

'¿Como te haces entender?'

Gender and Gun Cultures in the Caribbean Context

Jasmin Blessing, Henri Myrntinen, Nicola Popovic, Nicole Stolze

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UN-INSTRAW Gender, Peace and Security Working Paper Series

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Gender,
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Abstract

Although Latin America and the Caribbean have not seen inter-state conflict for decades, the countries in the region cannot be said to be at peace given the high levels of gun violence. In spite of the magnitude of the problem, there is relatively little research available on the social constructions of gun ownership and the use and abuse of guns, particularly in the Caribbean region. This paper examines some of the gendered impacts and readings of guns in the Caribbean region, looking at the extent at which gun violence has affected Caribbean societies, at cultural and gender norms as well as socio-economic conditions which determine gun ownership and use and policy responses to the issue, including gender mainstreaming in security sector reform processes and civil society initiatives. The focus is on more urbanised societies in the Caribbean region, with a special focus on gun violence and responses in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

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Gender,
Peace & Security

Acronyms

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CIPAF	Centro de Investigación para la Acción Feminina
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESA	Airport Security Authority (Dominican Republic)
CESEP	Port Security Authority (Dominican Republic)
DNCD	National Drug Control Directorate (Dominican Republic)
DNI	National Department of Investigations (Dominican Republic)
DR	Dominican Republic
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FLASCO	Facultad Latinoamérica de Ciencias Sociales
GBV	Gender-based violence
UN-INSTRAW	United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAS	Organisation of American States
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America

1. Introduction

*Todos los vatos salen, estan en la calle
Tirense cabrones, si me ven manejar
Con los que me junto
Con un Magnum quebrando unos putos
Puro cholo loco empaca cromo
Y te llenamos el saco de plomo
¿Como te puedo hacer entender?
How I could just kill a man!¹*

- Californian Latino hip hop band Cypress Hill, 'No entiendes la onda'

The Caribbean region, as well as the Latin American region more broadly, has one of the highest rates of small arms and light weapons (SALW)-related violence in the world. While this region accounts for less than 10 per cent of the global population, the gun-related violence in the region represents approximately 42 per cent of homicides globally.² Murder rates in the Caribbean are among the highest in the world at 30 per 100 000 annually.³ Though it has been 25 years since the last inter-state military conflict in Latin America and the Caribbean, the high number of SALW-related incidents indicates that many of the countries in the region are in a state of conflict. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from the use and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) resulting from inner-state armed violence as well as the formation of national and international paralegal armed gangs and other non-state actors.⁴ Gun violence and related injuries and deaths have a devastating impact on the local population and undermine their capacity with respect to economic growth, education, social dynamics and health. Small arms and light weapons have therefore become a threat to both security and development in the region.

While many local and outside observers speak of a 'gun culture' and see this linked to local concepts of appropriate male behaviour, there has been relatively little research into the links between gender roles and SALW violence, particularly in the Caribbean region. Gun ownership and gun violence do not happen in a social vacuum but are either made possible or prevented, as well as given meaning, by society. Gun violence impacts men and women differently at different times in their life cycles, and men and women play different roles in creating or closing these socio-cultural spaces for gun violence.

This paper aims to look at mass media and the products of popular culture that often reproduce images of violent masculinity. While it is not within the scope of this paper to conduct on the ground research through focus group interviews, opinion polls and surveys,

¹ Authors' informal translation into English: "All of them brothers are out hanging in the street. Get down, motherfuckers, when you see me driving by with my posse. With a Magnum taking out some fools, pure crazy Latino, packing some chrome and giving you a load of lead. How can I ever make you understand, how I could just kill a man!"

² United Nations Children's Fund, "Statement on the occasion of Global Week of Action against Gun Violence", Panama, 6 June 2008.

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, "Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean", Report No. 37820 (Vienna, UNODC and World Bank, 2007). Available from <http://www.unodc.org/pdf/world%20bank%20C&V%20Report.pdf>

⁴ While SALW is a broader term, we will concentrate mostly on guns in this paper as these tend to be the weapon of choice for most SALW-related violence in the region, rather than, say, recoilless rifles or grenade launchers.



as often used in gender analysis or social behaviour evaluations, the paper analyses the ongoing discourse on masculinities and gender roles in the Caribbean region and looks at statistics, reports and research regarding gun violence in relation to popular culture such as music videos, posters and other forms of media. As such, this study aims to uncover the social dynamics in the region that often result in the misuse of firearms, power and the image of 'manhood'.

The paper argues that enactments of violent masculinity are intricately embedded in, amongst other things, expressions of local popular culture, such as music, videos or movies, in which gun ownership and hyper-masculinity are equated with economic and social power, sexual prowess and respect. Guns are cast as both tools for gaining these benefits as well as being fetishised symbols in and of themselves. The messages communicated through popular culture play a central role in glamourising and legitimising behaviours that are clearly *not* socially positive or productive. 'Macho' reggae or reggaeton lyrics or action movies cannot, however, be simplistically blamed for producing gun violence.

This paper argues instead that these media outlets are the most obvious manifestation of the complex interrelations between gender, violence and popular culture in the particular economic, social and cultural setting of the Caribbean. A discussion of cultural, social and historical patterns is included in this analysis to explain how the current culture of violence and its glorification came about, to understand its contemporary impacts and to suggest remedial actions that might help challenge and displace it in the future.

The focus of this paper will be mainly on Caribbean societies, especially the ones most affected by gun violence,⁵ though other societies in the region and globally will also be examined when relevant. More specifically, this paper looks at three case studies, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, by reviewing publically accessible data and statistics.

⁵ These tend to be the more urbanised Caribbean nations such as the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago. Haiti, with its specific problem of politically-motivated internal strife will not be discussed here.

2. Defining gun cultures and masculinities

*I'm the man with the gun in his hand
I don't plan
I'm stayin' around, I'm playin' around
I'm all about layin' you down*

- Puerto Rican reggaeton artist Daddy Yankee feat. Snoop Dogg – Gangsta Zone

The term 'gun culture' is a catchy but vague expression, often used to either cast a positive or negative light on gun ownership. For the sake of this paper, we define gun culture as a set of shared beliefs in which guns, their use, display and veneration play a central role in society. In a pro-gun culture, guns are seen as a way to gain and maintain respect, social status and economic benefits. Not only is there widespread proliferation of guns, but they also figure prominently in various manifestations of culture, be it in songs, movies or imagery. In these media outlets, guns are largely depicted as enabling and supporting glamorous and successful characters whose stories bear little resemblance to the lives of the impoverished and desperate youth in degraded neighbourhoods who constitute their primary audience. The discrepancy between the imagery presented by the media and popular culture reinforce the connection between the use of gun power and manhood on the one hand and reality on the other may cause frustration, which can feed into a vicious cycle of violence.

Guns are relatively easy to come by in many countries in the Caribbean region, especially in the illegal markets. Many of the weapons find their way into the region from the United States of America (USA) where gun ownership laws are lenient. The USA is a particularly important cultural reference point, with high rates of gun violence and a popular media saturated with small arms imagery. In addition to exporting the products and values of its massive popular culture industry (often via the Caribbean Diaspora working and living in the USA and Canada), the USA is also a major importer of the narcotics originating in or passing through the Caribbean countries. This has contributed to the appearance of both international drug cartels and their local affiliates in the region and simultaneously to a militarisation of the police forces in their attempts to counter the rise of the drug cartels.

According to Rachel Stohl from the Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C., at least 45 to 80 million small arms and light weapons are circulating throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region.⁶ SALW are brought into the region in different ways. This includes either the legal or illegal purchase from overseas or smuggling into countries in the region or through diversions from legal owners in a particular country. Another way is through smuggling from South America, where different countries are licensed to manufacture certain firearms. Former members of guerrilla troops in post-conflict areas may be suppliers of arms as well. Additionally, as the world's leading manufacturer and largest exporter of arms, the USA is a major source of SALW in the Caribbean.⁷ In 2006, the USA legally exported almost \$50 million worth of these weapons to the Latin American and Caribbean regions.⁸ However, many arms of USA origin illegally enter the Caribbean region.

⁶ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle, "The Small Arms Trade in Central America", in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, (Washington, DC, North American Congress on Latin America, 2008). Available from http://www.cdi.org/pdfs/Small_Arms_Latin_America.pdf

⁷ UNODC and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, "Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean".

⁸ Rachel Stohl and Doug Tuttle, "The Small Arms Trade in Central America".



