

MEXICAN AND BRAZILIAN MACHISMO: CULTURAL TOLERANCE

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of Latin American women disappear on daily basis. The United Nations through the Women Unit classifies Mexico as an emergency State, and Brazil as an alarming country in terms of violence and murder against women and little girls. However, the key question is to analyse the tolerance toward violence and subjugation of women in Mexico and Brazil. The hypothesis of this work is based on the idea that violence against women in Mexico and Brazil is due to prevalent machismo in those countries, which is influenced by the political, social, economic and cultural structure. The present text aims to understand how machismo is embodied into Mexican and Brazilian culture, reflected into family and social structures and values, as well as inside the political establishment, which contributes not only to subjugating women, but also to increasing gender violence in these countries, where corruption and impunity are also critical. The text is based on an interdisciplinary perspective, with ethnographic data extracted by direct interviews conducted in the communities of Xochimilco, South of Mexico City, Mexico. The article exposes the main perspectives about machismo, offers a cultural description of family values and social tolerance towards machismo, provides a general picture about the levels of gender violence in Mexico and Brazil, and presents the role of political establishment in the development of machismo, and finally it offers some conclusive comments.

Keywords: machismo, women, Mexico, Brazil, violence

INTRODUCTION

Machismo studies are keys to understand gender inequality. The gender perspective allows analyzing and understanding the characteristics that define women and men in a specific way, as well as their similarities and differences. This gender perspective analyzes the vital possibilities of women and men, the meaning of their lives, their expectations and opportunities, the complexity and differences that occur between both genders, as well as the institutional and daily conflicts that they face. The feminist gender perspective also contains multiplicity of proposals, programs and alternative actions to contemporary social problems derived from gender oppressions, gender disparity and inequity (Lagarde 1996, 13).

In recent years, there is a reasonable extensive bibliographic production on machismo, misogyny and gender inequalities in Mexico, Brazil and Latin America. However, a few studies have analysed it from a multidisciplinary perspective and taking into account the gender perspective.

Certainly, Mexico and Brazil have launched several initiatives to fight gender violence, and thanks to the work of feminists groups in both countries, machismo has been recognised as a large and complex social and cultural problem despite the advancements to make this issue visible and the introduction of many international treaties, national reforms, and new public policies. Machismo and violence against women continue causing more deaths and damages in women than malaria, AIDS or wars (Sagot 2008, 36).

According to Liang, Salcedo, and Miller, machismo is “the masculinity ideology, which is composed by prescriptive attitudes and beliefs, shaped by cultural beliefs that guide men behaviour” (Liang et al. 2011, 201). Giraldo adds “machismo consists basically in the emphasis or exaggeration of masculine values, as well as in the belief of superiority. In addition to this exaggeration, machismo includes other peculiar characteristics attributed to the concept of manhood [...]. The outstanding characteristics of the male are his heterosexuality and his aggressiveness” (Giraldo 1972, 295).

In the same line, Edelson coincides with Giraldo. Both authors relate physical, psychological and cultural features to describe machismo. Following Edelson, “machismo refers to a set of beliefs about how males should behave. Positive traits associated with

machismo are honour, pride, courage, responsibility, and obligation to family, while negative traits are sexual prowess, high alcohol consumption, and aggressiveness [...] While women assume traits such as submissiveness, and self-sacrificing behaviour. These behaviours are consistent with the second dynamic, *marianismo* [...] which is the ideal role of women presented as a self-sacrificed mother, loyal wife and without sexual desire" (Edelson et. al. 2007, 2).

The machismo, as a cultural and social construction, leads to male patriarchy and male supremacy over women. From this perspective, Abbasi and Aslinia indicate that machismo is a process of learning aggression and other observational behaviours, in which a child is able not only to learn aggression from his parents, siblings, uncles, family members and friends, but also learn other characteristics assigned to machismo such as dominance, protectiveness, love, assertiveness, and power (Abbasi and Aslinia 2010).

Among attributes given to machismo are beliefs and behaviours of superiority of men. The values behind machismo are physical force, risk, courage, independence, and capacity to infringe violence against women (Abbasi and Aslinia 2010).

