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**INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: PERCEPTION AND  
REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN  
GUANAJUATO. A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

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## ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence and domestic violence refer to the violation of women's rights, often provoked by socio-cultural norms based on a patriarchal matrix. In Mexican society, in particular, gender-based violence affects the physical and psychological well-being of Mexican women. Moreover, the social representations of women who suffer violence and the lack of an effective legislative framework often reproduce the legitimization of gender-based violence, enhancing negative stereotypes and prejudices. In this scenario, the voice of the women who suffer violence in intimate relationships is silenced. In particular, in public and academic debates the impact and consequences of violence against women are reported through quantitative data, obscuring the subjective dimension of each story. This contribution reviews empirical literature on violence against women through a fieldwork on intimate partner violence, realized in the region of Guanajuato. The instrument of this analysis is based on a qualitative method, which allows the creation of a dialog, emphasizing the dimension of signification in an introspective way. Subsequently, the research focuses on the analysis of social representations regarding violence against women. In particular, it explores the collective imaginary of police officers who safeguard citizens' rights in primary interventions. In fact, primary and secondary prevention strategies rely on the knowledge acquired by all professionals who are responsible for preventing and eliminating gender-based violence. Considering that negative stereotypes keep reproducing the image that women who suffer violence "ask for it" and "deserve it", this contribution aims to analyze the prevalence and incidence of such stereotyped perceptions, reporting on the consequences and implications of these attitudes.

**Key words:** Intimate partner violence, Mexico, gender stereotypes, social representations of IPV, biographical interview, sexism

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## Introduction

The data collected in the Mexican National Survey (ENDIREH) in 2011 show that 24 million (44.9%) Mexican women above the age of 15 have suffered violence within intimate relationships (ENDIREH, 2011a, p. 8). The great impact and consequences of violence against women in Mexican society are well known at an institutional level. This fact is supported by the high number of legislative measures applied in the fight for the eradication of violence against women. In 1994 the General Assembly validated the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), which established women's rights, types of violence against women, strategies for preventions and the parameters for punishment and eradication as well. Consequently, the Mexican state has adopted administrative legislative laws against domestic violence, such as the *Ley de asistencia y prevención de la violencia intrafamiliar* (Law for prevention and support of interfamilial violence, 1996). This law consequently modified some norms in the civil and penal codes regarding violence against women in cases of divorce and murder. However, an effective change of the Mexican legislative framework was launched with the validation in 2007 of a law for women's access to a life free of violence, the *Ley general de acceso de las mujeres a una vida libre de violencia*.

In this act, domestic violence was recognized as “the abusive act of power or intentional neglect, aimed at dominating, subjugating, controlling, or assaulting women in physical, verbal, psychological, patrimonial, economical and sexual ways, inside or outside the family home, whose aggressor has or has had a relationship by blood, is or has been married, cohabits or has cohabited, or has or has had de facto an intimate relationship” (Chapter 1, art.7, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, in art.8 all the preventions and sanctions in cases of violence against women are indicated. As Torres Falcón (2004) points out, the right of abortion is guaranteed only in the Federal District area in Mexico City, whereas in the rest of Mexico's regions abortion constitutes a penal crime, and in cases of violence against women justice often does not apply the norms concerning the gender perspective. Finally, the diversification and complexity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Violencia familiar: Es el acto abusivo de poder u omisión intencional, dirigido a dominar, someter, controlar, o agredir de manera física, verbal, psicológica, patrimonial, económica y sexual a las mujeres, dentro o fuera del domicilio familiar, cuyo Agresor tenga o haya tenido relación de parentesco por consanguinidad o afinidad, de matrimonio, concubinato o mantengan o hayan mantenido una relación de hecho.

legislative framework in each Mexican region causes difficulty in establishing the proper use of the norms in defense of women's rights. All in all, the administrative laws are instruments that offer information regarding the access to public services and psychological support. Meanwhile, civil laws establish rules in cases of divorce or controversy (child custody or maintenance payments) and penal laws regulate the punishment in cases of sexual, physical or psychological violence (Torres Falcón, 2004). However, the efficacy of legislative norms and the proper application of those depend deeply on the socio-political context, in which the role of the patriarchal institution can often provoke unequal articulation of the applicable procedures.

