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## Catholicism and Feminism: A Chilean Paradox

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CATHOLICISM AND FEMINISM:  
A CHILEAN PARADOX

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By Gabrielle C. Toppin

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies  
Croft Institute for International Studies  
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi  
May 2018

Approved:

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Dr. Katherine Centellas

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Dr. Oliver Dinius

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Dr. Sarah Moses

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and women in Chile, as well as how this relationship might be influenced by the authoritarian regime under Augusto Pinochet from 1973-1990. Chile is known as one of the most Catholic and conservative countries in Latin America, and is considered a “late female mobilization state” that has just recently legalized divorce and has not legalized abortion. The Church played a pivotal role in the defeat of the dictatorship and continues to influence the country’s society, culture, and politics. Even as women have entered the public sphere in the past few decades, intense *machismo* (or sexism) is still strongly at play and has led to a number of femicides that have sparked women’s movements across the nation. The study utilizes empirical research conducted in Valparaíso, Chile, and builds an ethnographic analysis to answer the research question: What relationship, if any, exists between the modern Catholic Church and female mobilization today in Chile, and how has the Church’s relationship with Pinochet’s regime influenced that potential relationship? The paper suggest ways in which the Catholic Church can speak to, aid, and empower women in Chile fighting against femicide and other gender equality issues. The relationships between these three variables, the Church, women, and dictatorship, may be indicative of the country’s future for the Catholic Church, women, and democracy.

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Catholicism and Feminism:

A Chilean Paradox

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

Chile's modern society grapples with the idea of tradition versus progress, the past versus the present. To conceptualize this, we see such a dichotomy in a variety of spheres in Chile. In a society still charged with sexism, a progressive female president leaves office amidst growing feminist movements against femicide. As seen during Pope Francis's recent visit to Latin America, the traditionally influential and powerful Catholic Church attempts to remain relevant as the Chilean public falls away from Catholicism. Finally, deep wounds still remain nearly three decades following the violent dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet as the Chilean population continues to navigate its relatively newfound return to democracy.

Chile serves as a unique country that faces an everyday encounter with the Catholic Church, women, and remnants of authoritarianism and human rights injustice. Women not only in Chile but across Latin American continually seek equality in the private and public spheres of society, some through the support of the Church and others not. Moreover, in Chile specifically, wounds from the dictatorship still remain open, as the population continually seeks healing each day from its aftermath of human rights violations. The relationships between these three topics may be indicative of the country's future pertaining to the coincidence of Catholicism and feminism. Through my

observation and research I have developed my research question: What relationship, if any, exists between the modern Catholic Church and female mobilization today in Chile, and how has the Church's relationship with Pinochet's regime influenced that potential relationship?

While studying abroad in Valparaíso, Chile, my peers and I experienced first hand the unusual impact that these variables have had on Chilean society. As a foreign student attending one of Chile's most prominent Catholic universities, we were asked by the university administration with little explanation to refrain from attending any social protests or marches, even the women's march on International Women's Day. Although many of my peers and I were upset and agitated by this request, most of my group abided by administration's wishes. Like many Latin cultures, the city seemed to stop for any Catholic holidays, especially Semana Santa<sup>1</sup> regardless of the dropping percentage of Chilean public that actually still practices the religion today. The verbal and sexual harassment against women in Chile is widespread—and, as I unfortunately learned, inevitable. As a dark-haired young woman, I was often mistaken as a Chilean when walking around the city. Outside of my own safe neighborhood in Viña del Mar, I could not walk more than five city blocks without hearing shouting and a whistle, known as a *piropo*<sup>2</sup>, directed at me, followed by a string of derogatory Chilean Spanish. My Chilean host mother and sister explained to me that it was normal and happened to most women around there. They reassured that I should not feel threatened, but that that I also should

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<sup>1</sup> Otherwise known as “Holy Week” to Catholic English speakers. This is the week leading up to Easter and is an official holiday in Chile.

<sup>2</sup> Chilean slang *piropo* roughly translates to “cat call” in English.

not react to it. We were told as foreign female students by our university to just keep walking and ignore it.

Within my own host family, I was directly exposed to the effects of *machismo*<sup>3</sup> as it is known in most of Latin America. While my host mother led a very successful professional life in a regional government position, she was limited by her role as a single mother of four adult children that still lived at home, a 30-year-old daughter and three sons at 26, 25, and 24-years-old. Once she returned from work each day, she assumed the role of cooking, cleaning, and tending to her children's needs, regardless of their age—especially her sons, whom she often pridefully bragged about and believed could do no wrong, unlike her daughter. Finally, we as foreign students quickly learned that mentioning the name *Pinochet* in Chile is comparable to mentioning the name *Voldemort* at Hogwarts. Although our university administration and professors never encouraged us to refrain from discussing Pinochet, many of our Chilean peers and family members quickly warned us to take caution when speaking of him or the dictatorship. Unless we were speaking in an academic setting or with a host family member that we trusted, it was understood that we were not to discuss the name of the dictator that forever left a dagger in the heart of Chile.

The Roman Catholic Church has historically had a strong global influence, both positive and negative, and continues to serve as a defender of human rights and equality. As a traditionally and densely populated Catholic country, Chile has experienced the effects of the Church's influence over the years, particularly during and following the horrific dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet from 1973-1990. In 1973, Pinochet and his

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<sup>3</sup> On a very basic level, machismo may be defined as strong or aggressive masculine pride.

regime, *la junta*<sup>4</sup>, overthrew and murdered socialist president Salvador Allende and named themselves the leading party of Chile, claiming to “protect the country against spreading communism”. While church clergy in Chile initially supported *la junta* in solidarity against communism and some bishops continued to do so, the Church eventually took a public opposition to the regime as word spread of its crude and unjust actions toward socialist or communist individuals in the country. As injustice continued, the Church supported and empowered grassroots women’s movements in opposition to Pinochet and human right violations. The Catholic Church itself proved to be significant in the defeat of the dictatorship, especially following Pope John Paul II’s visit to Chile when he called upon the Church and the Catholic population to take a stand against the regime.

Moreover, the Catholic Church is well known for its strong stance against issues like divorce and abortion, the very issues that the Chilean government has traditionally disapproved of<sup>5</sup>. As human and women’s rights movements gained traction during the Pinochet era, movements for social advancement and particularly against sexual violence have strived for a louder voice in recent years, even as the prominent modern women’s movements for social justice have decreased with the return of democracy. Despite that, a *machista* culture continues to exist in both spheres, even as women grow stronger in the social, political, and professional realm.

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<sup>4</sup> *La junta* was a United States-backed government administration comprised of Pinochet and three other military leaders that plotted against President Salvador Allende and executed the military coup.

<sup>5</sup> Chile became one of the last countries in the world to legalize divorce in 2004. Abortion remains illegal under nearly all circumstances, although a recent law passed to decriminalize it under extreme circumstances. (NY Times)

In addition to the social movements previously mentioned, the infiltration of machismo has generated a society prone to violent sexual harassment and violence throughout Latin America and has sparked movements for justice in Chile. *El femicidio*, or femicide<sup>6</sup>, was a sensitive yet common topic while I studied in Chile. Plastered on walls throughout the city were posters in protest of the horrific rape and murder of a young Argentinian girl from the previous year. Although she was certainly not the first woman in Latin America to be killed based on her gender, her death ignited an intense flame in women throughout the region that has resulted in fervent women's justice movements specifically in Argentina, Chile, and Peru, as well as Mexico and other countries in Central America.

I hypothesize that the Church's response to Pinochet's regime helped set the tone for the formation of the modern Chilean Catholic Church as a defender of human rights, and that has consequently influenced female mobilization in modern Chile's public sphere. However, in its defense of traditional gender roles, the Catholic Church's teachings continue to contribute to the perpetuation of *machismo* in the household and more intimate spheres that may lead to gender-based violence. I argue that while the Chilean Catholic Church played a prominent role in aiding women to fight for justice against the dictatorship several decades ago, it fails to empower women today in the same way against cultural issues like machismo that have excluded women in the public sphere and culminates in femicide. However, we see through the progression of papal teaching that the Catholic Church as an international institution continues to make strides to more

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<sup>6</sup> Femicide is defined by the World Health Organization as "the intentional killing of women because they are women."

fully and acknowledge women. By capitalizing on this, I argue that the Chilean Catholic Church does in fact have the influence and ability to aid modern feminist movements.

### *Data and Methodology*

I have analyzed primary sources from interviews and various databases, as well as secondary sources to answer my question and have conducted a mixed, but largely qualitative study using an inductive analysis grounded in a strong theoretical framework.

These theories include:

1. Overlap and friction of Catholic Church teaching and modern feminist beliefs. (Blofield)
2. Chile as a “late female mobilization state”. (Blofield and Haas)
3. The Catholic Church as an obstacle to authoritarianism. (Klaiber)

By concentrating on these three theories proposed by various academics in my literature review, I have developed an empirical study that builds upon these theories and is descriptive in nature. Prior to my time abroad in Valparaíso, Chile, I received approval from the University of Mississippi IRB to conduct this study. While spending a semester in Chile, I was able to conduct ethnographic research including several face-to-face interviews in both Spanish and English with local Chileans. Moreover, a large portion of my primary research derives from an analysis of the Roman Catholic Church Doctrine, as well as quantitative and qualitative data from the World Values data, Pew Research Forum, the United Nations Development Program, and other primary databases. By analyzing for key themes and patterns relating to my three themes, I have drawn conclusions for my “so what” discussion as follows.

