesur). Impunity in Guatemala is deeply rooted and omnipresent. The country’s 36-year-civil war came to an end in 1996 with a peace agreement between the government and guerillas but genocidaires have not been brought to justice. (With the exception of General Ríos Montt, who was indicted for genocide and crimes against humanity in January 2012 – 16 years after the end of the war – and is awaiting a trial.) Against the background of a reign of impunity, the UN and the Guatemalan government established the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala in 2007 (known under its Spanish acronym CICIG). THE CICIG estimates that 98% of all crimes go unpunished in Guatemala (CICIG 11)! Despite several successes made in dismantling organized criminal networks, a rule of law is far from being guaranteed in Guatemala, and probably even less so than in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

4.3.1.2 Components of Vulnerability

The following part of the case study assesses the root causes, dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions making up the vulnerability elements in Guatemala.

45 According to the femi(ni)cide figures from 2012 for Guatemala and El Salvador used in this thesis and adopted mainly from official police or forensic sources, Guatemala would be the deadliest country for women, followed and not preceded by El Salvador. This discrepancy once again proves the remarkable imprecision of femicide statistics in Central America and the existing difficulty of differentiating between a femicide and a homicide.
4.3.1.2.1 Root Causes

Once again misogyny and patriarchy can be seen as the foundation of femicide and the consequent creation of vulnerabilities in Guatemala. The civil war strongly intensified a societal depreciation of females and the naturalization of the use of VAW: In the 1980s thousands of women were sexually abused, raped and tortured before being killed by state agents. The state even trained soldiers to rape and terrorize women and 99% of all acts of sexual VAW were committed by soldiers or other security officers (Sanford 118).

In addition to gender-discrimination the element of ethnic discrimination immensely influences vulnerabilities in Guatemala. The indigenous population of Guatemala has been subject to discrimination and marginalization for centuries. More than half of the Guatemalan population (54%) lived below the poverty line in 2011 and the indigenous population is generally more disadvantaged in terms of access to health, education and justice than the Mestizo population (Central Intelligence Agency).

4.3.1.2.2 Dynamic Pressures

As a consequence of structural poverty and low investments in health care, access to health in Guatemala is poor – especially in rural areas – with 0.9 physicians and 0.6 beds per 1.000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency). Only 3.8% out of 30.7% of VAW victims who do look for assistance at an organization or an institution go to see a doctor in a practice or a hospital. The main reasons for not looking for assistance is distrust in others and shame (UNFPA, Salud y Justicia 12). Additional common obstacles for indigenous women are unfamiliarity with conventional medicine or the inability to speak Spanish. In terms of healthcare the vulnerability of females in Guatemala is rather high. “Continuous violence and femicide deteriorate the public health of Guatemalans” (interview Vicente).

Access to education in Guatemala is still a challenge. In 2002 only 63.3% of the female population could read and write (Central Intelligence Agency). Due to education campaigns these figures have however slightly improved. Illiteracy of the population between 15 and 24 years is at 13% in 2012. Six out of ten illiterates are of indigenous origin which is proof of particular disadvantages for indigenous people (Equipo Regional de Monitoreo y Análisis de Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica 58). According to a World Bank Study in 2007 only one in 10 indigenous teenage girls is enrolled in secondary school, and among those who live in extreme poverty, the figure is one in 100 (Valladares, Women Pin Hopes).

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46 Comparable figure for Germany: 3.531 physicians /1.000 residents and 8.17 hospital beds/1.000 residents (Central Intelligence Agency)

47 “La violencia continua y el femicidio deterioran la salud integral de los y las guatemaltecos.”
Furthermore, Guatemala records a high housing deficit with 67% of all Guatemalan families being homeless or living in informal houses (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo). A lack of decent housing does not only represent a livelihood threat due to insufficient shelter but also increases the dependence of females on their partners or husbands for property reasons.

4.3.1.2.3 Unsafe Conditions

Hereinafter, factors applying to physical environment (dangerous locations), social relations (special groups at risk) and public actions and institutions (state response and safety) are assessed.

