

# WOMEN AND GUN VIOLENCE:

Key Findings from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), San Salvador (El Salvador)  
and Maputo (Mozambique)

Peace Studies Group (NEP/CES)

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# WOMEN AND GUN VIOLENCE

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since men constitute the majority of those who use and are victimised by guns worldwide, prevention and combat policies and programmes have been aimed almost exclusively at men and boys, paying scant attention to the roles and impacts of gun violence on women and girls. However, the continuum of violence experienced by women and girls in these contexts is a synthesis of the main social ingredients of violence and its cultural basis. Thus, alongside sound knowledge of men's and boys' involvement in gun violence, a clear understanding of women's and girls' needs, rights and vulnerabilities is essential to reduce gun violence in general. This report aims to contribute to fill this gap.

This report will concentrate on the analysis of the typologies and motivations for the involvement of women and girls in armed violence (as direct agents who actively participate, or indirect agents who play supporting roles such as in the transportation of firearms, drugs or information), and identify the importance and symbolism which they attribute to firearms; the examination of the direct consequences (death and injuries) and some of the indirect effects of armed violence on the lives of women (guns as instruments of intimidation and sources of insecurity in situations of domestic violence as well as determinants for the condition of survivors or relatives of lethal victims of gun violence); the initiatives, formal and informal, led by women in these contexts in response to gun violence, namely efforts to improve arms control regulations.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, the field of small arms<sup>1</sup> policy and research has gradually begun to incorporate human rights issues to expand beyond the current focus of understanding and measuring small arms supply. It has started to contemplate the human toll of gun violence, especially in the fields of development and humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and national and international security, as well as daily violence across the globe.

Nevertheless, the humanisation of this still highly technical realm has remained incomplete. Remarkably, the debate on how gender informs and constrains male and female attitudes towards guns and on the gendered nature of gun ownership and violence, which amplifies and emulates existing sex-based unequal power relations (from men to women and other men) and other related forms of discrimination and violence, is nascent. Not only have gender differences in small arms demand and use not been widely researched, but the differentiated impacts of gun dissemination and violence have also not been sufficiently identified and addressed. The lack of quantitative gender- and age-disaggregated data on firearm-related violence and particularly the lack of information on the circumstances of violence is an example of this.

Likewise, the most common policy approaches in the field of small arms control, which focus on crime and conflict prevention, are based on artificial distinctions between the desired focus of intervention (legal and illegal guns) and its agents (law-abiding citizens and criminals), and fail to take gender differences into consideration. In light of this, they have hitherto failed to contain and respond properly to gun violence and thus need to be re-evaluated. Specifically, and not surprisingly, since men constitute the majority of those who use and are victimised by guns worldwide, prevention and combat policies and programmes have been aimed almost exclusively at men and boys, paying scant attention to the roles and impacts of gun violence on women and girls. However, the continuum of violence experienced by women and girls in these contexts is a synthesis of the main social ingredients of violence and its cultural basis. Thus, alongside sound knowledge of men's and boys' involvement in gun violence, a clear understanding of women's and girls' needs, rights and vulnerabilities is essential to reduce gun violence in general. This report aims to contribute to filling this gap.

According to several studies conducted since 2005 in Latin America by the Peace Studies Group, namely in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and San Salvador (El Salvador), and on the African continent, especially in Maputo (Mozambique), this paper explores how small arms demand is shaped by gender identities and relations, and how gender expectations and roles are a product of and are affected by gun-related violence. Particular attention will be paid to the experiences of women and girls associated with or affected by gun violence, especially in urban scenarios, namely those involved in or affected by violent practices within more or less organised illicit groups – such as drug-trafficking factions in Rio de Janeiro and *maras* in San Salvador – and gun-related interpersonal acts of violence, i.e. domestic violence incidents, as in the cases of Rio de Janeiro, Maputo and San Salvador.

The case studies analysed in this report belong to two of the world regions most affected by armed violence: Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. The cases selected also represent the world's largest proportion of epidemic gun distribution in non-conflict settings. In fact, both Brazil and El Salvador, while not engaged in an officially declared war, experience some of the highest gun-related mortality rates in the world, mostly concentrated in urban areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Small arms are conventional weapons designed for personal use. These include revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; sub-machine weapons; assault rifles; light machine-guns. Throughout this report the terms “small arms”, “firearms” and “guns” will be used interchangeably.

In turn, Mozambique, and especially its capital, Maputo, witnesses lower rates of gun-related violence than previously anticipated. After two cycles of conflict, the country was left with huge quantities of landmines, explosives, uncontrolled firearms, and millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. Despite successes – disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes succeeded in taking around 260,000 weapons out of circulation – roughly 1.4 million firearms remain in circulation today in the country<sup>2</sup>, especially in the main urban centres. Coupled with the moderate rise in criminality in Maputo province, especially property-related crimes, and the limited capacity of the government to address the issue (vulnerability of state-controlled stocks and the absence of *de facto* control of registered firearms), this has recently given rise to a growing perception of insecurity amongst the population.

Specifically, this report will concentrate on the analysis of the typologies and motivations for the involvement of women and girls in armed violence (as direct agents who actively participate, or indirect agents who play supporting roles such as in the transportation of firearms, drugs or information), and identify the importance and symbolism which they attribute to firearms; the examination of the direct consequences (death and injuries) and some of the indirect effects of armed violence on the lives of women (guns as instruments of intimidation and sources of insecurity in situations of domestic violence, as well as determinants for the condition of survivors or relatives of lethal victims of gun violence); the initiatives, formal and informal, led by women in these contexts in response to gun violence, namely the efforts to improve arms control regulations.

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2 UNDP (2010), 'RJ inspira controle de arma em Moçambique [Rio de Janeiro inspires arms control in Mozambique]', accessed 20th October 2011. Available at <http://www.pnud.org.br/seguranca/reportagens/index.php?id01=3477&lay=jse>

### 3. GENDERED DYNAMICS OF GUN VIOLENCE

Worldwide, the ubiquity of small arms and light weapons, facilitated by their portability, affordability and utility, has contributed not only to the blurring of the distinctions between war and peace zones, but also between the actors and victims of gun violence, representing a significant human, political and socio-economic cost to individuals, countries and regions.

There are currently around 650 million small arms worldwide, 75 percent of which are in the hands of civilians<sup>3</sup>. The civilian population is also the main victim of gun violence. Globally, over 468,000 homicides occur every year, 42 percent of which are committed with firearms<sup>4</sup>. Many more are physically injured and emotionally wounded every year. Despite its breadth, gun violence distribution varies across world regions, countries and spaces: Latin America, Central America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa constitute the most affected regions by armed violence in the world.

In the 186 countries reviewed recently in the *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011*, around 12.2 percent of lethal violence occurred in armed conflict settings and 87.8 percent in non-conflict settings. In fact, whereas 55,000 deaths took place annually in declared armed conflict situations on average between 2004 and 2009, 48,000 people per year died violently on average during that period in Brazil alone<sup>5</sup>. These non-war or formal peace scenarios, such as territories characterised by high levels of gun violence perpetrated by civilians and state agents, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Venezuela, and South Africa, have only recently begun receiving due attention in the analysis of the intersection of gender, violence and security.

This type of lethal violence is unevenly distributed not only across countries, but also within them. In some contexts, like in Brazil and El Salvador, the combination of significant or growing social and economic asymmetries, low rates of development and high unemployment rates, unplanned city growth and the fragility of the quality of urban infrastructures, the availability of firearms and the centrality of violent cultures in the construction of interpersonal and community relations, and widespread impunity have all given rise to a high concentration of armed violence in circumscribed urban territories within larger scenarios of institutionalised peace, in what has been called “new violence”<sup>6</sup> and “newest wars”<sup>7</sup>.

The dissemination and use of small arms also has different effects on men, women, boys and girls within different contexts and it is facilitated either by political and economic conflicts, organised crime (principally associated with drug trafficking) and interpersonal violence. Worldwide, men and boys are killed and wounded as a result of gun violence much more often than women and girls. In fact, global statistics show that over 90 percent of homicide victims are men, and that men made up 88 percent of those people who committed suicide using a gun in 2010.<sup>8</sup> In urban gun violence scenarios in particular, the face of this violence is not only male, but also predominantly young. A large proportion of young men end up killing or getting killed as a result of the processes of affirmation of dominant and violent masculinities<sup>9</sup>.

3 Small Arms Survey (2010). *Gangs, Groups and Guns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.101-102.

4 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2011). *2001 Global Study on Homicide*. Vienna.

5 Geneva Declaration (2011). *The Global Burden of Armed Violence*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

6 K. Koonings and D. Kruijt (eds.) (2004). *Armed actors: organized violence and state failure in Latin America*. London: Zed Books.

7 T. Moura (2005). ‘Novíssimas guerras, novíssimas pazes. Desafios conceptuais e políticos [Newest wars, newest peaces. Conceptual and political challenges]’, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, No. 71, June, 77-96; T. Moura (2010). *Novíssimas Guerras. Espaços, Identidades e Espirais da Violência Armada [Newest Wars. Spaces, Identities and Spirals of Armed Violence]*. Coimbra: Edições Almedina.

8 IANSA Women’s Network (2011). ‘Voices of Survivors: the different faces of gun violence’, accessed 20th October 2011. Available at [http://www.iansa-women.org/sites/default/files/newsviews/iansa\\_wn\\_voices\\_of\\_survivors\\_2011\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://www.iansa-women.org/sites/default/files/newsviews/iansa_wn_voices_of_survivors_2011_web_0.pdf)

9 G. Barker (2005). *Dying to be men. Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion*. London/New York: Routledge.

Additionally, men make up the majority of members of the police, the military and other armed forces; most owners and users of small arms are men and boys. However, it is important to stress that only a small minority of young men becomes involved in gun violence. In fact, while men make up the majority of gun users, this does not mean that the majority of men use guns. Many men and boys refuse to adhere to the violent version of masculinity or, after some life changing experiences, decide to cease their involvement with gun violence. Many others have become active in anti-gun violence campaigns, lobbying for more robust international small arms trade regulations and better legislation on firearms ownership, and also have joined campaigns to stop violence against women. Initiatives such as the White Ribbon campaign, initiated by Canadian men with the aim of challenging men's complicity in violence against women, and the MenEngage Alliance<sup>10</sup> are examples of this.

Additionally, women are also agents, albeit in far smaller numbers, and targets of certain types of gun violence as a result of their sex, whether in war- or peacetime.