So, why does research on the Catholic Church, gender, and authoritarianism matter in Chile? Today's 21<sup>st</sup> century Chile is teeming with discussions on topics like femicide and social advancement for women. From newspapers to literature to everyday language, the Chilean population appears to become increasingly more aware of these issues globally and locally and is integrating these discussions into its society. As one of the most socially conservative countries in Latin America, divorce was only legalized in 2004 and merely speaking of abortion was unheard of until just recently. Moreover, like Latin American women in countries like Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and other countries, Chilean women are now joining in and taking to the streets to speak out against sexual and domestic gender-based violence. Because these issues largely impact women, I believe this study will be indicative of why the country continues to remain so traditional, and on the other hand, what has caused those who are now speaking up to do so. Studying in Chile for nearly half a year, I noticed that to many there, these issues *matter* to them and therefore, may contribute to a cultural change arriving soon.

Moreover, I am intrigued to see what this study reveals about the current and future state of the Roman Catholic Church in Chile. As illustrated through the Pew Research forum, while Chile (like many countries) claims to be a Catholic country, many do not faithfully practice the religion. As a Church that is so engrained in the culture and that has had so much influence in the country for centuries, what happens now? Even more, what happens to the Church that is largely accredited for the fight and eventual defeat of Pinochet's regime? With an atheist outgoing-president in office, a lack of public trust, and a rising generation of non-practicing or non-religious young adults, will the

Church remain as one of the most powerful forces in the country? And if not, what does this imply about any major cultural changes and for women's rights and movements?

This study attempts to answer my research questions in the pages that follow.

Firstly, I provide a literature review grounded in my theoretical framework. The literature review focuses on themes pertaining to my research on the Catholic Church (both as an international institution and in Chile), modern feminist movements in Chile, Catholic feminism, machismo, and the dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. Next, I dedicate a chapter to the Catholic Church's teachings that pertain to women and human rights. In this chapter I also include a description and analysis of the Church's relationship with Pinochet and the significant role it played in Chile's return to democracy. Next, I cover a chapter on women in Chile. Specifically, I emphasize machismo and femicide in Chilean society and its affects on women in both the private and public spheres. I also speak on women's movements on femicide that we see in the country today. Finally, I conclude with a discussion that culminates why this research as a whole is significant in modern Chile and where it leaves us regarding the state of Catholicism and feminism in this unique country.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

As foreign students in Valparaíso, Chile, my peers and I were not permitted by our Catholic university to participate in social protests or marches, including various student movements and feminist movements. As I sat in my class on Gender Studies in Latin America, a few female peers shared that they “snuck over to Santiago for a women’s march” recently, with proud yet hesitant smiles. They explained in detail their experience and the empowerment they felt through their participation, as our professor jokingly winked and said, “I’m going to act like I didn’t hear you”, in attempt to justify her decision to not report the students. Such a prohibition was a little strange and surprising to me, as I could not imagine my home university here in the U.S. forbidding me to attend a political or social protest for something I believe in and placing a constraint on my freedom of speech in a democratic state. I cannot tell you exactly why we were prohibited to participate in such events. That is, we were given no specific reasons in writing anywhere. However, I can take a wild guess.

My research builds upon a theoretical framework of scholarship on the Catholic Church, feminism, and authoritarianism. This framework consists of three main theories that I have adopted from various authors that offer insight into the relationships of these three variables and therefore, allow me to delve into an active discussion of their past, present, and future states in Chile. These theories include:

1. Overlap and friction of Catholic Church teaching and modern feminist beliefs.

(Blofield

2. Chile as a “late female mobilization state”. (Blofield and Haas)

3. The Catholic Church as an obstacle to authoritarianism. (Klaiber)

Each theory entails a major factor that has helped to shape the current relationship between the Catholic Church and women. Theory 1 from Blofield encompasses the teachings and beliefs of both the Catholic Church and modern feminism. Theory 2 from Blofield and Haas covers the concepts that led to Chile’s late mobilization, specifically that of *machismo*. Finally, Theory 3 from Klaiber includes the distinct and influential relationship between the Catholic Church and Pinochet’s dictatorial regime, as well as how this affected Chile’s transition to democracy.

#### *Overlap and Friction of Catholic Church Teaching and Modern Feminist Beliefs*

As I began my research, I immediately began typing in search bars on my computer “abortion movements in Chile” and similar key phrases. I assumed after the talk I had heard about abortion in Chile that this would be a prevalent movement to include in my research. However, I soon realized that while it is a popular topic of discussion and Chile, the women’s movements today are geared more towards femicide and other issues of gender equality. A recent surge of women’s movements across Latin America against femicide is making noise, specifically in countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. Modern feminist movements in Chile began as a way to publicly oppose the military regime and demand a new political order<sup>7</sup>. Feminist movements around the world continue to function as a way for women to identify separately from men and express a demand for greater decision-making in society<sup>8</sup>. While Latin American women have traditionally been placed in the private, domestic role of the

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<sup>7</sup> Baldez, 2002, p. 1

<sup>8</sup> Baldez, 2002, p. 13

household, they have begun to speak out and defend their roles as fully participating citizens in the public sphere. While my discussion and analysis on women in this paper will heavily on femicide, I have still however chosen here to approach the issue of abortion in Chile in relation to the Catholic Church, as it demonstrates the tension and complexity of Catholicism versus feminism.

In recent decades these feminist movements in Latin America have developed into labor, political, and human rights movements<sup>9</sup>. Helen Icken Safa writes, “[Latin American women] are redefining and transforming their domestic role from one of private nurturance to one of collective, public protest, and in this way challenging the traditional seclusion of women into the private sphere of the family”<sup>10</sup>. Chile’s history of feminism and social movements is unique, as it involves a dictatorial regime and the influence of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church played a significant role in supporting women and feminist movements during dictatorships. Safa writes:

[In Chile and Brazil], women from all class levels, with church support, organized into human rights groups to protest the disappearance or killing of their loved ones, or to seek amnesty for political prisoners or exiles. Catholic doctrine played an important role in these women’s self-definition and quest for legitimacy, and they rarely questioned traditional gender roles.<sup>11</sup>

As these groups gave modern Chilean feminist movements their initial momentum, many feminists following the end of the dictatorship shifted their focus more to the social and political aspects of issues like abortion and divorce, conflicting with the social teachings

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<sup>9</sup> Safa, 1990

<sup>10</sup> Safa, 1990, p. 355

<sup>11</sup> Safa, 1990, p. 358

of the Church that gave its initial support to those women. Merike Blofield explains that religion and women's rights often conflict with one another. Specifically, abortion and divorce are closely tied to the Catholic Church. They both speak against Church doctrine and therefore, it is difficult for women in countries like Chile to gain social and political ground with the existence of such a strong established power like the Catholic Church<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, Blofield is quick to indicate that the Church's social teaching poses some difficulty, as it often falls left of center, but prolife teachings and others push it more to the political right. Such complex political stances can create a conflicting role. Do Catholic Church teachings on social justice from the political left help improve women's rights, or do its more conservative teachings from the political right pose obstacles?<sup>13</sup>

In her book *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, Sandra Marie Schneiders tackles this idea of overlap between the beliefs of the Church and of feminism. Many Catholic feminist women tend to find tension with the institutional church and often struggle with their spirituality, as it can be both incredible while still oppressive<sup>14</sup>. She writes, "Feminism represents a profound criticism of every aspect of theology: the content of the theological canon including both scripture and tradition, the subject matter and arguments of classical theology, and the masculinized methods of the discipline"<sup>15</sup>. This may demonstrate the difficulties Catholic women often find in navigating how traditional and/or patriarchal scripture, doctrine, and ideologies may function for them as feminists in the modern world.

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<sup>12</sup> Blofield, 2006

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Schneiders, 2004, p. 3

<sup>15</sup> Schneiders, 2004, p. 2

The possibility of being both Catholic and feminist often comes into question, as many view the Church teaching as an obstacle to professing one's true feminist beliefs. U.S. Catholic thinker Kristen Heyer discusses the notion of Catholic feminism and the idea that according to the "signs of the times", the Catholic Church has an obligation to continually reevaluate and address the "experience of women" in its words and its actions. She writes, "Catholic feminism takes up the meaning of the Gospel and God's action in human lives in light of women's lived experience, asking what tradition does to and for women"<sup>16</sup>. However, while the Church does a commendable job of addressing a wide range of social issues that pertain to women, too often it does not take the necessary action to do something to help women. The Church itself must therefore ensure that its actions reflect its words.

Moreover, the rights of the unborn and the rights of women do not always match up within the Church's doctrine and echoes back to the lack of women's and even married persons' voices in doctrine, causing difficulties and friction for many Catholic feminists. For example, Senator Bob Casey Jr. speaks on the pro-life movement that the Church so steadily supports and claims that the pro-life movement must not only encompass the rights of the unborn, but also the rights of children in unfunded schools or broken homes, and the rights of women and mothers everywhere for a just life. He states, "We need policies that provide maximum feasible protection for the unborn and maximum feasible care and support for pregnant women, mothers, and children. The right to life means the rights to a life with dignity"<sup>17</sup>. Gregory Kalscheur echoes this belief with a thought-provoking question: "Have we listened to the voices of women who

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<sup>16</sup> Heyer, 2007, p. 2

<sup>17</sup> Heyer (Casey), 2007, p. 6

have felt compelled to make the choice for abortion, and are we working to establish a set of social policies that might provide women with the support needed to make the decision to carry their baby to term?”<sup>18</sup>. Statements regarding the pro-life movement and beliefs such as the two above only begin to indicate the Church’s need to follow-up on this ideology that affects so many women across the world and specifically in countries like Chile with concrete political action.