The characteristics of special groups at risk and dangerous locations described in the case studies of Nicaragua and El Salvador do generally apply to Guatemala as well. Very high levels of VAW and an average of one to two femicides per day together with the omnipresence of common crime turn violence into a daily phenomenon and a very high risk factor for females. “For the women this situation of risks and vulnerability is very strong. Not only because of the number but because of the type of violence committed against her. It psychologically affects the woman, influencing her relationships to her partner, her family and her community” (interview Quiroa).48

On top of that, just like in El Salvador women are made responsible for the violence they suffer; an attitude which can be directly linked to misogynous ideologies and promotes revictimization (interview Vicente). Interviewee Quiroa emphasizes further the repercussions on the children of femicide victims:

The crime directly impacts families and leaves collateral victims; children in particular. They are deprived of a fundamental element which enables balance and an integral development of all human beings and represents the determining factor which strengthens the core of society. This factor is the natural transmission of cultural, moral, spiritual and intellectual values.49

Interviewee Vicente additionally describes the many different ways in which the continuous VAW negatively impacts society:

It strengthens the naturalization of VAW; it strengthens a culture of violence and repression as well as the use of violence as a means of conflict resolution; it violates the rule of law and

48 “Para la mujer esta situación de riesgo y vulnerabilidad es muy fuerte, no sólo por el número sino por el tipo de violencia que se cometen contra de ella, lo cual de hecho condiciona psicologicamente a la mujer afectando las relaciones de pareja, familiares y comunitares.”

49 (...) el delito impacta de forma directa el seno familiar, al dejar víctimas colaterales, especialmente los hijos los cuales se verán privados del elemento sustantivo que permite el equilibrio y el desarrollo integral de todo ser humano y que es el factor determinante para consolidad el núcleo de la sociedad. Este factor es la trasmisión natural de los valores culturals, morales, espirituales y intelectuales.”
the rights of women. The Guatemalan people are maintained in a state of generalized anomie towards violence. 50

Another consequence of the social phenomenon femicide are internal and external migrations. Physical and sexual violence forces Guatemalans to move to different departments within the country or even to leave the country all together. In order to escape from their aggressors they migrate to Mexico or the United States (Valladares, Guatemaltecas Huyen de su País). Conditions of vulnerability are increased due to these migrations. If women have to leave their children psychological resilience is usually severely impaired.

According to the Global Peace Index Guatemala improved its position in 2012 by moving from 125 down to 124 (Institute for Economics and Peace). Despite the slight increase Guatemala occupies the lowest GPI position within Central America. In a country with one of the highest homicide and femicide rates of the world, security and safety are rare. Both interviewees agree that femicide is a problem of civil security and 51% of the population thinks that crime, violence and gangs constitute the greatest problems of their country (Corporación Latinobarómetro) – parallel to the situation in El Salvador. The decrease of femicide cases in 2012 is a step in the direction of more security, but reports of VAW have more than quadrupled between 2008 and 2011 (2008: 4.886 reports; 2011: 20.398 reports)(Valladares, Guatemaltecas Huyen de su País). An increase in reports, however, does not necessarily equal an increase in VAW, but can also be a sign of a growing confidence amongst women to defend their rights.

The numbers of unpunished VAW and femicide cases leave no doubt that state response is insufficient and that women do not present a priority to the government. Vicente speaks about “no-actions towards the problem of violence against women, negligence by the state, duplicity of activities of governmental institutions, lack of allocation of budgets and other resources for the institutionalization of women in our country, use of resources determined for specific programs in favor of women for other governmental programs, patronage and nepotism.” 51

Interviewee Quiroa from the Presidential Secretariat for Women’s Affairs does not make evaluative statements concerning the response of the state to femicide but mentions that the current government under president Otto Pérez Molina has based their activities against femicide

50 “Se fortalece la naturalización de la violencia contra las mujeres; se fortalece la cultura de violencia y represión en Guatemala, el uso de la violencia como medio de resolución de conflictos; se vulnera el Estado de Derecho en Guatemala; se violan los derechos humanos de las mujeres y los y las guatemaltecas se mantienen en un estado de anomia generalizada ante la violencia.”
51 “no acciones ante la problemática de la violencia contra las mujeres, la negligencia estatal, la duplicidad de actividades por parte de instituciones gubernamentales, la falta de asignación presupuestaria y de otros recursos a la institucionalidad de la mujeres en nuestro país, el uso de los recursos designados para programa específicos para las mujeres para otros programas del Gobierno en turno – clientelismo”
mainly on prevention. Quiroa further states that the international community has manifested their response (focused on the attention of the phenomenon) in the face of rising femicide cases as well as of the alarming cruelty involved.

4.3.2 Conclusion

Even though Guatemala is officially at peace since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, it is one of the most violent countries in the world. Homicidal violence has taken on alarming dimensions and according to some sources femicides in Guatemala have even surpassed femicide rates in Mexico, thus turning Guatemala into the number one country in terms of femicides worldwide. Social exclusion and a non-application of laws seem to be the principal reasons for the preoccupying level of violence and insecurity in Guatemala which is certainly much higher than in Nicaragua and even higher than in El Salvador.