Moreover, a great obstacle to the elimination of violence against women has been represented by socio-cultural norms that place women in a negative, inferior, subdued position in relation to the male gender. Such negative beliefs and behaviours are influenced by stereotypes and prejudices which, reflected in social representations, provoke the naturalization of sexist attitudes, beliefs and thoughts within the society. Consequently, it is commonly accepted that it is normal that men beat women, so aggressiveness, violence, power as well as the tendency to control and subdue female gender are legitimized as correct behaviours at a symbolic, societal, economic, political and institutional level (Petrillo & Di Matteo, 2007). In fact, women are recognized as inferior, passive, docile and subdued, who have to carry their cross (Agoff et. al., 2007). This is unlike males' attitude to committing violence, which has been codified as a sign of love and faith (ibid.). Above all, stereotypes allow the normalization of this dichotomous vision of gender roles and they are considered the natural understanding of the reality.

Education and social relations are structured according to stereotypes and prejudices, whose meaning is always negotiated by the power relations between the dominant and dominated group (Hall, 1997). These elements suggest that both socio-cultural and legislative norms embody the hegemonic power relations present in a society, thus provoking the marginalization and stigmatization of some groups. Violence against women needs, therefore, to be analyzed considering the complexity and plurality of factors that cause its origin, re-production and legitimization. Particularly, intimate partner violence (IPV) appears to be a conflict provoked by an innate unbalance of power between gender roles (Corsi, 1998).

This contribution aims to offer an interdisciplinary approach for the analysis of intimate partner violence in Mexican society. The first part of the work shows the interdisciplinary theoretical framework developed within Women Studies, Cultural Studies and Social Psychology, which critically investigates the phenomenon of violence against women. The first



chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the legislative frameworks established at an international level. Since 1993, thanks to the Convention of Vienna, violence against women has been recognized as a crime that violates human rights. The international attention on the social struggle allows for fixed definitions of different types of Violence Against Women (VAW), introducing international parameters for the eradication and elimination of all forms and violence, as well as establishing preventive measures for the fight against gender-based violence. Moreover, in the second chapter the analysis focuses on the case of VAW in Mexican society, paying particular attention to historical, geographical, socio-cultural, economic and political factors that influenced the type of normalization of violence against women.

Mexico is characterized by a long history of violence and corruption, so its society has often been living in pain, suffering emotional and mental distress. In this regard, the government has often been accused of using a political system based on blackmailing because of the dramatic social crises and human rights violations (Enciso, 2010). Since 1990 the number of victims against women has grown dramatically, especially in border towns like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. In fact, femicide cases that have occurred in this area have alerted the international justice system, leading to calls for urgent actions in defense of women's rights. This contribution has considered, in particular, the cases of intimate partner violence that have occurred in Guanajuato, a state in central-northern Mexico. Following the national surveys, the impact and consequences of intimate partner violence affect the well-being and integrity of women in that region, provoking a state of denial of justice for these women solely because of their gender.

The third chapter will introduce the concept of gender perspective and its development in feminist movements. Thus, feminist theories constitute fundamental roots for the recognition and affirmation of women's rights. Special attention will be paid to the theories affirmed during the second and the third waves of the feminist movement because during those periods the most significant struggles regarding women's recognition were critically investigated. The focus of the research is the analysis of the relationship between power, violence and the domination of the female gender, which provokes the legitimation of violence against women. The third wave of the feminist movement has articulated central concepts about the female body, female subjectivity and civil rights in relation to patriarchal, androcentric hegemony. The latter concept has been identified as the main cause of the naturalization of the objectification of the female body (Lagarde, 1989).

