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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their generative comments and feedback. I would also like to thank Suyapa Portillo for their important suggestion. I write this in honor of the Salvadoran refugees in my life.

On March 27, 2021, a Salvadoran refugee named Victoria Salazar was murdered by police in the Mexican resort town of Tulum, Quintana Roo. Four police officers surrounded and detained Ms. Salazar for allegedly disturbing the peace. While being detained, she fell to the ground and two of the police officers, one woman and one man, climbed on her back. Victoria Salazar yelled for help while the woman police officer knelt on her neck. She stopped screaming and moving. Instead of an ambulance arriving to provide aid, Ms Salazar was handcuffed and shoved in the back of a pickup truck. In March 2018, she had received a humanitarian visa from the Mexican authorities.¹ Three years later, her neck was broken by Mexican police. The autopsy report found that Ms Salazar suffered a fracture in the upper part of the spine.² As Clanci Rosa notes, Victoria Salazar's death put a face to the capitalist, heteropatriarchal, and racist system that working-class women across the globe are struggling to live in.³

Victoria Salazar was from Sonsonate, El Salvador. In Sonsonate, 43 percent of the population live in what the Salvadoran Ministry of Finance calls "multidimensional poverty," which includes inadequate access to education, housing, secure employment, health services, and substandard quality of life.⁴ Ms Salazar left Sonsonate in 2016 with

¹ Eunice Rendón, "Todos le Fallamos a Victoria Salazar," *El País*, March 30, 2021, https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-03-31/todos-le-fallamos-a-victoria.html?event_log=oklogin&prod=REGCRARTMEX&o=cerrmex.

² Unknown, "Policías de Tulum Rompieron Cuello de Victoria: Autopsia," *Excelsior*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/policias-de-tulum-rompieron-cuello-de-victoria-autopsia/1440473>.

³ Clanci Rosa, "Victoria No Murió, la Mato la Policía y los Estado Feminicidas," *Revista La Brújula*, March 30, 2021, <https://revistalabrujula.com/2021/03/30/victoria-no-murio-la-mato-la-policia-y-los-estados-feminicidas/>.

⁴ Ministerio de Economía, *Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples 2016* (San Salvador: Gobierno de la Republica de El Salvador, 2017), 47, <https://www.transparencia.gob.sv/institutions/minec/documents/220965/download>

her two daughters, ages 15 and 16.⁵ According to her mother, Rosibel Salazar, Victoria was a single mother who could not find work and wanted a better future for her daughters.⁶ El Salvador has one of the highest rates of feminicides with a woman killed by a man every 24 hours in 2018.⁷ Victoria Salazar was fleeing this gendered violence emerging from the “working-class precariousness” of the Salvadoran masses.⁸ Her objective was to make it to the U.S. but since there were no safe routes for her family, she settled in Mexico. She lived in Chiapas and then moved to Tulum to work in the tourist industry. In a state where 87% of its GDP comes from this sector, she found work cleaning hotels and servicing tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The month Victoria Salazar was murdered, the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services held a hearing with testimony from Navy Admiral Craig Faller, commander of U.S. Southern Command. In his testimony, Faller shared: “Now more than ever, I feel a sense of urgency about the global threats we face here in our neighborhood. This region is our home. This neighborhood is our home. It's a shared neighborhood. It's a hemisphere which is of vital national interest to the United States.”⁹ Faller argued that the most significant threats facing the hemisphere were China and transnational criminal organizations. He stated the Communist Party of China was

⁵ Laura Weiss, “Biden’s Disturbing Acceptance of State Violence Against Central American Migrants,” *New Republic*, April 20, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/162100/victoria-salazar-george-floyd-refugee-cap>

⁶ Unknown, “Victoria Salazar: Qué se Sabe de La Mujer Salvadoreña Muerta en México Tras Ser Brutalmente Sometida Por Policía,” *BBC News Mundo*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56584525>.

⁷ Ciara Nugent, “Violence Against Women in El Salvador is Driving Them to Suicide—Or the U.S. Border,” *Time*, May 14, 2019, <https://time.com/5582894/gender-violence-women-el-salvador/>.

⁸ R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster, “Marx’s Theory of Working-class Precariousness: Its Relevance Today,” *Monthly Review*, April 1, 2016, <https://monthlyreview.org/2016/04/01/marxs-theory-of-working-class-precariousness/>.

⁹ David Vergun, “Border, Hemispheric Security Discussed at Senate Hearing,” U.S. Southern Command, March 16, 2021, <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/2539364/border-hemispheric-security-discussed-at-senate-hearing/>.

seeking regional dominance in Latin America, while transnational criminal organizations such as drug cartels and gangs were a direct threat to U.S. national security. While transnational criminal organizations destabilize Latin American governments, Faller noted, China would gain dominance in the region. Faller was questioned about U.S. security assistance to corrupt governments such as Honduras whose former president, Juan Orlando Hernandez, has been extradited to the U.S. on drug trafficking charges.¹⁰ Faller responded by saying the U.S. must double-down on their commitment to assisting these governments. These global threats require a U.S. presence in the hemisphere. Corruption and human rights violations by these governments, he commented, would decrease through further U.S. assistance.

If we follow Faller's logic, we could claim that Victoria Salazar fled El Salvador due to the insecurity resulting from the violence of transnational criminal organizations, and her death by Tulum police was a casualty that can be remedied by U.S. security assistance by way of improved police professionalism. The latter effectively took place. Two weeks after her death, Tulum's municipal police were placed under the "absolute control" of the Public Security Ministry (SSP) to complete 216 hours of training.¹¹ This rationale, however, has been the ongoing practice of U.S. imperialism and expansion of neoliberal capitalism in Mexico, Central America, and the rest of Latin America.¹² The

¹⁰ Unknown, "Honduran Ex-Leader Hernández to be Extradited to the U.S. Next Week," *BBC News*, April 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-61078957?emci=5e3b9c54-f4bb-ec11-997e-281878b83d8a&emdi=9ffef8cb-f5bb-ec11-997e-281878b83d8a&ceid=4606001>.

¹¹ Anonymous, "SSP de QRoo Asume Control Absoluto de la Policía Municipal de Tulum," *Milenio*, April 11, 2021, <https://www.milenio.com/estados/policia-quintana-roo-asume-control-policia-municipal-tulum>.

