

Vulnerability and Development: Rereading *Populorum Progressio* in Light of Femicide

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FIFTY YEARS AGO, *Populorum Progressio* highlighted the importance of caring for the developing world and asserted the significance of social justice. The document was addressed to the Catholic community but also called upon those outside of the Church—“men of deep thought and wisdom—Catholics and Christians, believers in God and devotees of truth and justice, all men of good will” (no. 83)—to be aware of the challenges around the world. Despite the fact that Pope Paul VI called for change, many of the issues raised in *Populorum Progressio* are still with us today. Challenges of food scarcity, clean water, and access to education are all immediate problems that need to be addressed in many areas of the world. Pope Paul VI drew attention to the plight of those in the developing world and focused on issues that still resonate with us today. One modern issue *Populorum Progressio* does not address is the problem of femicide, or the misogynistic killing of women by men, perhaps because the issue had not yet received the attention and concern which it generates today. Even though femicide is not discussed in *Populorum Progressio*, this article will argue that, by engaging the important themes of integral human development and poverty, *Populorum Progressio* can advance an understanding that femicide threatens the full personhood of women and that insistence on integral human development creates an imperative for the Church to do more to support the dignity and value of women.

INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*

Populorum Progressio provides an examination of integral human development and explores what it means to be fully human. Pope Paul VI wrote about the importance of recognizing the full personhood of each individual and ensuring that human rights were respected and upheld. Today, we need to hear this call again since our world continues to struggle to protect human rights and defend the integrity of the marginalized.

Throughout *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI identifies ways in which the global community must respect and promote the integral

personhood of individuals, particularly in the developing world. He says, "The ultimate goal is full-bodied humanism. And does this not mean the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man?" (no. 42) *Populorum Progressio* identifies the basic human needs of all individuals and asks that not only the Catholic community but also "all men of good will" (no. 83) consider those whose circumstances force them to live on the margins. Pope Paul stresses that "there can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity" (no. 43). By calling on the established principle of solidarity, he emphasizes the idea that people are interdependent and necessarily rely on one another. Those in the developed world ought to stand with those on the margins in meaningful ways. Moreover, "all of humanity" would seem to include women as well as men in the imperative to work for the development of all.

The idea of integral humanism in *Populorum Progressio* includes making sure that fundamental needs are provided for and protected. For example, Pope Paul VI decries the fact that many in the world are without food. He notes that it is impossible to be "unaware of the fact that on some continents countless men and women are ravished by hunger and countless numbers of children are undernourished.... Thus whole populations are immersed in pitiable conditions and lose heart" (no. 45). Food is only one example. Paul VI makes clear that ensuring "life's necessities" is the bare minimum for achieving "truly human conditions" (no. 21).

The full development of the human person is contingent upon each individual having access to the resources that are available. Pope Paul asserts that "every man has the right to glean what he needs from the earth" (no. 22). He goes on to say that wealthier nations have a responsibility to support nations that are still struggling to develop. The document states, "the superfluous goods of wealthier nations ought to be placed at the disposal of poorer nations" (no. 49) in order to create a more just distribution of wealth and resources. This global imbalance of resources created situations of injustice, and the pope used his document to call on the leaders of the developed world to share their wealth and power more generously.

FEMINICIDE IN MEXICO, GUATEMALA, AND HONDURAS

Although femicide is a phenomenon that can be found around the world, for the purpose of this analysis, our focus will be restricted to three countries of Latin America: Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. The statistics regarding incidences of violence against women in these countries are staggering. While each serves as its own individual case study, at least three commonalities relate to the high levels of violence against women in this part of the world.

First, in all three countries, a significant number of women work in *maquiladoras*, or factories, producing goods for export. The working conditions found within *maquiladoras* are often detrimental to human flourishing and fail to promote an environment of respecting human dignity. Ciudad Juárez, a major border city in Mexico, is home to many *maquiladoras* where women work long hours for very little pay. Many of these *maquiladoras* are located on the outskirts of cities and the (overwhelmingly male) managers arrange shifts that require women to either come in very early in the morning or leave in the middle of the night, which puts them at risk. Women, for the most part, have not been invited to participate in the conversations about what would be safer for them, so they continue to work in dangerous situations. The *maquiladoras* employ hundreds of women who are often seen as nothing more than pieces on an assembly line that can be easily replaced if they go missing. The rise of *maquiladoras* in the wake of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994 has corresponded to the high numbers of women being killed in Latin America. Women are rarely in positions of leadership within the *maquiladoras* and have subsequently been placed at risk.