The dissemination of small arms facilitates and exacerbates violence and threats of violence against women in war situations. In many conflict situations, they have been used to threaten women and communities and to facilitate the perpetration of honour crimes and sexual violence<sup>11</sup>. Men and boys also endure violence at gunpoint, namely in situations of forced conscription/mobilisation. Accounts of sexual violence experienced by men at the hands of enemy parties also exemplify the power of gender dynamics at play in wartime and the role of guns in forcing subjection<sup>12</sup>. Women combatants or those involved in armed groups are also impacted by gun use within the group, and the violence and hierarchy generated by its presence, drifting between victimisation (outward and inward) and perpetration of violence during wars, and social marginalisation and survival in the aftermath of conflict<sup>13</sup>.

Even in formal peace contexts, several groups – police authorities, vigilante groups, gangs and organised crime groups – resort to gendered armed strategies ranging from systematic sexual crimes, femicide and forced displacement, to the manipulation and perversion of the perceptions of the roles of women and men with bellicose aims.

In addition to direct harm on the lives of women and girls, there are also indirect effects of arms proliferation in conflict and post-conflict situations. Women endure the long-lasting effects of war, such as displacement, hunger, disease, and often a spiral of economic, social, family and emotional disruption whenever their male relatives, who are the most likely to get killed or injured by war and by gun violence, disappear. The trauma of surviving gun violence in both peace- and wartime, as well as its subsequent disruption of social cohesion and family safety, often affects women more than men, given their traditional roles in society and in the family (caregivers) and women's often limited access to police and justice services<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, in some regions of the world, those who are widowed as a result of gun violence face particular challenges<sup>15</sup>.

10 MenEngage is a global alliance of NGOs and UN agencies which seeks to engage boys and men to achieve gender equality. International Steering Committee Members include the Sonke Gender Justice Network (co-chair), Promundo (co-chair), EngenderHealth, the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the International Center for Research on Women, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Men's Resources International (United States), Salud y Genero (Mexico), Save the Children-Sweden, Sahoyog, the White Ribbon Campaign, World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). At the national level, members include more than 400 NGOs from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, Asia and Europe. The Alliance came together in 2004 with the general goal of working in partnership to promote the engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality, promoting health, and reducing violence at the global level, including questioning structural barriers to achieving gender equality.

11 E. Isikozlu and A. S. Millard (2010). *Towards a Typology of Wartime Rape*. Bonn International Center for Conversion. Available at <http://www.bicc.de/uploads/pdf/publications/briefs/brief43/brief43.pdf>

12 D. Zarkov (2001). 'The Body of the Other Man: Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Croatian Media' in C. Moser and F. Clark (eds.) (2001). *Victims, Perpetrators, or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political*. New York: Zed Books, pp.69-82.

13 A. C. Ibañez (2001). 'El Salvador: War and Untold Stories' in C. Moser and F. Clark (eds.) (2001). *Victims, Perpetrators, or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political*. New York: Zed Books, pp.117-130; M. Denov and R. Maclure (2009). 'Girls and small arms in Sierra Leone: Victimization, participation and resistance' in V. Farr, H. Myrntinen and A. Schnabel (eds.) (2010). *Sexed Pistols: The gendered impacts of small arms and light weapons*. New York: United Nations University Press, pp.51-80.

14 T. Moura (2007). *Rostos Invisíveis da Violência Armada [Invisible Faces of Armed Violence]*. Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras.

15 C. Yeung, (2009). 'Missing men, lost boys and widowed women: Gender perspectives on small arms proliferation and disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda' in V. Farr, H. Myrntinen and A. Schnabel (eds.) (2010). *Sexed Pistols. The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons*. New York: United Nations University Press, pp.390-418.

Moreover, guns usually constitute a great source of danger for females when present in the home, regardless of its owner, his/her motivations and legal status in both peace- and wartime, particularly in the post-war period. Several studies around the world have revealed that the presence of a firearm in the home may also facilitate violence against women and girls, increasing the chances that domestic violence results in a fatality<sup>16</sup>.

In addition to being directly harmed by a gun, guns are often used to threaten an intimate partner in cases of domestic violence. In fact, a firearm is more likely to be used to threaten and injure family members than to protect the home from intruders<sup>17</sup>.

It is then evident that in so-called peaceful societies, as well as in warzones, gun use is intertwined with culturally endorsed expressions of masculinity, in which guns are associated with virility. Some young men regard guns as a powerful means to obtain status, power and access to goods and women<sup>18</sup>. In addition to constructing their identity *vis-à-vis* other men, young men also formulate a significant part of their identities in their intimate relationships through violence against their female partners. Additionally in line with this form of violent (and armed) masculinity are the attitudes of some adult males who often procure guns as a part of their perceived and constructed role as protectors<sup>19</sup>.

Women and girls also intervene in support of armed and violent masculinity, encouraging men to participate or by subtly endorsing the stereotypes which associate men with violence and protection, namely through the glorification of firearms and seeking access to them as a way of obtaining goods and status.

Gun violence, including the possession and use of firearms, is, then, also the result of gender construction, which rests on the worsening of hegemonic and militarised masculinity, associated with familiarity and fascination with firearms, and the persistence of vulnerable groups of females and males over which masculine power can be exercised. The presence and availability of guns amplify gender power dynamics already at play, as their use and ownership is mainly through men, which in turn reinforces men's power *vis-à-vis* other men and women.

16 D. J. Wiebe (2003). 'Homicide and Suicide Risks Associated with Firearms in the Home: A National Case-Control Study', *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, June, Vol. 41, No. 6, pp.771-82; UNDP Montenegro (2007). 'Small Arms and Gender-Based Violence in Montenegro', accessed 12th November 2011. Available at [http://www.seesac.org/uploads/Small\\_Arms\\_and\\_Gender-Based\\_Violence\\_in\\_Montenegro.pdf](http://www.seesac.org/uploads/Small_Arms_and_Gender-Based_Violence_in_Montenegro.pdf)

17 D. Hemenway (2011). 'Risks and Benefits of a Gun in the Home', *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. Vol. 5, No. 6, p.507.

18 G. Barker (2005). *Op. Cit.*

19 M. Kimell (2005). 'Masculinity and Gun Violence: The Personal Meets the Political', communication presented at the seminar "Men, Women and Gun Violence: Options for Action", UN Second Biennial Meeting of States, New York, 14th July 2005.

## 4. WOMEN AND GUN VIOLENCE IN RIO DE JANEIRO, SAN SALVADOR AND MAPUTO

With the end of the Cold War and the reach of a military impasse, the El Salvadorian armed conflict came to an end after twelve years of struggle (from 1980 to 1992). It resulted in more than 80 thousand casualties and a flux of around 1.5 million refugees, in a country of 6 million inhabitants. Nevertheless, the track record of state repression, i.e. systematic massacres of the peasant community, shows that torture and forced displacement are deeply rooted.

Despite being hailed as a successful case of post-war rehabilitation, currently El Salvador is known internationally by the existence of some of the more lethal gangs in the world (M18 and *Mara Salvatrucha*), both with close ties to US gangs, particularly those of Los Angeles, as well as gangs from other regions of Central America.

The climax of direct violence in El Salvador was reached in 1994 after the signing of the peace accords. At that time, there was a significant increase in the homicide rate to 165.5 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants. Currently, with an estimated 400,000 privately owned guns, El Salvador is ranked at no. 89 in a global index comparing civilian arsenals in 178 countries<sup>20</sup>. El Salvador also has one of the highest rates of homicide in the world: 61.9 deaths for every 100,000 inhabitants (average annual violent deaths from 2004-2009)<sup>21</sup>. In 2006 gun violence made up for 80 out of every 100 deaths.<sup>22</sup> Most victims are men aged 15–39, but recently the number of femicides has increased, with the country ranked at no. 1 for femicide worldwide<sup>23</sup>. Firearms account for 64 percent of these femicides<sup>24</sup>.

This setting of “violent peace” is the result of an absence of economic and political transformation, as well as the prevalence of impunity. The new model of supposedly democratic governance has ended up strengthening itself not through political reform but rather through the dissemination of control over El Salvadorian society. This control was implemented through liberalisation, privatisation, power sharing with the opposition and even authoritarianism. In this context, the conditions for traditional mobilisation to war – land distribution, political divergences and power struggles – are replaced by the conditions for violence dispersion, namely de-legitimation and criminalisation.

Violence attributed to marginal groups (*maras*) mirrors the violence which cross cuts society. Armed violence, however, is neither confined to the *mara* phenomenon nor organised criminality, as access to and the use of small arms is quite generalised within society, both in urban (especially concentrated in larger cities) and rural areas<sup>25</sup>. Faced with the rising concern of San Salvadorians regarding insecurity and criminality, which frequently ranks higher than unemployment in the hierarchy of national preoccupations<sup>26</sup>, *maras* are often used as “scapegoats”.

20 GunPolicy.org (2011). ‘Small Arms in El Salvador: Facts, Figures and Firearms Law’, accessed 14th November 2011. Available at [http://www.gunpolicy.org/fi\\_rearms/region/el-salvador](http://www.gunpolicy.org/fi_rearms/region/el-salvador)

21 Geneva Declaration (2011). ‘Trends and patterns in lethal violence’ in *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011*, Op. Cit., p.53.

22 C. Buchanan and J. Chávez (2008). *Guns and Violence in the El Salvador Peace Negotiations*. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, p.32.

23 Geneva Declaration (2011), Op. Cit., p.53.

24 Ibid.

25 Comisión Nacional para la Seguridad Ciudadana y Paz Social (2007). *Seguridad y Paz, un reto de país: Recomendaciones para una política de Seguridad Ciudadana en El Salvador [Security and Peace. A Challenge for the Country. Recommendations for a Citizen Security Policy in El Salvador]*. San Salvador: Secretaría Técnica, p.12. Available at [http://www.pnud.org.sv/2007/content/view/27/83?id\\_public=14](http://www.pnud.org.sv/2007/content/view/27/83?id_public=14)

26 PNUD (2003). *Armas de fuego y violencia [Guns and violence]*. San Salvador: PNUD. Available at <http://www.enlaceacademico.org/base-documental/biblioteca/documento/armas-de-fuego-y-violencia/>

Domestic violence is also prevalent. Violence against women is, however, underreported in El Salvador as well as naturalised and widely accepted<sup>27</sup>.