¹² Gian Carlo Delgado-Ramos and Silvina María Romano, "Political-Economic Factor in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Merida Initiative, and the Obama Administration," *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 38: 93 (2011); Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 101-102.

militarization of Mexico through its drug war, financed by the U.S. through the Merida Initiative, and ongoing border militarization of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) have created what scholars have called a “perilous passage” for migrants and refugees.¹³ Faller’s reasoning and justification for U.S. presence in Latin America, I contend, set the conditions for Victoria Salazar’s fateful encounter with the Tulum police. For refugees like Victoria, and other working-class cisgender and transwomen across the hemisphere, ramping up the drums of a new cold war with China and militarizing Latin America are the real global threats. Chinese capital investment in Latin America and transnational criminal organizations are of concern. But, as I will demonstrate in the remainder of this article, they are not the primary culprit of structural violence that is engendered by the social degradation and working-class precariousness afflicting women like Ms Salazar. They form part of the many contradictions emerging from the crisis of neoliberal capitalism in Central America and the region.¹⁴

In this paper, I introduce a “proletarian feminist analysis” to the study of Central American displacement and forced migration to argue that Victoria Salazar’s death is a “social murder.” According to Friedrich Engels, when the social relations of exploitation under capitalism place people in dangerous labor conditions, when their home is where the hatred is and there are no alternatives but to be forced to flee, when people are not protected, but abandoned by governments which leads them to a premature death, we

¹³ Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism* (Oakland: Ak Press, 2014); Edur Velasco and Richard Roman Arregui, “Perilous Passage: Central American Migration through Mexico,” in *Latino L.A.: Transformation, Communities, and Activism*, ed. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 38-62.

¹⁴ William I. Robinson, “The Second Implosion of Central America,” *NACLA*, January 28, 2019, <https://nacla.org/news/2019/01/28/second-implosion-central-america>.

must call this murder. It is a social murder that is a “disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend [themselves], which does not seem what it is, because [no one] sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one, since the offence is more one of omission than of commission.”¹⁵ Although Mexican police murdered Victoria Salazar, I contend that the social degradation and working-class precariousness in El Salvador and Mexico, all shaped by neoliberal capitalist relations of exploitation and afflicting cisgender and trans women in distinctive ways, set the conditions for Ms Salazar’s social murder.¹⁶ Anuradha Ghandy, a proponent of proletarian feminism, notes that the oppression of cisgender women (but this, I contend, also applies to transwomen), must be linked to the wider exploitative socio-economic and political structures of capitalist imperialism.¹⁷ These conditions and struggles against them, she argues, “cannot be successful in isolation from the struggles to overthrow the imperialist system itself.”¹⁸ Through a proletarian feminist analysis, I demonstrate that the working-class precariousness of Salvadoran women is a primary contradiction of capitalism, which is exacerbated under its current stage of neoliberal capitalism. In what follows, I provide a discussion of social murder, working-class precariousness, and proletarian feminism. I then analyze the degradation of working-class women in El Salvador and Mexico under neoliberal capitalism. For these women, capitalism systematically engenders precarity. A proletarian feminist analysis

¹⁵ Friedrich Engels, *Conditions of the Working-class in England* (Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1969), 84, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf>.

¹⁶ On capitalist relations of exploitation, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (New York: Verso, 2014), 250.

¹⁷ Anuradha Ghandy, "Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement," in *Scripting the Change: Selected Writings of Anuradha Ghandy* (Delhi: Daanish Books, 2012).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

emphasizes that only revolutionary organizing against the differential experiences of capitalist exploitation and oppression can halt social murder.

Social Murder, Working-class Precariousness, and Proletarian Feminism

A week after Victoria Salazar was murdered, her body was returned to her family in Sonsonate. During the burial, her brother, Carlos Salazar, was interviewed by the press. "No one managed to understand what happened," he said, "because it looks like she is asking for help at one point and suddenly the police arrive and subdue her and in less than 10 seconds they already killed her." He declared, "Nobody did anything to help her, they just left her like a dog, dead there."¹⁹ After Ms Salazar's murder, Mexican authorities arrested her Mexican boyfriend on allegations that he abused her, her 16-year-old daughter, and sexually assaulted her 15-year-old daughter.²⁰ Two weeks before her murder, she appeared before the local child protection service to formally accuse him of sexually assaulting her daughter. She then took her daughter to a shelter to protect her. In El Salvador, agents of the state did not provide dignified living conditions for the Salazar family, and in Mexico, agents of the state neglected her family's safety and took her life. Ultimately, she could not flee the misogyny that crosses

¹⁹ Liseth Alas, Damaris Girón, and Francisco Rubio, "Nadie Alcanza a Entender Lo Que Pasó': Familia de Victoria Salazar Clama Por Justicia en Sepelio de las Salvadoreña Asesinada por Policías Mexicanos," *ElSalvador.com*, April 4, 202, <https://historico.elsalvador.com/historico/824039/victoria-salazar-entierro-sonsonate-salvadorena-asesinada-policias-mexicanos.html>.

²⁰ Adry Torres, "Boyfriend of Salvadoran Woman Who Died After Female Cop Knelt Neck in Resort Town Tulum is Arrested 'For Abusing Her and Her Daughters,'" *Daily Mail*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9424421/Authorities-arrest-abusive-boyfriend-Salvadoran-mom-died-cop-knelt-Tulum.html>.

national borders.²¹ For many working-class women in El Salvador and Central America, in their home countries as well as abroad, social murder is a daily reality.

In his investigation of the conditions of the working-class in England, Engels describes the socialized misery proletarians endure under capitalism. “Since capital, the direct or indirect control of the means of subsistence and production, is the weapon with which this social warfare is carried on,” he notes, “it is clear that all the disadvantages of such a state must fall on the poor.”²² This social warfare, the struggle between labor and capital, creates conditions of immiseration, inadequate living conditions and homelessness, hunger and starvation, malnutrition and disease, and indirect death. Engels called this indirect death social murder.²³ When someone causes bodily harm to another knowing that the injury will be fatal, we call that murder. However, when capitalists and agents of capitalist states create social conditions that will inevitably have the masses meet an early and an unnatural death, and permit them to remain, we must also call this murder. Capital, Engels notes, “knows the consequences of its deeds; that its act is, therefore, not mere manslaughter, but murder.”²⁴ This structural violence that Engels is referring to must be understood dialectically and as a consequence of the mode of production. This does not suggest that violence under capitalism is subsumed under a generic notion of class struggle or all other forms of oppression are derivative of class. “It is,” as James A. Tyler argues, “however, meant to acknowledge that violence appears in different forms depending on the dominant mode

²¹ Elena Reina, “Salvadoran Migrant’s Death in Mexico Echoes Killing of George Floyd,” *El Pais*, April 6, 2021 <https://english.elpais.com/usa/2021-04-06/salvadoran-migrants-death-in-mexico-echoes-killing-of-george-floyd.html>.