Violence against women becomes a very complex issue due to the fact that men and women are learning social norms at early age (from family, school, church, politics, TV, etc.). For Cabrera, the socialization process of machismo drives men and women to adopt some features of behaviour. Women have been taught to be passive and men to be active and assertive (Cabrera 2014, 6). Violence against women is an issue that is affecting women worldwide, however there are some features in each country that increase men aggression such as family values, social environment and social tolerance.

When abuse becomes prominent in the domestic space, there is a psychological violence that women go through, ultimately affecting their decision to stay in abusive relationships, which could possibly tie into the socialization process (Cabrera 2014, 8). In addition, in macho societies women, who abandon these relations are viewed socially as "bad women" or "bad mothers".

Cabrera defines emotional abuse as "any behaviour that causes emotional damage and decreases self-esteem. It is a behaviour that degrades human condition as such and threats, embarrassment, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, constant surveillance, and exploitation are the most common emotional abuse" (Cabrera 2014, 8).

In many societies, physical and sexual violence are not classified as such, and even worse, psychological and emotional violence are invisible. "The socialization process through violence, presents gender violence as "an acceptable behaviour". Machismo creates

a type of violence that it is obscured and difficult to distinguish; sometimes it is disguised as “love” (Cabrera 2014, 9).

Often, women who experience domestic violence in marriage have also experienced violence in their home families. In this sense, these women have been socialized in patriarchal and macho families with father, brother or male figures exercising machismo and violence against women. The violence becomes normalised since early age, not only for “the victim”, but also by the whole society that accept this violence as a “normal” way to control the behaviour of women.

Violence against women is a structural component of gender oppression system. The use of violence is not only one of the most effective means of controlling women, but also one of the most brutal and explicit expressions of domination and subordination. The position of women and men is organized in a hierarchy, in which men have control over the main resources of society, among them, women. There are numerous ideological, moral, political, economic and legal supports for exercising men authority over women. Although these supports are historical and cultural, the use of violence is one of the most prevalent and widespread forms that help the exercise of that authority (Sagot 2008, 36).

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL TOLERANCE OF MACHISMO

Historically machismo was introduced and institutionalised in Mexico by Spanish conquerors, and in Brazil by Portuguese conquerors as a way to impose their values and interpretation of male dominance. Machismo culture was fostered and endorsed by the Catholic Church as a way to preserve male power and female submission, and promote women purity (Stergakis 2018).

For Perilla (1999) machismo began to develop when Spaniards and Portuguese invaded Latin America and took control and power over these territories and individuals, establishing themselves as masters and destroying native cultures. This new ethnic organisation would create a new political system based on ethnic origin known as *mestizaje* (blending of Spaniards and native Latin American people) (Perilla 1999). The characteristics of *mestizaje* are closely related to the characteristics of machismo and social dominance, which are power and control over a population leaving them with little or no voice. *Amestizo* child (son of a European and Native Latin American person) was educated to develop his identity of manhood by exercising his dominance over females inside a patriarchal family system

(Perilla 1999). This behaviour is best known as machista. Male behaviour left women to be viewed as a possession or territory to be won over. Female intimacy would be profoundly violated through the emergence of machismo in young *mestizo* men (Perilla 1999).

As for Segato, the expression patriarchal-colonial-modernity describes adequately the Latino American societies, since the priority of patriarchal society is the appropriation of the body of women. The woman's body is the first territory, where the power can be exercised like a colony, conquered by a conqueror. This dominant relation shaped the modernity of Latino American social relations. The conquest itself would have been an impossible enterprise without the pre-existence of a victorious masculinity ready to conquer women's bodies (Segato 2016).

From Spanish conquest (1519–1521) until the colonial period (1535–1810), and arriving to the twenty-first century, the machismo has been present and profoundly rooted in Latin American countries with catholic colonial past. Certainly, there are some advances on women's rights due to feminist movements. The gender inequality and violence against women started to be visible in the 1980's. The creation of women associations advocating against gender violence was more prosperous in the 1990's, and at that time women movements achieved to place women violence into the global agenda. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the feminist groups also discussed that violence against women, and it was condemned by international laws and national public policies (Sagot 2008, 38).

In Mexico, there are some legal regulations to control physical abuse against women, such as the General Law of Access to a Free Life for Women enacted in 2007, reformed in 2011 and 2018. The General Law for Equality Between Women and Men enacted by the Chamber of Deputies of the Honourable Congress of the Union created in 2006 and reformed in 2018, and the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination promulgated in 2003 expressed in article I of the Mexican Political Constitution (SRE 2019).