In 2007, the cost of violence in El Salvador (derived from total homicides, assaults, sexual violence, extortion, robbery and thefts) totalled US \$2.225 million, the equivalent of 10.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and more than twice as much as the country spends on health and education combined<sup>28</sup>. The magnitude of gun violence in the country suggests that a significant percentage of these costs is gun related.

Despite recent advances, Brazil remains one of the most violent countries in the world, with gun-related mortality rates similar to many war scenarios. Brazil is now ranked 18th in the world ranking of violent homicides, with 28 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants (average annual violent deaths from 2004-2009)<sup>29</sup>. In 2008, Brazil registered 50,000 gun-related deaths<sup>30</sup>. The state of Rio de Janeiro is ranked 7th in the country's index of violent homicide. This represents an important shift since 1998, when the state was ranked 3rd in the index of the states with the highest prevalence of gun-related deaths.

The legacy of the military regime which ruled the country from 1964 to 1985 played a particular role in the emergence of organised crime and in the permanence of significant structural and cultural violence in the democracy which followed. In fact, those who participated in repressive practices during the dictatorship became members of extortion and extermination groups, illegal gambling societies (*jogo do bicho*), drugs-trafficking factions<sup>31</sup> and militia groups, and were also responsible for the lack of justice reform and the permanence of repressive police practices, especially those aimed at the poor segments of the population<sup>32</sup>.

At the root of the flare-up of direct urban violence from the end of the 1980s to the present in Rio de Janeiro are rapid urban growth and the absence of sufficient housing structures (which has led to the increase of poor communities on the outskirts of big cities since the 1960s); high inequality in wealth distribution; slow economic growth; great dependency on international loans; low living standards; growing firearms availability (Brazil is the second-largest small-arms exporter in the western world and the fifth worldwide<sup>33</sup>); the emergence of drugs-trafficking factions and other armed groups; the ineffectiveness or neglect of the state; the memory, culture and practice of violence maintained and perpetuated by the police and private security groups.

With an estimated 14.8-17.6 million privately-owned guns, Brazil is ranked 8th in a comparison of the size of the civilian arsenals across 178 countries<sup>34</sup>. This means that in Brazil there are 8 guns for every 100 people<sup>35</sup>. Over 500,000 Brazilians have died from gun-inflicted injuries between 1979 and 2003 (more than four times the number of deaths recorded in the Arab-Israeli conflict over the course of 50 years).

Gun violence exacts almost \$90 million in health costs in Brazil, while productivity losses are estimated at \$10 billion<sup>36</sup>. In the megacity of Rio de Janeiro, homicide resulting from drug-trafficking conflicts and police incursions do not account for all lethal victims of gun violence in the city. Violent practices by militia and corrupt police forces, interpersonal violence, and conflicts in the home have also to be taken into account. Despite the variety of violent incidents, the main direct victims are invariably the same: poor black men.

In addition, following the pattern of new violence in Latin America, violence in Rio de Janeiro is notably greater in some neighbourhoods and does not affect the entire population evenly. As affirmed recently by Sílvia Ramos,

27 M. Hume (2008). 'The myths of Violence: Gender, Conflict, and Community in El Salvador', *Latin American Perspectives*, 162, Vol. 35, No. 5, pp.59-76.

28 C. Acevedo (2008). 'Los costos económicos de la violencia en El Salvador [The economic costs of violence in El Salvador]', *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 50, December, p.76.

29 Geneva Declaration (2011). *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

30 Instituto Sangari and Ministério da Justiça (2011). *Mapa da Violência 2011. Os Jovens do Brasil [The Map of Violence 2011. Youth in Brazil]*. Brasília: Instituto Sangari e Ministério da Justiça, p.26-28.

31 A. Zaluar (2004). 'Urban violence and drug warfare in Brazil' in K. Koonings and D. Kruijt (Eds.) (2004). *Armed actors. Organised violence and state failure in Latin America*. London/New York: Zed Books, pp.139-154.

32 Ibid.

33 Small Arms Survey (2007). *Guns and the city*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

34 GunPolicy.org (2011), 'Brazil – Gun Facts, Figures and the Law', accessed 12th November 2011. Available at <http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/brazil>

35 Ibid.

36 R. Stohl and D. Tuttle (2008). 'Arms Trade in Latin America', *NACCLA Report on the Americas*, March/April, p.16.

'[S]ome regions of the city of Rio, especially the affluent ones, have a number of violent deaths similar to cities in Europe or the United States, ranging from 2 to 12 homicides per 100,000 residents. Other areas, particularly poor ones, have homicide rates of 75 per 100,000 inhabitants. It is like there are two different countries within the city'<sup>37</sup>.

Between 1960 and 1990, Mozambique witnessed two violent wars, the first one between the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the Portuguese army and the second, after the recognition of the country's independence, between FRELIMO, the marxist-inspired, and indeed only, political party, and the Mozambican National Resistance Movement (RENAMO). This civil war ended in 1992 with the signing of the peace accords in Rome. Two years after the United Nations-monitored peace process (UNMOZ), the country underwent its first multiparty elections.

After the withdrawal of UNMOZ, there was a significant increase in violent crime, particularly gun-related crime in urban centres in the south of the country, demonstrating the availability of small arms and light weapons<sup>38</sup>. Several initiatives were set in motion to disarm and control small arms, led by the government and civil society. In 1995, the government devised a crime combat plan, which encompassed the deployment of rapid intervention police units on those main roads and in areas afflicted by violent crime, the reestablishment of district police divisions and increased cooperation with the police forces from neighbouring countries and national communities (*Operations Rache*). As a result, in the first months of 1995, the police arrested thirty armed gangs and discovered 69 arms caches. Criminality peaked in 1996/97, but has since been constantly diminishing. According to research, a large part of crime was associated with economic hardship<sup>39</sup>.

Today, three sources of small arms and light weapons remain in the country: the gun caches which belonged to both parties during the civil war, gun caches created by demobilised soldiers, and weapons in the hands of civilians<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, Mozambique is perceived as a success story, where the number of weapons in circulation and violent crime rates remain lower than anticipated. Studies place Mozambique as one of the least-armed countries in southern Africa<sup>41</sup>, citing private gun possession somewhere between 1.1 and 2.9 percent<sup>42</sup>.

Due to the inexistence of and lack of access to systematised information from the police, the judiciary and prison records, exacerbated by the high number of unreported crimes, it is difficult to produce a consistent assessment of the origin and type of violent criminality in the country. According to available data, in 1997 the crime rate in the country was 247.75 per 100,000 inhabitants. The incidence of crime dropped consistently until 2000, when it registered a rate of 210.62 per 100,000. While there was a rise in following years, in 2003 the crime rate was lower than that of 1997 (219.46 per 100,000)<sup>43</sup>.

Between 1998 and 2003, robberies committed with firearms increased from 4.56 to 5.76 per 100,000 inhabitants. The incidence of crimes committed with firearms is higher in the southern provinces, particularly in the capital city, where there is a higher rate of gun-related violence. Between 1994 and 2003, the Legal Medicine Department of Maputo Central Hospital registered 11,717 deaths by external causes in Maputo. 75 percent of those were men and 23 percent women. Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death (47.2% of all external causes), followed by firearm-related injuries (8.8%), burn injuries (8.7%) and injuries from blunt objects (7.2%)<sup>44</sup>.

In May 2006, the President of Mozambique, Armando Guebuza, admitted that the social panic in the country was a result of a widespread sense of insecurity. In a public event, Guebuza declared 'we recognise the impatience that citizens are feeling due to insecurity. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is working to adequately address the

37 ONU Brasil (2011). 'Violência no Brasil tem endereço, faixa etária e raça, apontam especialistas em seminário no Rio [Violence in Brazil has a postal code, a age bracket and race, according to experts at a Rio seminar]', accessed 13th December 2011. Available at <http://www.onu.org.br/violencia-no-brasil-tem-endereco-faixa-etaria-e-raca-apontam-especialistas-em-seminario-no-rio/>

38 A. Leão (2004). *Weapons in Mozambique: Reducing Availability and Demand*, Monograph No. 94. Durban: ISS.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 G. Lamb (2004). 'Puzzling over the pieces', in C. Gould and G. Lamb (2004). *Hide and Seek, Taking Account of Small Arms in Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

42 A. Leão (2004). *Op. Cit.*

43 MINT, WHO and SAS (2009). *Firearm-related Violence in Mozambique. A joint publication of the Ministry of the Interior of Mozambique, the World Health Organization-Mozambique, and the Small Arms Survey*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey.

44 Ibid.

issues of law and order in the country<sup>45</sup>. Meanwhile, the statistics presented by several media show that violent criminality, namely gun-related violence, has decreased in the first half of 2006 in comparison to the same period in 2005<sup>46</sup>. According to the Police Commander of one of the largest precinct of Maputo, violent criminality has not increased, rather its visibility has grown:

If we analyse the evolution of violent crime, we realise that it is decreasing. The recent cases of gun violence, however, due to their particular violence, have had a very strong impact on society and thus may create the impression that gun violence is actually growing. [...] In my opinion, after the war we succeeded in controlling small arms and reducing violent crimes perpetrated with firearms.

(INTERVIEW WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE 7TH PRECINCT, MAPUTO, MAY 2010)

The coordinator of the small arms control programme of the renowned Brazilian NGO Viva Rio, Rangel Bandeira, who has been working with the Republican Police of Mozambique, recognises the problem of the fragility of data and statistics but emphasises the fact that gun-related mortality and crime in Mozambique bears no resemblance to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America. In light of this, he adds that 'what the government is doing is highly positive and should be praised. They are anticipating the problem. Preventing disease is always cheaper and quicker. They are being wise by investing in the prevention of violent crime before it becomes an issue'<sup>47</sup>.

In a similar vein, a study on the availability and use of small arms in Sub-Saharan Africa claims that Mozambique has no culture of gun use, even though violence is part of urban populations' daily lives<sup>48</sup>. Mozambique also has a lower percentage of privately held guns, quoted below one percent<sup>49</sup>. This percentage refers only to legal weapons; it is difficult, however, to measure illegal possession<sup>50</sup>.

#### 4.1. WOMEN AND SMALL ARMS DEMAND: MOTIVATIONS AND USES

With the exception of Brazil, which has substantially improved the record keeping and knowledge of its arsenals since the early 1990s, accurate, accessible and disaggregated data on state-controlled and particularly privately registered small arms are scarce. Specific age and sex-disaggregated information on the owners and bearers of guns is difficult to obtain.