²² *Engels, Conditions of the Working-class in England*, 45.

²³ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

of production.”²⁵ Violence under capitalism, and specifically under its current neoliberal variant, is predicated on a market logic of what Tyler refers to as “letting die.”²⁶ “Consequently,” Tyler notes, “those who are determined based on market logics to be nonproductive—the precariat, the redundant, the surplus populations—are increasingly being disallowed life to the point of death.”²⁷ The lives of Salvadoran and Central American refugees and migrants, like Victoria Salazar, are often depicted as disposable by dominant narratives that occlude their material conditions.²⁸ Instead, we are only told of their deaths which then become another statistic. Ms Salazar’s murder by the police, like many other Salvadorans and Central Americans, “seems as a natural one.”²⁹ However, social murder is not natural, it is a result of precarity induced by the social relations of exploitation in capitalism.

The conditions of precarity experienced by Victoria Salazar are co-generated by capitalist state institutions and affect multiple aspects of social reproduction, as Elva Orozco Mendoza’s work helps us see.³⁰ According to Catherine S. Ramírez and her colleagues, precarity is more than a condition or a status. Instead, social and labor precarity should be understood as, “an existence defined by vulnerability, unpredictability, and insecurity, be it in the realm of work, housing, health, or other

²⁵ James A. Tyner, *Violence in Capitalism: Devaluing Life in the Age of Responsibility* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 204.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 10

²⁷ *Ibid*, 128.

²⁸ Leisy J. Abrego and Jennifer A. Cárcamo, “Misrepresented Insecurities: An Annotated Interview About Displacement and Resistance of Central America’s ‘Eternos Indocumentados,’” *Latin American Law Review*, Issue 7 (2021), 132.

²⁹ Engels, *Conditions of the Working-class in England*, 84.

³⁰ Elva F. Orozco Mendoza, “Las Madres de Chihuahua: Maternal Activism, Public Disclosure, and the Politics of Visibility,” *New Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2019: 217.

aspects of life.”³¹ Building on scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Arne Kalleberg, Guy Standing, and Judith Butler, they argue that although the existence of precarity resembles the conditions of the classic proletariat, there are numerous crucial differences. They argue the precariat lacks formal labor contracts and suffers from a lack of basic social services, state benefits, and statutory protections.

R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster, by contrast, argue that precarious existence has always been the case for the laboring class under capitalism. This existence they call working-class precariousness.³² According to Jonna and Bellamy Foster, the examination of working-class precariousness has a long history in the socialist thought associated with the analysis of the reserve army of labor – the unemployed and underemployed.³³ They trace this history to the work of Engels in *The Condition of the Working-class in England*, Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto*, and Marx’s *Capital Vol. I*. Marx’s analysis of the “general law of capitalist accumulation” is essential to this point.³⁴ Marx presents the conditions of the proletariat primarily in terms of precariousness in labour and more generally in life. “Concepts like ‘precarity’ and even the ‘precariat’ may have a role to play,” Jonna and Bellamy Foster argue, “if it means describing more fully the conditions that characterize the reserve army of labor and the increasingly tenuous hold of the active labor army on jobs and decent working conditions.”³⁵ Describing these conditions more fully is illustrated in Paul Apostolidis’s

³¹ Catherine S. Ramírez, Sylvanna Falcón, Juan Poblete, Steven C. McKay, and Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, *Precarity and Belonging: Labor, Migration, and Noncitizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 5.

³² R. Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster, “Marx’s Theory of Working-class Precariousness.”

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

observation that precarity is bivalent since specific segments of the working-class experience it in harsher ways while it pervades throughout the social formation.³⁶

Analyzing working-class precariousness, or precarity, through Marx's general law of capitalist accumulation illuminates a primary contradiction of capitalism:

"Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutalization, and moral degradation at the opposite pole."³⁷ The reserve army of labor, or in other words, the relative surplus population, is a constitutive element of capitalism. The process of capital accumulation itself produces a redundant and disposable population and precarity for working people. Under neoliberal capitalism, these conditions have exacerbated through new forms of capital accumulation (i.e., the development of production through science and technology, new rounds of primitive accumulation, militarization, and flexibilization, fragmentation, and cheapening of labor). In the late 20th century, one-third of the global labor force was unemployed.³⁸ Although capitalists have always relied on the unemployed to depress wages, the structural feature of dispossession and disenfranchisement have intensified.

According to Marx, the waged worker under capitalism sinks to the level of a commodity. The waged worker, "becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities," and "that the wretchedness of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and magnitude of his [or her] production."³⁹ The waged worker's labor power is key to capital

³⁶ Paul Apostolidis, "Desperate Responsibility: Precarity and Right-Wing Populism," *Political Theory*, Vol. 50, Issue 1 (2022), 116.

³⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 799.

³⁸ William I Robinson and Mario Barrera, "Global Capitalism and Twenty-First Century Fascism: A U.S. Case Study," *Race and Class* 53, no. 4 (2012): 17.

³⁹ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1848," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 70.

since it guarantees, “the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form...”⁴⁰ Now, if the waged worker is the most wretched of commodities, what happens to workers when they become surplus? Marx notes, “along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It forms part of the faux frais [incidental expenses] of capitalist production: but capital usually knows how to transfer these from its own shoulders to those of the working-class and the petty bourgeoisie.”⁴¹ In the current conjuncture, the state of pauperism can be understood as working-class precariousness, or precarity, where oppression and exploitation is experienced in differential ways. Roderick Ferguson shows that the differential experiences of oppression and exploitation that the relative surplus population experience can, “become the locations for possible critiques of state and capital.”⁴² Critiquing the state and capital from the location of the relative surplus population allows us to examine capitalism as a rich totality with many determinations, relations, and locations of oppression and exploitation.

Victoria Salazar’s case illustrates these conditions of precarity and “letting die” under neoliberal capitalism. Despite being granted a humanitarian visa and working in the service sector in Tulum, she was killed by the police. She was part of the relative surplus population in El Salvador, fleeing abject living conditions, and was then absorbed as a service sector worker in Mexico. As a woman, Central American refugee, and migrant worker, she was othered and brutally killed. As Isabell Lorey notes,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, 797.

⁴² Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 15.

precarity creates hierarchization of insecurity which accompanies processes of othering.⁴³ After the autopsy report was released⁴³ by Mexican authorities, the four police officers that killed Victoria were arrested and charged with feminicide. The woman officer who knelt on Victoria's neck said she became a police officer because there were no other employment opportunities.⁴⁴ Neoliberal capitalism in Mexico has eviscerated the industrial and agricultural productive structure as well as most public institutions.⁴⁵ Instead, the neoliberal model relies on the poor to police the poor and destroy the social wellbeing of the majority for the wealth and privilege of the few.