Vulnerability factors in Guatemala are numerous despite a reduction of femicide cases in 2012. Due to their disadvantaged position in society, particularly expressed in a restricted access to education, health and resources, the livelihoods of indigenous women and girls are especially weak and generate much vulnerability to the hazard femicide.

The generally low security in Guatemala owing to high rates of common as well as organized and gang crime in addition to the high level of brutality used in femicides represent a continuous risk for females and negatively impact psychological and emotional resilience. The fact that VAW in Guatemala even motivates internal and external migrations of women demonstrates once more the severity of femicide in Guatemala.

Moreover, extremely high impunity rates in Guatemala send the wrong signals to perpetrators and society. Instead of discouraging the phenomenon of femicide by condemning perpetrators of gender-based killings and other crimes of VAW, widespread impunity might even encourage more crimes against women and girls and complicates the process of denaturalizing violence. On top of that, impunity increases the already high vulnerabilities of the female population and hampers their resilience.

4.3.3 Results of Advocacy and Policy Work

Vicente attributes a high importance to advocacy and policy work of women’s organizations as it enables and facilitates the involvement of women, the very group of people most affected by VAW and femicide, in political matters regarding their safety and protection. “We, as women, have demanded a response to the social problem of violence from the state and accompany the response in order to generate joint processes in terms of attention, assistance, sanction and prevention of
violence against women” (interview Vicente). Quiroa also values advocacy and policy work of NGOs and other civil society actors but stresses that these actors are different from governmental actors which have been rightfully elected by the people to carry out a public office. She thinks that the women’s movement can help to provide a different perspective on governmental affairs regarding women’s rights and to propose actions which are distinct from or complementary to the ones proposed by state actors. Furthermore, a dialogue can develop which allows to coordinately work together and to “solve situations before they turn into conflicts” (interview Quiroa).

The biggest advocacy success in Guatemala already dates a few years back. In April 2008 a law against femicide and VAW was passed, called Ley contra el Femicidio y otras Formas de Violencia contra las Mujeres (English: Law against Femicide and other forms of violence against women). The law served as a strong reference in the formulation of the laws against VAW which came into force in El Salvador and Nicaragua (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 82-83). The Guatemalan NGO Sector de Mujeres was a key actor in the formulation as well as the approbation process of the law which shows a high level of political involvement of women’s organization (outcome category five – improved policies).

SEPREM, the Presidential Secretariat for Women’s Affairs interviewed for this thesis, is the leading authority responsible for the implementation of the law. One year later in April 2009 a strategic plan for the application of the law was set up jointly by the Judicial Sector, the prosecuting attorney’s office, the Ministry of the Interior, the Public Defense Institute and the National Institute of Forensic Sciences of Guatemala.

Implementation of the law has been challenging. In 2010 SEPREM found the lack of internal rules and regulations in local state institutions to be one of the main limitations of an efficient implementation and application of laws against VAW. Regulations would not incorporate human rights of women and adequate cultural attitudes. In fact it is not uncommon that national plans and policies do not reach local level (UNFPA, Programming to Address Violence 54). SEPREM further lamented the little knowledge of national and international women’s rights and laws and of the role of the state as a promoter and guarantor of women’s rights (Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer 17).

In the face of these challenges in implementation the women’s movement of Guatemala – united in the Red de la No Violencia contra las Mujeres (REDNOVI; English: Network for No Violence against Women)enhanced their advocacy activities. While some NGOs (in particular Grupo

52 “Las mujeres hemos demanda al Estado Guatemalteco la respuesta ante la problemática social y se le a acompañado para generar procesos conjuntos para la atención, sanción y prevención de la violencia contra las mujeres. “
53 “resolver situaciones antes que estas se constituyan en conflictos”
54 The director of this NGO was originally going to be interviewed for this thesis. Unfortunately the interview could not be conducted as all NGO staff was involved in emergency assistance due to a strong earthquake in Guatemala in November 2012.
Guatemalteco de Mujeres) strengthened their monitoring activities e.g. by frequently publishing monitoring reports (outcome category five – improved policies), Sector de Mujeres participated in the elaboration of the so called Protocolo de Aplicación de la Ley contra el Femicidio (English: Protocol for the application of the law against femicide) led by the Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Intrafamiliar y contra las Mujeres (English: National Coordinator for the Prevention of Violence within in the Family and against Women; CONAPREVI; a public agency for public policies concerning VAW composed of both representatives of the public sector as well as representatives of REDNOVI) and other public institutions engaged in the fight against VAW. The protocol aims at especially improving the response of the justice sector and accompanies the implementation and application process. It was approved in April 2008.