Furthermore, such analyses take into account the multiple recognitions of female subjectivity, starting from the differences between battered Western women and battered

women of color whose characteristics differ, in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, and geographical position (Crenshaw, 1993). Stereotypes particularly affect women of color, who, in cases of violence, have to deal with discrimination and prejudice. In fact, this chapter will consider the role of stereotypes in the categorization process of human beings, used for the construction and interpretation of reality. The theories developed in Social Psychology offer an interesting perspective that addresses the analysis of violence against women, starting with the hegemonic role of stereotypes and prejudices at societal and political levels.

Finally, the theoretical part concludes with the analysis of the social representation of VAW. In fact, social representations constitute a set of common beliefs, values and ideas about a reality, deeply influencing, through stereotypes, the interpretation of meaning and reality (Moscovici, 1961; 1976). Social representations have been investigated within the theories of Social Psychology and Cultural Studies, considering the relevant role assumed by these in the articulation and regulation of power relations in a society. Thus, representations are significant in the naturalization process of meaning, and their role becomes fundamental in the establishment of hegemonic discourse on the legitimation of violence against women. Considering that the negotiation of meaning settles in the struggle between dominant and dominated groups, its identification helps to understand the kind of perception reproduced in the collective imagination. According to Stuart Hall (1997), the analysis of the representations of the role of gender constitutes a significant parameter of analysis of social conflict, since it entails whether representations are interpreted following the hegemonic discourse or whether their meanings are negotiated or even contrasted.

The second part of this work consists of the analysis of the results collected by two qualitative researchers. The fieldwork was carried out in the state capital, Guanajuato, during a five-month period between 2014 and 2015. The fifth chapter will present biographical interviews of six women who have suffered violence within their intimate partner relations. Following the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, the stories of these women have been interpreted on the basis of the gender perspective considering, therefore, social, geographical and political characteristics. The qualitative research is based on life story interviews, such as semi-structured or free interviews, proposed by Atkinson (2002), which allows the disclosure of the subjective and introspective parts of the protagonist. Therefore, violence against women has been approached through the “voice of the subjects,” which discloses the multiple levels of the social problem, avoiding the production of general and quantitative information.

The sixth chapter focuses on the analysis of the social representations of violence against women. Specifically, the aim of the investigation is to disclose the collective unconscious of

professional figures, like police officers, teachers, doctors and public employers who every day work in close contact with women who suffer violence. The qualitative method has been proposed by the social psychologists Petrillo and Di Matteo (2007), who conducted the research in Naples, Italy. In the interviews respondents were asked to classify types of violence against women and to describe the hypothetical profile of women who suffer violence and of perpetrators who commit the aggression.

Furthermore, this work aims to present the multiple factors of intimate partner violence in Mexican society. First, the author attempts to explore different theoretical frameworks regarding violence against women, taking into account multiple approaches developed in Western and non-Western countries. Second, the empirical research on intimate partner violence attempts to disclose “the subjective voice” both of the women and the community. Qualitative research enables, in fact, the highlighting of faint and invisible aspects of consequences and impacts of violence against women, focusing on the subjective dimension. It allows for the recognition of many risk factors related to women’s risk of suffering violence within the relationship, as well as the identification of preventative measures that reduce the impact and reproduction. Finally, the study explores similar factors in the community, since one of the principle causes of the reproduction and legitimization of gender-based violence are stereotypes and prejudices rooted in the collective imagination. The identification of such fixed images on violence against women aims to deconstruct negative meanings and beliefs which provoke the widespread dissemination of sexist attitudes against women.