The inescapable fact that all Church doctrine has been written completely by men remains to be the elephant in the room. Maria Riley speaks on the “Patriarchal bias in Catholic social teaching” that has overflowed into society, family, and other aspects of Catholic culture, especially in Latin America. She explains that this bias is based on three points:

1. Catholic Church doctrine was written by men about men.
2. This doctrine assumes that man is normative for human.
3. Women are defined from this patriarchal perspective.<sup>19</sup>

Due to this bias, Church hierarchy and methodology have historically overlooked women and their experience and therefore, have made it increasingly difficult for women to identify through both their faith and their gender. Heyer echoes Riley’s position as she states, “Ultimately excluding women’s voices from the development of church teaching fails to attend to the promptings of the Holy Spirit among the people of God and fails to embody the conciliar emphasis on inductively engaging humanity’s joys, hopes, fear, and anxieties”<sup>20</sup>. This faith versus femininity complex lends to the overarching theme of how

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<sup>18</sup> Heyer (Kalscheur), 2007, p. 7

<sup>19</sup> Riley, 1990, p. 155

<sup>20</sup> Heyer, 2007, p. 7

the Catholic Church can be a sustainable and continual supporter of women as it was to Chilean women at a time of such great need during the dictatorship when it provided them support and a platform to speak and act against injustice. If the Church was able to successfully support women in their fight for justice against authoritarianism, how can that contribute to the Church's support of women in today's movements against issues like femicide in Chile?

*Chile as a "late female mobilization state"*

Although Latin America continues to gradually dissociate itself from the concept, machismo continues to exist in Chile and serves as a major factor that has historically restricted women from mobilizing. This word, a term used to describe sexism in Latin America, was common in the everyday language and behavior I was exposed to while in Chile. While machismo may entail different behaviors on a country-by-country basis, Ingoldsby defines traditional machismo as, "The cult of virility, the chief of characteristic of which are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relations"<sup>21</sup>. While the extremities of this definition are not always the case today, I experienced firsthand a notable semblance of machismo in my own household in Chile that initially peaked my interest in women's roles in the private versus public sphere.

While my host mother held a respectable and fairly prestigious governmental position, most of her energy went into caring for her four adult children at home. Although her ex husband, their father, lived about a mile from their house, she was constantly consumed and overwhelmed with a seemingly natural and cultural expectation

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<sup>21</sup> Ingoldsby, 2991, p. 58

to provide and care for her children regardless of their age. Ingoldsby describes the common and traditional phenomenon of “familism” in Latin America. It is the idea or concept that family is placed ahead of everything else<sup>22</sup>. Through this concept, I realize that what my host mother practices, along with numerous other families, is normal in Latin America and many other regions of the world. Sherry B. Ortner describes the partnership between womanhood and familism as she writes, “Mothers and their children, according to cultural reasoning, belong together... [woman] is confined to the domestic family group; ‘women’s place is in the home’”<sup>23</sup>. This illustrates the role that familism consequently often plays in the perpetuation of machismo.

Ingoldsby continues to describe machismo as the idea of male superiority that consequently causes women to both appear and feel inferior. Women become “submissive” and “can be dominated”<sup>24</sup>. Over time, many women in the region began to accept the idea of machismo as the norm and it became a household name and practice. On the basis that women are to be “conquered”, Ingoldsby adds that the mere existence of women makes men feel more macho. He writes, “Indeed, can there be a macho without a virgin to seduce, an inferior to protect, a submissive to dominate, other men to protect one’s sisters from?”<sup>25</sup>. This includes the understanding that men are to be “humored”, as if they are just “little boys” that “cannot help the way they are”<sup>26</sup>. Such gender stereotypes contribute to a cycle of machismo in multiple realms on Latin America’s society, and as I will later elaborate on, contribute to the cycle of femicide.

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<sup>22</sup> Ingoldsby, 1991, p. 57

<sup>23</sup> Ortner, 1974

<sup>24</sup> Ingoldsby, 1991, p. 59

<sup>25</sup> Ingoldsby, 1991, p. 59

<sup>26</sup> Stevens, 1972, p. 9

Similarly, though less prominent in discussion, Stevens describes *marianismo*, the counterpart of machismo. This idea depicts women as “semi-divine, morally superior and spiritually stronger than men”<sup>27</sup>. Through marianismo, women are expected to present themselves as pure, pious, and spiritual individuals, dedicated to their families as an imitation of the Virgin Mary. In Latin America, machismo and marianismo often accommodate one another in one fluid system that ultimately caters to male-dominance, serving as an obstacle to women’s rights<sup>28</sup>. Accordingly, as the Latin American family is the basic unit of its society, women’s rights are structured to be complementary to men’s rights in relation to family<sup>29</sup>. The notions of machismo and marianismo add a complex factor to the equation of gender and religion in Chile, more specifically where women fall on the spectrum of freedom, power, and compliance to their counterpart, to the Church, and to the state.

In regards to women and religion, the Pew Research Forum reports on women and religious practice worldwide. Social scientists argue “women are universally more religious than men across all societies, cultures, and faiths”<sup>30</sup>. Specifically, roughly 83.4% of women worldwide identify with a faith group, 79.9% of men do; that is about 97 million more women than men globally<sup>31</sup>. The study suggests this is likely due to the fact that women are more likely to experience poverty, illness, single parenthood, etc. and therefore, lean on religion more<sup>32</sup>. While this may all seem trivial to my research, it highlights an interesting point that the Church’s influence likely matters more to women

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<sup>27</sup> Stevens, 1972, p. 62

<sup>28</sup> Stevens, 1972; Schneiders, 2004, p. 14

<sup>29</sup> Schneiders, 2004, p. 12

<sup>30</sup> Pew Research Forum, *The Religious Gender Gap Around the World*, 2016

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

than men in highly religious regions like Latin America and therefore, women are more likely to actually follow what the Church itself says. This in turn adds to the perpetuation of patriarchal ideals like machismo in the household and public life.

Blofield, Haas, and Htun all analyze how laws have evolved since the 1990s regarding women's rights in society. Blofield and Haas coined the term "late female mobilization state"<sup>33</sup>. States are categorized under this phrase based on recent military regime, political salience of the Catholic, and (in some cases) a status as less-developed welfare states. This coined phrase illustrates that Chile moved to reform female rights laws decades after its neighbors, and feminists still continue to push for greater reform. However, as many social and political figures are opposed to reform that challenges traditional family and society structure, most successful bills in the past have been those that do not threaten existing gender roles, such as bills that support child and daycare facilities<sup>34</sup>. Similarly, Htun demonstrates that laws in Latin America have historically conformed to religious and patriarchal models<sup>35</sup>.

#### *The Catholic Church as an Obstacle to Authoritarianism*

As the sun set one clear evening around Easter time, I walked through the city of Viña del Mar, Chile, to meet some friends for dinner. I was soon stopped by a long line of halted cars at the city's main street of Libertad. Police officers directed all cars to brake and wait as a procession approached in the distance. With a glance down Libertad I saw a large crowd slowly walking toward me where I was waiting to cross the street near the cathedral I often attended mass. As a Catholic myself, I quickly realized that this was

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<sup>33</sup> Blofield and Haas, 2005, p. 38

<sup>34</sup> Blofield and Haas, 2005

<sup>35</sup> Htun, 2003

a Roman Catholic procession in preparation for Easter on Sunday. I watched as priests and bishops approached, carrying the Holy Eucharist up high, with hundreds quietly yet eagerly following behind them. I waited until they passed and police officers gave the other bystanders and myself the okay to cross the street and continue along with our evening.

The dichotomy between this religious “march” so to speak and the prohibited feminist marches that march for the rights and empowerment of women intrigues me. Each serves as a demonstration of beliefs of its respective party, but one is viewed by some (my Catholic university) as more scandalous or radical than the other. This procession was just one example of the influence the Catholic Church continues to have in the Chilean culture and in many Hispanic cultures. An analysis of the role that the Catholic Church plays in Chilean culture and society will be crucial for a discussion on the relationship between church and gender. As the first modern feminist movements in Chile began during the authoritarian rule of dictator Augusto Pinochet as a response to human rights violations, it is helpful to take a look at the Church’s role during that time and how it aided or hindered these movements.

Following a brutal military coup and government takeover, General Augusto Pinochet presided over Chile from 1973 - 1990. While the Chilean Catholic Church’s role eventually shifted to one that opposed Pinochet’s regime as a defender of human rights and democracy, it initially supported the military coup and even called upon the Chilean public to “cooperate with the new regime in restoring order” following former President Salvador Allende’s socialist government<sup>36</sup>. Many argue that the Church hierarchy’s

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<sup>36</sup> Loveman, 1987, p. 5

stance was ambiguous, as it had historically been in parts of Europe. Brian H. Smith elaborates on this as he writes:

While the hierarchy did not actively encourage such authoritarian rulers as they came to power, neither did they as a group prophetically denounce systematic violations of human rights nor other atrocities perpetrated by these dictators while in power.<sup>37</sup>

While the statement above refers to the Catholic Church pre-Vatican II before it took a strong doctrinal stance as an outspoken defender of human rights, it exemplifies the Church's ambiguous history of hesitantly speaking against government wrongdoings if that meant it would taint the Church's reputation. Similarly, Chilean Archbishop Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez issued the Church's first official statement following the military coup that neither fully legitimized nor fully condemned the coup. While it acknowledged the violence and deaths that occurred, it still asked for the public's cooperation with the junta<sup>38</sup>.

It is important to note that the military junta used inspiration from the Church to legitimize its "Christian mission" and allowed the Church to remain as one of the only major social organization or institution to function openly. That being said, Cardinal Silva came to an agreement with the junta that as long as the regime allowed the Church to maintain its "institutional freedom" and "conduct both pastoral and humanitarian activities" then the Church would provide legitimacy to the junta<sup>39</sup>. By 1974, repression throughout Chile became undeniable and local parishes opened their doors for legal

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<sup>37</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 283

<sup>38</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 288

<sup>39</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 290

support and material aid to those fallen victim of the regime. It was here in April 1974 that the Chilean bishops together issued their “first major criticism of the government”, “Reconciliation in Chile”. This address acknowledged and criticized ideals and actions committed by the regime. While it did not lead to any major changes on the junta’s part, it did foreshadow what would later become a stronger stance against the oppression of the marginalized and poor under the dictatorship<sup>40</sup>.