The fact that the public agency CONAPREVI is composed of REDNOVI members shows the growing role of and tolerance for women’s groups in political affairs regarding VAW. Within CONAPREVI the network has become an institutional partner and a strong and politically influential alliance has been formed (outcome category three- strengthened alliances).

The approved protocol now provides the women’s movement with yet another tool to demand state responsibility and response in the face of VAW and femicide. In order to tackle the difficulties identified in local state offices responsible for the application of the law, the protocol calls for departmental and municipal meetings aimed at training local implementing actors in using the new legal instruments and at identifying further difficulties and resistances. These advocacy measures relate to outcome category five, improved policies, as they aim at improving policy implementation.

A very similar approach was taken in Guatemala in 2006 in order to ensure the effective implementation of two national policies for the promotion and development of women and for the achievement of equity of opportunities. Municipal Agreements in 20 municipalities were developed in order to bring women’s rights into force. Therefore local government officials, civic groups, NGOs and community leaders were brought together to identify obstacles and develop plans to tackle them. As a national goal was made meaningful and realistic on a local level and involved the participation of various local actors, this approach is considered best practice in fighting VAW (UNFPA, Programming to Address Violence 53ff). The success brought about in 2006 raises hopes that the application of the femicide law will finally improve due to the advocacy measures carried out at departmental and municipal level.

Despite these important steps, the above given numbers suggest that even four years after the law came into force impunity is as dominant as ever. The interviewees relate this unsatisfactory development to the still prevailing patriarchic ideas both within society and public offices. Indeed the
political context in Guatemala did not favor an alliance between the women’s movement and the mass media which could have allowed for a widespread campaign for awareness raising purposes. The political climate in 2012 generated by president Otto Pérez Molina from the rightwing Patriotic Party, who took his office in January 2012, does not encourage a political participation of women’s NGOs and inhibited competent press coverage on topics related to VAW (Vanderschaeghe and Lind 94). Vicente agrees: “The media enhances the naturalization of violence against women.” The NGO Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres also reported that the media makes the causes of VAW invisible (Alarcón).

Despite the prevalence of patriarchy the interviewees believe that the phenomenon femicide is known amongst the majority of the population. Vicente is convinced that this widespread knowledge is the result of activities of the women’s movement which managed to put VAW as a social problem on the public agenda. Quiroa goes even further and says that femicide “is the most known and discussed crime at a general level”. A widespread knowledge of the gender-based killings of females as a crime called femicide is a solid foundation for a shift in social and cultural norms (outcome category one). The increased engagement of the international community against femicide in Guatemala might have also led to an increased awareness of VAW among the Guatemalan society. However, Vicente thinks that in the face of alarming dimensions of femicide and impunity the international assistance still falls short and is too often only manifested in short-term activities instead of long-term processes.

Another factor that, according to the women’s movement, represents a success in the fight against femicide, particularly against impunity, and indicates a growing confidence amongst women to defend their rights is the increase in police reports of VAW. While 4.886 reports were filed in 2008, 20.398 reports were filed in 2011. This fourfold increase coincides with the time period when the law against femicide came into force in 2008 (Valladares, Guatemaltecas Huyen de su País).

4.3.4 Conclusion

Compared to Nicaragua and El Salvador, Guatemala presents as the country most afflicted by femicide and impunity. Just like in Nicaragua and El Salvador a progressive law against VAW and impunity is in force, however for a longer period of time. Against the background of an unsatisfactory application of the law, the women’s movement is invested in improving the application, most importantly by trainings of government officials.

55 “Los medios de comunicación fortalecen la naturalización de la violencia contra las mujeres.”
56 “es el delito más conocido y mencionado a nivel general”
Next to high numbers of femicide, escalating impunity is the main inhibitor in the fight against the phenomenon. Despite the law against femicide and a national commission exclusively working on reducing impunity, impunity of femicide cases remains as high as ever.

On the other hand, the wide-spread awareness of VAW among the population, an increase of VAW reports and the decrease of femicides in 2012 gives rise to hopes that the efforts of non-governmental as well as governmental and international actors are finally beginning to bear fruit. While it is difficult to identify the exact reasons for the considerable decrease of femicides between 2011 and 2012, it is not unfounded to connect said decrease at least partly to a slowly improving application of the law against femicide four years after its approbation. The essential and ongoing role of women’s NGOs in this process cannot be denied.
5 Conclusions

Feminicide, the most gruesome form of VAW, is a wide-spread social phenomenon of enormous dimensions in Central American countries. It is based on misogynous and patriarchic attitudes, is often executed with excessive brutality, takes the lives of hundreds of females every year in El Salvador and Guatemala and less so in Nicaragua, poses great risks to livelihood and property of females and their families, generates significant protection needs and is not adequately targeted by national structures.