Pope Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio*, writes of the importance of work that offers one a sense of dignity. He quotes Pope John XXIII who “stressed the urgent need of restoring dignity to the worker and making him a real partner in the common task” (no. 28). Although factories in Latin America offer women an opportunity to work, the work in which they are engaged is not work that restores their dignity or recognizes their full humanity. Women are often seen as little more than the objects they are working to create and their voices are often ignored. *Maquiladora* culture and the ways in which women’s voices have been discounted have both contributed to growing rates of gender-based violence.

The second factor contributing to the high level of violence across these three Latin America countries is the dominant cultures of *machismo* and *marianismo*. *Machismo* refers to a general attitude of “manliness” that includes misogyny and a domination of women. Scholars Karen Englander, Carmen Yáñez, and Xochitl Barney define *machismo* as “a term used for the performance of masculinity in many contemporary, international contexts and it is used as a descriptor of unwelcome male behavior.”¹ They also note that “the extreme form [of *machismo*] is manifested as hate and extreme physical and psychological violence against women and it has been reported in a number

¹ Karen Englander, Carmen Yáñez and Xochitl Barney, “Doing Science within a Culture of Machismo and Marianismo,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 13, no. 3 (2012): 68.

of Latin American countries to differing degrees by the United Nations specialist on violence against women.”²

While men in Latin America feel the need to prove their manhood, women are frequently culturally forced to be meek and submissive, in a posture of *marianismo*. *Marianismo* refers to the idea of adopting an attitude of meekness that resembles the prevalent cultural portrayal of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Englander, Yáñez, and Barney describe *marianismo* as “performed through a collection of behaviors that are ascribed as positive.”³ This type of cultural norm leads women to be obedient and subservient, especially to their husbands or authoritative men. Women are expected to be “spiritually and morally superior to men” but also “self-negating and martyrs for their children.”⁴

The dual problem of men being especially misogynistic and women being submissive leads to skewed societal roles and norms. As these attitudes have become ingrained in society, they have become harder to undo. It has become commonplace for men to be violent or just patronizing towards women. At the same time, women are seen as less important members of society and are considered to be generally more disposable. Their voices matter less than men’s. These attitudes have contributed to high rates of feminicide throughout Latin America. Due to the culture of *machismo* and *marianismo* throughout Latin America, women are oppressed and economically restrained. It is therefore often necessary for women to get whatever jobs they can, despite the fact that jobs in *maquiladoras* often put them at risk.

In keeping with prior teachings on the nature of humanity, Pope Paul VI does not differentiate between genders in *Populorum Progressio*. Reading the document, we can infer that he affirms the full personhood of women as well as men since he does not make gender distinctions and often emphasizes the plight of all of humanity. Throughout *Populorum Progressio*, he advocates on behalf of the marginalized and those who are suffering without regard to gender or other factors. He writes of the importance of recognizing the dignity of all persons and a desire for peace as well as the fulfillment of the common good. The institutional violence that has been inflicted on women in places like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras is not in keeping with the integral development of the human person or the development of the common good as understood in *Populorum Progressio*. Pope Paul, in 1967, asserted, “We must make haste. Too many people are suffering” (no. 29). Unfortunately, the actions that the pope advocated for have not come to pass. Although some progress has been made, changes have been slow and often ineffective.

² Englander, Yáñez and Barney, “Doing Science,” 68.

³ Englander, Yáñez and Barney, “Doing Science,” 69.

⁴ Englander, Yáñez and Barney, “Doing Science,” 69.

Finally, the growing drug trade throughout Latin America has contributed to the high rate of femicide in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Drug culture and the social and political influence of *narco-trafficantes*, or drug lords, have led to the increased prevalence of criminal gangs. As gangs have taken control of neighborhoods, violence has inevitably spiked, and more women have become victims of violent gang rituals and sexual violence. Women have also been affected by gang violence because many women have been coerced into joining neighborhood gangs. Their participation in these kinds of activities increases their risk of being targeted by rival gang members. In addition to participating directly in gang violence, women in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras have been accidentally caught in the middle of drug or gang activity.