The lack of the Church’s full condemnation of the military regime lies partly in the divisions with the Chilean Church clergy. While some bishops were simply blind to the atrocities and oppression occurring around them, other politically conservative bishops chose to align themselves with the regime and essentially chose to ignore human rights violations<sup>41</sup>. Theologian George Weigel argues that overtime, while most Chilean bishops did not disagree on whether they should defend human rights, they still disagreed on *how* it should be done. That is, whether it should be done quietly or publicly<sup>42</sup>. However, even following the Church’s direct and clear condemnation of the dictatorship in the late 1970s, select clergymen continued to offer their support to the military regime and were often believed to be opponents of the Popular Unidad, the primary political party that worked against the regime<sup>43</sup>.

Further contextualizing Catholicism in Latin America at the time of the dictatorship reveals more about the motives of Catholic clergymen and the Catholic population that took a stand for the human rights and dignity of the oppressed around them. Specifically, liberation theology was a major player in shaping Latin American

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<sup>40</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 295

<sup>41</sup> Valensuela, et al., 2007

<sup>42</sup> Weigel, 2009, p. 532

<sup>43</sup> Loveman, 1987

Catholicism during this time. Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez and other Latin American theologians in the 1960s – 1970s studied and preached this new way of practicing one’s Catholic faith throughout the region <sup>44</sup>. Liberation theology was founded on three central insights: 1) Theology is a secondary task as a reflection of a life of faith; 2) Jesus requires identification with and commitment alongside the poor and marginalized in society; and 3) that the Work of God in history has been a work of liberations <sup>45</sup>. Based on these principals, liberation theology calls for a “people’s church” rather than a “hierarchical Church”, that allows the poor and marginalized to be organized and equipped to understand their own “victimhood” and be inspired by Jesus the Liberator to recreate society and deliver them <sup>46</sup>.

Gutiérrez explains that Latin America was the perfect and most necessary setting for liberation theology, as it was “the only continent of underdeveloped and oppressed people who are in a majority Christians” <sup>47</sup>. He felt that first world capitalist views “did not fit the realities of [Latin American] people”, and therefore sought to put his Catholic faith into action against sinful and unjust social structures in the region undergoing revolution and “institutionalized violence” during the second half of the twentieth century <sup>48</sup>. Like in Chile, there were “restless clergy” throughout Latin America calling for radical changes against violence, injustice, and exploitation. These clergy that began to

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<sup>44</sup> Himes, et al., 2004, p. 439

<sup>45</sup> Himes, et al., 2004, p. 440

<sup>46</sup> Weigel, 2009, p. 238

<sup>47</sup> Gutiérrez, 1970, p. 243

<sup>48</sup> Gutiérrez 1970; Himes et al., 2004, p. 439

preach and practice liberation theology were often labeled as “subversives” and Marxists, causing a great amount of friction within the church hierarchy <sup>49</sup>.

The coincidence of liberation theology in Latin America and the development of the Second Vatican Council under the Catholic Church internationally created a foundation for the Chilean Church to assume a position as a moral authority in the latter half of the dictatorship. In short, the Second Vatican Council “committed the Church to an active role in the promotion of justice, human rights, and freedom”<sup>50</sup>. It essentially aimed to develop more accessible and relevant practice and doctrine for the Catholic community<sup>51</sup>. Brian Smith explains that following the Council, bishops in Latin America “have exercised this prophetic role vigorously, denouncing political disappearances, torture, economic exploitation, and racism perpetrated by authoritarian regimes”<sup>52</sup>. While the Catholic Church under JPPII did not legitimize or fully support liberation theology as it too closely related to Marxism, its ideals were influential among lay Catholics and the Church at the local level in Latin America. Christian Smith states, “For Latin American Catholics who were already experimenting with progressive pastoral strategies and social activities, Vatican II came as an unequivocal endorsement”<sup>53</sup>. This illustrates the impact that liberation theology still had on the mission of the Catholic Church through its influence among the people. Ultimately, the conversation between liberation theology and Vatican II doctrine allowed Catholics to put their beliefs on human rights and justice into pastoral action. Latin America’s newfound empowerment to fight for the oppressed

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<sup>49</sup> Gutiérrez, 1970, p. 251

<sup>50</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 4

<sup>51</sup> C. Smith, 1991, p. 99

<sup>52</sup> B. Smith, 1982, p. 5

<sup>53</sup> C. Smith 1991, p. 99

against human rights atrocities helped give way to modern feminist movements in Chile were supported through the Church.

Klaiber elaborates on the Church's role in the development of these modern feminist movements in Chile as a demand for justice for the disappeared and tortured. Through the Church's support, women were given a strong and legitimate platform to create their own voice and movements. Stern writes, "Women in search of their disappeared loved ones became an extremely powerful social referent, projected into the public domain by the women's own actions as well as the sympathetic publicity through church-based solidarity"<sup>54</sup>.

Through the Vatican II council and the historical influence of the Catholic Church, the Church was able to promote democracy in the face of dictatorial regime. From a global perspective, this notion was also exemplified in Poland in 1989 in opposition to a communist regime. By "maintaining control of own governance, education, and worship", the Church sustained its legitimacy among the people. It not only defended its own freedom, but also became a strong advocate for democracy<sup>55</sup>. Moreover, Philpott suggests this same pattern was visible in Latin America, particularly in Chile as Catholic bishops united in opposition to the dictatorship and used their influence to encourage a peaceful transition to democracy<sup>56</sup>. As democracy was successfully achieved, women were then able to create a greater and freer platform to practice advocacy in the public

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<sup>54</sup> Stern, 2004, p. 117

<sup>55</sup> Philpott, 2007, p. 511

<sup>56</sup> Philpott, 2007, p. 512

sphere<sup>57</sup>. Walsh argues that not simply democratization, but *good* democracy is key to women's rights advancement<sup>58</sup>.

With the return to democracy in 1989 following the dictatorial regime, the Catholic Church maintained its influence in Chilean society, particularly in its political realm. As a moral authority during the dictatorship, the Church was then able to use this position as leverage in the years to follow<sup>59</sup>. Guzman goes on to explain:

The Catholic Church's involvement in the struggle for human rights, democracy, and social justice not only granted it significant moral authority in the country, but also allowed it to maintain close ties to the opposition forces that came into power in 1989, particularly the Christian Democratic party (PDC). These forces felt indebted to the Church for its support, and were reluctant to endorse policies that would cause conflict with the clergy.<sup>60</sup>

Such alliances created an obstacle for feminist demands to have a voice in post-authoritarian Chile, as many demands like divorce legislation, greater reproductive and sexual rights, and sex education in schools were not in alignment with the Church's teachings. Ultimately, as the Church provided such a significant role in the transition to a democratic state, the institution itself provided legitimacy to groups that sought to change the status quo. However, it became much more challenging for those feminist groups to continue to make changes in society when those changes spoke against the very institution that helped bring order to the nation.

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<sup>57</sup> Walsh, 2011

<sup>58</sup> Walsh, 2011, p. 3

<sup>59</sup> Guzmán, et al., 2010, p. 917

<sup>60</sup> Guzmán, et al., 2010, p. 974

## *Conclusion*

The three theories discussed above are foundational in research on the relationship between the Catholic Church and women in Chile. As this relationship continues to evolve, both the Church's influence and feminism continues to change individually. By exploring this research, I seek to discover the complex connections and relationships among these variables and provide an analysis that yields an active discussion on what will occur next. Such a discussion will be indicative of the future state of each aspect of my research as Chile continues to democratize and become a stable state for all to speak and act freely without the traditional restraints of society or culture. Through this, there is hope that both types of marches, feminist and Catholic, may coexist in conversation and have institutional and societal support.

### **Chapter III: The Catholic Church**

I incorporate an analysis of passages from Catholic Church doctrine and social teaching on women and human rights as a large portion of my data collection. I found the documents through the Vatican Library database online provided to the public by the Vatican in Rome. This includes sections from the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church regarding The Dignity of the Human Person, Offenses Against the Dignity of Marriage, Equality of Men and Women. Similarly, I have incorporated letters, encyclicals, and homilies from multiple popes including Pope Leo XIII's Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor (1891), Pope John XXIII's Peace on Earth (1963), Pope John Paul II's Dignity and Vocation of Women (1988) and his Letter to Women (1995), and current Pope Francis on these subjects. In addition to these, I have included other official Vatican documents and Papal teachings, including the Importance and Priority of Defending Innocent Human Life.

While I acknowledge that Catholic Church teaching is extremely complex and not intended to be analyzed from a simplistic or superficial perspective, I concluded that I was not able to conduct my research without it. An analysis of its doctrine was simply the only way to see the Church's official teachings clearly spelled out. Moreover, I acknowledge that the Catechism, encyclicals, and other papal teachings have all been deeply deliberated and meditated upon, both academically and spiritually, since the Church's beginnings over 2000 years ago. This doctrine is reformable and has changed overtime as society has evolved. However, I also want to acknowledge that while the

Catholic Church is in fact a traditional institution with hierarchical imperfections, it is meant to be a church for the people. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has intentionally and continually ensured that the Catechism, encyclicals, and other teachings are readily available to the public through the Vatican Library and other forms of publication. These documents are intended for the public and are intended to be read, interpreted, and applied to one's life. As an undergraduate student, I understand that I am not fully capable of doing this analysis justice from a holistically theological standpoint, but I argue that as a scholar and practicing Catholic, I have approached this necessary analysis to the best of my abilities.