Despite these characteristics femi(ni)cide is mainly addressed by developmental organizations, does currently not constitute a priority to humanitarian actors and has rarely been analyzed from a perspective rooted in knowledge from the field of humanitarian action.

Escalating impunity and a lack of appropriate laws and institutional practices in addressing femi(ni)cide are considered main causes for rising numbers of femi(ni)cides. But while there seems to be agreement on these causes, not all experts consider advocacy and policy work to be the method of choice for combating the phenomenon.

Therefore the main purpose of this research was to find out whether femi(ni)cide in Central America constitutes a humanitarian crisis and to investigate the benefit of advocacy and policy work of women’s organization in empowering women and fighting femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. This was done by means of a qualitative in-depth multiple case study approach combined with a literature review and several key-informant interviews which altogether provide a solid basis on which to answer the following two main research questions:

- Does femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala constitute a humanitarian crisis?
- To what extent does advocacy and policy work of (humanitarian) women’s organizations contribute to the fight against femi(ni)cide – at the examples of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala?

In accordance with the two research questions the following part of the chapter is two-fold, summarizes the most important findings of the research and finally answers the main research questions.

In order to answer the first main research question properly, it is useful to refer back to the disaster terminology laid out in chapter 2.5 which defines a disaster as “what occurs when the impact of a hazard on a section of society (causing death, injury, loss of property or economic losses) overwhelms that society’s ability to cope” (Twigg 13). Looking back at the disaster equation, a disaster is the realization of the risk (risk = hazard multiplied by vulnerability). The figures included in the case studies demonstrate that the risk of the socio-political hazard femi(ni)cide has realized
frequently for several years in all three case countries – with Guatemala being the country most afflicted by femicide in 2012 and Nicaragua being the country least afflicted. Even though the numbers of femi(ni)cides finally decreased in 2012 in Guatemala and El Salvador, they are still at epidemic levels, whereas in Nicaragua the numbers are generally much lower, but show no indications of a future decrease. The occurrence of other forms of VAW is wide-spread in all three countries. VAW and its underlying ideologies misogyny and patriarchy are so deeply rooted in society, that a remarkable part of that society, including women and girls, do not often recognize violence as an unnatural let alone illicit act.

As outlined in the case studies the impact of femi(ni)cide on people and property is severe. On a more societal level a culture of violence and impunity is manifested with every femicide that goes unpunished. In Guatemala and El Salvador where excessive brutality is one of the characteristics of femi(ni)cide, people are systematically being terrorized by violated cadavers appearing in the streets on a daily basis. In El Salvador and Guatemala - two of the most violent countries of the world - safety, especially for women and girls, is missing. But protection needs of women – particularly in private spaces – are also urgent in Nicaragua, which according to statistics is one of the safest countries in Central America.

The application of the PAR-model in the three case studies has proven highly useful in identifying various existing vulnerabilities on an individual level concerning the hazard femi(ni)cide. Primarily these relate to women’s health (physical and psycho-social), self-esteem and the capacity to provide for themselves. It was found that livelihoods of women and girls in the case countries are not sustainable due to structural poverty and female’s subordinate status in society brought about by discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes and economic inequalities. Therefore livelihoods cannot easily cope with stress resulting from VAW, nor maintain their productivity. As a consequence the livelihoods of the next generation are also endangered. Children’s resilience in turn is also significantly impaired if they experience violence as a normal part of their lives, are brought up by mothers who struggle to provide for their families because of a lack of self-esteem and economic means resulting from experiences of VAW, or eventually if they lose their mothers due to femi(ni)cide.

VAW in the three investigated countries constitutes a severe public health issue. However, health care facilities of the state do neither provide competent psychological nor physical care to substantially respond to vulnerabilities of females related to health. In addition, state institutions such as the national police or public attorney’s offices do not manage to adequately prosecute offenders and protect the lives of females. The situation of femi(ni)cide is characterized by hopelessness for women and girls owing to a lack of competent and efficient state institutions to turn to for assistance. Hence, against the background of structurally weak livelihoods of women and
girls, states do not provide females with sustainable instruments in order to cope with the aggressive forces of VAW. Thus, recovery\textsuperscript{57} is unlikely without external aid – which according to Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon is one of the characteristics of a disaster (see chapter 2.1.5).