In 2012, *The New York Times* interviewed Hector Hawley, who was responsible for investigating and documenting many of the crime scenes where women had been killed in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Hawley said that these women were “a more vulnerable group”⁵ because of their status in society. He specialized in women’s murder cases and, in his view, “the stunning tally of women killed [was] mostly caused by the increased local involvement in gangs and drugs; and jealous men. Often, both gangs and jealousy come together in a single case.”⁶

While *maquiladoras*, *machismo* and *marianismo*, and the drug trade contribute to the violence against women, exploring the particular situations in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras provides a more comprehensive understanding of what femicide looks like in Latin America. These three countries are not the only places where femicide is occurring, but they are among the countries in the developing world where the rates of violence against women have been the highest. There are specific reasons why femicide has emerged as a concern in these three countries, although statistics show that femicide is also a prominent issue in El Salvador and Colombia.⁷ These statistics indicate that in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, women’s safety and security are constantly at risk and so women in these countries are seen as disposable individuals whose lives matter less.

In Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, the reality of femicide has been impossible to ignore. Femicide has, in recent years, become part of the identity of the city because of the growing

⁵ Damien Cave, “Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez,” *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/world/americas/wave-of-violence-swallows-more-women-in-juarez-mexico.html.

⁶ Cave, “Wave of Violence.”

⁷ Mimi Yagoub, “Why Does Latin America Have the World’s Highest Female Murder Rates?” *InSight Crime: Investigation and Analysis of Organized Crime*, www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/why-does-latin-america-have-the-world-s-highest-female-murder-rates.

attention paid to the high numbers of murdered women. The international aid organization Amnesty International reported that between 1993 and 2007, approximately 400 women had been killed in Ciudad Juárez.⁸ Those figures have continued to grow, although the worst years of femicide in Ciudad Juárez are considered to be 2009-2010. It has been difficult to get exact numbers on the women who have been killed or who have disappeared from Ciudad Juárez because women do not always get reported as missing and because there is no single resource keeping track of women who have disappeared; sources, however, have said that 304 women were killed in the city in 2010 alone.⁹ A *New York Times* article reported that 60 women had been killed in the first six months of 2012, with 18 femicides in the month of April.¹⁰

These numbers are shocking, but the stories recounted by families about the casual manner with which authorities respond to these killings and disappearances are even more disturbing. Families report that authorities often fail to investigate the killings at all and may insinuate that the young women in question could have run away to the United States or become prostitutes. They will also imply that the women should not have dressed a particular way or gone out at a certain time of day or night and suggest that the violence that was perpetrated against them was “deserved.”¹¹ There is a sense that there is no accountability for these crimes, and killers know that they will literally get away with murder.

Guatemala’s rate of femicide is also staggering. As in Juárez, there are competing reports on the exact numbers of women who have been killed, but Amnesty International reported in 2007 that there had been 2,500 femicides since 2001, and 299 between January and May in 2005.¹² These numbers have continued to grow.

The reality of femicide in Guatemala began during the 36-year civil war in Guatemala from 1960 to 1996. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs reports that during the Guatemalan civil war, “thousands of men were trained to commit acts of gender-based violence.

⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “No More! The Right of Women to Live a Life Free of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean,” www.unicef.org/lac/No_more.pdf.

⁹ Cave, “Wave of Violence.”

¹⁰ Cave, “Wave of Violence.”

¹¹ See the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (CHA), “The International Violence Against Women Act: Could IVAWA Save Guatemala from Femicide?” www.coha.org/the-international-violence-against-women-act-could-ivawa-save-guatemala-from-femicide/: “Police and other government officials frequently accuse victims of gang associations, drug abuse, or prostitution; the female victims’ physical appearance or attire is often cited as cause for delay or for the failure to investigate and prosecute.”

¹² ECLAC, “No More!”