By dissecting and incorporating official Catholic Church doctrine with other primary data and secondary sources, I have been able to identify patterns pertaining to key themes and concepts regarding my research and analyze how they have changed over time according to the manner in which Church authorities speak of them, as well as compare the ideas across them to other data. Such an analysis has allowed me to draw conclusions regarding the future of Chile and its Catholic Church, as well as offer suggestions on how changes within the international Church could aid in Chile's situation regarding the Church and women. The following sections build upon my theoretical framework that focuses on the overlap and friction of the Catholic Church and modern feminist movements, Chile as a "late female mobilization state", and the Catholic Church as an obstacle to authoritarianism.

### *The Catholic Church on Human Rights and Dignity*

In regards to Chile, it is necessary to look at the Catholic Church's beliefs and teachings on justice and dignity of human life. With millions of Chileans still struggling

with the aftermath of a severely unjust authoritarian regime, and an ongoing discussion on the legalization of abortion in the country a discussion on human rights is inevitable and indicative of the Church's influence in the country. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is strict and clear on its beliefs on human rights—every person has a right to a dignified life. Under “The Dignity of the Human Person”, the Catechism states, “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God... It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfillment”<sup>61</sup>. Similarly, under “Social Justice”, the Catechism states:

Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority...

Respect for the human person considers the other “another self”. It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person... The equality of men concerns their dignity as person and the rights that flow from it.<sup>62</sup>

Next to the Bible itself and the Pope, the Catholic Church looks directly to the Catechism for guidance and understanding of its teachings. Just at first glance, the Church's stance on the dignity of each individual and social justice is quite clear as previously stated.

These topics may be applied to both that of abortion and authoritarianism and serve as an explanation of the Church's response of the two issues in Chile.

During the dictatorship, Pope John Paul II was one of the first major public figures to publicly and directly condemn Pinochet and his horrific actions against human rights. During a 1987 visit to Chile, the Pope chose to take an “aggressive approach to

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<sup>61</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

human-rights issues”<sup>63</sup> and called upon the Church authorities and Catholic Chileans everywhere to take a stance against the authoritarian regime and for democracy. With the support of the Church teachings as stated in the Catechism, John Paul II spoke of his responsibility to fight for social justice as a “mission” and begged that the Chilean public would not let the church itself there die. He stated, “...I am not the evangelizer of democracy, I am the evangelizer the Gospel. To the Gospel message, of course, belongs all the problems of human rights, and if democracy means human rights, it also belongs to the message of the church”<sup>64</sup>. This statement, among others, echoes the established Church teaching through the Catechism and thus, provided credibility in his words and enabled the Chilean public to put their trust in this religious leader to guide their country to democracy and freedom from injustice. Here, the Church teachings aligned with the Chilean public’s needs at the time—a need for support during a long period of distress, a need for a powerful figure to condemn its leader’s actions, and a need for an outside influence to direct them back to peace and democracy. Pope John Paul II and the Church’s support provided the country with a glimpse of hope and in return, the Catholic Church gained more credibility in the country.

While these teachings speak against authoritarianism and came to Chile’s aid during the Pinochet regime, they also speak against abortion, a prevalent topic globally today, particularly in Chile. Merike Blofield draws on her theory of Chile as a late female mobilization state and characterizes abortion as a “primary public health problem” in Chile, as women continually practice abortion outside of the medical clinic regardless of

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<sup>63</sup> Suro, *The New York Times*, 1987

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

the law<sup>65</sup>. Due to this, Chile has one of the highest abortion rates in South America, among numerous women's health issues. Since 1990, Chileans have increasingly voted "yes" to legalizing abortion, especially if the mother's health is at risk or in the case of rape. However, since 1990, the Right has "promoted only one position on abortion: absolute prohibition"<sup>66</sup>. Often aligned with the Right in Chile, the Catholic Church has held and likely will always hold a very strong stance on abortion. Like the Right, the Church believes in "absolute prohibition", drawing solely from moral obligation.

For the Church, abortion firmly stands as a human rights issue, not a women's rights issue. Drawing from the Catechism's "Dignity of the Human Person", Papal Teaching and other official Vatican documents speak on abortion. A 1974 Vatican document on the *Declaration on Procured Abortion* states, "The first right of the human person is his life... Hence it must be protected above all others. It does not belong to society, nor does it belong to public authority in any form"<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, in his publication on the *Importance and Priority of Defending Innocent Human Life* of 1995, Pope John Paul II focuses on the honor and dignity of the human life as a reflection of God. He writes:

It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life... A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it

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<sup>65</sup> Blofield, p. 98

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108

<sup>67</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974

is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.<sup>68</sup>

As the Pope and this Vatican congregation speak of abortion here, we see that the Church believes it is not solely a matter of ending the life of an infant, but largely a matter devaluing human life in general, as JP II also expressed regarding human rights violations under Pinochet.

Moreover, from 1974 to 1990 to today in the catechismal teachings above that still stand in 2018, we see no change in the Church's stance on abortion as a human rights issue. In contrast, quantitative data from World Values Survey provides a more indicative overview of Chile's perception of the issue. In a wave of surveys, Chilean participants were asked, "Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (1 = never, 2-9, 10 = always). In a sample selected in 1990 at the end of the dictatorship, 75% of participants responded "never", while 1.1% responded "always". In a more recent sample selected in 2012, the results ranged more from 1-10, as 43.3% responded "never justifiable" and 5.6% responded "always justifiable".<sup>69</sup>

While the data above may serve only as a sample of the country, it is indicative of a Chilean society that, like the majority of the world, has slowly but surely moved away from the Church's traditional teaching that abortion is not justifiable under any circumstances. This is telling of a country that had such a strong Catholic influence for so

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<sup>68</sup> Pope John Paul II, 1995

<sup>69</sup> World Values Survey, 1990-2012

many years, and it raises an interesting discussion regarding the Church's power after it became one of the leading supporters that led the country away from the dictatorial regime.

*The Catholic Church and Gender*

While this research largely focuses on the Catholic Church and in part, the authoritarian regime in Chile, I have dedicated a major part of the study to women in Chile and how, if at all, they are impacted by the Catholic Church. Women throughout Latin America have over the past few decades come out of the shadows of the private, domestic sphere and stepped into public sphere of work and politics<sup>70</sup>. Safa writes, "Women are demanding to be recognized as full participants in the public world and no longer wish to have their interests represented solely by men"<sup>71</sup>. Building upon this, women in Chile interestingly got their start to this full participation in the public world through the support of the Church during the dictatorship. Even in the small northern town of Arica, the Church was pivotal in these women's movements, as Chovanec describes:

The Catholic Church in Arica... made a distinctive contribution to the women's and anti-dictatorship movements... the church in Arica was fundamental in all the work of recovering democracy... the church played a fundamental role in terms of welcoming the people and of being the voice of those who had no voice, of taking risks with the people who were oppressed.<sup>72</sup>

As women across Chile protested and marched for justice for their husbands, fathers, and sons who had disappeared on account of loyalty to the communist party, the Church

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<sup>70</sup> Safa, "Women's Social Movements in Latin America", 1990, p. 354

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 355

<sup>72</sup> Chovanec, 2009, p. 46

continually provided a legitimate source of support and reason for their fight. While we see the Church as primary aid in facilitating women's participation under those circumstances, it is valuable to look at how it has historically spoken of and on behalf of women in its doctrine.

When setting out to collect qualitative data on the Catholic Church and women, I immediately went to the Catechism just as I had for data collection on both human rights and authoritarianism. After easily searching and finding numerous sections dedicated specifically to abortion, democracy, and other issues, it quickly proved to be more challenging when searching for anything about women. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the word "man" is mentioned exactly 748 times, and the word "woman" is mentioned only 86 times. The word "men" is mentioned exactly 356 times, and the word "women" is mentioned only 22 times<sup>73</sup>. Nearly every time "woman" or "women" is mentioned, it is only in relation to family and children. While the words "man" or "men" have historically been used to include both men and women, as all humans are considered "mankind", this language is also reminiscent of the masculinity found in the Spanish language that excludes women. For example, for a group of 100 women, one would use the feminine pronoun "ellas" for "they" to address the group. However, if one man joined the group, one would use the masculine pronoun "ellos" to address the group of 100 women and one man. This reflection of the Catholic doctrine language and the Spanish language highlights a point of interest of the very culture within institutions themselves that so seamlessly exclude women in their everyday language.

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<sup>73</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, statistics and graphs

Similarly, nearly every Chilean woman I interviewed, Catholic or non-Catholic, acknowledged the strong influence of the Catholic Church within the Chilean culture today, even if she felt that the institution of the Catholic Church itself has lost influence. To the question, “Do you feel the presence of the Catholic Church has a strong influence over marriage and family in Chile? Does it infringe on women’s freedom and independence?”, Marcela, a Catholic by identification but less by practice, stated that the Church has continually had a “discourse of equal rights” that teaches that men and women are equal, but that the Church remains “medieval” and unlikely to change. Therefore, while she believes Chile has become a “very lay society”, certain teachings are still instilled in its culture <sup>74</sup>.

Maria Riley explains that women are rarely mentioned in Catholic doctrine or social documents at all before Pope John XXIII’s encyclical in 1963, and even then women were still heavily tied solely to family, while men were tied to the public and economic world<sup>75</sup>. While I was unable to utilize much data from the Catechism itself here, I looked to letters and encyclicals written by Popes that speak of women and their roles in society. It is helpful to lay out these documents in chronological order to see the patterns and changes in the Church’s speech regarding women.

Pope Leo XII’s Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor (*Rerum novarum*) of 1891 provides a historical illustration of the Catholic Church’s view of women and while considerable progress has since been made, some tradition still remains today from documents like this one. In this encyclical regarding economy and work, the word “woman” is mentioned twice and “women” is mentioned once. The Pope writes,

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<sup>74</sup> Personal interview, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Riley, 1991

“Women are not suited for certain occupations; a woman is by nature fitted for home-work... to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and well-being of the family”<sup>76</sup>. Again, while this is a historical document and the Church has advanced in time, this statement still illustrates the traditional view of women from the eyes of the Church—a womb and a caregiver. By instilling this teaching from the very beginning, the Church has consequently encouraged a sexist culture in densely Catholic-populated countries, particularly in Latin America.