In the case of Mozambique this is aggravated by the fact that currently the government maintains a manual system of record keeping. According to that system, there are currently 4,000 civilian licenses for firearms ownership held by the Department of Public Security and Order of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM). State-owned weapons are also registered within the national register. There is no information on the distribution of gun ownership across municipalities, age and sex. In light of the difficulties in tracing weapons both nationally and regionally, generated by the current system, the government reactivated their cooperation with the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio in 2009 to develop an integrated, electronic firearms register<sup>51</sup>.

In Brazil, data on registered firearms points out an almost male monopoly on bearing and using privately held guns<sup>52</sup>. Studies and anecdote evidence suggest a similar reality in El Salvador<sup>53</sup>. Considering this, this section analyses women's participation in gun violence, with special reference to the cases of Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador, paying particular attention to organised armed groups such as drug-trafficking factions and *maras* respectively.

45 Interview with Armando Guebuza, *Jornal Expresso*, 30th May 2006.

46 "Violência e criminalidade no país" ["Violence and criminality in the country"], *Meianoite*, 31 October 2006.

47 UNDP (2010), *Op. Cit.*

48 C. Gould and G. Lamb (2004). *Hide and Seek, Taking Account of Small Arms in Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

49 G. Lamb (2004). *Op. Cit.*

50 MINT (2006), *Violência relacionada com as armas de fogo em Moçambique. Relatório Resumo [Firearm-related violence in Mozambique. Synthesis Report]*. Unpublished.

51 Mozambique (2010). 'Record Keeping' in United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA) (2010) *National Report of Mozambique on its Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*. Permanent Mission of Mozambique to the United Nations: New York, Section B.3, pp.14-15. .

52 P. Dreyfus, M. De Sousa Nascimento (2005). 'Posse de Armas de Fogo no Brasil: Mapeamento das armas e dos seus proprietários [Possession of Firearms in Brazil: Mapping of weapons and their owners]' in R.C. Fernandes (ed.) (2005). *Brasil: as armas e as vítimas [Brazil: the weapons and the victims]*. 7 Letras: Rio de Janeiro, pp.126-196.

53 C. Buchanan, Cate and J. Chávez (2008). *Guns and Violence in the El Salvador Peace Negotiations*. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

## WOMEN INVOLVED IN ARMED VIOLENCE AND WAR STRATEGIES AGAINST WOMEN

Some studies on the involvement of young men in armed violence in Rio de Janeiro have revealed that the possession and/or use of firearms is often associated with ways of attaining prestige, social status, power, money and women<sup>54</sup>. Similar to what happens with men and boys, especially in a setting characterised by the invisibility of those young people from marginalised social classes and extreme inequality, for women and girls the glamourisation of and incentives to armed violence are underpinned by the search for a certain kind of social recognition, in which consumer goods and respect are key.

Women love criminals! Our Lady, it even makes him better looking!!! He gets handsome, he gets more powerful... (...) He has a position. Girls are very devalued... Slum girls can't buy at Gang, PXC... and criminals can!  
(INTERVIEW WITH A 17-YEAR-OLD GIRL INVOLVED IN A DRUG-TRAFFICKING FACTION, RIO DE JANEIRO, SEPTEMBER 2009)

This type of incentive, resulting from the construction of a valued femininity/identity, is not, however, exclusive to a specific sector of society:

I think that's what it is, you know, it's all... it's being drunk on power, on success... girls think that a guy who carries a gun he can give them... a good position in society... so that's what they want... they go after them in the slums... even rich girls, middle class, upper middle class, they go after that in the slums, that position with the guy, who carries a gun, that power he's going to give her.

(INTERVIEW WITH 31-YEAR-OLD FEMALE PRISONER SENTENCED FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING, TALAVERA BRUCE PRISON, MAY 2007)

The incentive to armed violence, therefore, is related to a construction of a type of femininity that is valued, recognised, and largely dependent on the existence and promotion of a violent and armed masculinity (and vice-versa). That is to say, this social recognition and the sensation of a certain idea of power are, for the female sex, determined by the existence of a masculine counterpart (which provides women with this power), and is as lasting as the presence of the men in their lives.

The attempt to maintain this social status or visibility develops, therefore, into specific forms of involvement in the spiral of armed violence. The participation of adolescents and women involves hiding drugs and weapons, or even relaying and keeping information as a symbolic way of proving faithfulness and loyalty when the masculine element involved in armed violence has to hide or is arrested.

However, not all forms of female participation in armed violence are the result or expressions of the glamour related to firearms or incentives to armed violence. Women and girls can be particularly involved in armed violence support roles (whether in drug trafficking, kidnappings or robberies), but they are often considered as marginal.

The transportation of firearms and/or drugs is other practice often performed by or attributed to girls and women. Indeed, female participation in the structure of drug trafficking in Rio de Janeiro is largely associated, according to the interviewees, with transportation functions and the sale and preparation of individual drug packages.

The distinction made here between roles incentivising armed violence and secondary or base roles in this violence does not mean to imply an obvious separation between them. The motivations identified by young women for their involvement and participation in these peripheral roles are similar to those underlying the glamourisation of armed violence: low expectations, social exclusion and the prospect of armed violence as a mechanism for obtaining consumer goods.

Armed violence, as a system, benefits from invisibilities and stereotypes. This is perhaps why the involvement and direct participation of girls and women in armed violence, or the fact that women resort personally to using firearms as a means of reaching a goal or escaping invisibility, emulating the role traditionally played by men, cause such discomfort and suspicion.

54 G. Barker (2005). *Op. Cit.*; L. Dowdney (2005). *Op. Cit.*; P. Rivero, (2005), "O Mercado Ilegal de Armas de Fogo na Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Preços e simbologia das armas de fogo no crime [The illegal firearms trade in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Values and symbolism of firearms in crime]" in R. C. Fernandes (2005). *Brasil: As armas e as vítimas [Brazil: the weapons and the victims]*. 7 Letras: Rio de Janeiro.

Even though they are a minority, girls and women are in fact participating more directly in armed violence.

I was a containment soldier. I learned to handle guns. And is that rare? It's very unusual. But it was really just me who used a piece. Just men. The girls were sellers. I got into gunfights with policemen several times. I always worked at night as a soldier. Then, I earned trust and became a seller. Then, my day was Sunday. My weapon was the base one, my case was different. Then they gave me several rifles, Hugo, pistol, H8...

(INTERVIEW WITH A GIRL MEMBER OF A DRUG FACTION, 18 YEARS OLD, MAY 2007<sup>55</sup>)

This type of involvement includes girls and women who occupy positions considered more central in the drug trade hierarchy (those who carry and/or use firearms in their functions), in robberies, or in homicide cases. In most cases, direct involvement corresponded to a more visible expression, or a more accentuated practice, of other types of involvement (incentive, secondary roles).

Finally, for women and girls, armed violence is often constituted as a way of reacting to other types of accumulated violence. Homicides in particular – the most extreme expression of violence – were at times motivated by the accumulation of physical and psychological abuse, and structural and cultural violence perpetrated over the course of years, particularly by people with whom these women maintained a close relationship. This is the case of the interviewee quoted above, who had been sentenced for homicide.

The justifications or motivations presented for involvement in armed violence differed for girls and women. For the former, it was mainly about the search for social recognition, the feeling of belonging and the sensation of adrenaline. For women, on the other hand, it came from a need to satisfy basic needs and support their families, especially if they were unemployed. These motivations result from power relations to which girls and women are exposed, and from social expectations which are often imposed, both on the male and the female sex, as conditions for being valued within a certain social group.

Motherhood was often singled out as a driver for girls' and women's involvement in armed violence but also as a determining factor in changing their behaviour. On the one hand, involvement in crime and armed violence came up as a way of "having what they had never had". On the other hand, motherhood influenced a change in values and behaviour. Girls and women aware of the risks and insecurities often referred to wanting a different and "longer-lasting" life for their sons and daughters.

In El Salvador, estimates establish that there are around 16,000 gang members in the country, organised in 381 groups. Of this, 62 percent are affiliated to the MS gang and 38 percent to the M18 gang<sup>56</sup>. According to estimates, between 20 and 40 percent of all gang members are female<sup>57</sup>.

These groups fight an endless struggle: they are the visible face of a war of the poor against the poor, in which they are both the victims and perpetrators, maintained by a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, based on the depoliticisation of violence and hopelessness. In peacetime El Salvador, the strategies of mobilisation and terror employed by police groups, death squads, *maras* and organised crime in order to ensure economic survival and create a feeling of insecurity are often gender based and encompass systematic sexual violence, femicide, forced displacement and the manipulation or subversion of gender roles.

Specifically, the membership, mobilisation and violent strategies (inward and outward) of *maras* lie on the labour division between men and women and the manipulation of masculinity- and femininity-based expectations. In fact, the very partition between gangs appears to have been motivated by a struggle over women.

55 T. Moura (2007). *Op. Cit.*, p.48.

56 W. Savenije (2009). *Maras y Barras. Pandillas y violencia juvenil en los barrios marginales de Centroamérica* [Gangs and youth violence in marginal neighbourhoods in Central América]. Universitet Utrecht/Facultada Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales: San Salvador, p.6.

57 A study in 2001 estimated that women and girls made up around 20 percent of all gang members in the country. In Honduras, the percentage of women in gangs is 30 percent, according to Savenije (2009), while in the USA women make up around 40 percent of gang membership (Demoscopia, 2007). Female involvement in El Salvador should be around these percentages. See M. L. Santacruz Giralt, A. Concha Eastman and Homies Unidos (2001). *Barrio adentro: La solidaridad violenta de las pandillas* [Within the neighbourhood: violent solidarity in the gangs]. IUDOP: San Salvador; W. Savenije (2009). *Op. Cit.*; Demoscopia (2007). *Maras y pandillas, comunidad y policía en Centroamérica* [Gangs, community and police in Central America]. Demoscopia: San José, p.XVI.

Several studies have pointed out that the motivations and factors behind the collective mobilisation of youth to violence are closely connected to reactions against other types of violence, such as social exclusion, familial violence and prison violence. The main motivations for joining a violent group include access to resources, the search for status and identity, the achievement of respect and power, often associated with the access to guns and sex, the possibility of a new family and friendships, and security and protection.