In Brazil, there are many regulations in place against women violence. For example, the Maria da Penha Law (MPL) introduced in 2006, which integrates polices and criminal procedures to deal with gender violence. Another important step was the law amended to require domestic violence aggressors to pay for victims' treatment (Projeto de Lei 2438/2019). However, the gender oppression continues being present in families and social structures, as well as State institutions as a tool to control and oppress women bodies, desires and expectations.

Mexican women are often treated as “children” without full empowerment; while Brazilian women are frequently educated as “beauty dolls”; in both cases women should pay respect to their father, brother or husband, and later on to their own male son meaning that a woman in herself is never totally free of her decisions and she should always be under the protection of a male.

In Latin America culture, men have the right and ownership over their partners, or over females around them. The social and cultural context might influence men to feel that they need to protect themselves against other men, who can possibly have an interest in “their women.” When this occurs, women become submissive as men take control.

In Mexico and Brazil, men dominance is present since their households and home communities; women tend not to have a voice about familial choices. There is a higher likelihood for men to become machista, when they hold traditional attitudes regarding sex roles and acceptance of patriarchal values (Ceballos 2013, 8).

Male social dominance, patriarchy, and gender roles within families, communities and society are accepted as part of the Mexican, Brazilian and Latin American culture, and characteristics such as dominance, control, protectiveness, and provider are associated with male role. In this sense, Latin American machismo is in one way or another, experienced through familial and social system on daily basis (Ceballos 2013, 13).

In Latin America, there is the expectation that femininity and masculinity should be performed in a way that conforms to the traditional compulsory binaries of gender and sexuality (Stergakis 2018), particularly in Mexico and Brazil.

The process of gender socialization¹ in Mexico and Brazil empowers men to feel and be superior towards women in family, work and public places. To understand the mechanisms of socialization, which ease the development of machismo, it is necessary to understand a family, social, cultural and political structure, where social practices are put in places such as family, school, media, friends, community and neighbourhood organizations, political

¹ The process of socialization is a process of constant learning, which allows for individuals to learn and interpret codes, values and experiences of their political, social, cultural and family context, although this learning is also influenced by personal features such as temperament, personality and psychological predisposition. These characteristics help to adapt individuals to live and share values collectively (Manheim 1983, 55–56).

parties, bureaucracy and state institutions (Manheim 1983, 55–56).

Without stereotyping, many Latin American men feel the right to use women for their personal service, that means: “you should clean the house, keep discrete regarding other men, being a self-sacrificed mom – you should stay with your husband even if there is adultery from men side, for the good sake of her children –, not having sexual desire for anybody else and being ready to have sex with her man when he wants, keep quiet and accept any physical, emotional or psychological mistreatment, and accept men polygamy as condition to keep the marriage going on” (Nieto 2019, 2).

Women condition in Mexico and Brazil is quite demanding not only in terms of family and social expectations, but also among the women themselves: “In Mexico when you divorce, even if legally it becomes less problematic, your family and other women look at you as a failure, because you were unable to keep the father of your children with you. Socially, other men look at you differently, as if you are available to have sex without any compromise or you don’t have any men to respect you socially. Among women, you become a threat as you may take their husbands from their side” (Nieto 2019, 4).

The role of women in Mexico and Brazil is not easy. Socially, women learn to normalise emotional and physical violence since childhood and it is reproduced along their lives. Brazilian national statistics indicates that there is a link between the age of the woman and the relationship with the aggressor. During childhood, parents are the most common offenders against girls (with a prevalence of mothers as offenders); in adolescence the offenders are the parents, partners, boyfriends (current or former) and brothers. During their young and adult lives, women are offended most commonly by partners, boyfriends and brothers; and older women are mostly offended by their sons, followed by their partner, their brothers and carers (Pierobom 2018, 17).

In Latin America male power is predominant; this power is nourished by the same women, social relations, family values blended with values of reciprocity and hierarchy since childhood².

² Machado describes the Brazilian family as “social institution” with “predominant values” vis à vis the generalization of individualism. In Brazilian society, the codes of personal relations and family values permeates the whole society. These codes are articulated with individualistic codes, leading to a variety of kinds of family organization based on principles of reciprocity and hierarchy, according to class situations and positions (Machado 2001, 16).