For instance, in the case of Jamaica, 85 per cent of the imported illegal arms that have been seized between 1995 and 2002 were brought into the country from the USA.⁹

There seems to be an interdependence and exchange between drug cartels in Central America and the Caribbean and the global North. This means that there exists a relationship between the flow of drugs from Latin America to the North in exchange for fire arms from the global North being sent to the global South.¹⁰ A major factor contributing to the surge of gun-related crime in the region is the trafficking of narcotics, which has facilitated the availability of firearms. The firearms required for protection of the contraband during transportation are smuggled in along with the drugs. Within these environments, which promote the demand for weapons, reducing gun ownership is a difficult undertaking. In order to achieve long term changes, it is essential to change not only the patterns of the drug trade but also the deeply rooted gun culture, which is linked to cultural associations of guns and violence with masculinity.

Another way in which its northern neighbours have influenced Caribbean societies in the last decade or so has been through the deportation of convicted criminals from Canada and the USA 'back' to the Caribbean even if they were born in North America.¹¹ Though the actual impact of these deportees on crime rates is disputed, the popular perception in Caribbean societies tends to be that they are at least partially responsible for increasing violent crime rates in Caribbean countries. Maras and youth gangs have been identified as groups that may act locally and transnationally and that use illegal activity such as violence and drug use as an alternate economic occupation. The maras of Central America and the south western USA are one of the most vivid and violent examples of the transnational nature of gangs, of the feedback loops and cross-border ties created by migration, the link between the international drug trade and the flow of weapons as well as deportations.

In this sense, there is a strong transnational component to gun cultures in the Caribbean that is inter-related to a variety of social processes. Many of the societies in the Caribbean region can be regarded as having developed a gun culture that is not only reflected in the presence of guns in the public and private spheres but also in the media and popular culture. Security forces, the private sector and individuals carry guns not only as mechanisms of defence from others, but also as a symbol of status and masculinity. "It has been suggested that one quality of an 'acceptable' man may be the ability to instil fear in others. For this purpose gun possession can be particularly attractive."¹²

Authoritativeness, defensiveness, aggressiveness, physical strength, self-assurance, or self-reliance [are viewed] as heroic or natural in nation formation, military achievement, sport, or business; yet we often deem the very same displays criminally transgressive and

⁹ United Nations Development Programme and Planning Institute of Jamaica.2005. *Globalisation and its impact on the Jamaican economy and society, with special reference to rural development - National Human Development Report*, (Kingston, Government of Jamaica and UNDP, 2005)

¹⁰ See IANSA website: <http://www.iansa.org/regions/camerica/camerica.htm>

¹¹ Gary Marx, "New life is no life for U.S. ex-cons in Haiti", 17 May 2007 Available from

<http://alternativechance.org/New-life-is-no-life-for-U-S-ex-cons-in-Haiti-?r=1227201572>

¹² Ella Page, "Men, Masculinity and Guns- Can we break the link?", (London: IANSA Women's Network, 2009) 3.

*unnatural if performed by men who are marginalised ethnically, politically, economically, or sexually.*¹³

Though men from the lower classes of society tend to often be over-represented in gun-related crime, it would be wrong to see the issue as merely a problem of socio-economically marginalised men. As will be outlined in the following sections, gun violence and gun cultures are far more complex phenomena, involving a high degree of 'buy-in' by other sectors of society in addition to the most visible actors, the armed men themselves.

Children and youth are also affected by and partake in gun violence. According to a report published by UNICEF in 2007 found that firearms are often readily available to children in the Caribbean region. In some instances, there can also be a social acceptance and justification of children's possession of arms, particularly among boys.¹⁴ This has a large direct effect in terms of numbers of death and injuries of children, with substantial differences between boys and girls. Even though there is a lack of comprehensive data available, the number of gun-related deaths and injuries is high. Also, indirect impacts, of which little data is available, on children's and youths' education and their socio-economic situation as well as resulting mental traumas have yet to be fully analysed. It is crucial to analyse the impact that gun possession and armed violence has on the local population in order to identify obstacles to development and human security in the countries of this region.

a. Gender and gun violence

A study conducted by Kenneth Epp on gun violence in the Caribbean concludes that there are different risk factors that promote the use of SALW and an increase of violence, which include "poverty, youth unemployment, large-scale migration to urban areas, drug trafficking, a weak education system, ineffective policing, the widespread availability of weapons, drug and alcohol use, and the presence of organized gangs."¹⁵ Due to these socio-economic as well as historical factors, a large part of the population is at risk of falling into a vicious cycle of a lack of integration and recognition in their societies on the one hand and criminal or violent activities on the other. Indeed, in popular discourse, gun violence is often linked with young, lower class males and often with those members of Caribbean societies whom are classified as being 'darker,' an indicator which is often linked with a perceived subaltern status in society.

Though the issue has long been under-researched, there is a growing body of literature on the gendered aspects of small arms misuse.¹⁶ In some countries, the 'gender gap' in terms

¹³ Rebecca E. Biron, *Murder and Masculinity: violent fictions of twentieth century Latin America* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2000) 11.

¹⁴ UNICEF, *The Impact of Small Arms on Children and Adolescents in Central America and Caribbean: A Case Study of El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago*.

¹⁵ Kenneth Epps, "Addressing small arms violence in the Caribbean", *The Ploughshares Monitor*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Summer 2008). Available from <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/monitor/monj08a.pdf>

¹⁶ Some notable examples are the *Small Arms Survey 2006 – Unfinished Business*, which includes a special section that examines gendered readings of small arms, available from <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/yearb2006.html>; Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrntinen and Albrecht Schnabel eds., *Sexed Pistols – Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons* (Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2009) which compiles a global range of case studies relating to the various gendered dynamics of SALW ownership, use, display and disarmament; and Bernhard Harcourt, *Language of the Gun –*



of small arms impacts is immense: in El Salvador, 94 per cent of firearm-related homicide victims were male. In a study of 234 random homicides in Honduras, 75 per cent of which were firearm-related, 98 per cent of the perpetrators and 92 per cent of the victims were male.¹⁷ By a substantial margin, men are also more likely to use a weapon to commit suicide than females.¹⁸ Because so much gun violence is male dominated, both from the side of the perpetrators and of the victims, there is a need to examine the connection between notions of masculinity and gun violence in more detail, though this does not mean that the role of women should be overlooked.¹⁹

Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between and among them.

Performances of gender are always linked to particular socio-cultural environments. In the Caribbean, as in other parts of the world, these gender dimensions cannot be separated from additional discriminatory dynamics, such as those due to race and social status. In our analysis of how guns and gender intersect, we rely on the concept of performativity as discussed by Judith Butler.²⁰ Butler stresses several aspects of performativity, that of “an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon it anticipates” and that of “repetition and ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.” In other words, internalised socio-cultural norms of what is appropriate masculine behaviour in a given situation become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy and reaffirmation through the appropriate response that this is indeed the way in which men or women are supposed to act and react.

Using the term ‘performance’ does not mean that the behaviour is in some way inauthentic; rather, the ways in which ‘women behave as women’ and ‘men behave as men’ are based on social expectations which have been internalised by the person and the collective. It is important to note that while the concepts of performativity and ‘doing gender’ open up a variety of enactments in theory, gender roles tend to be strictly regulated in practice by society and by individuals themselves. Individuals tend to remain within and fulfil idealised gender roles because approval of these roles is also reproduced within different social groups.

Youth, Crime, and Public Policy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), a nuanced study of the meanings given to guns by juvenile delinquents in the south-western United States of America.

¹⁷ William Godnick, Robert Muggah and Camilla Waszink, “Stray Bullets: The Impact of Small Arms Misuse in Central America”, Occasional Paper No. 5, (Geneva, Small Arms Survey, 2002).

¹⁸ See for example Sharon Moyer and Peter J. Carrington, “Gun Availability And Firearms Suicide”, Working Document WD1993-3e (Ottawa, Department of Justice of Canada, 1992).

¹⁹ As Wendy Cukier and James Cairns point out, though men are disproportionately victims of armed violence, they are also disproportionately likely to have been ‘packing heat’ at the time. Women, therefore, are disproportionately represented amongst the unarmed victims of gun violence. Wendy Cukier and James Cairns, “Gender, attitudes and the regulation of small arms: Implications for action” in *Sexed Pistols – Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons*, Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrtilinen, and Albrecht Schnabel, eds. (Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, Routledge, 1990) xv-xvi.