Armed groups often create the illusion of equality and blurring of hierarchies<sup>58</sup>. Gangs emerge as new models of social insertion and community cohesion. In these settings, violence becomes an organised strategy of survival for groups of youths. Hence, the explanations for youth violence usually point to the confluence of structural factors (dropping out of school, unemployment, migration, unplanned urbanisation) and individual or behavioural ones (the desire to “fit in”, peer identification and inclusion and pleasure through violence). Although each of these explanations is valid and useful, their isolated use, without an understanding of the relations between each of them, can be misleading in terms of the analysis of the motivations of youth violence.

In San Salvador, only a few gang members have joined gangs as a way to access financial resources. The most frequently cited reasons are *el vaci*<sup>59</sup>, family problems or a lack of understanding<sup>60</sup>; however, as a result of the progressive criminalisation of *maras*, this reality has changed over time. This demonstrates that the main motivation for entering *maras* is not economic gain through criminal structures and illicit activities, despite the fact that these are gang activities (especially following the progressive criminalisation of these groups), but rather some form of symbolic gain, namely status, power and respect, particularly from their male and female peers. The adrenaline and danger which youth experience through these activities are highly connected with gender constructions and expectations.

For women and girls the motivations for entering the gang are associated with protection assurance, finding a new family, survival and consumption, *la vida loca* and gender equality<sup>61</sup>. For women and girls, entering the gang means protection from other groups and especially their families, often the site of aggravated risks of assault and sexual violence for young people. Around 80.5 percent of all gang members have been victims of violence as children and almost 50 percent have witnessed abuse against women and children in the home<sup>62</sup>, while most female victims of sexual violence in the country are between 12 and 18 years old<sup>63</sup>. In this scenario, entering the gang may also mean the possibility of finding a new “family”. Additionally, in a setting of few alternatives for survival and/or meeting needs and desires of consumption for women and girls, which often range from prostitution to emigration, these elements also play a role in attracting women and girls to gangs. The following quote illustrates this reality:

I'm 24 years old and I am a gang member. I cannot say that I'm proud of it but that's it. When I was eleven, my parents split up. My father left with two of my brothers and my mother took three. I stayed with my grandmother. I was the middle child. She owned a *tortilla* stand and I helped her selling them. It was hard for me to study, I didn't have any resources, but we survived. When I was 11 and a half years old I met this lady. She helped me a lot. She had three sons. One of them was a gang member. I started hanging out with him. He was 17 years old. But soon after...he started to hit me and hang out with other women. When he hit me I cried. I began enjoying the gang world. I began getting involved. One time I met the leader (*palabrero*). He gave me whatever I needed. He gave me advice and showed me how to stay united. And I liked that. I liked that because he was protecting me. He got me in the gang when I was 12 years old. When he was killed, things changed. The other gang members started hitting us, abusing

58 P. Richards (1996). *Fighting for the rain forest: war, youth and resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: International African Institute; James Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann.

59 Hanging out, having fun.

60 M. L. Santacruz, Giralt, A. Concha Eastman and Homies Unidos (2001). *Op. Cit.*, p.60.

61 S. Roque (forthcoming). 'Depois da guerra... a guerra. Mulheres e estratégias de mobilização e terror em El Salvador [After the war... the war. Women and strategies of mobilisation and terror in El Salvador]' in *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, Special Edition “Women and Wars”.

62 M. Liebel, (2002), 'Pandillas y maras: señas de identidad [Gangs: identity signs]' in *Revista Envío*, 244. Available at <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1161>

63 ORMUSA (2009). 'Observatorio de la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres - Femicidios [Observatory of Gender-based Violence against Women – Femicides]', accessed 8th November 2011. Available at <http://observatoriodeviolencia.ormusa.org/femicidios.php>

us, girls and boys. They made us do stuff like stealing in order to survive. So we went to shops and to houses and stole things. My grandparents didn't help us much. They also had needs.

(INTERVIEW WITH FEMALE GANG MEMBER, ILOPANGO PRISON, SEPTEMBER 2007).

Finally, women and girls are also drawn to gangs as a result of the romantic promise of equality which they often represent. The possibility of assuming different femininities and playing different gender roles, distancing themselves from traditional gender expectations, is also an explanatory factor for female gang mobilisation. Likewise, the expectation of *la vida loca*, free from gender and social expectation influences and driven by adrenaline, is also an element which influences female gang mobilisation.

Within the *maras*, social (and mostly sexual) control is profoundly gendered. While the girls usually face the same initiation rituals as men when they enter the group, such as beatings, their participation in the daily life of gangs is subject to a strict code of conduct<sup>64</sup>. They cannot date *civilians* and they are expected to cater for the needs of their men, i.e. help at home and in bed. Whenever their men are imprisoned, women are expected to visit and assist them. This does not mean that some women do not engage directly in gang activities, particularly violence. This is evident, for example, in the growing numbers of imprisoned female gang members. Direct violent engagement of women is, however, perceived ambivalently within the gang, especially by male gang members. There are no female leaders at the top of the hierarchy, only women leading other women (*palabrera*). Women are usually not entitled to bear guns, only knives. For male gang members, hanging out with *homegirls* is sometimes an earnest consideration, since it often means less likelihood of getting killed and leaving their children unattended. Mistakes, breaches of loyalty and ill behaviour, as well as the decision to take a break from gang activities, are met with particular suspicion and sometimes physical (for example, burning or cutting women's hair, which is often a symbol of femininity) or sexual violence:

There is so much violence within the *pandilla*. There is physical and moral violence, because they all say that we are no good. There is sexual violence. The ones higher in the hierarchy often think that we are whores. Sometimes they [girls] are raped by one, then another and another. I saw this happen in my gang and it happened to me when I was little [in the hands of a rival gang]. One day, when I was going to the market, they grabbed me on the street. They hit me, raped me. They did everything they wanted. It's a way of showing that they are better than us. To demonstrate power, men kill men, while men rape women.

(INTERVIEW WITH FEMALE GANG MEMBER, ILOPANGO PRISON, SEPTEMBER 2007).

When someone wants out (*calmarse*), one has to reach out for God first. When that doesn't work one does not have to face beatings but rather death. Sometimes the person ends up dead because he/she didn't show enough respect for the gang. When someone wants to change their lives he/she has to think it over, has to man up.

(INTERVIEW WITH FEMALE GANG MEMBER, ILOPANGO PRISON, SEPTEMBER 2007).

Between *maras*, violence also assumes gendered forms. The so-called *contrarias* (members of other *maras* and their relatives), particularly women, are often victims of sexual violence exerted by members of rival groups, as a result of the logic of domination similar to the one underpinning rape in wartime<sup>65</sup>. *Civilians*, women who have no involvement with gangs, are also affected by the violence perpetrated by or associated with gang violence via forced displacement, sexual assault, extortion, prostitution and protection rackets.

The involvement of women in the armed groups analysed above demonstrates that violent experiences within organised violent groups do not necessarily represent a rupture away from traditional femininities. Although there is in fact room for identity negotiation as a result of the power attributed to guns, similar to cases of female participation in war, the roles and tasks assigned to women and girls are based on their ability to conform and play roles associated with hegemonic, violent masculinity. When that does not happen, women's responsibilities are circumscribed to secondary and support tasks, which are necessary to maintain male-dominated spaces in the private domain and within group activities.

64 S. Roque (2012). *Op. Cit.*

65 *Ibid.*

## 4.2. THE IMPACTS OF GUN AVAILABILITY AND GUN VIOLENCE ON WOMEN: PUBLIC VICTIMS AND THE MILITARISATION OF THE HOME

Comparatively, men represent a disproportionately high percentage of the victims of (namely gun-related) homicide, while women constitute approximately 10 percent of gun homicide both in Brazil and El Salvador. This comparison, however, has a double effect: on the one hand, it sidelines the specificities of the direct impacts of gun violence in the lives of girls and women, for example, between 2004 and 2009, more than 60 percent of femicides were committed with a firearm in Brazil and El Salvador<sup>66</sup>; on the other hand, the data only provides us with a partial picture of the real impacts of armed violence on the lives of these groups. Like other studies suggest, firearms are more often used to merely threaten and coerce victims to comply with one or more offenders rather than to shoot female victims<sup>67</sup>.

20,776 women were killed as a result of firearms in Brazil between 2000 and 2009<sup>68</sup>. Data show that the availability of guns in the home represents a higher risk of death for women than for men. In 2009 alone, 2,148 femicides with firearms occurred, 21.9 percent of which were in the home. Women between 20 and 39 years old represented over 52 percent of all victims. Regarding male victims of mortal violence, of 33,379 gun homicides, only 8.2 percent took place in the home<sup>69</sup>.

Despite this general trend, some changes have been registered since the 1990s. Married women, and the number of women killed in the home, died in greater numbers in 1990 than today. Today, most single women are killed in the street (32 percent), 24 percent are killed at home, while married women still die in greater numbers at home (37 percent) than on the streets (20 percent)<sup>70</sup>. Overall, the number of women killed on the streets today is significantly higher than in 1990<sup>71</sup>.

In Brazil, however, despite aforementioned change, most gun-related femicides still take place at home under circumstances of domestic violence<sup>72</sup>. In El Salvador, 71.2 percent of all gun-related femicides registered in 2011 (479) occurred on the streets and other public spaces, yet a rise in deaths at home was registered compared with 2010<sup>73</sup>. In that period, most victims of femicide in El Salvador were women and girls aged between 10 and 49 years old<sup>74</sup>.

In addition, guns do not need to be fired in order to constitute armed violence. The threat of their use facilitates a wide range of abuse which is virtually impossible to quantify. Whether the violence takes place in the home through an intimate partner or in a public place through a group of soldiers, the weapon and its power remain the same, even though the magnitude and scope of the violence may vary.

As previously mentioned, intra-family violence, which affects women disproportionately and takes place in the private sphere in war- as well as peacetime, is often facilitated by firearms, which are used as instruments of coercion or threat, which can be lethal.

A pilot study, conducted in eight of the nine Special Police Stations for Women in Rio de Janeiro in 2006, in which 615 questionnaires were filled out by women denouncing violence, reveals important specificities of violence against women<sup>75</sup>. Firstly, it shows that guns are a source of threat and fear not only in the public and

66 Geneva Declaration (2011). *Op. Cit.*, p.133.

67 M. Miller, D. Azrael and D. Hemenway (2000). 'Community Firearms and Community Fear', *Epidemiology*, Vol. 11, pp.709-714.