For instances, “My mother used to tell us, cook for your brother, he is a man and he can’t cook, this is why he will get a woman. Besides, my mother used to tell us. Listen to your father he is the man of the house, and you need to learn to respect the authority of a man” (Nieto 2019, 3).

Machismo in Brazil is translated into a system where men are viewed as strong and powerful and must prove their virility through premarital and extramarital affairs. Women, in contrast, are considered weak and are expected to remain chaste until marriage and faithful after.

The macho culture is presented in the media such as TV programs, songs, social-cultural events and community festivals as a positive feature of Latin American macho culture: “In Mexico, las charreadas – family parties, where men are dressed with distinctive clothes such as hat, boots and charro costume, and they display of horsemanship and bullfighting – are parties to glorify the machoculture such as physical strength, virility, and admiration for men power” (Stergakis 2018). The charro figure is the central character of the festival; traditionally this image has symbolized the masculinity through the dramatic feats of acrobatics and strength.

In Brazil, the macho culture is portrayed on TV programs as the “rich, strong and powerful man who can have the most beautiful women fighting for his love and virility” (Chong and La Ferrara 2009). Men are represented as decisive, aggressive and patriarchal leaders (Braga 2016).

Mexican songs, folklore and popular sayings are full of messages to remind women that they need to accept the fact that men can have many women, otherwise they will leave and they will always find a young woman available: “All men, we have a church – referring to wife or principal woman; a cathedral – talking about the lover or concubine, who represents a second woman, and chapels – referring to any women that they can encounter for sex without social and emotional compromise, that means they are the rest of the women on the list, but without taking any relevant role in men’s life” (Nieto 2019, 2).

Mexican males feel entitled to set up and rule relations with women. This empowerment is expressed in many traditional Mexican songs, which glorify male power in the collective memory of Mexican people: “You leave because I want you to go / At any time that I want I can stop you / I know that you need my love / Because you want or not / I am your owner” (Jiménez 1972, 1).

The family structure and social and cultural environment contribute to legitimising and reinforcing machismo in Mexico and Brazil.

Abusive macho practices in Mexico are displayed even in public places, such as harassment, groping and male masturbation. For example, “It is common to see and feel male genitals close to your ass or in front of your vagina in rush hours on the metro, this is why there are wagons of the metro allocated just for women. This is why there are also buses for women” (Nieto 2019, 4).

Similarly, in Brazil, machismo and misogyny are often together. Cases of “corrective rape” to give a lesson to a woman for challenging men power are frequent: “It doesn’t matter if a woman is a lesbian, transgender, bisexual or heterosexual; she can still be called a ‘racha’, a slur meaning ‘hatchet wound’, referring to what all women supposedly have between their legs” (Braga, 2015).

The number of women killed in Brazil is associated with the widespread levels of other forms of violence against women. In 2014, there were 47,646 reported rapes of women, equating to one rape each 11 minutes. According to a survey, 90.2% said they were afraid of being raped. Alarming, 42% of Brazilian men think that, if a woman is wearing “provocative” clothes, she cannot complain if she is raped (FBSP and Datafolha 2016, 17).

The machismo in Mexico, Brazil and Latin America is quite complex, since different sectors of the society continue endorsing this behaviour, and even worse, admiring male superiority as a positive value, even by the same women, who have been the victims of Macho behaviour. This situation complicates the analysis of machismo as women and men validate this behaviour and reproduce it in their next generation of children.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a worldwide problem; “unfortunately in Latin America society, violence is accepted, since it is taught that violence is the way to keep men power, and machismo is a hegemonic model of masculinity” (Watson 2016).

The Mexican machismo combined with other problems such as corruption, impunity and the development of other global crimes such as narcotrafficking, and trafficking of human beings are contributing to the increase of violence against women, particularly from poor and vulnerable background (Watson 2016). Similar situation is experienced in Brazil, where violence against women is normalised by family and society.