Like many academic writers on feminism, many Catholic publications speak of the “Signs of the Times” when referring to the changes that the world saw in women and their growing activity in political and public life. Pope John XXIII’s Peace on Earth (*Pacem in terris*) of 1963 demonstrates progress and more acceptance of women in society than did Pope Leo XIII at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet still with some hesitations regarding women’s traditional roles. Pope John XXIII explains the “signs of the times” as he writes:

“The part that women are now playing in political life is everywhere evident... Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons.”<sup>77</sup>

On behalf of the Church, with a slightly surprised tone, Pope John XXIII’s words illustrate the changing society around him. He acknowledges women’s modern demands and their rights as human persons, again reiterating the Church’s unceasing stance on the dignity of the human person. While he continues to push for more female activity in the

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<sup>76</sup> Pope Leo XIII, 1891

<sup>77</sup> Pope John XXIII, 1963

public sphere, he does so while still maintaining the traditional belief that women's primary responsibilities are to marriage and to family. He states, "Women must be accorded such conditions of work as are consistent with their needs and responsibilities as wives and mothers"<sup>78</sup>, reeling the discussion back in to the traditional role of women. Furthermore, in a section of this encyclical entitled "Economic Rights", the word "women" is only mentioned once and only in regards of women gaining economic rights solely in relation to the family through marriage.

Often referred to by Latin Americans as "el Papa feminista" (the feminist Pope), Pope John Paul II was the first to intently write about, for, and directly to women, specifically in his encyclical entitled *The Dignity and Vocation of Women* (1988) and his popular *Letter to Women* (1995). In the former, JPII builds upon the idea of the signs of the times, "The hour... has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness... in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved"<sup>79</sup>. He speaks of women as a being separate from men, using the phrase "the richness of femininity" to emphasize that women hold something that is inherently unique, distinct, and good<sup>80</sup>. JPII still uses traditional language in this encyclical, like "handmaid of the Lord" and speaks of woman in relation to her husband and family, yet attempts to analyze and explain it in a new light, reiterating the equality of men and women through a "mutual relationship"<sup>81</sup>. This entire work serves as the first great step that the Church takes to acknowledge the fullness of women and their value to society apart from childbearing and rearing.

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Pope John Paul II, 1988

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

JPII's Letter to Women attempts to speak directly to the heart and mind of every woman throughout the world and to each individual, unique woman, rather than "women" in general<sup>82</sup>. JPII immediately addresses the reality of the issues that women face in modern times and encourages the use of "dialogue" to approach these issues<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, he gives thanks to God and the Holy Trinity for the "mystery of women" and for "the great works of God, which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her"<sup>84</sup>. Similarly and perhaps most significantly, he thanks *all* women individually—to women who are mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, who work, and consecrated women; to "every women for the simple fact of being a woman". Here, it is clear that JPII is attempting to compensate for the mistreatment and disregard of women in the past. He states:

I know of course that simply saying thank you is not enough. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.<sup>85</sup>

This clear statement is pivotal for the relationship between the Catholic Church and women around the world. He continues with an apology on behalf of the Church itself and a promise to help change the way women are viewed and treated by the Church and in society. In relation to countries like Chile that deal with heavy domestic and sexual

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<sup>82</sup> Pope John Paul II, 1995

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

abuse, he calls upon those governments to pass laws for protection against such violence. Similarly, while he deeply condemns male aggression and rape, he still sticks to the Church's firm stance against abortion.

Finally, I draw upon current Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation On Love and Marriage (*Amoris Laetitia*) that discusses the rights and participation of women in public life. I found that through Francis's words, arguably the most progressive Holy See to date, women are most fully acknowledged and society is condemned for disrespecting the gender as a whole. On sexual and domestic violence, he writes,

I would like to stress the fact that even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women's rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement... are craven acts of cowardice... History is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior... we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of her dignity and rights of women.<sup>86</sup>

There are several aspects of this passage to point out that are of particular interest to me. Firstly, as a whole, we see here for perhaps one of the first times a pope's blatant condemnation of violence and injustice against women in modern society. In doing so, Francis is aligned with the Church's permanent defense of human rights in every sense of the term. Secondly, I argue that his mention of "unacceptable customs" that "need to be

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<sup>86</sup> Pope Francis, 2016

eliminated” may be applicable to patriarchal customs like machismo in Latin American culture. This may also be seen in his mention of a burdensome history that has made women inferior in the eyes of society. These phrases illustrate the massive obstacles and dangers that machismo continues to create in Latin American society and the very evident need for change. Finally, he recognizes women’s movements and even speaks of them in the face of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Francis recognizes women’s movements like those against femicide in Latin America today not as feminist movements working against the ideals of Catholicism, but as feminist movements working for the dignity and rights of women as human beings. This is the perfect door to open conversation between Catholicism and feminism and reiterates that violence against women quite literally speaks directly against Church teaching.

### *Conclusion*

This analysis of the Catholic Church’s teachings on human rights, social justice, and women illustrates the Church’s firm stance in its beliefs and how that may affect society and its people. Firstly, while we can see a definite shift in language over time through different popes to recognize and include women, other underlying stances still remain firm and continue to perpetuate patriarchal beliefs within the institution itself. Moreover, apart from a change in language in papal teachings, the Catechism unfortunately continues to exclude women in its language and content. This can be damaging as it fails to support the mobilization and empowerment of women in modern Chile the same way that it once did during the dictatorship. However, we see through each Church document that its earnest position on human rights is unshaking. While not

often discussed in Church or papal teaching, this stance may be applied to femicide, as it ultimately comes down to the protection and dignity of human lives.

## Chapter IV: Women in Chile

To answer my question that assesses the impact that the Church may have on women in Chile, I chose to research how women play a role in Chilean society and in what ways they continue to be suppressed in both the private and public sphere. While I knew that this research would include a narrative on *machismo*, I did not realize how heavily it would focus on *femicide* until I went deeper into my research. Femicide, or *femicidio* in Spanish, is the gender-based murder of women and is a growing epidemic throughout Latin America. Known as the “culmination of machismo”, femicide has led to feminist movements across the region in search of justice for the basic human right to live as a woman. In the following chapter, I analyze machismo, modern Chilean feminist movements, and end with a discussion on femicide and how it relates to the Catholic Church in Chile.

My primary data here draws from articles from a variety of both Chilean and American news sources including Chile’s *The Santiago News* and America’s *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Huffington Post*. Similarly, I rely on several face-to-face interviews and interviews via email with Chileans. During these interviews in Chile, I used semi-structured questions that I had previously developed on topics like gender, family, the Catholic Church’s influence, and the dictatorship. These interviews do not use any specific identifiable information of the interviewees other than age and gender. While these interviews are only a small sample of Chile’s population, they contain insightful information and opinions that illustrate the general state of the Church and gender today.

Furthermore, I have utilized sets of quantitative and qualitative data from the Pew Research Forum, the United Nations Development Program, United Nations Women (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), the Chilean National Service for Women (SERNAM), and other databases that provide information on femicide in Latin America. The data from these sources largely focuses on religion and women, gender roles, and femicide.

### *Machismo – The Root of Gender Inequality*

Machismo deeply exists in nearly every aspect of Latin American culture and serves as a major player that continually suppresses women in society. Machismo, a word used to describe sexism and gender-based violence, was prevalent to me as a foreigner from the moment I arrived in Valparaíso, Chile, one of the more progressive cities in the country. Ingoldsby defines traditional machismo as, “The cult of virility, the chief of characteristic of which are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relations”<sup>87</sup>. While the extremities of this definition are not always the case today, I experienced firsthand a strong semblance of machismo in my own household in Chile that initially peaked my interest in women’s roles in the private versus public sphere.

My host mother’s life exhibits the very essence of the dichotomy we see in Chile between the two spheres. A single mother, she has a degree in law and has raised four children ranging from 24 to 30 years old. They all still live at home and heavily rely on her for housing, food, and attention. By day she serves as the Director of Federal Elections for the 5<sup>th</sup> region of Chile, one of the most populous regions in the country. She

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<sup>87</sup> Ingoldsby, 1991, p. 58

has a huge office with a beautiful view, multiple secretaries, and dozens of employees that report directly to her. However, each night she would return, promptly tie an apron over her suit, and begin to cook dinner for her children, myself, and another foreign student. As dinner cooked, she would scurry around the house, picking up dirty plates and glasses that had been left by her three sons earlier that afternoon after watching the Chilean national fútbol team victoriously defeat a rival. Her daughter is the only child that would occasionally help clean up after dinner and anytime I offered to clean my own plate, she would snatch it from me as if it were absurd for anyone other than her to clean it. And the next morning she would wake up, go to work, and do it all over again.

UNDP provides a similar account from a 2002 study. In my Spanish class full of Americans at my Chilean university, our professor felt it was necessary to focus on this particular narrative from UNDP during our very first session of class as a means to describe this very significant and evident aspect of their Chilean culture. Entitled “La fatiga de ser yo misma” (The Fatigue of Being Me), this short account describes the arduous life of a single mother in Chile:

My name is Jeanette Monsalve... I work from 10:00 in the morning to 7:00 at night in a large store downtown. I am 28 years old and I have a 4 year old son. I have been separated for about three years; my husband was very sexist and I couldn't stand it. I live in an apartment in Maipú, it's small but safe, and it's close to my parents. I like my job because it shows that I can manage on my own. They respect me because they know I am a decent woman. It is not easy; sometimes they harass female workers but others do not say anything so they don't lose their job. But I don't get run over. I am respectful and nobody can say anything bad of

me... Actually, I am proud of what I have accomplished. It has not been easy to get a steady job with a young son after the separation...<sup>88</sup>

This narrative illustrates the difficulties that many women face in Chile and the rest of Latin America that have stemmed from the idea of machismo, whether that be trouble finding work under the expectations of raising children, or common sexual harassment in the workplace.