As R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt note, "one is not free to adopt any gender position in interaction simply as a discursive or reflexive move. The possibilities are constrained massively by embodiment, by institutional histories, by economic forces and by personal and familial relationships."²¹ Men and women are therefore constrained by their social, cultural, economic, political and religious environments, which lay out the limits of acceptable gender behaviour, which are in turn internalised and reproduced by the individual.

This means that social roles are reproduced in accordance with the expectations that accompany them. Gender roles are reproduced in what is considered an appropriate male or female role in different social constructs such as families, groups, barrios,²² or countries. This can mean that a man takes on the role of the bread winner of the family along with the task of protecting his woman and children, while the woman stays at home and fulfils reproductive and housekeeping tasks. Indeed, this 'ideal' is so strong that despite its stark impossibility in most of contemporary Caribbean societies, it remains difficult to change especially as it is consistently reinforced through popular culture.

Hyper-masculine male behaviour has become an integral part of many depictions of masculinity in Latin American and Caribbean popular culture. Movies, television series, songs and music videos tend to celebrate the economically and sexually successful, respected heterosexual male, for whom women are sex objects. Often, the only way for young men to get close to emulating these ideals is through violent, criminal behaviour. One of the most popular masculine role models of the popular culture industry is that of the homophobic and misogynist, hyper-masculine 'gangsta,' who is projected both as a successful role model to be emulated while simultaneously signifying 'outlaw' and rebellion against 'the system.'

Hyper-masculinity, which is often used interchangeably with the concept of machismo, indicates a type of masculinity that is based on an overt display of physical strength and the readiness to use violence and of heterosexual prowess, or as Donald Mosher defines it, "a personality construct reflecting extreme involvement in and acceptance of the traditional male gender role."²³ In other words, a system of ideas, forming a worldview that chauvinistically exalts male dominance by assuming masculinity, virility, and physicality to be the ideal essence of real men, who are adversarial warriors competing for scarce resources (including women as chattel) in a dangerous world."²⁴

Hyper-masculinity has been and still is often used to label ethnic minority or otherwise marginalised (e.g. colonialised) men. In this regard, R.W. Connell points out how colonial powers favoured 'hyper-masculine warrior races' when recruiting for their colonial armies.²⁵ According to Stuart Hall, the myth of 'hyper-masculine' black maleness colours western views on everything from crime statistics to sports commentaries.²⁶ Accordingly, Joan

²¹ R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", *Gender and Society*, vol. 19, No. 6, (2005) 842-843.

²² *Barrio* is the Spanish word for quarter or block; often used to refer to an urban and socio-economically marginalised neighbourhood.

²³ Donald Mosher, "Macho Men, Machismo, and Sexuality", in *Annual Review of Sex Research*, vol. 2 (Allentown: The Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, 1991) 199-247.

²⁴ Donald Mosher and Silvan Tomkins, "Scripting the Macho Man: Hypermasculine Socialization and Enculturation", *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 25 (1988) 60-84.

²⁵ R.W. Connell, *The Men and The Boys*. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001) 61.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, *Identiteetti*, (Tampere, Vastapaino, 2008) 139-152.



Phillips has examined how North American and European women come to Barbados looking specifically for black 'masculine' men as sexual partners.²⁷

Thus, the label of hyper-masculinity or of machismo is also used as a tool for 'othering' certain ethnic groups or social classes, 'celebrating their maleness' but also labelling them as potentially dangerous. In the Caribbean context, violent masculinity is often equated with lower-class, urban, often darker skinned young men living in low-income neighbourhoods. Common to nearly all analyses of male identities or masculinities is the public nature of having to prove one's manhood. In the socio-economic context of the barrios, displays of extreme masculinity, most often manifested through violent and brutal acts, allow young men to assert their role as dominant males within their community thereby legitimising their power through the manifestation of aggressive masculinity.²⁸ Many disadvantaged youth are invisible within the greater social body and assume that such a position can only be challenged through the manifestation of violence. In this sense, violence becomes "a claim to visibility."²⁹

Especially in the Caribbean and Latin American context, enactments of hyper-masculinity are often equated with the popular, yet often ill-defined and even pejorative term of machismo.³⁰ However, as Matthew Gutmann points out in a study of working-class masculinities in Mexico City, machismo as a social construct needs to be seen in its particular temporal, social and cultural setting and not as a monolithic, unchanging and rigid set of rules by which Latino or Caribbean males always live. He notes that machismo instead is a flowing, contested, and often vague set of values of what it means to be "a masculine male."³¹ While the ideal of the hyper-masculine, womanising, hard-drinking, gun-wielding macho lives on in the public imagination, for the individual man, his personal emotional needs, preferences, economic and social circumstances and so on, mean that this ideal does not completely define all aspects of his life.

Even though the hyper-masculine ideals cannot be lived up to constantly, violent male role models, real or imaginary, whom obtain power and respect in their immediate environment exert a powerful pull over men and boys and stimulate the reproduction of a gun culture in the younger generation. The following quote from Colombia is a vivid illustration of this process:

In a public elementary school in Medellín, a teacher asked her fourth grade students:

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

²⁷ Joan Phillips, "The Beach Boys of Barbados: Post-Colonial Entrepreneurs", in *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*, Bandana Pattanaik and Susanne Thorbek eds. (London, Zed Books, 2001) 45.

²⁸ Sarah Mc Donald, "Performing Masculinity from City of God to City of Men", *Journal of Latin American and Iberian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (December 2006). Available from <http://www.aialasa.org/jilas/articles/12-2McDonald.pdf>

²⁹ Sarah Mc Donald, "Performing Masculinity from City of God to City of Men".

³⁰ Matthew Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City, Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

³¹ Gutmann's male respondents would for example define some of their behaviour as being 'typically macho' (at times jokingly) while at other times define themselves in opposition to the Mexican macho-stereotype.

One of the children, nine years old, stood up and said: "When I'm big, I would like to be like Toño, one of the guys from my barrio who has a pistol and likes to kill anyone who disrespects him. I want to be a good killer so that everyone respects me and my family. I want to have a lot of money, walk around with a 9 mm and say to anyone who looks at me 'what are you looking at?' And if they give me shit, I kill them. That's what I want to be like' (Osorno, 1991).³²

As Bernard Harcourt showed through his study on the attitudes of juvenile delinquents towards guns in the Southwestern USA, it cannot be taken for granted that even within a social group accustomed to using guns on a daily basis, all of the men have a homogenous way of viewing guns.³³ While the majority of the young men exhibited a fascination with guns and saw them both as fetishised objects of desire and as tools for gaining power, respect and wealth, other respondents had far more ambivalent views on guns and some even showed disdain for them. Therefore, more research is needed into what the actual attitudes towards guns are amongst men, boys, women and girls in Caribbean society rather than relying on projections of what one might imagine these attitudes to be.

b. Resistance and hegemony: the socio-economic environment

*Las leyes de la calle no son las del tribunal... aquí los jueces dictan las sentencias con fuego
[...] siente el fuego, ilas reglas del juego las pongo yo!*³⁴

- Puerto Rican reggaeton artist Daddy Yankee

Since Latin America and the Caribbean are some of the most violent regions in the world, the fear of crime and anxiety about personal security in the Caribbean crosses boundaries of class, gender, political preference and ideology. Although several agreements between, for example, members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) exist with respect to arms trade and illicit weapon possession and trading, the effective failure of the Caribbean and Latin American states and public order systems to respond adequately and provide protection for basic security needs is, on one hand, creating a booming private security business for those that can afford to purchase security; on the other, those in poverty stricken areas are fearful, frustrated and resentful, and many have decided to take justice into their own hands through extra-legal means, including through gun violence. In this context, compromised human security in the Caribbean further serves to promote a gun culture. In addition to residents of the *barrios*, the dominating economic elite are increasingly opting to protect themselves through gun ownership.

The ways in which young Caribbean males seek to portray themselves as men is shaped by expectations placed upon them by society and by themselves. Given the high degree of hierarchical stratification in these societies, often economically and racially-based, as well as

³² Authors' own informal translation.

³³ Bernhard Harcourt, *Language of the Gun – Youth, Crime, and Public Policy*.

³⁴ Authors' own informal translation: "The laws of the street are not those of the courthouse, here the judges pass their sentences with fire... feel the fire, I set the rules of the game!"



being highly gendered, masculinities need to be seen within a context of a struggle for power, status and respect. For marginalised males, the gun can become 'the great equaliser' in obtaining what they feel has been denied them in a postcolonial, and continually exclusionary, society. This image of guns is reinforced by the reification and celebration of guns in popular culture, where gun-ownership is often also linked with hyper-masculine imagery.