The reports about violence against women in Mexico are alarming. According to National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate

Violence against Women (CONAVIM), on average in 2016 six women died due to a violent act each day in Mexico (Watson 2016). According to figures from the Mexican Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP), in November 2018, 760 cases were opened for homicides committed against women due to gender reasons (Becerril 2019). In many parts of Mexico such as the state of Mexico, Morelos and Guerrero women cannot get out alone after 10 PM, otherwise they risk to be raped and kidnapped for sexual purposes (López 2019).

While in Brazil, in 2015, the government released a study that showed that every seven minutes a woman was a victim of domestic violence. Over 70% of the Brazilian female population have suffered some kind of violence throughout their lifetime and 1 in every 4 women reports being a victim of psychological or physical violence (FBSP and DATAFOLHA 2016, 17).

In 2013, 4,762 women were killed in Brazil, a rate of 4.8 female killings per 100,000 people, an average of 13 per day. In 2013, Brazil was the fifth in the international ranking of female homicides. The rates of female killings increased 21% from 2003 to 2013; 50.3% of these deaths were committed in the context of family violence, and 33.2 % in context of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). This means that, in Brazil, there were four IPV deaths per day (Pierobom 2018).

Since 1985, 92,000 Brazilian women have lost their lives, often at the hands of a husband, partner or family member (Hargreaves, 2015) and for decades, domestic violence was not part of the Brazilian criminal code, it was until 2006 when the president Luiz Inácio da Silva known as Lula (2003–2010) passed to the Congress an initiative to criminalise domestic violence (Hargreaves, 2015).

The legal recognition of femicide³ in Mexico and Brazil is quite recent. In Mexico, *femicide* was recognized as a specific crime thanks to the Mexican and international feminists in 2009. The femicide was defined in legal terms as a form of extermination of women under schemes of physical or sexual violence (Monárrez 2004, 4).

In Brazil, Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) ex-president of Brazil launched a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against women and girls, and the Brazilian Congress changed the penal code to include femicide in 2015 – it is defined as any crime that involves

³ The word femicide is used as the killing of women or female children committed by a man, on the grounds of gender hate (OCNF 2018).

domestic violence, discrimination or contempt for women, which results in their death (FBSP and DATAFOLHA 2016).

Victims of sexual femicide in Mexico and Brazil were considered, until recent years, by media, political establishment and social imaginary in relation to victims' behaviour that moved away from the idealization of feminine prototype (Mona´rrez 2004, 4). This means, they were killed, because they were not complying with their social role assigned by their gender, and they were considered "bad women".

Among 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, 14 countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a rate of 12 women murdered every day. In Mexico alone, seven women were killed each day in 2016, according to the women office of the United Nations (ONU 2017).

On the other hand, the National Survey of Housing conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in Mexico indicates that one in two women have been victims of abuse. This figure is impressive considering that more than 50% of the population are women, approximately 57 millions. From these women, 63% have suffered any kind of violence at any point of their life, and 47% of this violence is inflicted by a male partner (INEGI 2014).

It is also important to say that having exact statistics is difficult, due to the fact that it is hard to prove that a murder was committed because of a gender cause, particularly in countries where up to 99% of crimes go unsolved, many victims' families often do not go to authorities to denounce crimes, because they believe it will not change anything (Watson 2016) or due to the high levels of corruption in Mexico and Brazil, where having access to the justice system, means spending money for paying bribes to public functionaries or police officers to investigate a crime.

The risk of suffering violence increases, when gender is intersected with racism and poverty. In Mexico indigenous and poor women are the target of sexual depredators and domestic violence. Following the report of the Mexican Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP) six of the 32 Mexican states of the country received 49.6% of the total number of femicides; these states concentrate more on indigenous and poor women (Becerril 2019). Similarly, in Brazil black women represent 66.7% of female victims of homicide, whereas only 51% of the total female population is black. From 2003 to 2013, the number of homicides of white women dropped 9.8%, while this number increased by 54.2% for black women (Waiselfisz 2015). Studies also indicate that macrosocial factors, such as income inequality and community disaggregation, increase the risk of lethal domestic violence (Pierobom 2018, 17).

POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT AND THE MACHISMO

The Mexican Political Establishment⁴ has been composed historically by men. Women have had a secondary role on the political system. The integration of women in politics was driven by international requirements, feminist fights, and evolution of a Mexican political system. However, the main political positions have been placed into men's hands. Certainly, women have won political and civil rights such as the right to vote achieved in 1953. The access for women to the political representation in Mexico has been difficult as the history shows. At the end of the 1950s, there were just a few women with important political positions. Between 1954 and 1989 there were just 229 women with high political positions in the judiciary, executive and legislative powers (Rodríguez 1999, 56).