The conditions described above are illuminated through a proletarian feminist analysis. Through this analysis, I conceptualize the relative surplus population as a gendered and racialized class subject, who face exploitation and oppression in differential ways. By centering on the material conditions of gender, race, and other social relations, we can conceptualize the differential experiences of class struggle.⁴⁶ Writing in the Maoist tradition, Anuradha Ghandy situates her proletarian feminist analysis within the communist struggles of India. However, as J. Moufawad-Paul notes, her writings and theorization emerging from an anti-imperialist, militant women's movement connected to a people's war, is foundational in understanding women's

⁴³ Jasbir Puar, "Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Bertlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejic, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanovic," *TDR: The Drama Review*, Issue 56, No. 4, (2012), 166.

⁴⁴ Univision News, "Madre de la Migrante Que Murió a Manos de Oficiales en México Pide a Biden Que dé Asilo a Sus Nietas," *Univision*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrnEOot0w7Y>.

⁴⁵ Asa Cristina Laurell, "Three Decades of Neoliberalism in Mexico: The Destruction of Society," *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2015).

⁴⁶ On proletarian feminism, see "Capitalism Generates Death Worlds'- On Necrocapitalism with Alyson Escalante, J. Moufawad Paul, and Devin Zane Shaw," *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*, podcast audio, December 23, 202, <https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/capitalism-generates-death-worlds-on-necrocapitalism-with-alyson-escalante-j-moufawad-paul-and-devin-zane-shaw>.

oppression and exploitation in the peripheries of global capitalism and beyond.⁴⁷ In her analysis of the philosophical trends of feminist movements in western societies, Ghandy asserts that the struggle against women's oppression must begin with an analysis of the material causes of that oppression, the wider economic and political forces that give rise to patriarchal and misogynist cultures and practices, and the social structure that shape it.⁴⁸ "[P]atriarchy has its roots in class society," she notes. "In all societies it is perpetuated by the exploiting classes, i.e., in feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism. So, fighting patriarchy means fighting against these exploiting classes."⁴⁹ Working-class men perpetuate patriarchy and misogyny, as the case of Victoria Salazar's boyfriend illustrates, yet this is a contradiction that must also be addressed by organizing and mobilizing against the system that perpetuates class exploitation and heteropatriarchal oppression.⁵⁰ The Proletarian Feminist Research Group argues that while particular contradictions with various levels of antagonism exist between women and men, they must be linked to, "the economic exploitation of women by the bourgeoisie, by the class struggle which gives them their content."⁵¹ Working-class men imbibe and enact patriarchal ideas, but these ideas, in the last instance, serve ruling classes.⁵² At the time of her death Arundhati Roy notes Ghandy was organizing on "how to purge the Maoist Party of the vestiges of continuing discrimination against women and the various

⁴⁷ J. Moufawad-Paul, "Radical or Proletarian Feminism," *M-L-M Mayhem*, February 10, 2014, <http://moufawad-paul.blogspot.com/2014/02/radical-or-proletarian-feminism.html>.

⁴⁸ Ghandy, "Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement," 198-99.

⁴⁹ MS, "Anuradha Ghandy: Remembering The Red Feminist," *Feminism in India*, July 17, 2017, <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/07/17/red-feminist-anuradha-ghandy/>.

⁵⁰ On secondary contradictions, see Mao Tse-tung, "On Contradiction," 1937, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm.

⁵¹ Proletarian Feminist Working Group, "A Blunt Knife Draws No Blood: Towards a Revolutionary Line in the Women's Movement," <https://proletarianfeministresearchgroup.wordpress.com/home/>.

⁵² Ghandy, "Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement," 190.

shades of patriarchy that stubbornly persisted among those male comrades who called themselves revolutionary.”⁵³

Proletarian feminist analysis, grounded in a historical and dialectical materialist analysis, locates women’s oppression and exploitation within the class conflict; again, the category of ‘women’ here includes both cisgender and trans women. Hisilia Yami argues that a proletarian feminist analysis does not overemphasize the class struggle at the cost of gender oppression, but rather is informed by the dialectical relationship between the two.⁵⁴ Similarly, Amy Chew observes that GABRIELA, a women’s federation in the Philippines, also refuses to separate issues of gender from class. “Its political scope,” Chew notes, “encompasses not only domestic abuse but also land reform, militarism, forced transnational migration, and more.”⁵⁵ Socialist and Marxist feminists emphasize social reproduction as the root of women’s oppression under capitalism.⁵⁶ Ghandy’s proletarian feminist analysis, however, argues that women’s role in social production must not be underplayed. Women’s oppression, she argues, cannot be overturned without working-class women having control over the means of production, over the means of producing necessities and wealth, or participating in the revolutionary struggle to bring about socialism and communism. Catalina Adrianzen similarly argues that the roots of women’s oppression can be traced to the formation,

⁵³ Arundhati Roy, “...But Anuradha was Different,” in *Scripting the Change: Selected Writings of Anuradha Ghandy* (Delhi: Daanish Books, 2012), xiv.

⁵⁴ Hisilia Yami, “Philosophy and the Question of Women’s Liberation,” in *People’s War and Women’s Liberation in Nepal* (Raipur : Purvaiya Prakashan, 2006), 87.

⁵⁵ Amy Chew, “Bringing the Revolution Home: Filipino Urban Poor Women, ‘Neoliberal Imperial Feminisms,’ and a Social Movements Approach to Domestic Violence,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol 46, Issue 3 & 4 (2018):50.

⁵⁶ For an important analysis of social reproduction and women’s oppression, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Autonomedia. 2009)

appearance, and development of the right to ownership over the means of production rather than the sexual division of labor.⁵⁷ This, Ghandy contends, is not only an economic question but a question of power and politics.

In their analysis of necrocapitalism and the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, the M.I. Asma writing collective provide a proletarian feminist analysis of what they call “pandemic femicide.”⁵⁸ In Canada, the high death rates in long-term care homes have been predominately women. More women staff work in these facilities under poor and unbearable conditions, while 74% of the long-term care population are women. This, they argue, is a result of a gendered division of labor and the long-term effects of domestic violence on women. A sector of the health-care labor in these homes are imported through temporary foreign worker programs from countries such as the Philippines, and often face routinized gendered and racist harassment from other workers and patients. This misogynist violence and patriarchal structure, they argue, is embedded in the capitalist system.