# Chapter one

## Violence against women

### 1.1 Gender-based violence<sup>2</sup>: Background and Definition

Gender-based violence discourse is a central argument both in social and human sciences and its aims are to investigate the origins, characteristics, risks, consequences, and preventions of violence in individual and social dimensions. In particular, psychologists have questioned human attitudes of being violent, highlighting the difference between “aggressiveness” and “violence”. The first term refers to an individual tendency to intentionally provoke physical and psychological damage against another individual. The concept of intentionality is highly relevant in psychological theories because it stresses the biological human component of aggressiveness as a natural drive that can become dangerous in cases of intention. Further theories in psychology about aggressive attitudes assume biological determinism, which research tries to explain through science with physical abnormalities related to genetic heritage, anatomic structure and sexual chromosome abnormalities, as well as with research about hormone function and neurological structure<sup>3</sup>.

On the one hand, aggressiveness is considered an adaptive function of human beings: as animals, humans have to find a way to survive, so it belongs to human nature and people need it in order to adapt to the environment<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, in Freudian discourses, aggressiveness is a reaction of frustration because of the negation of a desire (Freud, 1900–1905). So it has been explained as an instinctive natural drive. Moreover, Freud suggests that aggressiveness is a death drive. In humans there are two opposing forces, *Eros* (love) and *Thanatos* (death). Both forces act in the human passions in order to create a unity between the physiological and existential needs. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, destructive energy produced by a death drive should be directed towards external objects; otherwise it can produce self-destruction (Freud, 1921). On the other hand, psychologists focus on the negative emotive

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term *gender violence* refers to any kind of violence against human beings due to sexual identity (woman, man, lesbian, gay, transgender and queer). Even if in this work I focus on the cases of violence against women, the use of the term *gender violence* aims to avoid a restrictive understanding of the phenomenon.

<sup>3</sup> See Lombroso, C. (1876) *L'uomo delinquente*; Jacobs, P. A. et al. (1965) *Nature*; Swaab DF, Hofman MA (1984). "Sexual differentiation of the human brain. A historical perspective". *Progress in Brain Research* 61: 361–74.

<sup>4</sup> See Konrad, L. (1966) *On Aggression*.

reaction that provokes violent attitudes<sup>5</sup> or the existence of an aggressiveness acquired by socialization processes, which are developed through family, school, society, and mass media (Social Learning Theory; Bandura, 1973). The last factor is significant because it includes imitation processes from external environmental conditions. So in order to talk about aggressiveness or violence, researchers have to take into account the role of media, social discourse and the effect of its circulation in the media.

But what is violence's origin? Why do people need to act in a violent way? As previously declared, violence does not belong to aggressiveness; in fact, scientists make a distinction between the two terms in order to create a strict connotations of the terms.

Aggressiveness is a natural drive that, because of individual factors such as social, cultural supports, can intentionally provoke acts in order to damage others. Whereas violence refers to forms of physical or psychological assault that intend to destroy or injure others. It may be related to individual factors and structural or cultural supports, and it constitutes a crime, so violent actions are by law prosecutable. Following the theory of category construction (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), male–female categorization may provoke violent acts against the opposite gender due to negative stereotypical attitudes that turn into prejudice and discrimination<sup>6</sup>. Finally, violence is a feeling generated by a conflict that manifests itself in the confrontation between the masculine and the feminine. Particularly, the lives of women appear constrained by social codes that condemn them to a life of liabilities and discretion. In fact, in many societies women are victims of possessive love and they suffer physical, psychological and economical batterings by men.

Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon throughout the whole world that includes all women, regardless of differences in age, ethnicity, class, culture, and religion. In many countries violent practices, torture and segregation persist against the female sex solely because of their gender. According to an EU survey on VAW “one women in three in the EU has experienced sexual assault or physical and psychological violence since the age of 15” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, p. 27). This issue first drew attention in the 1970s with second wave feminism. During this period feminist scholars publicly denounced female battering, such as domestic violence and/or intimate partner violence. In particular, feminists demanded gender equality, women's rights and normative recognition of gender-based discrimination. Principally, they denounced suppressive systems based on

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<sup>5</sup> See Berkowitz L. 1989. Frustration-aggression hypothesis: examination and reformulation. *Psychol. Bull.* 106:59–73  
Berkowitz L. 1990. On the formation and regulation of anger and aggression: a cognitive association analysis. *Am. Psychol.* 45:494–503  
Berkowitz L. 1993. Pain and aggression: some findings and implications. *Motiv. Emot.* 17:277–93