In Brazil, women's rights to vote were introduced earlier than in Mexico, in 1932. Brazilian political establishment evolved faster than the Mexican with a multi-party system, but under a caudillismo-coronelismo – strong men – which eased the concentration of power on men hands. The representation in the Chamber of Deputies met only 10% of women in 2016. The proportions are also low in municipalities and state level governments. Currently, there is just one woman as a governor (among 27 positions) and, in 2016 elections, just 12.57% of the candidates for mayors were women. This data shows the low rate of women presence in power even after the implementation of the gender quota law in 1996, and the pressure by women politicians to reach equal presence in political positions (Thome 2018).

In contrast in Mexico, women represent an important political force and they have achieved better representation in the Mexican Political System. According to the National Electoral Institute (INE), during the presidential and legislative elections in 2018, women

⁴ The term Political Establishment refers to powerful people, who hold political, economic and cultural power not only to the President and Parliamentarians of the country, but also to the influential people who holds power, representation and authority in the country. The Political Establishment may include politicians, civil servants, judges, police and army decision makers, academic and organic intellectuals, governors, businessmen, high clergy, and ambassadors. The term establishment is taken in the sense of Henry Fairlie, who describes it as the whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised (Fairlie 1968).

reached 65 places in the senate against 63 for men. In the Chamber of deputies, women reached 246 places against men, who got 254 (Zamora 2018).

The achievement of women into the political representation in the Senate, Chamber of deputies and local and state governments have had important consequences to the advance of the democracy⁵ in Mexico. Nevertheless, this representation has not been translated in the reduction of violence against women and the tolerance of machismo inside of the Mexican population.

Women political representation in the Mexican system has been questioned through different occasions. For example, many women legislators have received the name of *Juanitas* or *Manuelitas* to denominate women, who have been popularly elected, but they are obliged by their male leader of the party or governors of the states to renounce, require an absence licence, and pass their position to the second person in line, who usually is a man – *suplente*. These cases have been well documented in different states, for example, in Chiapas under the governor Manuel Velasco Coello (2012–2018), 50 women elected were replaced by their male colleagues (Pimienta 2018).

The Mexican women political representation is manipulated in order to comply with the international gender quotas, rather than having a real impact on gender equality, this logic of double standard is reproduced also with the gender programs launched by different governments. While in Brazil the absence of women in political office is notorious. According to Thome (2018), the reasons behind lie in age, marital status, children, education, social and cultural predisposition to work on political issues considered mainly as a male issue. It is important to mention that Brazil has already experienced a female president, Dilma Rousseff, but *in Mexico this situation has not occurred yet, since all presidents have been males*.

In recent years, Mexico created important institutions to support women's rights such as The National Institute for Women (Inmujeres) to promote women's rights, and fight against sexual harassment;

⁵ This text takes the term democracy described by Linz who states: "Democracy is a form of governance of life in a *polis* in which citizens have rights. These rights are guaranteed and protected by the State. To protect the rights of citizens and to deliver other basic services, citizens demand a democratic government which needs to be able to exercise effectively its claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of force in a territory" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 10–11).

the gender commission inside the Senate, Chamber of deputies, the International Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Advisor on gender issues (OSAGI) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (SRE 2019). The law and legislation to defend women's rights in Mexico is quite advanced. For example, the General Law for Equality between Women and Men, promulgated in 2006 in Mexico establishes that the National State, including the Federation, states and municipalities provide the infrastructure to guaranty equality between women and men (SRE 2019).

Moreover, Mexico has signed international agreements and it is part of the most important international organisations in the world to protect women's rights such as the United Nations-women Unit, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against women "Convention of Belém Do Para" in 1994. Later in 2004, the first World Conference on the status of women held in Mexico City in 1975, the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 are among the most important (SRE 2019).

On the other hand, women in Brazil enjoy the same legal rights and duties as men, which are clearly expressed in the 5th article of Brazil's 1988 Constitution. The 2003 Civil Code improved women's rights, providing gender equality in the acquisition, management, and administration of property brought into the marriage or acquired after marriage. Another important women's right was a law that was passed in 1991 outlawing sexual harassment and making it a crime punishable by a fine of up to US\$ 20,000. In 2001, a law was passed under the civil code raising the punishment for sexual harassment to one to two years of jail time (BDHRL 2006; BBC 2001).