68 Confederação Nacional de Municípios (2010). 'Ano 2010 Homicídios por Armas de Fogo no Brasil: Atualização das taxas e números de homicídios cometidos com armas de fogo contra homens e mulheres até 2009 [2010 Homicide by Firearms in Brazil: Updated rates and numbers of homicides committed with firearms against men and women by 2009]', accessed 10th December 2011. Available at [http://cnm.org.br/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&Itemid=0&gid=98](http://cnm.org.br/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&Itemid=0&gid=98)

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Instituto Sangari; Ministério da Justiça (2011). *Op. Cit.*, p.28.

72 Confederação Nacional de Municípios (2010). *Op. Cit.*

73 Centro de la Sociedad Civil para el Monitoreo y Evaluación de la Violência (CENSOMEV)/FUNDEMOSPAZ (2011). 'Caracterización del femicidio en El Salvador [The characterisation of femicide in El Salvador]', *Boletim Informativo [Information Bulletin]* 13, November, p.2.

74 Ibid.

75 In 2006, the Peace Studies Group, based at the Centre for Social Studies (CES) in Portugal and the Centre for Studies on Security and Citizenship (CESeC) in Brazil conducted this pilot survey within the framework of the research project 'Women and girls in armed violence contexts. The case study of Rio de Janeiro'.

visible sphere, but also in spaces considered safe, such as the home. Secondly, it reveals articulations between domestic and armed violence.

Out of all the women who filled in the questionnaire, 60.3 percent had been attacked by their intimate partners or ex-partners (husbands, boyfriends or partners).

68.5 percent of the women in the survey knew their partner had a gun in the home and said they had already been threatened with a gun in some way. 73 percent also said that the presence of a gun prevented them from reacting physically or verbally to violence, with 68 percent stating that they would have liked to end the relationship with the aggressor, but did not because they were afraid of being attacked with a gun.

Especially important is the percentage of respondents who said they *did not know* if their intimate partner had a gun at home (24.6 percent of all the cases). The uncertainty of “not knowing” may have perpetuated the cycle of domination and abuse as much as in the cases where women did know, since a gun did not necessarily have to be used or even seen to maintain and perpetuate a relationship based on control.

This reality also echoes information collected in Maputo. Available data indicates that homicide rates have barely changed between 1998 and 2003, with approximately 5 homicides per 100,000 people occurring annually, mainly in the south of the country, especially the capital<sup>76</sup>.

Firearms account for only 8 percent of external causes of death. Studies on firearm-related mortality and morbidity in Maputo also show that firearm-related violence mostly affects males (more than 90 percent of victims of gun-related violence are male)<sup>77</sup>, especially men between 15-44 years old<sup>78</sup>.

Over that period, in at least 85 percent of all firearm-related deaths, the place of injury was unknown. In 61 percent of all cases the place of death (or the place where the deceased was found) was available: 22 percent of deaths caused by guns occurred in hospitals, 17 percent on public roads and 11 percent in the home<sup>79</sup>. This hinders any conclusion on the distribution of gun-related deaths across public-private spheres.

In 2006, data from the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) project on Mozambique concluded that more than 50 percent of women respondents claimed that they had been victims of violence perpetrated by men, mostly at the hands of intimate partners<sup>80</sup>, and that the reporting rate of these crimes was significantly low<sup>81</sup>. Of the 1,927 female respondents, 54.2 percent (1045) declared that they had experienced violence at the hands of men. 49.9 percent of them had experienced physical violence, while 22.8 percent had suffered sexual violence<sup>82</sup>. The most common form of physical violence was slapping, kicking, biting and punching (70 percent of all physically violent incidents and 35 percent of all violent incidents reported). Use of weapons was less frequent: 18 percent of the female victims of physical violence were assaulted with objects (9 percent of all female victims of any type of violence) and 12 percent were victims of or threatened by knives or guns (6 percent of the total sample of female victims of violence)<sup>83</sup>.

Although there seems to be few cases of lethal armed domestic violence, there is evidence that guns are used as coercion tools in many domestic violence situations, particularly legal weapons.

76 MINT, WHO and SAS (2009). *Op. Cit.*, p.22.

77 E. Zacarias, and S. J. A. Mabunda (1997). 'Estudo das Causas de Morte Violenta Registadas no Servico de Medicina Legal de Maputo [Study on the Causes of Violent Death Registered at the Legal Medicine Department in Maputo]', *Revista Medica de Mocambique*, Vol. 7, Suppl. 1, p.S29; H. Raman (2001). *Mortality due to Injuries in Maputo City of Mozambique*. Doctoral thesis, Institute of Public Health, University of Copenhagen.

78 MINT, WHO and SAS (2009), *Op. Cit.*, p.22.

79 *Ibid.*, p.38.

80 The survey was conducted in the city of Maputo and in the provinces of Maputo, Sofala, Manica, Zambezia and Nampula. The National Statistics Institute determined the sample of districts, localities, villages and neighbourhoods. The total number of female respondents was 1,927.

81 Centro de Estudos da População da Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (CEP) (2005), *Relatório do Inquérito Internacional sobre a violência contra a mulher [Report of the International Survey on Violence Against Women]*. CEP: Maputo.

82 Of all female victims of violence, 34 percent suffered from physical and sexual violence, 8 percent from sexual violence only, and 58 percent from physical violence alone.

83 CEP (2005). *Op. Cit.*

In your country it is hard to talk about the connection between firearms and domestic violence. Better put, officially we have few cases of domestic violence in which guns are effectively used. The number of threats with firearms is also low. But this does not necessarily mean that there is no gun use in family violence incidents. Often victims don't feel comfortable reporting such incidents, because of the nature of their relationship with the aggressor, who is often their partner. But I believe that there are cases of abuse targeting women who are wives and partners of police officers, military and other security agents. Abuse committed with legal weapons. [...] In the past, we have had reports, albeit informal, of people who refuse to go to the precinct, but who wish to see me and talk to me about that. Often we sought to mediate the issue with the police chiefs to see if the weapon has been used properly or misused.

[INTERVIEW WITH LURDES MABUNDA, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, MAPUTO, APRIL 2010]

*Interviewer – Have you received cases of female victims injured by guns?*

Agent 1 – No, but we have cases of women who say that they have been threatened by their partners with guns. These men have legal weapons. The problem is that in the end they usually don't go through with the denunciation or the men deny that they use the guns in that way...

Agent 2 – I think that people fear the guns. They know that the relationship is strained and that the partner has a gun legally and obviously the women fear the consequences.

*Interviewer – Who has access to legal weapons?*

Agent 1 – *Deputados*, police officers, and body guards.

[INTERVIEW WITH TWO AGENTS OF THE OFFICE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, MAPUTO, FEBRUARY 2010].

A study by the *Women and Law in Southern Africa* NGO on femicide committed by men in the domestic sphere, developed in the city of Maputo and in the provinces of Gaza, Sofala and Cabo Delgado, highlights the fact that domestic violence, as well as other types of gendered violence, result from a context of male domination. This is evident, for instance, in the way men try to legitimise this type of violence. Indeed, disobedience is often used as a justification for this crime. The most commonly used instruments in femicide are essentially machetes, knives, hands and feet, and, in the case of Cabo Delgado, firearms and burning wooden torches. Cabo Delgado appears to be a very particular case, as high levels of drug and alcohol consumption and the availability of guns there provokes further violence against women. The presence of high numbers of military officers in the province, married to women from other provinces, puts them in a particularly vulnerable position<sup>84</sup>.

Overall, the case of Maputo appears to corroborate the direct correlation established between femicide rates and the percentage of femicides perpetrated with firearms, in which low femicide rates often correspond to the rare effective use of firearms<sup>85</sup>.

### 4.3. WOMEN SURVIVORS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

Armed violence does not only affect those directly associated with guns. In San Salvador, a considerable part of the population is affected by the obligation to pay "rent", either to *maras* or to organised crime groups, and by forced displacement to other areas. In Rio de Janeiro, a recent study revealed important data on the so-called secondary, indirect or hidden victims of gun violence: from 1979 to 2001, between 300,000 and 600,000 people survived the violent death of family members and friends in Rio de Janeiro<sup>86</sup>. These survivors continue to have to deal with cycles of violence, usually without the support needed to be able to return to a healthy and productive life.

84 *Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) (2001). Poder e Violência. Homicídio e Femicídio em Moçambique [Power and Violence. Homicide and Femicide in Mozambique]. WLSA Mozambique: Maputo.*

85 *Geneva Declaration (2011). Op. Cit., p.133.*

86 *G. Soares, D. Miranda and D. Borges (2006). As vítimas ocultas da violência armada no Rio de Janeiro [The hidden victims of armed violence in Rio de Janeiro]. Editora Record: Rio de Janeiro.*

The drama for those who live close to this violence is unending and is not confined to the tragedy of collective or individual deaths. The different impacts they experience can be summarised as those of health (physical and emotional) and socioeconomics (of loss and the fight for justice)<sup>87</sup>.

Epidemiological studies show that between 25 and 40 percent of survivors of extreme violence and catastrophes suffer from health problems<sup>88</sup>. In general, the greater the intensity of the violence, the greater the occurrence of psychological disorders and physical symptoms. Thus, deliberate homicides cause a bigger impact than accidental deaths in natural catastrophes, and collective traumas affect the population more than isolated incidents<sup>89</sup>.

The indexes of urban violence which ravage Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador make the city's population live with the destructiveness and/or threat of firearms on a daily basis. Reactions such as insomnia, fear, persistence of hateful reactions, deeply ingrained bitterness (and difficulty in dealing with these memories) are examples of reactions to unnatural events reported by the family members of gun victims in Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador, especially those who lost children. These mothers spoke recurrently about the "incurable" or "life-altering" pain which resulted from the experience of having to deal with the death of children. Indeed, there is no word or name for this experience: widowhood results from the loss of a companion, being orphaned results from the death of parents; however, the loss of a child has no name. In the cases of Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador, these mourning processes are altered due to the intensity of the types of violence.

Often, the greatest obstacle to acceptance is related to the sense of injustice resulting from the non-sentencing/impunity of those responsible for the violence, and the anger and the impotence experienced in face of the aggression and the guilt for not having been able to prevent the death of a family member.

With regard to physical problems, the most cited were related to cardiovascular illnesses. Some female relatives, especially mothers, began to suffer from high blood pressure after their traumatic experiences.