When peace was established in 1996, those same men effortlessly re-joined society.”¹³ An entire generation of men grew up in Guatemala learning about different ways to abuse women as part of their military training, and when the war ended, they could not merely forget what they had learned, and the violence had become “normalized.” Currently, “Guatemala continues to bear the mark of the civil war: common methods [of gender violence] include rape, dismemberment, torture, and mutilation, acts reminiscent of tactics used during the war.”¹⁴ This history of the civil war in Guatemala contributes to a culture where women, especially indigenous women, are not valued as highly as men are and where violence is an everyday occurrence.

Despite attempts to restore peace in Guatemala in the aftermath of the civil war, violence has continued to dictate Guatemalan life. The Guatemalan military has been accused (and in some cases convicted) of carrying out massacres in the villages of indigenous peoples in the northern part of the country during the civil war.¹⁵ The genocide that the military carried out often included raping groups of indigenous women before killing them or leaving them to be humiliated in their villages. The practice of rape as a tool of war was fully utilized during the Guatemalan civil war, which has been documented in the truth and reconciliation commissions.¹⁶ Even though peace has existed for many

¹³ CHA, “The International Violence Against Women Act.”

¹⁴ CHA, “The International Violence Against Women Act.”

¹⁵ Several former Guatemalan Army commanders are in prison because of their involvement in massacres during the Guatemalan civil war. See Dan Whitcomb, “Ex-Guatemalan Army Office Tied to Massacre Sentenced to U.S. Prison,” *Reuters*, www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/10/us-usa-guatemala-massacre-idUSBREA1920H20140210. In 2013, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. See Elisabeth Malkin, “Former Leader of Guatemala is Guilty of Genocide Against Mayan Group,” *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2013/05/11/world/americas/gen-efrain-rios-montt-of-guatemala-guilty-of-genocide.html. A higher court in Guatemala, however, overturned the guilty verdict based on a technicality and ordered a retrial, which has not yet taken place. The general feeling among Guatemalans is that the guilty verdict is still true. See Kelly McEvers’ interview with Pamela Yates, “Guatemalan Ex-Dictator Ríos Montt Found Mentally Unfit for Genocide Retrial,” *National Public Radio*, www.npr.org/2015/07/08/421225062/guatemalan-ex-dictator-rios-montt-found-mentally-unfit-for-genocide-retrial. In this interview, filmmaker Pamela Yates says that, according to many Guatemalans, there is a saying: “la sentencia esta vigente – the verdict is valid. He was judged to be a genocidaire, and in their minds, he is a genocidaire.”

¹⁶ Rachel Hatcher, “Truth and Forgetting in Guatemala: An Examination of *Memo-ria del Silencio* and *Nunca Más*,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 34, no. 67 (2009): 131-162. Following the Peace Accords in Guatemala in 1996, the Guatemalan state launched a project attempting to uncover the truth of what had happened during the war. The state project is known (in English) as the Commission for the Clarification of History or CEH (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico). At the same time, the Catholic Church created its own

years and both the political community and the Catholic Church have tried to heal the country by establishing truth commissions, the legacy of violence, especially gender-based violence, remains and patterns of femicide have become a reality.

In Honduras, incidences of femicide have emerged in the country since the 2009 coup d'état that left the state of Honduras insecure and unstable.¹⁷ As a result of this instability, the rate of femicide in Honduras has risen sharply in the last seven years. One report by the Mesoeamerican Initiative of Human Rights Defenders states that feminicides in Honduras have risen by 62% since 2009. And the *Observatorio de la Violencia* or "Violence Observatory" at the National Autonomous University of Honduras has said that at least one woman was killed every 13 hours in 2013, resulting in 629 femicides.¹⁸

Since 2009, Honduras has been sharply divided between those who supported the former president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, and those who supported the coup and the newly-elected president Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo. Because of this disruption, Honduras has become extremely violent. Zelaya was largely considered a leftist president, which contributed to his ouster, in addition to the speculation that he was planning to illegally extend his presidency. While he was president, he supported the development of women's groups and defended women's education programs. He raised the minimum wage significantly and provided funding for programs that were judged by more right-wing politicians to be "too socialist." As a result of his policies, many women and *campesinas*, or women who live in rural areas, supported Zelaya and opposed the coup. These women have not remained silent about what they feel was a violation of their constitutional rights. They have continued to speak out against the coup and regularly taken political action.