Gun ownership and use also needs to be seen in the context of the socio-economic environment of these societies. While in some countries of the region, such as in Colombia and Haiti, armed violence has often had political motives. In others, such as in Brazil or Mexico, it has had economic roots. Armed violence in the countries analysed here is highly influenced by social inequalities and discrimination which results in the formation of gangs or other random forms of violence.³⁵

In all of these contexts, the interdependence of various factors that influence violent behaviour needs to be taken into account. The absence of reliable and impartial public security service providers, the large economic disparities, the increasing influence of the international narcotics trade in the region, and widespread legal and illegal gun ownership have led to veritable arms races. Lower class members of society arm themselves in response to police brutality and repression but also against the threats posed by armed gangs, while the upper classes arm themselves against the perceived threat of the now armed lower classes. This development, apart from continuing to marginalise potential perpetrators, increases the numbers of victims of armed violence, including through secondary victimisation as entire families and women in particular assume the role of caretaker when a member of the family is disabled or killed by gun violence.³⁶

The absence of a reliable police force has led to a tremendous increase in private security providers who are often at least as unreliable as the police, but are nevertheless highly visible, standing with pump-guns or AK-47s in front of ATMs or soft drink machines. In Jamaica, for example, 231 private security companies with some 15,000 guards were registered in 1994 under the Private Security Regulation Act adopted in 1992 to regulate the growing private security business. By mid-1996, the number of guards had exceeded 20,000.³⁷ This growth of private security companies may provide an additional security threat as it often lacks accompanying monitoring, evaluation and regulation mechanisms that control the use and appropriate carriage of firearms.

Armed groups such as gangs or paramilitary groups also do not act in a social and economic vacuum. The services they provide, be it trafficking of illicit goods, providing security, acting as 'muscle' to discourage investigative journalists, trade union activists or as electoral muscle, require a client, many of whom are found amongst the social and economic elites.³⁸

³⁵ See also Robert Muggah and Keith Krause, "La violencia armada en América Latina y el Caribe". Available from http://www.genevadeclaration.org/pdfs/Hechos_del_callejon_violencia_armada.pdf; and Small Arms Survey, 2000.

³⁶ Koo Hui-Wen and I.P.L. Png, "Private Security: Deterrent or Diversion?" *International Review of Law and Economics*, Vol. 14 (1994) 87-101.

³⁷ Ivelaw L. Griffith, "Security in the Caribbean: State Sovereignty or Public Order", Georgetown University. Available from <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Pubsecurity/ch3.pdf>

³⁸ As a deportee from the United States in Haiti interviewed by one of the authors in Port-au-Prince in March 2008 put in no uncertain language, "Shit man, those kidnaps here are done with Galils and AKs and shit, you know how



Successful provision of services to a client can open up new avenues for gang leaders to enter into the higher spheres of society and respectability, thus reinforcing the cultural association between gun cultures and successful lifestyles.

In the regional context, there have been different attempts to reform the security sector with different results. Various Caribbean societies, such as the Dominican Republic or Haiti, are emerging from long-lasting dictatorships and a high level of militarisation of the armed forces, including the police. Currently, the Dominican Republic security sector, as well as other Caribbean security sector actors, is a complicated web of state institutions and privately owned security companies, where responsibilities and obligations frequently overlap. As outlined by Jasmin Blessing, Louise Bjurström and Nicola Popovic (2009) in their case study of the Dominican Republic, while attempts have been undertaken by various security sector institutions to increase gender equity and sensitivity, much work remains to be done.³⁹

much that shit costs here? You think us or some poor kid from Cité Soleil's got that kinda money? No way, man! It's them people on the hill (pointing towards the villas on the slopes of the affluent suburb of Petionville) that's supplying those guns!"

³⁹ Jasmin Blessing, Louise Bjurström, and Nicola Popovic, "Engaging in Security: The Need for Women's Empowerment in the Dominican Security Sector", UN-INSTRAW Working Paper Series (Santo Domingo, UN-INSTRAW, 2009). Available from <http://www.un-instraw.org/en/instraw-publications/working-papers/engaging-in-security-the-need-for-women-s-empowerment-in-the-dominican-security-sector-in-the-dr/download.html>



3. Gun violence in the Caribbean

*'Gun is nice, gun is protection.
When you have it no guy can disrespect you.'*

*- Young male former gang member,
August Town, Jamaica⁴⁰*

There is a prevailing notion in the Caribbean that private gun ownership is both a right and a privilege. It is widely believed that guns are an effective and necessary component of protection, thereby portraying two contradictory images: order and violence. Paradoxically, it is assumed that guns provide protection from violence through the potential threat of violence. This perception of psychodynamic power of the gun is delusory since legally owned weapons are likely to increase the probability of violent crime.⁴¹

The deadly problem of gun violence is fundamentally gendered. The demand for small arms is directly linked to cultural associations of guns and violence with manhood, i.e. owning a gun makes you a 'real man' as male gun ownership is accepted and encouraged as a sign of maturity, status and unquestionable masculinity. The impact of gun violence is also gendered as women, men, girls and boys are faced with different threats and consequences. Young, poor, socially marginalized men with a low level of education and poor prospects for income generation are the primary group of people that are killed and injured in instances of gun-related violence.

Guns are often seen as a tool for gaining economic and social benefits in a life which is often cut short by a violent death. Laura Restrepo describes this sub-culture in Medellín in her essay on 'the cult of death,' in which she looks into the cultural environment of the *sicarios*, the juvenile killers who formed the initial pool of recruits for the cartels and later the paramilitaries. In a dynamic which is not dissimilar to the recruitment of youth in Naples described by Roberto Saviano (2007), the young men of the Medellín barrios join 'the cult of death' at an early age, often ending their brief career a few years later in a hail of bullets.⁴² Restrepo describes the young killers as being

purely urban creatures, born amongst the howl of powerful motorbike engines and the crackle of machine guns and grown up in the shadow of fast money and feverish consumption. [...] the lives of others are a commodity for them which can be exchanged for sought-after objects such as designer clothes, Nike-sneakers, gold chains, stereo sound systems, CDs of 'non-commercial rock,' cocaine to share with friends,

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Small Arms Survey*, 2006, 302.

⁴¹ Peter Batchelor and Kees Kingma, eds., *Demilitarisation and Peace-building in Southern Africa: Concepts and Processes* (Burlington, Vermont, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004).

⁴² Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra: A personal journey into the violent international empire of Naples organized crime system* (New York: Picador, 2008).

household appliances for mother's kitchen, hotel rooms to spend the night with girlfriends, Honda 1000 and Mazda 626 GLX motorcycles.⁴³

The spreading of wealth gained through contract killings plays an important part both in terms of gaining social acceptance (necessary both for the self-esteem of the killers as well as securing protected areas in which to retreat to) as well as in the construction of the self-image of the juvenile killers. Members of the community are treated to free alcoholic drinks and roast pork in spontaneously-organised parties in order to celebrate successful deals and local minor league football teams are sponsored by the *sicarios*, in an emulation of the larger bosses who own national football or baseball teams. Direct, monetary gains do not however always appear to be the main reason for participating in firearm-related activities. Social status, attention seeking, respect and protection are amongst the other motivating factors in gun ownership and use.⁴⁴

In addition to being the main perpetrators of gun violence, young men are also by far the group most likely to be direct victims of gun violence. Young, poor, socially marginalized men with a low level of education and poor prospects for income generation are the primary group of people that are killed and injured from gun violence. Youth homicide rates are highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example 41.8 per 100,000 in Puerto Rico and 50.2 per 100,000 in El Salvador.⁴⁵

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 90 per cent of gun-related homicides occur among men because males are often seen as a strong demographic risk factor. However, the presence of a gun also escalates violence against women and is often used both to threaten and to kill. Young women who are working as domestic labourers or whom have recently ended an intimate relationship seem to be at an especially high risk. In 63 per cent of cases, the perpetrator is the victim's husband / boyfriend or ex-husband / ex-boyfriend.⁴⁶ Research by the Centro de Investigacion para la Accion Femenina (CIPAF) showed that firearms are used in 49 per cent of the murders of women in the Dominican Republic.⁴⁷ This is directly linked to the problem of unregistered guns in the country as it is impossible for the police to ensure that men convicted or accused of violence against women, especially domestic violence, are not allowed to possess weapons. The absence of links between national laws on arms control and domestic violence poses a serious problem. Guns are deadly in domestic assaults because of the severity of the wounds caused by gunshot. Another reason is that the presence of a firearm, as a threat to life, reduces a woman's capacity for resistance.