Proletarian feminist analysis argues that women are forced out of the labor process, super-exploited, and have no control over the means of production. These material conditions shaped by capital accumulation set the terrain for precarity and social degradation, which are justified through a hetero-patriarchal, misogynist, and transphobic culture. These contradictions of capitalist accumulation are experienced in differential ways. Fundamentally, the struggle against hetero-patriarchy and misogyny

⁵⁷ Catalina Adrianzen, “Marxism, Mariategui, and the Women Question” <https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/adrianzen/1974.htm>.

⁵⁸ M.I. Asma, “Pandemic Femicide,” in *On Necrocapitalism: A Plague Journal* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2021).

are part and parcel of the class struggle, shaped by colonialism, capitalist imperialism, and white supremacy. This set the terrain for Victoria Salazar's social murder.

Precarity and Social Degradation of women in El Salvador

The precarity that conditioned Victoria Salazar's social murder cannot be understood without examining the history of class struggle and imperialist intervention in El Salvador through a proletarian feminist lens. In her poem, "El Salvador in the Eye of the Hurricane: the Promised Land I," Dora Magaña describes the causes that led to a civil war in her country: "Elections lost due to fraud, children will die daily, men with unemployed hands, employed women, humiliated, desolate fields without grain, lands in the hands of a few, germinating seeds of clear resistance."⁵⁹ The resistance, by way of a revolutionary armed struggle, would catapult El Salvador into the center of U.S. led counterinsurgency. In response to the struggles for national and social liberation in El Salvador, U.S. President Ronald Reagan stated in a 1984 Address to the Nation, "Central America is a region of great importance to the United States...It's at our doorstep, and it's become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua to install communism by force throughout the hemisphere."⁶⁰ In the 1980s, the Reagan administration financed the right-wing government of El Salvador in their militarization of the country, producing a generalized state terror against the Salvadoran population.⁶¹ The revolutionaries of El Salvador were indeed fighting for socialism, but

⁵⁹ Dora Olivia Magaña, *Álbum Para Amarte Patria II* (Mission Hills: La Mancha Publishing Group, Inc, 2010), 17.

⁶⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America, May 9, 1984," <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-united-states-policy-central-america>.

⁶¹ Leisy J. Abrego and Alejandro Villalpando, "Racialization of Central Americans in the United States," in *Precarity and Belonging: Labor, Migration, and Noncitizenship*, ed. Catherine S. Ramirez, Sylvanna

were not forced by other socialist governments. It was a grassroots mobilization against internal class contradictions. In this struggle, women played a fundamental role in challenging both imperialist plundering and the vestiges of patriarchy. As Diana Sierra Becerra notes, women's mass organizations such as the Association of Women of El Salvador (AMES) were actively developing a revolutionary feminist praxis.⁶² Despite the revolutionary attempt, the conditions described by Magaña would persist.

Victoria Salazar left El Salvador almost three decades after the end of the civil war. The armed struggle did not bring about economic democracy. Instead, after three decades of neoliberal capitalism, Salvadorans encounter precarity by way of alienation, domestic uncertainty, and desperation.⁶³ As her mother told the press, her daughter was fleeing conditions that are familiar to all.⁶⁴ For women, this includes their social degradation through political, economic, and cultural oppression. According to Silvia Federici, "There is no doubt that in the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' women suffered a unique process of social degradation that was fundamental to the accumulation of capital and has remained so ever since."⁶⁵ Under neoliberal capitalism, precarity has exacerbated the social degradation of women, cisgender and trans alike, and is a constant struggle for social movements in El Salvador and Central America.

Falcón, Juan Poblete, Steven C. McKay, and Felicity Amaya Schaeffer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 55.

⁶² Diana Carolina Sierra Becerra, "For Our Total Emancipation The Making of Revolutionary Feminism in Insurgent El Salvador, 1977–1987," in *Making the Revolution: Histories of the Latin American Left*, ed. Kevin Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 266-293.

⁶³ Alysa Garni and L. Frank Weyher, "Dollars, "Free Trade" and Migration: The Combined Forces of Alienation in Post-war El Salvador," *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 5 (2013), p. 67.

⁶⁴ Francisco Mejía, "Victoria Salazar Huyó de El Salvador Por La Violencia, Asegura su Mamá," *Milenio*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/victoria-salazar-huyo-salvador-violencia-mama>

⁶⁵ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 75.

As I describe below, the structural violence of precarity and social degradation that Victoria Salazar and other women are fleeing in El Salvador come to light when one analyzes historical and recent political, economic, and social conditions. These conditions are often linked to what is said to be the socially conservative, sexist culture of Salvadoran society. While such generalizations about Salvadoran culture are well founded, to treat these cultural features alone as the sources of precarity conceals the material conditions that shape this culture. Sexism is not an innate feature of Salvadoran men, but rather is shaped by a colonial, capitalist, and imperialist structure of domination. More recently, in the 1980s, U.S. funded Salvadoran military and death squads were trained to brutally rape and torture Salvadoran civilian women, activists, and guerillas. According to the United Nations Truth Commission, 85 percent of complaints regarding extrajudicial murder, forced disappearances, and torture were attributed to state forces.⁶⁶ Many of the cases discussed in the Truth Commission describe the torture and raping of women and little girls under the age of 12. These acts normalized the violence against women during the civil war and would continue after. In this period, due to social exclusion and discrimination members of the LGBTQI suffered in silence through the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Nicola Chávez Courtright notes that they not only suffered the effects of the disease, but also the “collusion of horrendous stigma and lack of information and medicines available at that time.”⁶⁷

After the civil war, a peace accord was brokered between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the government of El Salvador. In the peace

⁶⁶ UN Security Council, “From Madness to Hope’: The 12-year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador,” <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/ElSalvador-Report.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Nicola Chávez Courtright, “La Cronología del Movimiento LGBTQ en San Salvador,” *Revista Factum*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.revistafactum.com/la-cronologia-del-movimiento-lgtb-salvador/>.

process, there were high-ranking FMLN women sitting at the negotiating table, including Maria Marta Valladares ("Nidia Diaz"), Lorena Peña ("Rebecca Palacios"), and Ana Guadalupe Martinez. Although a historic moment in regards to women's presence within the reconstruction process, the agreement fell short of ending the social problems that led to the armed struggle or pursuing an intentional gendered reconciliation.⁶⁸ Feminists and women organizations criticized the agreement for failing to consider the reality of Salvadoran women.⁶⁹ The peace agreement did not address poverty, environmental degradation, existing gender relations, nor the inequitable distribution of wealth. Näslund notes that Chapter V of the agreement, which outlines economic and social development, ignored gender concerns when it came to unequal land distribution, agricultural credits, the alleviation of the cost of structural adjustments programs, international cooperation for community development, and institutional building. "By excluding women from education, technological assistance, land, and agricultural credit," Näslund argues, "the faulty Peace Accords have far-reaching financial, political, legal, and psychological implications on women and their dependents."⁷⁰

Since the Peace Accords, the conditions of women, whether cisgender or trans, have further deteriorated due to neoliberal restructuring. Neoliberal capitalism in El Salvador proved to be a reorganization of class power that transformed old oligarchic class structures, generated new transnationally oriented elites and capitalists, and a small high-consumption middle strata.⁷¹ Structural violence would take on the form of

⁶⁸ Irina Carlota Silber and Jocelyn Viterna, "Women in El Salvador: Continuing the Struggle," in *Women and Politics Around the World: A Comparative History and Survey*, ed. Joyce Gelb and Marian Lief Palley (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2009), 332.