Because many members of the police force, which is largely a military-run police, do not approve of the political activism of women in Honduras, they have participated in practices of femicide and violence against women. Stories have emerged of women being killed by police because of their participation in democratic demonstrations and protests, and in other situations women have been assaulted based on their political involvement.¹⁹ It has been reported that in the months

commission called the Recuperation of Historical Memory Project or REMHI (Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica.) These works were titled *Memoria del Silencio* and *Nunca Más* and they were published in February 1999 and April 1998.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Malkin, "Honduran President is Ousted in Coup," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/06/29/world/americas/29honduras.html.

¹⁸ Dan Beeton, "The Legacy Children of the Honduran Coup," *Al Jazeera America*, america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/6/violence-in-hondurasunaccompaniedminor-simmigrationtous.html.

¹⁹ For example, coup protester Irma Villanueva was at a demonstration in August 2009 when she was arrested by police officers along with other demonstrators. She

following the 2009 coup, police and military forces targeted those who supported Zelaya as well as progressive radio stations, news outlets, and women who continued to protest and fight for their constitutional rights to be reinstated.²⁰ In Honduras, women are already especially at risk because of their social vulnerability, and, in 2013, a United Nations report stated that Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world.²¹ Femicide in Honduras could continue to escalate to a level that is similar to what it has been in Ciudad Juárez if it continues to go unchecked.

In Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, femicide is an all too common occurrence. These deaths occur regularly and in too many cases, no one does anything about it. Scholar Hilda Morales Trujillo has noted the danger that comes with this complacency. She says, "The wave of misogynist violence has yet to provoke outright indignation among civil society. Beyond the organized women's movement and a few other exceptions, civil society remains unperturbed by these acts."²² Women's communities are necessary because they highlight the only places in society where these women are not disappearing into obscurity completely. Women need to be valued as full members of society and not just replaceable parts of an economic system. The human dignity of all women needs to be honored in order for anything to really change in Latin America.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO AND FEMINICIDE

In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI advocated and explained the notion of integral human development and its applications to the perceived problems of the time. The nations of the developing world were asserting their autonomy after a long legacy of colonialism yet hampered by their disadvantaged status within the global economy.

was taken away from the protest and beaten and raped by four police officers. She told her story on the Jesuit-run radio station Radio Progreso. See Robert Naiman, "Coup Protester Gang-Raped by Honduran Police," *Just Foreign Policy*, www.justforeignpolicy.org/node/304. The testimony of Irma Villanueva was documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Human Rights Watch announced a report generated by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on August 25, 2009 which said that "women [in Honduras] were especially subject to acts of violence and humiliation because of their gender." See "Honduras: Rights Report Shows Need for Increased International Pressure: Widespread and Continuing Abuses Documented by Inter-American Commission," *Human Rights Watch*, www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/25/honduras-rights-report-shows-need-increased-international-pressure.

²⁰ Dana Frank, "The Thugocracy Next Door," *Politico Magazine*, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/honduras-the-thugocracy-ext-door103883.html.

²¹ Frank, "Thugocracy Next Door."

²² Hilda Morales Trujillo, "Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala," in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, eds. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia L. Bejarano (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 135.

Populorum Progressio is addressed to the problems faced by the developing nations of Paul's own time, and yet its vision of integral human development remains relevant for the emerging problems of our own day. Although many of the problems noted by Pope Paul persist, such as poverty, hunger, and unequal trade relations, his vision of integral human development can also be fruitfully applied to the issue of feminicide.

Feminicide is defined as "the misogynist killing of women by men"²³ with impunity. The phenomenon of feminicide has only been explored academically within the last thirty years or so.²⁴ Feminicide is a radical obstruction to integral human development. The systematic patterns of feminicide in places such as Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras indicate that the human dignity of women is often ignored and that women are seen as disposable members of society, which places them as some of the most marginalized of people within some societies. Women are incapable of thriving and holistically developing if they are living in fear and unable to access the resources they need. Patterns of feminicide have threatened women's ability to maintain employment, since many women have been killed while traveling to and from work, as well as their ability to participate fully in activities of leisure, such as going out at night. Feminicide prevents women in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras from being able to live fully human lives and inhibits their ability to embrace their full personhood.