If victims or survivors of femi(ni)cide or other forms of VAW find the courage and strength to tackle their vulnerabilities, women’s NGOs are often their only reliable contact partners. Though however strong, women’s NGOs in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala heavily depend on financial support of international donors and cannot compensate for a well-functioning democratic government putting the security of women and girls on top of their political agenda and advocating for a change of socio-cultural norms.

Not only does VAW and femi(ni)cide hamper a sound development of females or even put an end to their lives, it also puts a serious strain on the socio-economic development and the democracy of the afflicted countries as a whole. The human cost of the phenomenon is high either due to death or to injuries and disabilities of survivors of VAW. But emotional and psychological consequences of VAW can also prevent women from maintaining being economically productive. Apart from human suffering, the economic burden of femi(ni)cide is high as we have seen that femi(ni)cide and other forms of VAW typically affect women between the age of 21 and 30 – usually an economically productive age.

The above summarized characteristics of the situation of femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, namely a breakdown or weakness of state and community structures, deeply-rooted socio-economic discrimination (of women and girls), limited options to make or maintain a living and high security issues, are typical characteristics of humanitarian crisis settings. The structural threat to livelihoods of women and girls and the absence of wide-spread disaster risk reduction mechanisms in all three case countries leave no doubt that the impact of the man-made hazard femi(ni)cide overwhelms the society’s capacity to cope. On these grounds it is safe to conclude that the disaster, brought about by the realization of the risk associated with the socio-political hazard femi(ni)cide, resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. As it was found that national structures fail, external help is required in order to finally overcome the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, femi(ni)cide in Central America should occupy a more prominent position on the humanitarian agenda. Recommendations as to how humanitarian actors could engage in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala are given in the following chapter six.

With regard to the second main research question focusing on the advocacy and policy work of women’s organizations, it is useful to firstly consider that advocacy and policy work can result in

\textsuperscript{57} Recovery = psychological and physical recovery as well as replacement of resources and social relations (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon)
essential changes in lives, community conditions, institutions and systems (Reisman, Gienapp and Stachowiak 16). The case studies have shown that in all three countries women’s organizations were actively engaged in promoting better laws against VAW and femi(ni)cide with the ultimate goal of improving institutional services provided to females resulting in the reduction of femi(ni)cides and in the empowerment of women. The often challenging and long-standing advocacy and policy work, carried out by a (regionally) united women’s movement, paid off successfully with the incorporation of laws against VAW and femi(ni)cide in the criminal codes of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. All interviewed key-informants, without a single exception, regard these legislative changes as immense progresses of women’s rights. The vast majority of interviewees stated that the legal protection of women’s rights in their countries has improved greatly due to the approbation of new laws typifying various forms of VAW which had not been considered crimes prior to the law. With reference to the analytical framework (benchmark criteria) for answering the second main research question it can be found that advocacy and policy activities falling under the outcome categories ‘improved policies’ and ‘strengthened alliances’ have been very successful in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. It was shown however, that ineffective legal, political and law enforcement procedures significantly hinder the diligent application of such laws in all case study countries.

Nevertheless, simply denying the efficiency or function of said laws by arguing that impunity, one of the main obstacles in fighting femi(ni)cide, has not decreased after the approbation of the laws, is shortsighted. The fact that the laws against femi(ni)cide do not apply quickly, does not justify dismissing their necessity altogether. While it is true that the laws alone do not resolve the problem, they do present a new and powerful tool to women’s organizations which allows them to finally demand state response and responsibility on substantiated grounds. Demanding political response is much more effective when based on provable incompliance with or violations of existing laws.

Moreover, advocacy and policy work of local (humanitarian) NGOs is directed at a holistic and integral response to VAW. Not only do the new laws focus on stricter sanctions of perpetrators of VAW and on specialized gender-based attention to victims in state institutions, they also aim at tackling the various elements of female vulnerabilities by for instance recognizing property grabbing by partners or husbands as a crime.

Due to the persistent political participation of women’s NGOs, which are actively involved in communities afflicted by violence and which often even consist of members who have experienced VAW themselves, the typical risk of implementing a response to violence which is not rooted in the realities of women and girls, but formulated by people who are remote from daily violence, was prevented.
In the face of missing political will, insufficient state response and high levels of impunity, advocacy and policy work of non-governmental actors constitutes a vital contribution in the fight against femi(ni)cide and in empowering women. However, local NGOs and other civil society actors cannot remain the only actors credibly invested in combating femi(ni)cide in the case study countries. Governmental and political actors have to finally play a leading role in the process.