⁶⁹ Emma Näslund, "Looking at Peace Through Women's Eyes: Gender-Based Discrimination in the Salvadoran Peace Process," https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/jpia/v10_1999/v10_1999c.pdf.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 30

⁷¹ Robinson, "The Second Implosion of Central America."

economic policy through fiscal austerity, privatization, retrenchment of public goods, and promotion of transnational investment. The intensification of this reorganization occurred in the late 1980s through the emergence of a new right-wing faction of the Salvadoran bourgeoisie.⁷²

From the 1930s to the civil war, the landed elite backed by a military dictatorship held control over Salvadoran society. This control unraveled during the civil war. A rapid recomposition by the ruling classes occurred that brought forth a new political party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (US-AID), ARENA created economic associations such as the Foundation for Social and Economic Development (FUSADES). Through this economic association and its organic intellectuals, a neoliberal program was developed. ARENA took control of the state in the 1989 presidential elections. They would be in control of the state for the next twenty years. During this period, neoliberal capitalism would reign supreme through privatization, lifting of subsidies, trade liberalization, devaluation of the currency followed by dollarization of the national currency, the promotion of non-traditional exports, the expansion of free trade zones and maquiladoras, and the signing of the DR-CAFTA (Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement).

After twenty years of ARENA, the FMLN, now a political party, won presidential elections in 2009 and 2014. During the two FMLN administrations, the attempts to subdue neoliberalism were unsuccessful.⁷³ The political, economic, and social

⁷² Paul D Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggles in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 182.

⁷³ Mirna Jimenez, "El FMLN frenó el neoliberalismo y fortaleció el rol del Estado," March 12, 2019, <https://www.diariocolatino.com/el-fmln-freno-el-neoliberalismo-y-fortalecio-el-rol-del-estado/>

conditions set by ARENA, made a socialist transition unfeasible. However, during the FMLN presidencies gains were made in women's healthcare and attempts to support the rights of LGBTQI communities. In 2010, a National Healthcare Reform established over 600 community health clinics in rural and underserved areas. They created maternal prenatal centers for women in areas with little access to hospitals, which reduced the maternal mortality rate, a state-of-the art National Women's Hospital was built, and FMLN-sponsored legislation was introduced, notably the Gender Equity, Equality, and Nondiscrimination Law and the Life Free of Violence Against Women Law.⁷⁴ In 2016, FMLN leadership, in collaboration with transgender activists, introduced a bill for a new Gender Identity Law to defend the rights of the trans community. Under the FMLN, El Salvador also joined the UN LGBTI Core Group, it increased sentences for bias-motivated crimes, and under the Sexual Diversity Directorate trained public servants and monitored government policies for LGBTI inclusiveness.⁷⁵ Another important gain in 2011 was the development of "Women's City" service centers, an initiative establishing six centers offering reproductive health services, vocational and business skills training, services for female victims of violence, and childcare services. According to the InterAmerican Development Bank, women who received services from these centers accessed 43 percent more public services than those who did not, were

⁷⁴ Hilary Goodfriend, "Love in the Time of Zika," *NACLA*, February 17, 2016, <https://nacla.org/news/2016/02/17/love-time-zika>,

⁷⁵ CISPES, "FMLN Backs New Gender Identity Law Defending the Rights of the Transgender Community," April 9, 2018, <https://cispes.org/article/fmln-backs-new-gender-identity-law-defending-rights-transgender-community?language=es>; Neela Ghoshal, "No Safe Haven for LGBT People in El Salvador," *Human Rights Watch*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/08/no-safe-haven-lgbt-people-el-salvador>

three times more likely to receive legal assistance, and reported higher levels of satisfaction with their lives.⁷⁶

These gains in healthcare and legislation by the FMLN have been important for cisgender and transwomen but have been limited in structurally challenging precarity. In 2016, when Victoria Salazar fled El Salvador, women were 53 percent of the Salvadoran population, 54 percent of the working age population, and 42 percent of the entire workforce.⁷⁷ However, only 47 percent of women were part of the workforce while 53 percent were inactive. Women represented 76 percent of the entire inactive population in the workforce and 30 percent of the unemployed nationwide. In urban areas, 51 percent of women who worked were formally employed while 49 percent formed part of the informal economy. Women in the informal economy are vulnerable to severe exploitation, fraud, violence, and are unable to meet their basic needs.⁷⁸ The majority of formally employed women worked in the service sector in areas such as commerce, tourism, and restaurants (45 percent), in manufacturing (17 percent), domestic work (12 percent) and social and health services (10 percent). Only 37 percent were salaried, while the rest had contractual employment. While employed, only 34 percent were covered by social security and 23 percent had access to health insurance. About 38 percent of girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 29 made up part of the “NiNi” population, those that do not work or attend school.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Arnoldo López Marmolejo, Marta Ruiz-Arranz, and Elizabeth Ochoa, “Closing Gender Gaps in the World of Work: Central America, Mexico, Panama, and the Dominican Republic,” Inter-American Development Bank, 2001, 75, <https://publications.iadb.org/en/closing-gender-gaps-world-work-central-america-mexico-panama-and-dominican-republic/>

⁷⁷ Ministerio de Economía, *Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples 2016*. The following data is from this census report unless stated otherwise.

⁷⁸ Silber and Viterna, “Women in El Salvador,” 340.

⁷⁹ Ministerio de Economía, *Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples 2016*.