While the term itself is common in everyday language around Chile, it of course proved to be difficult to find any “news” on machismo. However, a particular post from the Huffington Post entitled “Taking Down Machismo: The ‘Fight’ Against Gender-based Violence” offers a unique perspective about this phenomenon that has entrapped women for so long. In a story from Costa Rica, the article explains how sexual violence in Latin America stems directly from machismo itself. Of one woman’s husband (who also happened to be her step-father that she was forced to marry), the author writes, “Teresa’s step-father/husband threatened her repeatedly with death. At the same time, he forced her to produce life—six lives to be exact, even though Teresa did not want to bear him any children”<sup>89</sup>. My friend Marcela echoed this during an interview. In her opinion, Chilean mothers and society raise sons “to be machistas” that may sometimes be abusive to their mothers because they feel that their mothers will do as they say. However, she finds that many mothers merely continue to believe that their sons can do no wrong<sup>90</sup>. Machismo is literally created in the household, within the family.

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<sup>88</sup> UNDP, 2002

<sup>89</sup> Solis, Huffington Post, 2013

<sup>90</sup> Personal interview with Marcela, 2017

Similarly, as seen through my personal experience in Chile as well as through conversations and literature, machismo is heavily demonstrated through the distinct relationships that women have with their sons versus with their daughters. When asked, “Do you believe that Chilean mothers have a relationship with their son that is distinct from that with their daughter?”, interviewee Veronica immediately and confidently stated, “Yes! Chilean sons are ‘muy de mama’”, or that they are literally “very of their mother”. After living with a host family of three sons, this was no surprise to me. Many would say that Chilean mothers tend to “baby” their sons, no matter their age, cooking for them, cleaning up behind them, and showing more affection to them.

Veronica explained that Chilean mothers tend to be preoccupied with their son’s education, lives, relationships, everything. She is always in constant communication with her sons, as was her mother with her own sons, while she did not experience the same as a daughter growing up. Moreover, she shared that as a Catholic mother, her sons’ Catholic education has been a priority to her and their family, as she explained the extreme parental involvement in Catholic schools<sup>91</sup>. To the same question, Marcela reacted with an “Absolutely!”, as if I should not have even phrased it as a question. She explained that among Chilean women, at least of her own generation and prior generations, there is a strong desire to have a son, and that this is a “very Latin” ideology. She continued, “Boys are typically more pampered; they are given more freedom and more care, as if they cannot be independent”<sup>92</sup>. Upon hearing this statement, I suddenly understood the cycle of machismo, as Chilean mothers even encourage it through their assumptions that their sons cannot survive without them. Machismo begins in the

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<sup>91</sup> Personal interview with Veronica, 2017

<sup>92</sup> Personal interview with Marcela, 2017

household through this dichotomy between the treatment of sons versus that of daughters. By continually praising young boys and instilling the idea that they could never disappoint their parents, and teaching young girls the importance of domesticity, women consequently face the unfair expectations of being a perfect mother and even homemaker, and are often not encouraged from a young age to participate in society's public sphere.

### *Chile's Modern Feminist Movements*

Women's social movements have become highly influential in Latin America over the past few decades as a way for them to identify as a separate, strong being and infiltrate into the public sphere with their voice and actions. With the support of the Catholic Church, Chile's modern feminist movements got their start in opposition to the dictatorship as a voice against mass human rights violations and injustice and were pivotal reaching the return to democracy after decades of horror. Donna M. Chovanec describes them in her book: "The first demonstrations in Chile against the dictatorship were done by women. So, they initiated the road to the end of the dictatorship to be able to say to the government, to the military, that despite everything they had done to restrict liberty, the women could do things anyways"<sup>93</sup>.

Ironically, Chovanec and many others capitalize on the fact that as repressive and unjust as the dictatorship was, it was the *very* thing that finally got women out of the house. Due to cyclical machismo, women hardly participated in the public sphere. However, because there was no longer money coming in from many of their detained, disappeared, and murdered husbands, women were forced to take on a greater workload and left the house to go find work elsewhere. It was the first time that "women,

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<sup>93</sup> Chovanec, 2009, p. 9

housewives, and mothers had to abandon their homes, so to speak, to go out to work”<sup>94</sup>. Even so, with the return to democracy, many women “retreated to their homes again”<sup>95</sup>, where they were expected to be.

Women’s movements in Chile are often described as cyclical and have been seen in major, influential waves over time since those first modern movements. Today, many of the women’s social movements seen in Chile are those that speak out against growing sexual abuse and femicide in Latin America, known as the *Ni Una Más*, or Not One Less, movement. While I was aware that this is an active movement, finding news coverage on it was unnecessarily challenging—but I was not surprised. These protests against femicide do not appear to be the media’s top priority. One article explains that following the rape and murder of 16-year-old Argentinian Lucia Perez, a story I heard of often while abroad, “Women all over South America took to the streets... to protest not just Perez’s rape and murder, but the issue of machista violence—or gendered, sexual violence—and femicide overall”<sup>96</sup>. Photos of these protests portray Chilean women holding signs that read, “The one death we want is that of patriarchy”, “No more violence in political parties”, and “Woman! Free yourself from machista violence!”. Each of these signals the underlying impenetrable role that machismo even plays in politics and government; a role that affects everyday life in the country and hinders female advancement from injustice like femicide.<sup>97</sup>

Several articles point out the parallels between this movement and those during the dictatorship, as a means to describe the power that women could potentially have in

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<sup>94</sup> Chovanec, 2009, p. 25

<sup>95</sup> Chovanec, 2009, p. 52

<sup>96</sup> Hatch, 2017

<sup>97</sup> Hatch, 2017; The Santiago Times, 2017

the country and even do have to an extent. A Santiago Times article describes how each year on the anniversary of the military coup, women that protested decades ago set out to the streets again to march and dance in honor of their lost husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. “You never want to give up the search”, one woman describes, “I’m here because we have to keep searching for truth. We have to keep searching for justice”<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, coverage of a Ni Una Más march describes Chilean holding flags with missing and murdered women’s photos during a march in Santiago. Such methods of protest are reminiscent of those for missing and murdered men decades before that still carry on today<sup>99</sup>.

### *Contextualizing Femicide*

It is essential to further contextualize femicide in Latin America to gain an understanding of its severity, the dire need for immediate cultural change, and the need for support of feminist movements. Generally defined as the intentional murder of women because they are women<sup>100</sup>, femicide in Latin America is difficult to measure quantitatively. Many studies have found significant issues with proper investigation, reporting, and even recognition of femicide in the region and many countries suffer from a lack of proper police and medical-data collection systems; due to this, collecting data has proven to be very challenging<sup>101</sup>. Because of this large lack of reporting, I found it challenging to find numerical statistics on femicide rates in Chile.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) provided what appeared to be the most accurate quantitative report, indicating

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<sup>98</sup> The Santiago Times, 2016

<sup>99</sup> Hatch, 2017

<sup>100</sup> WHO, 2012, p. 1

<sup>101</sup> UNWomen, 2017; WHO, 2012, p. 1

that in 2014, there were 1,903 known reports of femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean. Out of these, 40 were in Chile, which proved to be an exact median number compared to other countries in the region<sup>102</sup>. Furthermore, through the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity of Chile, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) found that while it is difficult to clearly determine the rate of completed femicides, approximately one woman per 200,000 died from femicide in 2017. Further, 115 cases of attempted femicides were reported in 2017, or 1.24 attempts per every 100,000 Chilean women<sup>103</sup>. UNDP reports that while legislation has been introduced in a majority of the countries, these rates are still on the rise throughout the region<sup>104</sup>. UNWomen explains that femicide began drawing more public attention following the murder of over 400 women in Mexican border town Juarez in the 1990s, and since then, more steps have been taken to simply acknowledge the crime and enforce an end to gender-based violence in the region. Latin America now has the highest rates of femicide in the world— it has the highest rate of violence against women and systematic non-intimate femicide outside of relationships and the second highest rate within the relationship<sup>105</sup>. Approximately 30% of Latin American women have reported to be victims of partner violence and 10.7% have suffered from other sexual violence<sup>106</sup>. The region's machista culture only continues to enable this, as a UN report states:

Gender-related killings are the last act—a culmination—in a series of violent acts... In Latin America, we have a culture of high tolerance towards violence

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<sup>102</sup> CEDAL, 2015

<sup>103</sup> INE, 2017

<sup>104</sup> UNDP, 2017

<sup>105</sup> UNDP, 2017; WHO, 2012, p. 2

<sup>106</sup> UNDP, 2017

against women and girls... Violence becomes normalized; it is seen as a part of life for women... it happens on the bus, in the streets, and in the workplace.<sup>107</sup>

Here we see the immense need for a structural change within Latin American society and culture itself regarding attitudes toward women. As machismo continues as the rate and extremity as it does today in Chile and other Latin American countries, putting an end to femicide only becomes more difficult.

According to ECLAC, by 2015 sixteen countries in Latin America had modified their laws or passed new legislation on the criminalization of femicide. Chile was one of the first to introduce this type of “femicide law” into its Penal Code in 2010 with Law 20.480<sup>108</sup>. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) explains that this law was enacted in Chile to criminalize femicide perpetrated by spouses or ex-spouses and provide assistance to victims of domestic violence<sup>109</sup>. However, while a variety of sources acknowledge that laws like this in Chile and other countries do indicate advancement in the region’s recognition of the issue, legislation like this has still proven to not be enough to significantly decrease the rates and threats of femicide<sup>110</sup>. A study in collaboration with the National Service for Women of Chile (SERNAM) and the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity of Chile explains that regardless of these laws, grave obstacles still linger that impede women’s effective

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<sup>107</sup> UNWomen, 2017

<sup>108</sup> ECLAC, 2015

<sup>109</sup> CEDAW, 2012, p. 4

<sup>110</sup> ECLAC; SERNAM

access to justice, truth, and reparation; this lack of justice is reflected in the high rates of impunity that still exist throughout the region<sup>111</sup>.