Many family members of the victims of gun violence, especially mothers, due to their socially-attributed roles, are both considered and themselves feel responsible for the psychological, emotional and physical well-being of other family members and of their own communities. The task of helping those who have been left behind to overcome feelings of loss often falls upon them, while they simultaneously try to deal with their own pain. Besides intensifying already-existing feelings of guilt, this factor also emerged as a cause of destabilisation and the loss of family structure.

Most of the social obstacles faced, especially by mothers, result from the need to carry on with life. Armed violence in Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador occurs mostly in residential areas. This characteristic makes it highly probable for survivors to be in contact with the victim's place of death or the relative's body after the violent act has taken place. In many cases, the solution that some families find – when there is no choice – is to move to another neighbourhood, escape the memories and protect those who are left behind.

In addition, relatives or friends often have contact with the murderers, who remain free and who have a visible presence in the neighbourhoods and communities of those family members. This results in a constant memory of the loss suffered, the lack of justice and denial of rights to survivors.

In other cases, families may have to prove that the victim was not a criminal. This is especially the case when lethal gun violence results from a confrontation with the police. Murders committed by police officers in both settings are often "resolved" – that is, not punished – by resorting to allegations of the dead person's involvement in drug-trafficking and/or gang-related activities, and their resisting arrest. This stigmatisation has consequences for the lives of family members.

Violent deaths lead to and sometimes intensify economic or financial problems for families, especially if the dead person contributed to the home budget. To replace this income, other family members may often have to find work or abandon their studies. However, caring for people who are physically injured or traumatised by violence

87 T. Moura (2007). *Op. Cit.*

88 C. Martin Beristain (1999). *Reconstruir el tejido social [Rebuilding the social fabric]*. Icaria Editorial: Barcelona.

89 *Ibid.*

takes time, making it impossible to maintain paid work outside the home; at the same time it requires money, as the victims may need expensive treatment.

Other criticisms are present in survivors' accounts of the judicial system for its lack of speed, high levels of bureaucracy and insensitivity to survivors' needs. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, family members of victims are the ones who pursue justice in nearly all cases. For many of these women, the first time they become conscious of their rights is exactly the moment when they encounter difficulties accessing justice. The sluggishness of legal proceedings, the accusations which are not followed through, inquests and proceedings which are due to become barred by law, the lack of documented or testimonial evidence or ballistic examinations are a few of the examples cited.

If we don't stay on top of them, they'll stay...sluggish peculiar to the law, blaming bureaucracy. They don't care about bureaucracy, they don't want to know if it's really like that...

(INTERVIEW WITH A MOTHER OF A VICTIM OF GUN VIOLENCE, RIO DE JANEIRO, APRIL, 2009)

As a result of the growing number of deaths in the city during the 1990s in Rio de Janeiro, more or less organised groups of victims and relatives of victims of such human rights violations have been emerging, especially associated to police-led massacres. These often mother-based groups have become social and political actors who interact and question the state as a result of its direct and overt violence, as well as the lack of state presence in the public security realm. Groups' criticisms have targeted the state's neglect of socially and geographically marginalised territories, such as the slums, which experience constant conflicts involving drug factions, the police and militias.

While suffering and grief has prompted action, the demands for justice made by these groups as well as the relations forged with the state's judicial and police apparatus, has forced their transition from "moral" (based on personal and the collective sharing of grief) to "political" communities (political action and discourse based on the collective experience and solidarity in grief around which they rebuild their lives).

Using elements of the political culture of anti-dictatorship struggles in Latin America and the sentiment of loss as a source of support and credibility, these mothers have been structuring their demands and activism.

Among the greatest achievements of these groups, particularly the Mothers of Acari<sup>90</sup>, is the democratisation of human rights for the poor and marginalised. Personal experiences of violence and grief, and the use of maternal identity for political action has enabled two significant changes: the construction of a new identity related to the public sphere, to which they associate the "birth" of their citizenship, and ultimately the re-examination and re-invention of their private spheres, particularly their personal identities and the meaning of motherhood.

#### 4.4. WOMEN AND THE REGULATION OF SMALL ARMS

The 2003 Disarmament Statute in Brazil, which regulates the ownership and use of guns and ammunition in the country, is one of the strictest in the world, prohibiting all civilians from publicly carrying firearms. It also mandated a national referendum in October 2005, where Brazilians voted on whether or not to prohibit all civilian firearms possession, except for ranchers and at shooting clubs<sup>91</sup>. A national gun buy-back campaign was also contemplated by the statute.

In Brazil, women participated in a unique way to mobilise voluntary disarmament campaigns in the approval process of the Disarmament Statute (2003) and later on in the Referendum Campaign. In 2003, women activists were active in the process of drafting the national firearms legislation and advocated for the inclusion of a

90 For more information, please see T. Moura and R. Santos (2011). 'No body, no crime? The Mothers of Acari and the struggle against impunity and human rights violations' in A. O'Reilly (ed.) (2011). *You Say You Want a Revolution: The 21st Century Motherhood Movement*. Demeter Press: York.

91 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (2008). 'Third Biennial Meeting 14/18 July 2008: Implementation of the Programme of Action and of the International Tracing Instrument – Report Submitted by the Federal Republic of Brazil', accessed 20th November 2011. Available at <http://www.poa-iss.org/CASACountryProfile/PoANationalReports/2008@27@Brazil%20Report.pdf>

provision banning individuals with a history of family and domestic violence from being able to apply for, or obtain, a licence for gun use and/or ownership. Despite the fact that these dispositions were not included in the law itself (the law only mentioned the inexistence of a criminal record as the main criterion) the awareness they raised contributed to the inclusion of the issue of armed domestic violence in the provisions of the Maria da Penha<sup>92</sup> Law, the national framework for combating and preventing violence against women<sup>93</sup>.

In 2004, women actors and activists, some of them survivors of gun violence or relatives of gun violence victims, participated in a media campaign to sensitise public opinion on the dangers of having a gun and the benefits of voluntarily handing over their guns. The whole campaign was, to a certain extent, successful<sup>94</sup>. The fact that a significant proportion of women handed over guns on behalf of partners, brothers or parents and that among those who handed over guns many they had been convinced by female partners or mothers, is highly relevant.

This is still present, to some extent, in the work of some organisations dealing with arms control in dealing with arms control in Brazil. However, they seem to maintain their main focus on and at times sideline issues such as demand for and devaluation of guns and gun violence, topics in which women have usually an important role. It is important to note, however, that the trust, credibility and reputation of the arms control community was built around technical issues, meaning that it is difficult to push forward this new human face dimension and its requests and expectations. Recently, during the first week of the state-sponsored permanent disarmament campaign in Brazil, which has been going on since May 2011, 32 percent of the people who handed over guns were women<sup>95</sup>. This is particularly significant if we take into account that guns are mostly owned by men, both in Brazil and elsewhere.

While these experiences showed the arms control community the potential of women in the field of small arms control, today its potential remains underutilised by both women's movements in Brazil, which are still struggling to include gun violence in their agendas, and arms control organisations. On the one hand, the core organisations working on arms control in Brazil prepare and disseminate special materials aimed at women, demonstrating the dangers of owning or living with a gun and explain the steps necessary to hand over a gun in the ongoing voluntary disarmament campaign. In September 2011, *Sou da Paz*, one of the leading organisations in small arms control in Brazil, chose to officially end disarmament week in a region of Sao Paulo in a Municipal Conference on public Policies aimed at women. It addressed over 200 women and welcomed the involvement of women in the campaign. Additionally, women are now a significant part of the arms control teams in those organisations which deal primarily with gun control nationwide, namely *Viva Rio* and *Sou da Paz*, and also constitute a great part of those organisations affiliated with the cause (*Rede Desarma Brazil*). On the other hand, however, activities aimed at special segments of the population, particularly women, remain very isolated and time constrained. Additionally, there is no visible investment in producing, compiling or updating data on gun violence against women, i.e. data on licences revoked or refused on grounds of domestic violence<sup>96</sup>.

Finally, despite the presence and quality of large numbers of women in the organisations which deal with small arms control, many report that they are expected to prove their technical knowledge on small arms, especially

92 Lei Maria da Penha (Brazil's Federal Law 11340) was put in place with the purpose of reducing domestic violence. It was sanctioned on 7th August 2006 and put into practice on 22nd September 2006. The first offender was arrested in Rio de Janeiro the next day, after trying to strangle his ex-wife. The name of the law is a tribute to Maria da Penha Maia, a woman whose ex-husband attempted to murder her twice, causing her to become paraplegic. Today she is a notable figure in the movement for women's rights in Brazil. This law states that aggressors are no longer to be punished with alternative sentences, increases the maximum sentence from one to three years, and also provides for measures ranging from removing the abuser from the home to banning them from the proximity of the women and children attacked.

93 R. Santos (forthcoming)b. 'Fazer alvo às mulheres. As mulheres e as agendas de controlo de armas e direito às armas no Brasil [Targeting women. Women and/within the agendas of small arms control and arms rights agendas in Brazil]', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, Special Edition "Women and wars".

94 Then and now a few criticisms have been made about the scope and effectiveness of the campaigns, despite the fact that it resulted in the collection of over 500,000 guns in less than a year. In 2005 the referendum campaign as well as the voluntary gun collection campaign was referred as having successfully targeted the upper-middle classes, yet having failed to reach the lower classes. Recently, in a seminar organised by the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ) and the UN on disarmament on 12th December 2011, Lúcia Xavier, from the NGO CRIOLA, called attention to the challenges of the permanent disarmament campaign created by the federal government, underlining that it had not yet impacted on the main direct victims of gun violence: male black youths, who continued to get killed in large numbers. For more information see <http://www.onu.org.br/populacao-negra-a-mais-atingida-por-armas-de-fogo-precisa-de-mais-atencao-do-estado-afirmam-especialistas/>

95 J. Purcena and R. Fernandes (2011). 'Campanha de Desarmamento Voluntário. Os primeiros resultados [Voluntary Disarmament Campaign. The first results]', accessed 12/08/2011. Available at [http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/analise\\_armas\\_VR\\_12\\_mai\\_2011.pdf](http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/analise_armas_VR_12_mai_2011.pdf)

96 R. Santos (2012). *Op. Cit.*

when dealing with political actors and security forces, in different ways than men and that technical knowledge of small arms control remains key to their credibility and legitimacy, to the detriment of their knowledge and experience in combating and preventing violence.