In 2017, 32 percent of the population in El Salvador lived in poverty with 25 percent in relative poverty and 8 percent in extreme poverty. Women and girls are most affected by poverty, with the lowest levels of education, the highest rates of school dropouts, and approximately double the illiteracy rate of men.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights notes that “hate crimes, assaults, acts of discrimination, exclusion, denial of services, stigma, and marginalization continue to be the reality for Salvadoran LGBTQI people, with high rates of poverty, low schooling, murders, and low probability of life beyond 33 years.”⁸¹ Since 1993, there have been 600 recorded murders of LGBTQI people, and 151 cases of forced displacement between January 2018 and September 2019.⁸² During February 2017 alone, three transwomen were brutally murdered within a 72-hour period.⁸³ Transwomen have been completely forced out of formal employment. The Human Rights Ombudsman of El Salvador found that 85 percent of transwomen surveyed rely on prostitution to survive and 45 percent survive on only \$180 dollars a month.⁸⁴ In these conditions, 52 percent of transwomen surveyed state they have received death threats while 46 percent have been physically attacked. Only 10 percent of transwomen have their own home with the majority living in unstable housing conditions. It is no wonder that between January

⁸⁰ J. Sebastián Rodríguez Alarcón and Maria Fernanda Perico, El Impacto de la Pobreza y la Violencia en la Salud y los Derechos Reproductivos de las Mujeres en El Salvador,” *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, Issue 36, 1 (2020), <http://cadernos.ensp.fiocruz.br/static/arquivo/1678-4464-csp-36-s1-e00039119.pdf>.

⁸¹ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, “Situación de Derechos Humanos en El Salvador,” Organización de los Estados Americanos, 2021, http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/2021_ElSalvador-ES.pdf, 103.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 103

⁸³ Sergio Ortiz, “No Safe Place,” *Amnesty International*, 2017,9, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/7258/2017/en/>.

⁸⁴ Procuraduría Para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, “Informe Sobre La Situación de los Derechos Humanos de las Mijeres Trans en El Salvador,” 2015, https://www.sv.undp.org/content/el_salvador/es/home/library/otras-publicaciones/informe-sobre-la-situacion-de-derechos-humanos-de-mujeres-trans-.html.

2007 and November 2017, El Salvador sent the most LGBTQI asylum seekers in the U.S. per capita.⁸⁵

In 2018, the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights received more than 1,020 registered complaints of violence in the workplace by women, 60 percent of which were complaints of labor or sexual harassment.⁸⁶ In the maquila industry, women face dire working conditions that produce poor nutrition, progressive loss of sight, intense headaches, sleep disorders, depression and anxiety, permanent muscle and bone pain, particularly in the hands and arms, as well as differentiated effects to their sexual and reproductive health such as increased urinary tract infections, pregnancy complications, and other gynecological issues.⁸⁷ They are superexploited in this industry with work weeks of 50-80 hours, often with no overtime pay, lack of job security, exposure to toxic substances without protection, human rights violations, and sexual assault. Most maquila workers are young women between the ages of sixteen and thirty, often single head of households, and have very little education. In the 1990s, the right-wing think tank, FUSADES, attracted investors including maquila owners. They argued maquila workers only needed a sixth-grade education. According to Kathy Bougher, they advertised in U.S trade journals bragging about the advantages of investment in El Salvador which included photos of Salvadoran women maquila workers. FUSADES sold “women's attributes to investors for as little as thirty-three cents an hour.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Every Day I Live in Fear: Violence and Discrimination Against LGBT People in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and Obstacles to Asylum in the United States,” *Human Rights Watch*, 2020,

⁸⁶ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, “Situación de Derechos Humanos en El Salvador,” 94.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 96

⁸⁸ Kathy Bougher, “Women’s Lives for Sale: Free Trade and Education in El Salvador,” *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 33, Issue 11/12 (2003), 18.

While only employing 17 percent of the female workforce, the maquila industry, whose clients are international brands like Adidas, Pumas, Nike, and Walmart exported 2.4 billion dollars in 2014, half of El Salvador's total sales abroad.⁸⁹ They operate in the country's 17 free trade zones, where companies are given tax breaks, do not pay tariffs on imported input, and are given other political and economic incentives. LD El Salvador, a Korean owned corporation that produces garments for Nautica and Walmart, has been known to hire gang members to threaten workers who are organizing for better working conditions.⁹⁰ Neoliberal capitalism in El Salvador created the conditions for transnational corporations to superexploit Salvadoran working-class women while using male surplus populations to discipline them with fear of death.

While women workers in the maquila industry face super-exploitation, the immiseration of the Salvadoran working-class produces structural violence that affects cisgender and transwomen in differential ways. In 2018 alone, according to the Attorney General of El Salvador, 6,142 women were victims of sexual violence, including 2,600 cases of rape.⁹¹ From 2015 through June 2019, there were 692 reported acts of violence perpetrated against members of the LGBTQI communities including 72 homicides. Many of the victims of these attacks were transwomen. As mentioned above, the social degradation of cisgender and transwomen is also evident in their limited access to health and social security. Instead of equitable and safe access to reproductive health, women are criminalized for seeking bodily autonomy. El Salvador is

⁸⁹ Edgardo Ayala, "Salvadoran Maquila Plants Use Gang Members to Break Unions," *Inter Press Services*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/salvadoran-maquila-plants-use-gang-members-to-break-unions/>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, "Situación de Derechos Humanos en El Salvador," 81.

known for its severe criminalization of abortion. Women who have had obstetric emergencies that result in miscarriages or stillbirths have been charged with aggravated homicide. At least 74 women who have suffered obstetric emergencies have been sentenced up to 40 years in prison.⁹² For LGBTQI communities there are no specialized care policies that respond to their specific issues. This results in the complete denial and lack of recognition of their needs and gender identities. Social security does not cover any of their physical or mental health. This is troublesome in the case of people living with HIV/AIDS and with high rates of attempted suicide. These conditions of state abandonment and neglect of LGBTQI communities and criminalization of women are part and parcel of a neoliberal program that places capital accumulation at the expense of the masses. It develops free trade zones, agreements, and strong private property rights while slashing social safety nets, public health, and deregulating labor rights.

The conditions outlined above have been the root causes of why Salvadoran women have been joining other migrants and refugees in their mass exodus from Central America. Amarela Huerta notes, “the Central American exodus can be explained as a virtual refugee camp on the move crossing a territory in which governments have declared war on their citizens impoverished by neoliberalism.”⁹³ The precarity of neoliberal capitalism in El Salvador forced Victoria Salazar and her children out of the country. In Mexico, this working-class precariousness killed her. Similarly, other working-class women are displaced and flee El Salvador and Central America as surplus populations to either be criminalized or absorbed as super-exploitable labor in

⁹² Ibid, 90.

⁹³ Amarela Varela Huerta, “Notes for an Anti-racist Feminism in the Wake of the Migrant Caravans,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol 119, Issue 3 (2020), 656.