Rereading *Populorum Progressio* with feminicide in mind can highlight ways in which the document has the potential to speak to this troubling issue, as well as its limitations. *Populorum Progressio* does an excellent job of portraying the struggles and challenges of pursuing economic and social justice. The document discusses the violence of poverty and the suffering of those who are forced to live on the margins, but it does not highlight the fact that the majority of those living in poverty are women. This may be because attention had not yet been brought to this issue, and data on the feminization of poverty was not available until well after 1967, with the first studies on this issue not published until 1978, the last year of Paul VI's pontificate.²⁵ With

²³ Jill Radford and Diana E.H. Russell, eds., *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), xi.

²⁴ The term "femicide" was first introduced into the academy in 1976 by Canadian anthropologists Diana E.H. Russell and Jill Radford. In the 1990's, with their permission, it was adapted to "feminicide" by Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde. See Monica A. Maher, "Daring to Dream: Faith and Feminicide in Latin America," *Weep Not for Your Children: Essays on Religion and Violence*, eds. Lisa Isherwood and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Routledge, 2008), 188.

²⁵ In 1978, scholar Diana Pearce first talked about the feminization of poverty in her article, "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare" in *The Urban and Social Change Review: Special Issue on Women and Work* 11, nos. 1-2 (1978): 28-36.

much greater research into this issue and much data accumulated, to-day we are aware that up to 70% of the world's poor are women.²⁶ Women living in poverty face undue burdens and struggle with issues that do not concern men, including their physical safety.

In addition, *Populorum Progressio* named many of the structures and conditions that have allowed the problems of women in poverty to continue and even worsen. The countries around the world where the rates of violence against women are the highest are also countries where many of the citizens live in poverty.²⁷ Pope Paul VI wrote that "the disparity between rich and poor nations [would] increase rather than diminish" and that "the rich nations are progressing with rapid strides while the poor nations move forward at a slow pace." (no. 8) This has shown itself to be true in the three countries examined in this article, and the conditions associated with this reality have contributed to the higher numbers of women murdered throughout the developing world. In the same way that the development of all peoples must be a concern for all individuals, the eradication and prevention of femicide must also be a major concern, as the incidence of femicide and the conditions which give rise to it are a serious impediment to the integral development of all human beings, as well as the economic development of the nations. *Populorum Progressio* illuminates the Church's concern for those on the margins and calls for solidarity with those who are in real need, and endangered women are among the neediest people on the planet.

In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul made clear that integral human development could not fully be promoted unless the inequalities, social turmoil, and violence at its root were addressed. Although some progress has been made in some areas of the world, the conditions that Paul VI observed are just as true today, and, in the case of femicide, this means addressing the political corruption and drug trade which have become so prevalent in Mexico and Central America. The drug trade has also contributed to a rise in gang violence as well as shifting cultural norms. Any effort to combat femicide must address these broader social and cultural issues.

The encyclical can also speak to the need to eradicate this particular gender-based violence through its call for all individuals to participate in the work of promoting human development. Pope Paul VI says that "the Church asks each and every man to hear his brother's plea

²⁶ United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 1995," hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/256/hdr_1995_en_complete_nostats.pdf.

²⁷ UN documentation shows that the regions of the world where the rates of femicide are highest in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. See UNICEF, "Gender and Health," www.unicef.org/esaro/7310_Gender_and_health.html and The United Nations Security General, "Campaign to End Violence Against Women," www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/.

and answer it lovingly” (no. 3). Despite its unfortunately gendered language, which is a product of a different time, Paul here presents us with a universal call to action. Since women in developing countries are even more vulnerable than men, women need to be given a preferential concern when promoting human development. The universal call to action is helpful and serves as an important way that the Church can make a significant difference regarding violence against women. Not only does it serve as a call for all people to become involved in combatting violence against women, but it also suggests that women should take a leading role in asserting the dignity and value of their sisters around the world.

The interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of participation from everyone are major themes of *Populorum Progressio*. “The world situation,” writes Pope Paul VI, “requires the concerted effort of everyone, a thorough examination of every facet of the problem—social, economic, cultural and spiritual” (no. 13). This sense of interconnectedness will also be necessary for eradicating feminicide. A cultural shift is necessary in order to dismantle the dominant *machismo* and the embedded norms which have been harmful for women in many areas of the world, especially those that could be classified as “under-developed.” The call that Pope Paul VI makes to reach out beyond borders serves as a call to care for women around the world and to work to undo the violence that has been and continues to be perpetrated against women. Partnerships, alliances, and international networks must be strengthened in order to make a violence-free world a more concrete reality. This will require concerted effort and strong advocacy, both endorsed by *Populorum Progressio*. Realizing our own interconnectedness requires participation on behalf of everyone *from* everyone, an important theme that Pope Paul VI returns to throughout *Populorum Progressio*. This concept is one that is perhaps more critical today than it was in 1967, as we are more aware of the conditions of our brothers and sisters in developing countries.

Throughout *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI is determined to have those in the developed world respond to the developing world in a spirit of solidarity. He says that we must find ways to grow in “friendly relationships of true solidarity that are based on juridical and political equality” (no. 52). The kind of solidarity that Pope Paul believes is necessary for supporting the developed world is the same kind of solidarity that is needed in order to end feminicide, both in Latin America and around the world. People in the developed world have a responsibility to stand with women and activists and do what is necessary to end this epidemic. The spirit of solidarity that is present within *Populorum Progressio* is needed in order to address feminicide in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. In the same way that Pope Paul VI acknowledges that there are challenges to creating a sense of solidarity in the world, there are many obstacles to developing a true sense

of solidarity with those suffering from the effects of femicide. Without being physically present in these countries and seeing first-hand the realities of life there, it is difficult to place ourselves in full solidarity. However, as Pope Paul VI advocated for a “heightened sense of solidarity,” so we too are called to recognize the violation of rights and the human dignity stripped away from those victims of femicide and speak out on their behalves.

These issues are only a few of the major themes Pope Paul VI addresses in *Populorum Progressio* which are relevant to those struggling to eradicate femicide in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, but they highlight the most important of the imperatives involved: the connection between physical safety and the possibility of full and integral human development for all people. Although Pope Paul VI does not address the issue of femicide directly in *Populorum Progressio*, his sensitivity to those who are struggling in the face of economic hardship provides an important bridge to thinking about how Catholic social teaching can more concretely respond to gender-based violence and femicide. Despite Paul VI’s use of gender exclusive language and lack of focus on the intersection of gender and poverty—both indicative of his historical location—many of the ideas he generates can be translated to discuss women’s issues.

LIMITS OF THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Despite these promising themes in *Populorum Progressio*, the Church in Latin America’s response to femicide has been inadequate.²⁸ A re-reading of *Populorum Progressio* highlights the fact that the Church, both as an institution and as a people, must become more active in ending femicide. Women who are living in poverty in places like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras have been unduly burdened by poverty, which brings with it not only the indignities of the struggle for basic necessities but also the threat to their physical lives as a result of their social location. *Populorum Progressio* stands in

²⁸ Guatemalan scholar Carlos Aldana Mendoza has written about how the Catholic Church in Guatemala is actually complicit in femicide because it has not spoken out against the violence. See Carlos Aldana Mendoza, “Churches and Faith Communities in the Face of Oppression and Violence Against Indigenous and Mestiza Women in Guatemala,” actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Churches-and-Faith-Communities-in-the-face-of-Oppression-and-Violence-against-Indigenous-and-Mestiza-Women-in-Guatemala.pdf. American scholar Monica Maher talks about how “the churches, like the state, are implicated in these crimes [of femicide] due to the institutional sins of silence, omission, negligence and complicity.” See her “Spiritualities of Social Engagement: Women Resisting Violence in Mexico and Honduras,” *Religion and Politics in America’s Borderlands*, ed. Sarah Azaransky (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 128. The only church official who is known to have mentioned femicide is Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He called for an end to femicide during a Good Friday Stations of the Cross prayer service in 2015.

continuity with Catholic social teaching's preferential option for the poor, with Pope Paul VI writing that Jesus brings the "Gospel to the poor as a sign of His mission." (no. 12) Poverty increases one's vulnerability, which is evident in the statistical analysis of femicide occurring in under-developed nations such as those examined here. In this way, we can assert that a Church that cares deeply about the needs of the poor can and should do more to help women who are living amidst the threat of femicide.