While El Salvador remains one of the countries with weaker gun laws in the region, recent changes in legal frameworks have introduced restrictions on the number of guns each household can legally own, have increased the legal age of carrying a weapon from 18 to 21 and increased the number of gun-free zones<sup>97</sup>. Other relatively significant changes to the law have included increased criminalisation of violations, tighter restrictions on the carrying of guns in public, and the development of a psychological test for those applying for a firearms licence<sup>98</sup>.

Recently, in 2008, the women's group Cemujer has launched a campaign "No more arms, no more women homicides", which seeks to address a legal loophole allowing those with histories of domestic violence to own guns. *Cemujer* is also joining forces with other human rights organisations to present a policy proposal opposing all forms of violence against women, especially femicide<sup>99</sup>.

In Mozambique the low rates of gun-related homicide and the fact that women represent a small portion of the direct casualties of gun violence has translated into both the inexistence of target research and activism on the issues of gun violence and small arms control, and the absence of research and activism on the issues of the role of guns in violence against women.

Recently, in September 2009, Mozambique approved Law 29/2009, a new national legal framework on domestic violence. The revision process of the previous law was initiated in 2001 and was widely debated within civil society, especially amongst women's organisations affiliated with the *Fórum Mulher*. The three rounds of debate (2002, 2005 and 2006) eventually led to the adoption of a unanimous bill on domestic violence. If the law approved in general terms in June 2009 was very similar to the proposal drafted by women's groups, the final version of the law, approved in July 2009, introduced significant changes to the legal framework<sup>100</sup>. Among the most relevant shortcomings is the fact that the law does not recognise that domestic violence results from power inequalities between men and women, and that all violence prevention dispositions presented in the earlier draft of the law have been eliminated. Nevertheless, the law constitutes an important instrument as it recognises domestic violence as a public crime.

Despite the fact that the bill ultimately suffered many changes and led to the approval of a national legal framework substantially different from the initial proposal, the general issue of gun violence was included in the law. The issue of gun violence directed against women, however, has not been viewed as an object for particular attention by these groups, which have significant sway in national civil society. Likewise, civil society groups which have been at the forefront of small arms control and disarmament initiatives, such as the Mozambican Christian Council, which joins most Protestant churches in the country and was responsible for the largely successful 1995-initiated "Transforming Arms into Ploughshares" project have not focused particular attention on the ways guns, especially legally-registered guns, are used in violence against women, principally in the home.

97 C. Buchanan and J. Chávez (2008). *Op. Cit.*, p.32.

98 Comisión Nacional para la Seguridad Ciudadana y Paz Social (2007). *Op. Cit.*

99 'Guns kill women at home, trigger global protest', *AdvocacyNet News Bulletin*, 8th December 2008. Available at <http://www.advocacynet.org/resource/1230>

100 M. J. Arthur (2009). 'Aprovação da «Lei Sobre a Violência Doméstica Praticada Contra a Mulher». Que resultados? [The approval of the Law on Domestic Violence Against Women. Which results?]', *Outras Vozes [Other Voices]*. Available at [http://www.wlsa.org.mz/?\\_\\_target\\_\\_=tex\\_vdaprovaada](http://www.wlsa.org.mz/?__target__=tex_vdaprovaada)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to contribute to the examination of femininities in contexts of armed violence, this report documents and analyses the different roles girls and women play in contexts of armed violence, the different effects this violence or types of violence can have on their lives and the ways in which they organise themselves to resist and prevent it, using the case studies of Rio de Janeiro, San Salvador and Maputo.

Despite the statistical predominance of men as users and victims of gun violence, this report has underlined the fact that women are also agents, albeit in smaller numbers, and targets of certain types of gun violence as a result of their sex. Women also endure unique and specific effects of gun violence (direct and indirect), and an understanding of these is key to effective intervention. Likewise, many men and boys also do not resort to guns as a way of constructing their identity or as a way to resolve conflicts.

Where gender-disaggregated studies on firearms-related violence are available, evidence shows that guns play a significant role in the perpetration of violence against women, either in the home or in public spaces. While this report has demonstrated that, in San Salvador, the capital of the leading country in femicide, most female victims of gun-related violence are killed in public spaces, often after sexual assault at gun point. In other settings, such as in Rio de Janeiro or Maputo, firearms are particularly dangerous to women if they are accessible in the home to someone known to the victim, regardless of who owns the weapon or whether it was acquired as a form of protection.

Additionally, even when women are not directly targeted by gun violence, they often bear the brunt of its socio-economic and emotional impacts, and are left to pick up the pieces of lives and societies shattered by it. Groups of relatives of victims of gun violence in Rio de Janeiro, mostly made up of women, especially mothers, are an example of this.

While in the cases studied, as well as elsewhere, gun use is intertwined with culturally endorsed expressions of masculinity in which guns are often associated with virility, the cases of Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador have also revealed that some women and girls intervene actively and also unconsciously in support of armed and violent masculinity, either by acquiring a gun and/or participating directly in armed conflicts, by encouraging men to participate or by subtly endorsing the stereotypes which associate men with violence and protection, namely through the glorification of firearms and seeking access to them as a way of obtaining goods and status.

The motivations cited for the involvement (direct and secondary) in armed violence differed between girls and women. In the case of girls, the cases of Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador highlighted the search for social recognition (mirrored in the possibility to obtain respect and have access to consumer goods and/or drugs), the feeling of belonging (faced with exclusion and familial break-up and abuse scenarios) and adrenaline as the main motivations.

For women, justification often had to do with the attempt to fulfil basic needs and support their families, especially when they were unemployed. With this classification, one does not intend to establish any sort of hierarchy between the mobilisation motivations of girls and women (considering the former more *superficial* and the latter more *legitimate*). Although different, these motivations are the result of power relations to which girls and women are exposed and the result of social expectations frequently imposed on both men and women as conditions to obtain value within a certain social group.

Motherhood appeared both as a causal factor and an explanatory factor for the continued involvement of women and girls in armed violence, and as a factor of behavioural change. On the one hand, for many women and girls, participation in armed violence was seen as a way to “provide what they have never had”. On the other hand, violence was a factor which influenced behavioural and value changes. Women and girls could have promoted the use of arms or assumed peripheral roles in armed criminality, and have even played more direct roles; however, when faced with the risks and insecurities derived from their engagement in violent activities, they often wished for a different and “more lasting life” for their children.

When involved in collective violence, women are both victims and aggressors. Strategies vary from group to group in San Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, but they are greatly similar to those of mobilisation to and training for war, and are a product of the reproduction of power and differentiation relations between men and women. The preconditions for being part of the group are related to male characteristics, such as strength, agility and speedy reactions; however, women are expected to correspond to the same patterns. After entering the group, women are sometimes subjected to the “obligation” of providing sexual favours to the group’s men. Women often do not see these practices as rape, rather they see them as a task, the accomplishment of which is facilitated by the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Additionally, confrontation strategies between gangs involve territorial domain, also associated with the bodies of women from the rival group through rape. Other groups besides the gangs use the murder and torture of women as a way to instil fear among civilian populations, to create an environment of terror, and to obtain political benefits. Despite this, women in Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador are still seen as secondary elements in the domain of armed violence prevention and combat, absent from social and development projects which usually target men, boys, and small arms control.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

*For the EU and other international organisations and donors*

## GENERAL

Support and encourage the small arms and disarmament community to complement its technical and quantitative approach to armed violence, focused on the supply of small arms and qualitative analysis of small arms demand and impacts, namely through closer collaboration with survivors and affected communities, the development sector and the public health community.

## I. ON FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN ARMED VIOLENCE

1. To assist countries to invest in the creation of knowledge and data on the typology of the involvement of girls and women in armed and violent criminality, as well as on the motivations of girls and women in armed violence, principally in contexts with significant rates of gun violence. This should be done through:
  - Encouraging greater cooperation between the offices of Justice, Public Security and Gender Equality, namely the inclusion of gender and gun violence variables in data on violent criminality; target training and incentives to the complete filling-in of criminal occurrence registers, specifically the instrument used in the crime.
  - Supporting the inclusion of this topic on the agendas of human rights, violence prevention and gender equality organisations.
2. Support policies and programmes aimed at preventing and/or reducing armed violence specifically against girls and women locally and nationally, as well as reintegration measures. Gender-responsive protection measures in child and adolescent law and educational systems, programmes for girls and women who are involved in/associated with armed violence, as well as children and adolescents at risk, and programmes for the protection of children and adolescents threatened with death should be considered.
3. Rigid, narrow codes of traditional masculinity and femininity drive gender-based violence, armed or otherwise. This is often true in under-resourced communities, where gender codes tend to be particularly narrow and strict. Accordingly, it is important to support transformational gender programmes which have been designed to question, challenge and change rigid gender norms and inequities.

## II. ON FEMALE GUN VICTIMISATION

1. Support awareness raising about the relationship between violence against women and armed violence, through:
  - the recognition of firearms as threats in private life;
  - the incentive to collect data on the role of firearms in violence against women;
  - the encouragement to intersect VAW (violence against women) and arms control at public policy level (national and international).
2. Assist in the harmonisation of domestic violence and firearms and ammunition laws, following the example of the Maria da Penha Domestic Violence Law in Brazil, which contemplates banning individuals with an history of violence from access to firearms, the possibility of seizing guns and the suspension of gun licences in domestic violence situations.

3. Support arms control and disarmament initiatives and policies which take into account the needs and perceptions of both men and women, namely through consultation and threat assessment, and provide adequate incentives for participation.
4. Encourage the improvement of psychosocial evaluations of police officers, as well as training on violence against women and the role of firearms, reaching beyond those working in special victim units.
5. To ensure that risk analysis is conducted in all centres for victim support, including the issue of the presence of a weapon in the home.
6. Encourage EU and UN Member States to draw inspiration from the process of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325/2000 in order to create more efficient protection and public security policies which consider the role of firearms and ammunition in the perpetuation of gender-based violence, namely domestic violence, broadening the scope of their policies beyond the sphere of foreign affairs (development aid, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts).

### III. ON SUPPORTING THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

1. To support the systematisation of knowledge on victim/survivor support worldwide, namely through the funding of research, and adapt it to the victims of armed violence who are seen as indirect and in fact often forgotten (for example, relatives of direct victims of gun violence).
2. To promote and assist the creation of spaces where victims/survivors can ask for help, namely public services, organisations or networks of people who can shelter and support them.



INITIATIVE FOR PEACEBUILDING  
EARLY WARNING

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