Mexico and the US. The deployment of repressive apparatuses against transnational criminal organizations has resulted in the targeting of migrants and refugees.⁹⁴ US Border Patrol data shows the number of women detained while crossing the Mexican border more than tripled between 2018 to 2019 to nearly 300,000.⁹⁵ Between February and March of 2021 alone, the detention of Central American migrants in Mexico jumped 32 percent to 15,800, and more than doubled from March 2020.⁹⁶ In Mexico, Central American cisgender and transwomen are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence, especially sexual harassment and assault by employers.⁹⁷ It is estimated that through their forced migration, 9 out of every 10 Central American women are subjected to sexual or labor exploitation and even death by the hands of Mexican police, military, and members of informal economies.⁹⁸

Mexican anthropologist Federico Navarrete notes that the racialization of poverty and what he calls the “necropolitics of inequality” in Mexico has produced an indifference among the population towards the plight of Central American migrants and refugees.⁹⁹ This is further exacerbated through the intolerable impoverishment that neoliberal capitalism incurs and the rising femicide epidemic. A 2019 survey conducted by the Washington Post and *Reforma* found that more than 6 in 10 Mexicans

⁹⁴ Steven Osuna, “Securing Manifest Destiny: Mexico’s War on Drugs, Crisis of Legitimacy, and Global Capitalism,” *Journal of World Systems*, Vol. 27, Issue 1 (2021).

⁹⁵ Julia Westbrook, “How Mexico and Central America’s Femicide Epidemic Drives and Complicates the Migrant Crisis,” *The New Humanitarian*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/02/27/Femicide-migration-Central-America-Mexico-US-Mexico-women-violence>

⁹⁶ Juan Montes, “Mexico Steps Up Detention and Deportations of Migrants,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/mexico-steps-up-detentions-and-deportations-of-migrants-11618699790?mod=hp_lead_pos4

⁹⁷ International Labour Organization, “Central American Migrant Women in Mexico: Informality in Recruitment and Employment,” (2020), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_764779.pdf, 2.

⁹⁸ Eunice Rendón, “Todos Le Fallamos a Victoria Salazar.”

⁹⁹ Federico Navarrete, *Mexico Racista: Una Denuncia* (México: Grijalbo, 2016), 23.

saw Central American migrants and refugees as a burden on their country because “they take jobs and receive benefits that should belong to Mexicans.”¹⁰⁰ Over 50% percent believe that Central Americans should be deported back to their countries of origin. These statistics speak to the growing anti-migrant sentiment in the country as a result of the chronic immiseration of the Mexican population.

These contradictions emerging from capitalist relations of exploitation have produced a Mexican national chauvinism toward Central American refugee and migrant surplus populations. Although President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the chief of police decried Victoria Salazar’s death by police as an aberrant feminicide, this occurred in the context of an anti-migrant moral panic against Central Americans and rampant sexual violence that kills 10 women a day in Mexico. In the specific instance of Victoria Salazar, the fatal couplings of misogyny and Mexican chauvinism appeared as policing. The death of Victoria Salazar might be called a feminicide by agents of the state, but their deployment of repressive apparatuses against Central American migrants and refugees is part and parcel of what I have called social murder.

The Working-class Precariousness under Neoliberal Capitalism

When the international mass media covered the death of Victoria Salazar, there were immediate references and comparisons to the murder of George Floyd, a Black

¹⁰⁰ Kevin Sieff and Scott Clement, “Unauthorized Immigrants Face Public Backlash in Mexico, Survey Finds,” *Washington Post*, July 17, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/unauthorized-immigrants-face-public-backlash-in-mexico-survey-finds/2019/07/16/f7fc5d12-a75e-11e9-a3a6-ab670962db05_story.html.

man killed in the U.S. by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2020.¹⁰¹ Both Victoria Salazar and George Floyd were members of a racialized working-class trying to survive this “decadent civilization.”¹⁰² Despite their differential experiences of racialized and gendered class exploitation and oppression, the two victims were part of a transnational relative surplus population whose movement was criminalized. They sought a better future through migration, yet this future was cut short. For them, the precarity of neoliberal capitalism ended in social murder.

In this paper, I have introduced a proletarian feminist analysis to the study of Central American displacement and forced migration to argue that the death of Victoria Salazar must be understood as a social murder resulting from the working-class precariousness and social degradation of women, cisgender and transwomen alike, under neoliberal capitalism. As the leading capitalist state, the U.S. has financed the expansion of neoliberal capitalism in these countries and defended it through the ruse of global threats that only lead to transnational criminalization of the working-class. This has resulted in the further immiseration, creating working-class precariousness for many.

Marx’s general law of capital accumulation implies that precarity is a primary contradiction of capitalism. In El Salvador, precarity has produced a femicidal terrain for women. As Ghandy’s proletarian feminist analysis conveys, the only way out of this terrain are the formation of revolutionary mass organizations and their struggle against capitalist imperialism. In the current epoch of global capitalism, left social movements

¹⁰¹ Laura Weiss, “Biden’s Disturbing Acceptance of State Violence Against Central American Migrants.”

¹⁰² Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 9.

and political organizations, I believe, must center international solidarity in the long tradition of internationalism to prevent the further capitulation to national chauvinism, moral panics waged against relative surplus populations, and heteropatriarchal violence from working-class men. Internationalism can uphold the long historical traditions of political organizations and socialist revolutions that have organized, combined both national and international class struggle, and attempted to change the conditions of working-class women. Importantly, in the current conjuncture, analyzing and changing the conditions of working-class women must include working-class transwomen.

Internationalism requires the organizing of international solidarity, since solidarity is not a given. As Cedric Robinson notes, racialism in the capitalist system legitimates and rationalizes the exploitation of difference and its gendered premature death.¹⁰³ National chauvinism, a distinct form of racialism, exploits the division of workers and people's movements. In the same vein, heteropatriarchal violence exploits the division between working-class cisgender women, transwomen, and heterosexual men. It naturalizes the social order and masks the relations of exploitation under the capitalist mode of production. Neoliberal capitalism may produce the conditions for social murder, but people resist social death. As Magaña's poem illustrates, repressive conditions always germinate seeds of resistance. Mexican feminists marched on the streets of Tulum after Victoria Salazar's death and chanted "no me protege la policia, me cuidan mis amigas" (the police do not protect me, my girlfriends take care of me). As Ghandy

¹⁰³ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2, 8-28.

reminds us, these actions, and many more, must be organized into revolutionary mass organizations and mobilized against the capitalists and their state.