⁴³ Laura Restrepo, *En qué momento se jodió Medellín*, (Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia, La oveja negra, 1991).

⁴⁴ Luke Dowdney, *Neither War nor Peace: International comparisons of children and youth in armed violence*. (IANSA, ISER, Viva Rio, 2005). Available from

<http://www.coav.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?sid=104&UserActiveTemplate=en> See also Bernhard Harcourt, *Language of the Gun – Youth, Crime, and Public Policy*, pp. 31-56 for similar motivations for gun ownership amongst juvenile delinquents in the USA.

⁴⁵ World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002). Available from <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/9241545615.pdf>

⁴⁶ UNODC and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank. *Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean*. Available from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf

⁴⁷ See http://www.cipaf.org.do/index_cipaf.html



Inevitably, these levels of armed violence affect women, men, boys and girls either directly or indirectly. The effects are not only manifested in homicide and injury; there is also a long list of negative outcomes such as psychological trauma, poorer quality of life, reduced productivity and the disruption of formal and informal institutions. On a broader level, armed violence represents both a threat to sustainable development, to citizen's economic, social and cultural rights and to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁴⁸ The insecurity created by gun violence in turn has a deeply negative impact upon the economy and the entire development process. Businesses, tourism and investments experience a down-turn with a rise in gun violence. Human development depends on the fundamental assurance of personal security. In addition, this security vacuum creates perceptions of insecurity and people may feel the need to arm themselves. Especially in patriarchal societies in which the man assumes the role of the protector the increase of small arms possession by private untrained people raises and feeds into a cycle of insecurities

In the following section, we will highlight a number of these issues by looking at three national case studies: the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. As is visible from these three case studies, much of the research data on issues of gender and small arms violence remains rather general and anecdotal. There is relatively little in the way of concrete, long-term field studies nor is country-specific, gender-disaggregated data readily available. In order to have a fuller understanding of the issues, much more in-depth research is necessary, as is the statistical collection of data which reflects gender concerns. The three cases will look each at three different aspects of the nexus of gender, gun violence and security. First, taking the case of Trinidad and Tobago, some of the socio-economic factors affecting gun violence will be examined. This is followed by the case study of Jamaica, where the inter-linkages between gun violence and gender-based violence will be in the foreground. The third section will look at the mainstreaming of gender into the SSR process in the Dominican Republic.

3.a. Case study: Trinidad and Tobago – Escalating Gun Violence and Socio-Economically Marginalised Males

In opening the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in September 2005, President George Maxwell Richards said that the country was in crisis due to the escalating crime rate. In Trinidad and Tobago, as with the rest of the Caribbean, the upsurge of gun violence is threatening the personal sense of security and order in society. In Trinidad and Tobago, police statistics reveal that guns are being increasingly used to commit murders, robberies and to inflict injury.⁴⁹ Between 1999 and 2003, 80,180 serious crimes were recorded in Trinidad and Tobago. The misuse of guns and drugs is creating such insecurity in some communities that residents have become virtual prisoners in their own homes. Throughout the region, the reality is the same and communities are under siege.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For an outline of and monitoring of the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals, see <http://www.undp.org/mdg/>

⁴⁹ Information taken from the crime reports from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service which was available online at <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.tt/DivisionsAgencies/TrinidadandTobagoPoliceService/tabid/78/Default.aspx>

⁵⁰ For more information see IANSA, http://www.iansa.org/women/bulletin2/ngo_profile.htm

Trinidad and Tobago has seen a particularly sharp rise in firearm-related violence over the last few years. As violence has increased in the country, so too has the use of firearms. Increasingly, more powerful weapons are being used, resulting in higher mortality levels. According to CARICOM, the murder rate in the country has doubled since 2002. Before 2000, firearms were responsible for less than one third of all homicides. By May 2006, this percentage had risen to 74 per cent.⁵¹ In 2004, Trinidad and Tobago experienced 160 firearm murders, 450 injuries due to firearms and 1,500 firearm incidents that did not result in injuries.⁵²

Young males, especially those with few job prospects, are most at risk of being solicited to join armed gangs. Young men, especially those recently released from prison and those with little prospect of employment, are targeted by drug suppliers whom control the communities, empowered by the illegal guns that they possess and the profits of their illicit trade.⁵³ These recruits are approached with a quota of cocaine and the necessary weapons to protect their turf. Refusing the offer will mean continued hardship and deprivation or even death. The situation is further exacerbated by political patronage, whereby these communities are the beneficiaries of poverty alleviation projects by local governments and the international community which are often controlled by the community drug supplier.⁵⁴

A key finding of a UNICEF report on the "Impact of Small Arms on Children and Adolescents in Central America and Caribbean: A Case Study of El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago" is that young boys are far more frequently the victims than the aggressors of armed violence considering the high gun possession rate of young males. The proportion of children participating in acts of armed violence is small in comparison to figures for child victims of armed violence. In this context, monetary gains do not appear to be the main reason for children's participation in firearm-related activities. Social status, attention seeking, respect and protection are among the primary motivations for child involvement in armed activities such as gangs. In the case in which previous family members have been gang members, the access, integration and likelihood to choose this social construct for protection seems more probable.

Interviews with gang members in Trinidad and Tobago found that other sociological and anthropological factors play a major role in the fascination of male youth with guns. Disadvantaged, disenfranchised and influenced by a constructed stereotype of masculinity, which embraces violence and is threatened by surrounding social and economic forces, young males feel empowered by the possession of a gun.⁵⁵

Trinidad and Tobago's National Security Minister, Senator Martin Joseph pointed out that the last quarter of 2006 was the bloodiest and most violent historical period experienced in the

⁵¹ The World Bank. *Guns and Crime, a case study of Trinidad and Tobago*. Washington, DC, World Bank, 2007. Available from

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHAITI/Resources/CaribbeanC&VChapter9.pdf>

⁵² World Bank, "Guns and Crime, a case study of Trinidad and Tobago", 2007. Available from

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHAITI/Resources/CaribbeanC&VChapter9.pdf>

⁵³ WINAD, "A Human Security Concern: The Traffick, Use and Misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Caribbean," Women's Institute for alternative Development, 2006

⁵⁴ Yvette Holder, "Guns and Crimes: A Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago", (Washington, DC, World Bank).

Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTHAITI/Resources/CaribbeanC&VChapter9.pdf>

⁵⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, *The Impact of Small Arms on Children and Adolescents in Central America and Caribbean: A Case Study of El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago*, 2007. Available from http://www.unicef.org/lac/Fact_Sheet_Small_Arms_report.pdf.



country, especially regarding domestic violence which has figured prominently in murder rates: "As it stands now there are levels of homicides for which we cannot take control over (at this time) and those are the domestic-related ones."⁵⁶ Furthermore, according to IANSA, 75 per cent of small arms are in civilian hands and, where women are concerned, violence in the home is as big a problem as street crime.⁵⁷ The home is traditionally considered to be a safe haven; yet, this space where women in many societies spend a great deal of their time exposes them to a particularly high risk of death when a gun is present.

Some progress has been made in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, where domestic violence and firearm laws have been harmonised by provisions to not grant gun ownership to perpetrators of domestic violence. The 2004 Firearms (Amendment) Act places restrictions on domestic violence offenders holding a Firearm User's Licence or a Firearm User's (Employee's) Certificate. Any person convicted of an offence under the Domestic Violence Act (1999) is disqualified from holding a licence for a period of five years from the date of conviction. If a licence holder is convicted of an offence, the licence will be suspended for a period of five years from the conviction date.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there have also been positive initiatives involving women organising for disarmament. The Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD), founded in Trinidad in 1999, has been active in addressing the issue of gun violence in the Caribbean. WINAD is a women's organisation with a focus on building women's leadership. WINAD has been involved in research projects on small arms in the Caribbean in partnership with the Small Arms Survey. They also frequently contribute to discussions on gender dimensions of the small arms problem. WINAD's small arms control work began in 2001 with an internal attempt to analyze the increasing gun violence in Trinidad and Tobago. The work continued in 2002 when the organization hosted a national meeting for state and non-state actors in an attempt to further explore and analyze the impact that gun violence was having on the society. This meeting was followed by a regional meeting of ten countries from the Caribbean and Latin America region. One of the key recommendations that evolved from the conference was the call for more regional research to be conducted, especially with regards to specific initiatives focusing on a gendered approach to reduce gun violence in the Caribbean.