Brazil has also signed important international women's rights agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), by the United Nations General Assembly, and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against women "Convention of Belém Do Para" in 1994 (BDHRL 2006). Domestically, Brazil has improved the legal framework to protect women's rights. For example, Brazilian Parliament in 2006 approved a specific Gender Violence Statute, later called the Maria da Penha Law (MPL), after intense advocacy by Brazilians feminists (Pierobom 2018, 17). In terms of education Brazilian women are ahead of men. In 2018, it was estimated that female education was 93.4%, and male 93%, which means that women are better educated than men. As for educa-

tion expectancy – from primary school to baccalaureate education –, women attend school until the age 16, while male – until the age 15, which means that men stay in school one year less than women (CIA, 2018). Since the 1970s, women surpassed men in the higher levels, but women are largely behind in salaries and political influence. Certainly, there are many women going to universities, but still aren't seen equal in the workforce and professional mobility.

In Mexico and Brazil, women's rights are protected by written law. However, a few women use the legal State infrastructure to demand help against domestic or social violence. When examining the Mexican and Brazilian culture, government, political institutions and judiciary system have a huge responsibility in shaping machismo and violence against women. "It is observed throughout history that men reshape public power with positions of power like presidency, vice-presidency and other high positions to oversee the country and make important decisions. These men are required to be assertive, strong, powerful, and dominant which are characteristics found in machismo" (Ceballos 2013, 8–9).

In Latin America, the political establishment has not evolved at the same level than written laws; therefore, there is a mismatch between the law and its implementation. Even, the men who are advocates of women's rights are found later on, using their representative power to abuse or rape young women.

For many politicians from the right to left, it is normal to be portrayed in the press with several young women. They like to be perceived as conquerors, powerful, important, virile and having young women is like having a trophy, which "they deserve" and they "feel entitled for it", and the rest of society normalise this behaviour, and even they admire "macho politician". For example, the current Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro (2019 – currently) has been labelled as a macho politician as he justifies the gender pay gap:

"I wouldn't employ a woman [...] with the same salary as a man because women get pregnant" (Uchoa 2018). Other comments attributed to Bolsonaro are "I wouldn't rape you because you don't deserve it" (Uchoa 2018), saying this phrase to Congresswoman Maria do Rosario, from the left-wing Workers Party in 2018, during Bolsonaro's political campaign.

Mr. Bolsonaro also caused uproar while talking about his own daughter during a public event in April 2017: "I have five children. I had four boys, and in the fifth, I weakened and a girl came" (Uchoa 2018).

The exercise of the political and judiciary power in Mexico and Brazil is also accompanied by the exercise of violence against

women, using rape as tool to suppress human rights. The violence against women continues being a serious matter, particularly when politicians, decision makers, and the whole political establishment endorse directly or indirectly the superiority of men over women.

In Brazil, for example, the Penal Code considered until 1991, “defence of honour” as a principle, whereby a man could with impunity kill a wife who has been sexually unfaithful, and get free from prison. This law gave the right to men over the body of a woman: mother, wife, sister or any woman who could damage man’s honour. The honour defence was embodied into Brazilian culture and legal institutions over female sexuality (Welchman and Hossain 2005).

In recent years, women of all ages have taken to the streets in Mexico City and other Mexican towns to protest against sexual abuse by police officers, criminal gangs, bosses, and family male figures. For example, in November 2019 more than 3,000 women marched in Mexico City, demanding the Mexican government to put an end to violence against women and forced disappearances (Mexico News Daily 2019, 26).

The Mexican women protesters also stated their vulnerability faced to corruption and violence caused by the organised crime, where women are target for sexual slavery and rape:

“Today we raise an angry voice because we want safe abortion. We are in a time of emergency, the enemies are strong, they are many, they’re everywhere. We need a pact among women, to be together [...] We’re in a time of war [...] and we want to be alive, free and together” (Mexico News Daily 2019, 26).

Impunity, work and social inequality are some of the main disadvantages that Latin American women faced. Mexico is Latin America’s second-most dangerous country for women, after Brazil (The conversation 2019).