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 3.3

capitalism and patriarchy, which stigmatize the female gender, from a cultural sphere with ideologies of stereotype and prejudice to a structural political and economical sphere with the acts of production and reproduction (Firestone, 1970; Millet, 1970; Rubin, 1975). Women are limited to private spheres, they are denied public access to workplaces and they are relegated to mother–wife activities. Moreover, the understanding of female assault as a social problem presents serious difficulties, because there is a common belief that men should not need to rape a woman<sup>7</sup>. Finally, female battering in intimate relations is often considered a woman’s problem, arguing that they allow such treatment, justifying it and even accepting it (Lorente, 2001).

In this regard, the feminist perspective helps in the awareness of sexist attitudes and the role of misogyny in relation to sexual exploitation, sexual coercion and many other forms of violence against women (Russell, 1992). Feminist scholars support the actions of activists in order to promote a legal recognition of women’s rights violations, which differ depending on the geographical position and cultural tradition. Making a distinction between different forms of violence is important because of differences in class, gender and sex between women. At a community level, women have founded civil movements and non-profit organizations, denouncing violence against women and appealing to the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women for social and political reforms. In 1976 activist Diana Russell presented to the International Tribunal in Brussels the case of women from San Francisco who had been raped by husbands or ex-husbands, with the aim of showing the dramatically high rate of violence in the district. In this period violence against women became the research focus of many scholars.

On the one hand, psychologists and psychiatrists conducted empirical research in order to create surveys, scientific data and rates regarding the gender-based violence phenomenon, identifying risk factors and consequently proposing valid measurement methods, and focusing on women’s mental health<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the phenomenon has been investigated under the feminist perspective related to political, civil and cultural supports (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Caputi, 1988; Kelly, 1988). Consequently, the debates around this issue became international, gaining attention from the United Nations and several governmental and non-governmental organizations. In the 1970s the rate of violent crime rose steadily in both private and public spheres, and so the need to gain equality, security, integrity and liberty (UN, 1993)

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<sup>7</sup> In Western society rape has not been recognized as a crime for a long time; rather a common belief has persisted that sexual intercourse belongs to private sphere and not to the public one. Western countries first recognized rape as crime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contributing to the affirmation of legal measures and effective actions in the political and social dimensions in order to punish sexual crimes. For more information, see Pride, A. (1981) “To respectability and back: A ten-year view of the anti-rape movement. Fight Back!” In Delacoste & Newman (Eds.) *Fight back: Feminist resistance to male violence*, pp. 114–118; Estrich, S. (1988). *Real Rape*; Howard, A. & Kavenik F. (2000). *Handbook of American Women's History*;

<sup>8</sup> See Coley & Beckett, 1988; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz 1980; DSM-5, *Marital Conflict Disorders with Violence*, 2013.

among genders become an urgent issue concerning human rights. Although the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)—the first policy forum on women’s rights and gender equality—was established in 1928, there has been less social and political attention on the issue. During the 1980s and 1990s thirty-four countries submitted a protocol with the principal aim of obtaining the recognition of women’s subjectivity and the respect of their rights. The commission’s functions focus on the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality in civil, political, economic and cultural spheres, as well as the development of reports and legal measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to suggest relevant recommendations to the member states (OAS, 2015). In fact, there are some international legal actions that have contributed to the recognition of women’s discrimination. Firstly, in 1979 the United Nations enacted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), previously formed in the 1946, which defines in a normative way that violence against women refers to:

“...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (CEDAW, 1979, Introduction).