3.b. Case study: Jamaica – Guns and Gender-Based Violence

In his 2006 New Year's speech, then Prime Minister of Jamaica, P.J. Patterson, said: "Without a doubt, the high level of violent crime remains our most troubling and pressing problem."⁵⁸ The high rates of violence and crime including the rise of armed criminal gangs that plague Jamaican society have had a devastating impact on the Jamaican population. In

⁵⁶ Stephen Cummings, "Domestic violence-related homicides remain major challenge for Trinidad and Tobago says minister", Caribbean Net News. Available from <http://www.caribbeanetnews.com/cgi-script/csArticles/articles/000011/001161.htm>

⁵⁷ IANSA, "Preventing gun violence against women in the home". Available from <http://www.iansa.org/un/documents/PreventingarmedDV.pdf>

⁵⁸ UNODC and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank. *Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean*. Available from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf

2005, 1,674 individuals were murdered of which 91 were children. According to data collected via the Jamaican Injury Surveillance System, males below the age of 18 accounted for 60 per cent of the victims of violence related injuries in 2005.⁵⁹ The report also showed a clear increase in the use of weapons against (mostly male) children and young adults resulting in an increasing number of children murdered by firearms. In Jamaica, the growth of the drug and gun culture is most evident in statistical data. In 1986, 46 per cent of all murders were committed with guns. In 1993, this figure had risen to 56 per cent, and in 1996, to 68 per cent. In addition, in 1993, 53 per cent of all robberies and 24 per cent of all reported rape cases were committed with illegal guns. Due to the high levels of violence in parts of urban Jamaica, residents are often afraid to leave their homes and therefore interact less often with friends and family whom live elsewhere. Similarly, survey data shows that people avoid activities and locations that are perceived to expose them to a high risk of violence.

In many low-income urban areas, gangs compete for the territory, energies, loyalties and identities of young men. In the garrison communities of Kingston, Jamaica for example, gang leaders are seen by many young men as home-grown heroes.⁶⁰ These urban gangs attract mostly young men to versions of manhood that use violence as a way to deal with their social exclusion. Research among armed men involved in organised armed violence in ten countries found that carrying guns – which is mostly, but not exclusively a male domain – is seen as an effective means of gaining status and respect among both male and female peers.⁶¹ One respondent to a survey in August Town, Jamaica, described how he had used a variety of weapons for reasons of status and, in particular, to attract women.⁶² In this context gun users are often glorified in the popular media shown as armed role models in music, television and film.

According to testimony from an ex-gang member in Jamaica, a gun is often the most valued and appreciated possession for a young, poor man. Possessing a gun provides him with social status and enhances his self esteem within his peer group. A gun enables him to instil fear, settle disputes to their satisfaction, command respect and demand sexual favours. Indeed, for the first ten months of 2005 in Jamaica, 16 per cent of rapes were at gunpoint.⁶³ Forces such as these drive the demand for firearms. The relationship between guns, violence and masculinity fuels the demand for small arms and has to be addressed in any anti-violence initiative. Furthermore, the high rate of gun ownership in the Caribbean critically exacerbates the situation of domestic abuse against women by aggravating and escalating the consequences of threats and violence.

As outlined in detail in a 2006 Amnesty International report, gang-related gun violence has a number of highly gendered impacts on communities, especially in terms of increased use of guns in cases of gender-based violence.⁶⁴ Male gang members, especially gang leaders, are reported to use the power of the gun to force young women into having sex in order to increase their reputation for 'badness' in the street. As a lawyer interviewed by Amnesty International in the report puts it,

⁵⁹ Jamaica, Ministry of Health, *Jamaica Injury Surveillance System: Report for Period January – December 2005* (Kingston, 2005). Available from http://www.vpajamaica.com/statistics/JISS%20Annual%20Report_2005.pdf

⁶⁰ Gary T. Barker, *Dying to be men: youth, masculinity and social exclusion*, (New York, Routledge, 2005).

⁶¹ Luke Dowdney, *Neither war nor peace: International comparisons of children and youth in armed violence*.

⁶² *Ibid*, 117.

⁶³ Amnesty International, "Jamaica: Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: "just a little sex", " Amnesty International, 2006 Available from

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGAMR380022006&lang=e>

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.



*On the one hand he doesn't really need [a gun], as most men are much stronger than women. But with a gun you don't even have to be physically strong. You don't even have to say anything, they don't need to ask whether or not It's loaded they don't need to ask themselves whether or not you can hit them, because I've just seen the gun that's enough excuse to be scared. And there is a wealth of guns in Jamaica.*⁶⁵

The Jamaican case study, like the one from Trinidad and Tobago, underscores the interlinkages between widespread gun ownership, socio-economic marginalisation and masculine ideals stressing heterosexual prowess and violent displays of power – and the dire consequences this has for human security in society, especially for women and girls. However, as the cases also show, the linkages are not straight forward; the armed men are not only perceived as threats by other members of society, but also by some as role models to be emulated. As in Trinidad and Tobago, it has been local women's organisations which have played a key role in raising awareness of these issues and demanding action, such as through the 2002 Women's Manifesto.⁶⁶

3c. Case study: the Dominican Republic – Gender and Security Sector Reform

As in the previous cases of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, gun violence fatalities are increasingly making headlines in the local media in the Dominican Republic. On 29 July 2005, for example, the newspaper, *Diario Libre*, reported that twelve people had been shot dead in the last forty-eight hours. A recently published forensic report stated that homicide is the number one cause of death in the Dominican Republic, and police estimate that guns are used in 75 per cent of homicides.⁶⁷ As of 2005, there were 190,000 registered firearms in the country and hundreds of thousands of illegal guns.⁶⁸ Although recent programmes have been put into place to deal with the problem of contraband weapons and illegal guns, unregistered guns remain an urgent problem. Even registered weapons and guns have been used outside of a regulated legal framework, such as off-duty use of guns in the case of security personnel. Registering illegal guns is a relatively easy process; however, the cost of owning a legal gun is still far too high for the majority of the Dominican population (11,000 Dominican Pesos or 380 United States dollars). As a result, unregistered guns are still the most common form of gun ownership in Dominican Republic. Along with the rising rates of crime and insecurity, the effects of violence enabled by the increasing availability and misuse of small arms is being felt throughout the Dominican Republic.

Gun violence and the threat of violence negatively impact Dominican society at many different levels. The direct impact of death and injury are the most visible consequences of violence. It also affects public security, the economy and sustainable development. The easy availability of guns in the streets and at home threatens the security of everyone. According

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ *Diario Libre*, "1,023 muertes violentas en lo que va del año", 1 December 2005.

⁶⁸ Peter Prengaman, "Dominican Republic taking new look at culture of guns", *The San Diego Union Tribune*, 2 October 2005.

to one study on the USA, having a gun in the home increases the overall risk of someone in the household being murdered by 41 per cent; for women, the increase was 272 per cent.⁶⁹ The misuse of guns by law enforcement officers, gang members, criminals and gun owners in general turn public spaces into zones of insecurity with the ever present threat of violence.

Responding to this violence has been one of the challenges faced by the security sector institutions of the Dominican Republic. From a narrow perspective, the Dominican security forces include the National Police, the National Department of Investigations (DNI), the National Drug Control Directorate (DNCD), the Airport Security Authority (CESA), Port Security Authority (CESEP) and the armed forces (army, air force, and navy).⁷⁰ The Dominican security sector also includes government officials with a monitoring position, intelligence services, the judicial⁷¹ and penal systems, a large network of private security companies, and civil society. The responsibility of each institution in this network is not always well-defined and mapping out the activities and responsibilities of each security institution can therefore be a complicated task. An additional challenge for the provision of security by the state is the lack of comprehensive capacity building and adequate salaries of police and security services, for example. A security vacuum influences perceptions of insecurity and encourages alternative means for private actors to fill this gap.

As described in detail by the UN-INSTRAW report, *Engaging in Security: The need for Women's Empowerment in the Dominican Security Sector*, the security sector in the Dominican Republic has actively been seeking to redefine itself in a more democratic fashion.⁷² Based on the 2005 Plan for Democratic Security (*Plan de Seguridad Democrática*), the security sector institutions are actively attempting to improve their capacity in responding to the human security needs of Dominican society rather than focusing, as has been the case in the past, more on state security. As outlined in the UN-INSTRAW report, an integral – and very challenging – part of this process will be to mainstream gender not only into security sector policies but actually finding ways of implementing this gender-sensitive approach in practice. As in the case of its Caribbean neighbours described above, given the key role played by gun violence in creating insecurity in Dominican society, a deeper understanding of the interplay between gender, guns and violence is needed. However, much of this research and analysis still remains to be carried out.