The social and political tissue in Latin America contributes to reinforce the macho culture, therefore the tolerance to this abusive behaviour continues being present in the social and cultural collective imaginary⁶ of Mexican and Brazilian people. In both countries,

⁶ The social imaginary is used in the sense of the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis to name the social representations incarnated in the institutions: “the social imaginary is, primordially, the creation of signification and creation of the images and figures that support these significations [...] The social imaginary exists as social-historical doing/representing. The social imaginary institutionalises and obliges to accept the social-historical existence” (Castoriadis 1998, 222–225).

women contribute to reproduce machismo, since they are the main educator of their children: “when you have a child you expect to be respected by men and women, then you need to make him learn to be strong, not crying like a woman, and being the chief of the household” (Nieto 2019, 4).

In many Latin American countries, including Mexico and Brazil, the traditional law of status, linked to male honour, infiltrates the modern law of the legal contract, where there is a conflict between the status system and a legal contract. The legal contract recognised the civil rights of women, but the status system gives women a role of status-object, status-instrument of lineage and inheritance, and status-dependent on male honour, contributing to the women subjugation (Segato 2003, 8).

CONCLUSION

The Mexican and Brazilian machismo are historical and complex phenomena and deeply rooted in the social imaginary of their people, which goes in detriment of the equality of gender. This toxic feature is melted into their culture, contributing to the psychological, emotional, symbolic and physical violence against women.

There are some cultural small changes in recognizing women’s rights, but there is a long walk ahead: “You can think that men from the left wing or men educated abroad would be different, but there is not always the case. The middle-class men know that they have more advantages in a society like Mexico. For example, they can change a wife easily, always for a young one, and they can display some financial, political or international power to attract more young women around them and use women as trophies and sexual objects” (Nieto 2019, 3).

The machismo in Mexico and Brazil is considered even a positive value, which is admired among men and among some sectors of the society, in this sense the eradication of machismo in these countries is far away from being achieved in the near future.

After analysing the questions raised at the beginning of the text, we can draw the following conclusions:

- 1) The Mexican and Brazilian machismo is nourished since the family structure, as parents reproduce unequal relations based on gender, between themselves and among their children, keeping patriarchal and authoritarian relations with male supremacy.

- 2) In both countries, society reflects high levels of tolerance towards machismo, since family and community groups reproduce macho practices such as sexist comments, aggressive music with high contents of verbal abuse against women; and groping and public male masturbation are part of “usual” men’s behaviour, which is reflected in schools, universities, hospitals, public transport being among the most notorious places.
- 3) The Mexican and Brazilian machismo contributes to the increase of violence against women, since men feel entitled to perpetrate violence based on gender privileges. Macho behaviour such as stubbornness, defiance, warrior, superiority, virility, promiscuity and aggressiveness are part of male features, which increase trends to commit violence against women.
- 4) The political establishment in both countries has not addressed machismo as a structural problem, where the political system encourages this phenomenon, even after adopting cutting edge laws, reforms and increasing gender quota.
- 5) The change of laws to protect women’s rights in Mexico and Brazil has not been embodied by the whole society, even by the same women. For example, in rural areas women from vulnerable background are more likely to suffer domestic and social violence than educated and middle class women.
- 6) Corruption, narco-trafficking, impunity and global crimes have also contributed to the increase of the levels of violence against women.
- 7) Mexican and Brazilian machismo is an intricate part of family, culture, social tissue and political establishment, which is far away from being reduced. Machismo continues being present in the culture of these countries and it contributes to developing high levels of tolerance towards violence against women.

Violence against women in Mexico and Brazil implies a denial of their human rights, placing women in a situation of disempowerment and social exclusion. In that sense, the eradication of violence would imply a change in power relations. Violence must be addressed and conceptualized as a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men. Laws, policies and programs should serve to empower women individually and collectively, and never to re-victimize them. The norms and laws must be effective to face the nature and scope of the problem (Sagot 2008, 41).

The machismo in Latin America is a social and historical construction, learned, and reinforced since childhood, and reproduced in adulthood, which goes against integrity, empowerment, freedom,

health and life of women that needs to be addressed seriously by the State to promote an equal society, and eliminate social tolerance towards gender violence.

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