This action focused on civil rights, ensuring women’s access to political and public life, and it established a legal and social system responsible for human rights and gender equality, committing member states to fulfilling the obligation submitted by the convention. The United Nations organized four world conferences on women in order to keep working on an agenda for women’s rights (as shown in table 1). One hundred and eighty-five countries submitted the agenda, committing to following international guidelines and adopting strategic plans for a fight against women’s discrimination. Furthermore, in 1993 the General Assembly of the UN adopted the 48/104. *Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women*, through which numerous actions have been promoted, re-establishing international definitions and legal measures against female discrimination. In addition, in 1994 the advancement of women’s rights was discussed in the *Vienna Declaration and Program of Actions*, at the *Belém do Para Convention* and finally the resolution for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, celebrated on November 25. Specifically, the *Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women* provides a worldwide definition of violent acts against women. According to the first article:

[...] “the term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993, art. 1).

According to this definition, violence is recognized in the public and private spheres. In the public sphere it refers to institutional as well as structural violence committed by states, authorities and institutions, whereas in the private sphere it alludes to violence that occurs within the family dimension. In order to clarify the definitions of the different forms of violence, the second article of the declaration declares that violence against women occurs in physical, sexual and psychological ways in both spheres. In the private dimension violence occurs in the family or among neighbors, and it includes sexual abuse of the female gender (children, girls, and women), marital rape, dowry-related violence, forms of genital mutilation or any traditional practices that batter women as well as any kind of female exploitation. Whereas in the community, there are forms of rape, sexual harassment or intimidation at work or in educational institutions, as well as prostitution and trafficking of women. Finally, violence can be perpetrated by the state in the case of war crimes, sexual enslavement during military conflicts or the existence of a legal system which undermines and subordinates female roles.

The *Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women* establishes the state’s responsibility in adopting norms that modify social and cultural patterns based on female stereotypes and prejudice. It declares the equal understanding of gender roles in private and public spheres, promoting the recognition of female subjectivity in individual and social dimensions:

(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women (1979, art. 5).

(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases (1979, art. 5).



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| Universal Declaration on Human Rights  | 1948 |
| Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol                       | 1979 |
| Recommendation 19 of the Committee on the CEDAW  | 1983 |
| Vienna Declaration and Plan for Action (VDPA Vienna),  | 1993 |
| The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women  | 1993 |
| International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo  | 1994 |
| The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action  | 1995 |
| 25 November designated as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, UN adopts the option protocol of CEDAW, | 1999 |
| Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, (Istanbul Convention),      | 2011 |

The second article of the declaration clearly defines types of violence, such as physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence. In addition, the article highlights that violence manifests predominantly in three spheres: family, community and state. According to the Mexican National Research Institute of Family Relation ENDIREH (*Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinamica de las Relaciones en los Hogares*, 2003), violence against women is classifiable in different forms depending on its specific patterns:

*Physical violence* refers to any act that intends to dominate and subordinate the female body through the battering of women and though sexual assault, as well as any visible form of harassment such as beating or physical harm, whose consequences provoke damage to the victim, or even death. Such forms of violence take place in public and private spheres. Physical violence implies a visible trace of the violent act on the body, with the intention of subjugating the victim's body.

*Sexual violence* constitutes any forced sexual act using coercion, such as rape or physically forced sexual penetration, which takes place in both private and public spheres, as well as forced sex in marital relations, abuse by known and unknown perpetrators. Sexual violence occurs both in private and public spheres. Regarding the private sphere, it consists of the obligation of the partner to have sex or to fulfill any kind of erotic act, painful sexual practice or fetishism against her will. Such physical acts include verbal expressions like *frigid woman* or

*nymphomaniac* (Torres, 2001), which reproduce binary couples of sexual construction (sacral–profane; good–bad; open–closed).

*Economic violence* indicates, in the public space, women’s limited access to work places or highly paid positions, women’s right to gain an equal salary in comparison with the male gender and to not be legally discriminated against in the case of pregnancy. Moreover, in the private space it manifests in the form of a husband or partner’s control over a wife or partner’s salary, the negation of access to a husband’s income as well as to a family’s inheritance. This form of violence appears in implicit and explicit forms, and it aims for the complete subordination and control of women through material resources. Moreover, there are specific attitudes that manifest implicit economic violence, such as considering women as “servants”, neglecting to provide attention during the state of pregnancy or illness, denying access to education and health care, or even stealing their money or wage and destroying their property. All these are also obsolete forms of economic violence.