Ultimately, advocacy or policy measures cannot be completely successful and bring about changes in social and physical lives and conditions, unless normative notions of appropriate behavior for men and women, which still legitimize violence, are finally changed. Even though a shift in social norms is one of the outcomes attributed to the investigated advocacy and policy work and initial successes such as an increased awareness of femi(ni)cide and a rather general knowledge of and interest in the new laws have been achieved on a societal level, bringing about a shift in social norms is a long-term goal and remains the most challenging task in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. It is unlikely that the current efforts (mostly made by local NGOs) to address core social values and behaviors both of society and political, executive and judicial officials can deteriorate misogynous and patriarchic structures which have developed over centuries naturalizing VAW. Pioneering work involving local, national and international actors has to be carried out in order to finally overcome the burden of VAW and femi(ni)cide in Central America. Recommendations as to how a change of social norms could be promoted are given in the following chapter six.
6 Recommendations

Providing recommendations was one of the initially described objectives of this thesis. The findings of this research lead to recommendations of practical and academic nature.

Recommendations regarding Remedial Action

1) Record-keeping systems are the foundation of advocacy and policy work and additionally help to understand the development of all forms of VAW. Going back to the observation that record-keeping systems in all three case countries are weak and that data discrepancies and imprecision are common, one single official authority in each country should be responsible for collecting and publishing data on femi(ni)cide. Obviously for this purpose there has to be an exchange of information between executive, judicial and forensic institutions. Women’s organizations, however, should maintain their separate observations of VAW in order to draw public attention to significant discrepancies or a lack of due diligence on part of the official record-keeping authority—if necessary.

2) It was established that femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala constitutes a humanitarian crisis and should therefore be of (higher) concern to the humanitarian system. Identifying precise needs for humanitarian action however remains difficult as the situation in the case study countries does not primarily require “typical” large-scale life-saving measures such as the distribution of food and water or the provision of shelter in temporary camps. We have learned that in order to release the pressure resulting from a disaster all causal factors (vulnerabilities) have to be addressed (Wisner, Blaikie and Cannon 50-52). Thus, in order to combat femi(ni)cide in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, the numerous identified vulnerabilities have to be addressed – which are e.g. interlinked with the reduction of poverty in society. Hence, DRR falls in the gap between development cooperation and humanitarian aid. It is therefore recommendable that the coherence between both sectors and their response to femi(ni)cide is enhanced. Nonetheless, the limitations of the different sectoral agendas should be respected. An integral response to VAW in the case study countries should incorporate a variety of approaches aiming at restoring decent livelihoods: Legal and policy frameworks should be improved focusing on gender-equality, economic opportunities should be promoted and social reconstruction and reintegration should be enhanced (FAO). All efforts should be coordinated.

3) As societal norms resulting from misogynous and patriarchic ideologies were found to be the root causes of femi(ni)cide and also the main obstacle in combating femi(ni)cide which cannot be overcome by existing national efforts only, external aid has to increasingly target a shift of these norms. Therefore large-scale educational and awareness-raising measures (preferably involving
the media) should be taken which increase visibility of VAW and hence break the naturalization as well as the privatization of VAW in Central America.

4) Based on the finding that disaster risk reduction is rare in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, prevention and mitigation has to become a priority for both humanitarian as well as developmental agencies. VAW should be incorporated into risk reduction and resilience work as a hazard and factor in vulnerability. This research shows that femi(ni)cide is usually the peak of continuous VAW and rarely an unprecedented violent act. Therefore prevention has to become a key area in the fight against femi(ni)cide. The involvement of the state should be improved from the very moment a woman files her first report. The findings of this research suggest that a considerable number of femi(ni)cides could have been prevented if only the police or judicial officials had implemented effective precautionary measures in reaction to reports of attacks. The current increase of reports (as a consequence of the application of new femi(ni)cide laws and the accompanying awareness-raising campaigns) underlines the importance of an efficient first state response. It was shown that legislative changes do not fully have an impact unless accompanied by activities/programs aiming at the transformation of social and cultural norms and the disadvantaged position of females in society. Therefore the process of improving state response – especially by capacity building and gender-awareness training of state officials – has to be carried out parallel to the process of launching educational and awareness-raising campaigns.