3.d. Nine millimetres of fame – the role of guns in popular culture

⁶⁹ D.J. Wiebe. "Homicide and Suicide Risks Associated with Firearms in the Home: A National Case-Control Study", *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 41, (January-June 2003).

⁷⁰ The police force is located under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior and Police, the military under the Secretary of the Armed Forces, while the DNI and the DNCD, which have personnel from both, the police and the military, report directly to the President.

⁷¹ The judiciary includes a 16-member Supreme Court, appeals courts, courts of first instance, and justices of the peace. There are specialized courts that handle tax, labour, land, and juvenile matters. The Supreme Court is responsible for naming all lower court judges according to criteria defined by law. The 2003 Code for Minors outlines the judicial system for criminal cases involving juveniles and family disputes. Until recently, military and police tribunals enjoyed exclusive jurisdiction over cases involving members of the security forces, although some cases have lately been referred to civilian criminal courts.

⁷² Jasmin Blessing, Louise Bjurström, and Nicola Popovic, "Engaging in Security: The Need for Women's Empowerment in the Dominican Security Sector", UN-INSTRAW Working Paper Series (Santo Domingo, UN-INSTRAW, 2009)



*Walking down the road
With your pistol in your waist,
Johnny you're too bad.*

- Jamaican reggae band *The Slickers*, *Johnny Too Bad*

According to Scott and Steet, "popular culture is made to stand for a form of culture which is consumed by a large audience via a highly mediated process, legitimated by claims to populism and ease of access."⁷³ The major forms of popular culture in Caribbean and Latin American societies are movies, television, music and music videos. These are easily accessible by all levels of society and have become increasingly regionalised and globalised both in their own reach and in the influences that they incorporate. As mentioned above, the USA is a major source of cultural inputs for these local hybridisations.

Increasingly, the imagery used is suffused with hyper-masculine, potentially violent male role models along the lines of North American-style gangsta rappers. Ostentatious displays of wealth, fast cars, helicopters, 'bling' and fair-skinned (hence, in the racialised worldview of Caribbean society, upper-class) women, fill the videos, providing the cues for the aspirations of young men, aspirations which for most of them can only be fulfilled through criminal violence.⁷⁴

One of the most visible symbols of violent gangsta hyper-masculinity is the handgun. There is often an element of eroticization and fetishisation of guns in popular culture, imbuing them with an aura of mystique and power. While guns are ubiquitous in films, they are not often directly displayed in music videos. However, song lyrics often refer directly or indirectly to guns and gun violence and the 'click-clack' of a round being chambered is often used as an effect in songs.

As Italian journalist Roberto Saviano noted in his study on the Neapolitan Camorra, the displays of mafia masculinity both inform the way the mafia is displayed in the mass media and to an even greater degree, define how the members identify and display themselves: "It's not the movie world which scans the criminal world for the most interesting behaviour. The exact opposite is true."⁷⁵ In a kind of feedback loop, these male stereotypes are actively perpetuated by the entertainment industry itself. At first, the industry was copying "the bad boys" on the street, but increasingly the flow of influences goes the other way, with young men trying to emulate the male role models seen in the movies and videos. It is, however, also important to note that the violent, gun-toting, hyper-masculine stereotypes of popular culture are not only consumed by lower-class males, but also by the upper classes.

⁷³ Alan Scott and John Steet, "From Media Politics to e-protest?", in *Culture and Politics in the Information Age – A new Politics?*, Frank Webster, ed. (London, Routledge, 2001).

⁷⁴ A study of this is Philip Bourgois' *In Search of Respect* looking at the lives of Puerto Rican crack dealers in New York and their struggles to improve their socio-economic position only to find that most legitimate paths are closed to them by society

⁷⁵ Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra, A personal journey into the violent international empire of Naples' organized crime system*, 250.

The gangsta is not the only armed male trope which figures in popular media. Resistance to colonial or state oppression is a key theme in more political variants of reggae influenced by the Rastafari movement.⁷⁶ Even a mostly non-political, mainstream artist such as Daddy Yankee uses the imagery of resistance to state oppression in the opening sequence of the video clip to his global hit 'Gasolina'.

Men and women in Caribbean cultures are often socialised to regard violence as an integral element of masculinity. The perception of a certain romanticism surrounding narco-trafficking, a bad-boy mystique that may be analogous to seductive images of tough cowboys or strong silent mafiosos in other cultures, is common in the Caribbean. Sexy women, aggressive looks and the portrayal of men holding guns in Reggaeton videos ultimately shape young people's perception of guns, which in turn leads to a pistolisation of Caribbean culture.

3.e. The role of women and girls

In his report *Small Arms and Light Weapons* (July 2008), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, emphasised the urgent need for gender approaches for targeted prevention and policy intervention activities to address the needs of small arms victims, survivors and perpetrators:

Addressing the issue of small arms requires us to go beyond the efforts of arms control. We need to focus not only on the basis of reduction and control measures but equally on alternative, sustainable livelihoods, taking into account the crucial aspects of gender and age. All our peacebuilding efforts need to include ways to address small arms, as should broader national development plans in all countries affected by this scourge.⁷⁷

The report also acknowledges that women and girls are often gravely affected by small arms violence, through armed sexual violence, intimidation and coercion, as well as surviving partners and heads of households. Most importantly, it emphasises women's role as agents of change, for instance where disarmament processes are concerned or when women are engaged in community security initiatives.

While in the past much of the focus has been on women and girls as victims of gun violence, in reality they play a more complex range of roles in upholding but also in challenging gun cultures. They may participate as active perpetrators of gun violence, for example, through directly participating in gangs.⁷⁸ Women and girls also provide important logistical support, by supplying or transporting guns and ammunition, and also through more mundane domestic tasks for their armed husbands, fathers, brothers, sons and lovers, in addition to providing them with emotional support.

⁷⁶ Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton, NJ, African World Press, 1987).

⁷⁷ *Small Arms and Light Weapons* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.IX.7).

⁷⁸ See for example Marc Lacey, "Fleeing abuse at home, Central American girls find no haven in gangs", *International Herald Tribune*, 4 October 2008; Nadine Puechguirbal, Wiza Loutis and Natalie Man, "Haiti: The gendered pattern of small arms violence against women", in *Sexed Pistols – The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons*, Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrntinen and Albrecht Schnabel, eds. (Tokyo, United Nations University, 2009).



Moreover, the number of women engaging in armed violence has increased, for example through directly participating and becoming skilled members in gangs.⁷⁹ They can often kill with as much proficiency as men. Women with guns in their hands and the readiness to use them are non-traditional and may shock the enemy who does not expect an attack by someone who is “traditionally vulnerable” and who is thought of as hating guns. The assaulter can take advantage of that shock and be a serious threat.

Furthermore, women can even be seen as a kind of push factor for gun violence. When women live within their traditional gender roles, men often take on the provider roles. In order to fulfil their responsibilities as being providers of livelihoods, however, men often need to acquire guns since participating in illegal activities is a lucrative alternative in economies where employment opportunities are limited.

Women and girls can also become the ‘audience’ for the performances of violent masculinity. Many of the juvenile Colombian killers described by Laura Restrepo are raised by single mothers whom tend to play a central role in their lives. Quoting the sociologist Salazar, Restrepo says that Mother’s Day tends to be an especially bloody day, “as the young men start off into the day with a feeling of confused pride.” According to her, the paramilitary leader Manso Lucas sprayed a crowd with sub-machine gun fire, killing several bystanders when he heard the news of the death of his mother. Another leader, ‘Caravieja,’ is quoted as saying that “there can only be one mother, while any son of a bitch could be your father.” Mothers often provide logistical support for their sons, doing the cooking, laundry and other household chores, as well as providing a safe refuge. In turn, they are indulged with household appliances and the like. The 15 year old *sicario* Javier is quoted as saying, “soon I will be killed, but I would like to be remembered for the good refrigerator I bought for my mother.” Girlfriends are also drawn into the ‘support system’ of the perpetrators of gun violence. This can be as providers of psychological and emotional support, but they can also easily become ‘commodities’ that young men compete for.⁸⁰

Any attempts to change attitudes towards guns and gun violence in society therefore needs to be informed by the complex, gendered readings of guns by women, girls, men and boys. Women, men, girls and boys also have different reactions and capacities to support initiatives to reduce gun violence and create cultures of peace. Though women are often excluded from formal security policymaking and decision-making processes at the local, national and international levels, there are growing examples of women organizing for disarmament, gun violence prevention and the creation of cultures of peace. From the formation of the International Women’s Network of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) to civil society campaigns encouraging women not to condone male violence, grassroots women’s movements against gun violence are making their presence felt across the world, including in Albania,⁸¹ Brazil,⁸² South Africa,⁸³ and Papua New

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Laura Restrepo, *En qué momento se jodió Medellín*, 106-107.