Pope Paul VI asserts that the "Church has never failed to foster the human progress of the nations to which she brings faith in Christ" (no. 12). We can see, however, that the Church could still be doing more to foster human development in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras and others where femicide is widespread. The Church in Latin America serves as a powerful institution throughout the developing world, especially in Latin America. Despite wielding formidable influence, the church has not done enough to support women who are living in fear of femicide, and it has not done enough to advocate for the changes needed to end this violent reality. There are many concrete steps that the Church could and should take to in order to address this injustice, beginning with placing the eradication of gender-based violence and an end to femicide firmly on the agenda. People from all parts of the community, from grassroots community organizers to bishops, need to understand how to play their part to change the societal norms that permit the unrestricted and unpunished murders of women. If the Church is truly being called to affirm the common good and to support those who are living on the margins, as Pope Paul VI states that it is (no. 24), then the Church needs to be more active in the work of creating a just society for women as well as men.

The Church needs to take a more proactive role in the struggle against femicide, and a renewed look at *Populorum Progressio* could offer a fruitful place to begin. In addition to looking at *Populorum Progressio* through the lens of violence against women in order to see what possibilities for action exist, church officials could also incorporate more teaching about this violence into the ecclesial culture. For example, this issue could be the focus of more church-sponsored programs and events, with the position that all human beings are valuable and deserve safety as a basic right front and center. In addition to more regular preaching about the harm of femicide, the Church could work to end this violence by creating institutional programs that offer women greater autonomy and authority in the community, and the Church could also offer some safe havens for those at particular risk. Educating young people about the virtues stressed in *Populorum Progressio* and other social teachings is also of paramount importance so that a new generation may understand human dignity and value, the importance of respecting all individuals, and the need

to support the advancement and development of all people in society. The Church could foster community-building programs and retreats that let people share their experiences with all aspects of this problem, though these could be harder to implement among the poor as labor requires so much of the attention and time of the poor. It could also work more substantially with the Protestant and evangelical churches that are quickly growing throughout Latin America in order to build collaborative efforts to address this problem. The Church could also use its powerful influence within society to make more of a political impact, working with sympathetic politicians, NGOs, and institutions such as the United Nations to strengthen coalitions and work for international cooperation and investment in under-developed countries and areas.

Pope Francis has briefly discussed the dangers of violence against women,²⁹ but the Church as a worldwide institution, beginning with the Vatican, should make this issue a larger agenda issue. Pope Francis, as a man from a poorer country in the global south, is in an unique position to draw attention to the problem of feminicide. His popularity among Catholics in Latin America means that he would have a receptive audience if he chose to explicitly denounce violence against women. The pastoral function of the papacy is also important, particularly when it comes from a pontiff who is so personally popular. Pope Francis has proven that he is a champion of the poor and marginalized and should consistently offer encouragement and support for women who are vulnerable and seeking justice. His “soft power” could also reshape the conversation about faith-based organizations and activism by supporting the work of women on the ground by publicly recognizing and encouraging their efforts.

CONCLUSION

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* can offer some significant insights that speak to the modern issues of violence against women in the developing world. Although feminicide and the particular harms that make women in poverty especially vulnerable were hidden issues when *Populorum Progressio* was composed, the themes and moral imperatives that Paul VI raised in his encyclical offer fruitful resources for addressing these issues in our time. In keeping with the directives of the encyclical, the issue of feminicide should be addressed by the Church more directly, particularly in Latin America and other areas where women are especially vulnerable. In this way, the influence of *Populorum Progressio* can extend indefinitely, serving as

²⁹ See Philip Pulella, “Pope Condemns Female Mutilation, Domestic Violence Against Women,” *Reuters*, www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-mutilation-idUSKBN0LB0JM20150207. These comments did not focus on Latin American women specifically but did discuss the need to protect women in general.

an important starting point and also as a way to assert the importance of human flourishing and support a fully integral human development for all people, especially the most vulnerable.^M