5) Given the enormous potential of the new femi(ni)cide laws in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador to decrease vulnerabilities and to empower women on the one hand, and the notorious lack of political will on the other hand, actions aimed at the application of the law have to be enforced. Therefore compliance with the new femi(ni)cide laws as well as with other national and international legal instruments regarding women’s rights should be demanded and monitored by international human rights organizations in addition to the existing monitoring work of local NGOs. The international participation could help to exert more pressure on authorities in case of infringements of rights.

6) Advocacy and policy activities have been gaining importance both in the developmental and the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian agencies and/or networks such as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance should put more effort into developing benchmarks for evaluating advocacy and policy work. Thus, the identified lack of evaluation practices especially designed to measure the effectiveness of said activities in humanitarian contexts of violence would be addressed.
Recommendations regarding Academic Practice

1) It was found that femi(ni)cide in Central America does currently not constitute a popular topic of high relevance in the academic field of humanitarian assistance. Given the alarming proportions of femi(ni)cide and its severe effects on people and property, however, this should be changed. Femi(ni)cide should particularly be more present in humanitarian research on violence and gender. In no part of the world are women exempt from VAW; and new forms of violence, such as economic GBV, are emerging quickly and need to be addressed based on credible research.

2) In particular, in-depth empirical research on the impacts of VAW on the livelihoods of females in rural and urban areas is urgently needed to fill the current research gap. Such research would not only help to better understand the general phenomenon of VAW, but also be vital in creating efficient aid programs, as only those programs which are tailored to the needs of (primary and secondary) VAW victims are sustainable.

3) Concerning the lack of English language literature on femi(ni)cide in Central and Latin America efforts should be made to translate important existing and future Spanish publications into English and to additionally make them available to a more international, academic readership. Even though the lack of awareness of femi(ni)cide has its most severe consequences in those countries primarily afflicted by femi(ni)cide, attention to the phenomenon should also be promoted in the global North.
Constraints and Limitations of Research

Just like any research, this research is subject to some constraints and limitations. Firstly, due to limited financial and temporal resources the researcher was only able to visit Nicaragua in order to conduct expert-interviews. Consequently, interviews with experts from El Salvador and Guatemala had to be conducted via e-mail. Compared to the face-to-face interviews the questionnaires for the e-mail-interviews had to be slightly less long and complex following the logics of e-mail-interviews (Sarantakos 290). Moreover, the response rate in e-mail interviews was lower compared to inquiries regarding personal interviews. Sometimes several reminders had to be sent to the interviewees. In order to avoid the lack of flexibility which characterizes e-mail-interviews, several e-mails were sent back and forth in case of ambiguities etc. Due to a rather devastating earthquake in Guatemala in November 2012 – parallel to the interview period – filling out the questionnaire was no priority for the approached NGOs which were busy with providing a quick response to the disaster. Thus, fewer questionnaires were sent back to the researcher than expected.

Secondly, the researcher speaks Spanish fluently which is why a language barrier barely existed. Nevertheless, interviews were audio-taped so that, if necessary, unclear interview parts or statements could be listened to again after the interview, thus, enabling possible clarifying inquiries.

Thirdly, as femi(ni)cide constitutes a sensitive topic and occurs in a highly political context many (strong and) different opinions among the interviewees are generated which complicates an objective assessment of the situation in the three case study countries. Moreover, as different interviewees had different opinions for instance regarding the efficiency of implementation of a fairly new femi(ni)cide law, some contradictory statements arose.

Fourthly, an awareness of possible biases of key informants is necessary as the majority of interviewees is actively engaged in advocacy and policy activities and might feel the need to present their role or their achievements in an overly positive manner, or to dramatize their situation in order to attract more attention.

Fifthly, a general weakness of case studies is that the findings only relate to the unit of analysis and do not allow for generalizations (Sarantakos 216). However, since the definition and the basic characteristics of femi(ni)cide are universal, general findings and recommendations are likely to apply to other countries afflicted by femi(ni)cide.

Lastly, in order to analyze vulnerabilities, several figures and statistics had to be used. As described in the introduction to chapter four, VAW and femi(ni)cide statistics are known for their discrepancies and imprecision. Thus, the figures only closely approach the actual dimensions of femi(ni)cide.
8 Works Cited


## Annex

### Annex I: List of Interviewees

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<th><strong>Nicaragua</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Klemen Lorena Altamirano Carcache</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lydia Palacios Chiong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigitte Hausschild</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nora Ligia Rugama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilma Nuñez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wendy Flores</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayra Pineda and colleagues</td>
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<td>Sandra Ramos and colleagues</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeanette Urquilla</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Deysi Cheyne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delia Cornejo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria Lucrecia Vicente Franco</td>
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