UNDP states that addressing this type of violence against women is essential for “the achievement of peace, economic productivity, rights, justice, and social cohesion” in Latin America<sup>112</sup>. Various steps and recommendations have been proposed as a means to end gender-based violence in the region and engage in the type of progress stated above. First and foremost, many believe that the first step is to improve data collection and reporting of femicide across the board—intimate and non-intimate, attempted and completed. With improved statistics, state and federal governments, police, and medical researchers will be able to more accurately detect patterns of femicide regarding frequency, victim-perpetrator relationships, motivations, and other helpful data that is necessary to end this regional epidemic<sup>113</sup>. Secondly, there is a need for structural change in Latin America’s culture. The extreme and brutal aggression seen in femicide illustrates the result of a normalized patriarchal and machista culture that continually reinforces and produces gender-based violence against women<sup>114</sup>. Finally, there is a need for more accessible services for women to report violence and femicide. Chile has done a good job in taking the first steps to implement such programs. Campaigns exist specifically to help young girls learn what to do when they are sexually harassed on the street and with the help of the federal government, SERNAM has created a Center for Women that has

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<sup>111</sup> Soto & Garín, Ministerio de la Mujer y la Equidad de Género de Chile, SERNAM, 2017, p. 71

<sup>112</sup> UNDP, 2017

<sup>113</sup> UNDP, 2017; UNWomen, 2017; WHO, 2012

<sup>114</sup> UNWomen 2017; SERNAM, 2017

attended to nearly 90,000 women in need of help regarding sexual harassment and violence as of 2017<sup>115</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

Data demonstrates the very evident and dire problem that women in Latin America face today, and it only continues to increase and spread. The continued normalization of gender-based violence due to deeply rooted machismo in the region perpetuates the threat of femicide. In countries like Chile where strongly patriarchal and conservative society exists, this threat becomes more alarming. While there are many steps to remedy this epidemic, I argue that an intentional push for structural change in the machista culture and society is most necessary, however long that shift may take. While Chile is not at the top of the list in rates of femicide, data still illustrates that it is in fact a “serious violation of human rights”<sup>116</sup> and women are losing their lives because of it.

The growing feminist movements for justice against femicide in Chile demonstrate that many Chilean women feel strongly about speaking up and fighting for total gender equality and an end to violence. Like the first modern Chilean feminist movements during the military regime, these movements continue to give a voice to the female population. This current urgent human rights issue reflects that of the human rights violations under the military regime that the Catholic Church assumed the responsibility of supporting feminist movements to speak against. This institutional support and credibility proved to be valuable in their fight for justice and dignity. The Church’s stance on human rights since then still remains the same and it continues to promise to stand for the oppressed. While it was mainly men losing their lives decades

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<sup>115</sup> UNICEF, 2011; SERNAM, 2017, p. 19

<sup>116</sup> EU-CELAC, 2013, p. 2

ago, the Church cannot choose to turn a blind eye to the women losing lives today. At the end of the day, people are still being murdered and the Catholic Church still has the responsibility to fight for their rights as human beings.

## **Chapter V: Conclusion & Discussion**

### **Creating a Conversation between Catholicism and Feminism in Chile**

To return back to my original research questions, my research and analysis on the issues above have led me to a discussion on the possible coexistence of Catholicism and feminism in Chile. In my introduction my hypothesis suggested that the Church's response to the military regime helped set the tone for the formation of the modern Chilean Catholic Church as a defender of human rights, and that has consequently influenced female mobilization in modern Chile's public sphere. However, in its defense of traditional gender roles, the Catholic Church's teachings continue to contribute to the perpetuation of *machismo* in the household and more intimate spheres that may lead to gender-based violence. Through my theoretical framework in my literature review, I explored ways in which Catholicism and feminism differ and overlap; how notions like machismo have affected Chilean society; and how the Catholic Church played a role during the military regime. Based on these concepts, I approached an analysis of the Catholic Church and an analysis of women in Chile. In this final chapter I culminate my findings from these analyses and explore ways in which Catholicism and feminism may coexist and collaborate in modern Chile.

Through my research, I found that the Chilean Catholic Church's response to the dictatorship illustrates its willingness to take on the responsibility of defending human rights, as hypothesized. This is also consistently reflected in the progression of Church teaching over time. Moreover, while Church teaching on women and their role in society

has historically failed to include and empower women, a progression is evident through Papal teaching. While this aligns with my hypothesis, I would like to recognize that it is not the Catholic Church teaching that has *caused* a machista culture in Latin America, but has simply contributed to it. While I was unable to deeply explore the historic roots of machismo, I understand from my research that machismo is a highly complex notion that has a multitude of factors at play and therefore, it cannot be narrowed down to just one. I expand on the results of this research in the following discussion on why this matters and how this conversation may be nurtured in modern Chile.

Firstly, we see a very evident discussion and unchanging position on human rights, the dignity of the human person, and social justice through Catholic Church teaching. While this unshakable and constant stance is commendable, it fails to totally carry over to that of gender equality and the dignity of women. While the Catholic Church as an international institution has progressed and even updated its Catechism as of 1965 through the Second Vatican Council, its language continues to exclude women and falls behind in our quickly-moving, 21<sup>st</sup> century society. The language used in the Catechism remains, in part, archaic. Its lack of female input in its writing and publication is evident in its content, as it fails to acknowledge women in the same way as it acknowledges men. In regions of highly religious populations like Latin America, this adds a complexity for those women who wish to practice both Catholicism and feminism.

While the Catechism does not offer much space for a discussion and inclusion of women, papal teaching illustrates the shift from the Church's historical, patriarchal roots to a more progressive approach. This approach does not only acknowledge women, but finally reaches out to empower women and foster respect for them in modern society.

Such a shift demonstrates the potential and desire that the Church *does* have to create a space for women and its ability to push that even further. Known as the feminist pope, Pope John Paul II took the Church's position of female empowerment to another level. However, as JPII was actually a very conservative pope, I argue that current Pope Francis can and is making strides toward true equality of all persons, male or female. After just five years in the papacy, he already brings a new tone and attitude towards the marginalized and vulnerable. He also brings key modern issues like gender and violence into the light of the public sphere, promoting love and respect <sup>117</sup>. Following suit from the ideas offered in JPII's Letter to Women and now through his own words, I believe the Holy See has both the influence and potential to facilitate and construct a more durable, encouraging, and engaging atmosphere for women in Chile.

Finally, Chile has already seen the potential the Church has to mobilize and empower women to stand up for what they believe in. During the most difficult and oppressive decades in the nation's history, women were enabled to speak out against Latin American patriarchy and authoritarianism, trading in their aprons for protest signs and walking into the public sphere with fuller force than ever before. Through the Church's support, these women were provided legitimacy and credibility in their fight and did not back down until their voices were heard. Even today, these women continue to hold onto this battle cry and march for justice from decades past. I argue that if the Chilean Catholic Church was able to do this once, it is able to do it again. The authoritarian regime spoke directly against what the Catholic Church stands for—human rights. Today, Chilean women face a frightening battle with the femicide phenomenon.

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<sup>117</sup> Levine, 2016

Again, this speaks directly against the Church's teaching of human rights. As we have seen, the Church does not waver on this stance whatsoever in its doctrine and therefore, has every reason and obligation to do whatever it can to support and help mobilize Chilean women once again against this dire issue. While feminist movements on this issue are growing across the region, femicide rates are still increasing as illustrated in Chapter 4. New legislation demonstrates intentional steps from the government and public to act and generate real change. However, as femicide stems from machismo, a greater cultural change is necessary for the region to experience any major changes in gender-based violence.

While I acknowledge that support from the Catholic Church is not the only way or most essential way for women to overcome this immense obstacle in society, I argue that it is a potential avenue to impact change in social and cultural structures in Chile. Opening a conversation between the Church and feminist movements may be beneficial to both sides and thus, allow for a discussion of cultural change for the sake of social justice. A push from women for the Church to continually reevaluate and reform certain patriarchal content and language persists today even with progressive Pope Francis. The Catholic National Reporter argues that women in the modern Catholic world have a duty to campaign for change and that while there is still much to be done, they are continually finding hope in change through Francis's papacy in comparison to prior papacies<sup>118</sup>. By participating in this mutual conversation, women may continue to see progression from traditional and exclusive teachings.

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<sup>118</sup> Feuerherd, 2018

On the other side of this conversation, I argue that through the Church's reevaluation of its ideals and language toward women, a more progressive voice in their defense might serve as an agent for structural change in Chilean culture and society. While the Chilean population is falling away from the Church as seen through Pope Francis's recent pilgrimage, strong remnants of the religion still remain in its culture and society. The Church's influence is visible in politics as it maintains close ties with conservative political parties and Catholic universities hold high prestige and influence. Essentially, it does not matter so much whether the Church is able to gain back its Catholic following. What matters is that the Church owns up to its responsibility as a global defender of human rights and social justice and through that, supports an end to femicide. However, through these remaining Catholic influences and other everyday examples in Chilean culture, there still remains a possibility that the Church's empowerment and inclusion of women may serve as an agent for change in societal attitudes toward women and promote a mutual conversation. As the Catholic Church continues to more fully recognize women, there is hope that Catholicism and feminism may coexist and work together for greater mobilization and defense of women in Chile against patriarchy, injustice, and gender-based violence.

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