⁸¹ Shukuko Koyama, “Just a Matter of Practicality: Mapping the role of women in weapons for development projects in Albania, Cambodia and Mali,” in *Sexed Pistols - The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons*, Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrntinen, Albrecht Schnabel, eds. (Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2009) 329-355.

⁸² On Viva Rio and other Brazilian initiatives, see *The Small Arms Survey, 2006: Unfinished Business*, p. 315 http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/year_b_pdf/2006/2006SASCh12-full_en.pdf

Guinea.⁸⁴ Additionally, men are becoming increasingly involved in the prevention of gun violence through specific initiatives and programmes focusing on the transformation of current attitudes of young men on violent masculinities, violence against women and gun ownership and misuse. These successful initiatives have potential replication prospects in other contexts and have demonstrated the necessity for women, men, and male and female adolescents to be fully involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of initiatives to reduce gun violence. As the examples from Jamaica and Trinidad Tobago quoted above show, women’s organisations have been at the forefront of raising societal awareness and campaigning around this issue in the Caribbean region as well. Furthermore, the increasing awareness of the need for gender mainstreaming in the security sector (as shown in the case of the Dominican Republic) can be attributed to a large degree both to the active demand of women’s organisations to have a say in defining security but also a new willingness on the part of state actors and security sector institutions to reconceptualise security in more comprehensive terms.

⁸³ Carien du Plessiss, “Putting a Hold on Bullets” 8 March 2004. Available from http://www.iansa.org/women/hold_on_bullets.htm

⁸⁴ Carol Nelson, “Women and Disarmament: What can be learnt from conflicts in Solomon Islands, Bougainville and PNG?” statement to the in the right hands seminar, 21 – 24 2006. Available from <http://www.iansa.org/regions/asiapacific/documents/WomenandDisarmamentinPNGSIandBougseminarpaper06.pdf>

4. Conclusions: ways out of the vicious cycles?

*¿Como me vas a entender si balazos no te ha llovido?
¿Entiendes lo que digo?*⁸⁵

- *Californian Latino hip-hop band Cypress Hill, No entiendes la onda*

As Jacklyn Cock noted, “the gun is a convenient peg on which to hang traditional notions of masculine power.”⁸⁶ Guns are part of the dominant masculine code in the Caribbean culture. They portray qualities of dominance, aggression, toughness and strength. Even though violence is not exclusively practised by men, violence is often linked to men’s identity. They have become an essential prop and tool in the violent masculine performances of the policeman, the gangster and the security guard.

Within the socio-economic environments of many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean that promote the demand for weapons, reducing gun ownership is a difficult undertaking. Located half-way between the drug producers of South America and their markets in the North, between the gun markets of the USA and their markets in South America, it is difficult for Caribbean societies to escape the impacts of these trades. In the short term, strategies for limiting and for the interdiction of small arms and drugs are important. In order to achieve long term changes, however, it is essential to change not only the patterns of the gun and drug trade but also the deeply rooted gun culture which is linked to cultural associations of guns and violence with masculinity. Men and women in Caribbean cultures are often socialised to regard violence as an integral element of masculinity.

Tackling the problem of gun violence requires actions at several levels – national, regional and international. Policymaking on the regional level is of high importance, though this is not easy to accomplish considering the large number of countries with different levels and kinds of development and policies. The Caribbean and Latin American countries will need to do more to harmonise their small arms legislation, though without major changes in US policy, these policies might very well be undermined by weapon inflows from the region’s northern neighbour. On the one hand, the USA has been providing substantial assistance in arms control, such as the enactment of national laws; on the other hand, the country is one of the major sources of firearms. It is therefore essential to alter this contradictory behaviour towards more effective arms control and corresponding policies.

Nationally, the issue of gun violence and its links to patterns of entrenched socio-economic, class, ethnic and gendered inequalities needs to be addressed. The difference will, however, need to be made at the local and individual levels, with communities and individuals taking a stance against gun violence and gun cultures.

⁸⁵ “How are you going to understand me if bullets have never been sprayed at you? You understand what I’m saying?” Authors’ informal translation

⁸⁶ Jacklyn Cock, “Gun Violence and Masculinity in Contemporary South Africa”, in *Changing Men in South Africa*, Robert Morrell, et al, eds. (London, Zed Books, 2001).

Research regarding SALW, especially in connection with gun culture and gender aspects, is currently insufficient and more work needs to be done. Any comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackling issues of gun violence in the Caribbean needs to take the social dynamics of the issue into account, including issues of class, race and gender. As was pointed out by the Jamaican delegation to the UN Review Conference on Small Arms:

There is a need to pay greater attention to the needs of our women and children, who have been the most affected by gun violence. At the same time, equal if not more attention needs to be paid to young men who in most cases are often both the victims and perpetrators of violence through the use of small arms. There is need in this connection to pursue the strengthening of national and regional programmes that address youth crime.⁸⁷

Prevention can be achieved by establishing mentoring and childhood programs or by providing attractive activities after school and on weekends in order to keep youths busy and away from guns. Jamaica, for example, is currently embarking on a new strategy. Supported by the Worldbank, *Jamaica Inner Cities Basic Services for the Poor Project* focuses on the prevention of local crime and the reduction of the high levels of homicides, youth violence and potential risk factors. With spatial interventions integrated into the infrastructure and urban renewal, i.e. community centers or public lighting, the project founders seek to reduce opportunities for crime. In addition, conflict resolution activities such as family support services and the establishment of community liaison officers whom are responsible for community safety plans and strategies are planned.⁸⁸

Far more work needs to be carried out by various actors, including the state, civil society, international organisations and research institutions, into understanding the complex interactions between guns, violence and gender roles as well as developing and implementing effective policies to reduce gun violence in the Caribbean context.

As Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrntinen and Albrecht Schnabel point out

Research into issues of gender and small arms is to date still limited. Further research is urgently needed on various questions linked to this complex issue, such as the alienation of young men and women from employment opportunities, the glorification of gun possession, and the impact of interventions to end gun violence [...] ⁸⁹

A key paradigmatic policy shift, which can help combat gun violence and other forms of violence, is to recast the security discourse based on a gendered reading of human security. Moving from a state-centred understanding and evaluation of security and security provisions, human security allows focusing on the individual, its abilities and needs for a life

⁸⁷ Statement of the Government of Jamaica, UN Review Conference, 26 June 2006

⁸⁸ World Bank, "Project Appraisal Document For A Proposed Loan In The Amount of US\$ 29.3 Million To Jamaica For An Inner City Basic Services For The Poor Project", Report No. 34741-JM (Washington, DC, World Bank, 2006). Available from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/03/14/000160016_20060314085044/Rend ered/PDF/34741.pdf

⁸⁹ Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrntinen, and Albrecht Schabel, *Sexed Pistol: The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons* (Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2009).



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full of dignity and active participation in political processes.⁹⁰ Recognising that people have different needs and perceptions of security in accordance with different social patterns the importance of the inclusion of a gender perspective in the security discourse has been recognised as becoming more and more undeniable. By focusing on human security rather than the more traditional notions of internal and external national security, the different security needs of women and men, girls and boys can be better addressed. Given its geographic location and the strength of the narco-trafficking industry, it is unfortunately unlikely that the potential supply of small arms to the Caribbean will be reduced in the near or medium-term. Therefore, it makes more sense to concentrate on the demand-side. In addition to improving the general socio-economic conditions and using different schemes for reducing the number of guns in circulation, this also requires improving the security situation in the region. An effective way of doing this is to create security sector institutions which are more responsive to the actual security needs of society by carrying out gender-sensitive SSR programmes. What is also needed is a more fundamental and long-term shift in culture, away from the acceptance or even celebration of (male) violence, towards more peaceful expressions of gender identity. As outlined in the paper, first steps in this direction have been taken in the Caribbean region, but the way ahead remains long and fraught with challenges.

⁹⁰ Commission on Human Security, "Human Security Now" (New York, Commission on Human Security, 2003). Available from <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/English/FinalReport.pdf>

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