*Psychological violence* happens in a verbal way through injuries, intimidation, isolation, humiliation, and denigration. In this way violence becomes invisible and it acts on the psychic and mental spheres. Psychological violence is a kind of emotional harassment, whose effects are often invisible and imperceivable. Emotional violence includes verbal statements such as mockery, insults, and criticism or devaluated attitudes toward women in order to criticize intellectual or physical characteristics. All implicit or explicit threatening acts damage women, even under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Intimidation is considered as a set of verbal or behavioral attitudes that intend to damage women or the self. Moreover, hostile behavior refers to a male partner’s tendency to fly into a rage because women refuse to fulfill their gendered role, or because she disagrees with him. Similarly, a male’s tendency to control and monitor women’s activities or social behaviors both in public or private spaces, including criticisms and scowls, are recognized as emotional violence (Cervantes Muñoz et al., 2004).

*Stalking* is an intended obsessive conduct directed at a specific person with the aim of controlling and possessing this person through fear, threats, and persecution. Stalking occurs through repeated offensive and threatening messages, phone calls or chats on the internet many times during a single day, but it can also occur through following or loitering and the damage of property (EU-wide Survey on Violence against Women, 2014).

*Dating violence* refers to physical and psychological violence committed by a person who is or has been in a romantic or intimate relationship with the victim, and it occurs mostly among teenagers involved in a relationship (Sacco, 2014).

*Violence during pregnancy and obstetric violence* are types of violence that women suffer in relation to pregnancy. Violence during pregnancy is often associated with institutional violence and it includes miscarriage, late entry into prenatal care, stillbirth, premature birth, and fetal injury, as well as cesarean birth, which is imposed due to medical interests and causes maternal mortality, fetal injuries or physical damage to the woman.

Although such definitions are fundamental in the legal recognition of human rights' violations, creating awareness about physical and psychological damage at individual and social levels, a binary conception between the private and public dimensions of violent acts is still present. On the one hand, gender discrimination as an object of studies on human rights works in order to control a state's behavior regarding fulfilling international recommendations and guaranteeing protection and respect of human rights. Non-profit organizations, like Amnesty International or Human Watch, as well as institutional apparatus such as CEDAW, collect data with the aim of denouncing the exploitation of human beings or inhuman treatment to international institutions. Finally, their work is fundamental for the respecting of laws, stipulated protocols or conventions, obligating such states to respect human rights. Moreover, the criminal justice service is another important instrument that works to enhance the law, ensuring the appropriate punishment in cases of crime, offering equal parameters of valuation and establishing the maintenance of justice.

On the other hand, gender prospective offers an approach based on an analysis of patriarchy, power relations and the hierarchical construction of gender categories. As a consequence, gender-based violence needs to be investigated by taking into account the intersection with social, historical, political and cultural dimensions within a specific location (Lugones, 2008). In this regard, the public health approach drawn up by the World Health Organization (WHO) investigates violence against women, based on the ecological model (Krug et. al., 2002) with an interdisciplinary, intersectoral and population-based approach. In addition, the EU-wide survey on violence against women (2014) reports findings on the EU, using a population-based methodological approach. As a result, within these two frameworks the definition of gender-based violence is drawn up, focusing on the individual–subjective level, the community level, and the social level in intersection with power–control relations, considering the interplay of axes of power (racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism) and the cultural, political, and geographical dimensions.

### **Box 1 Reading the surveys**

The first research on the prevalence of gender-based violence occurred through the quantitative method based on the Conflict Tactics Scale created by Murray A. Straus (Straus, 1979). According to Straus, “conflict” is an innate aspect of human behavior. Starting from this axiom the scale should measure “conflict tactics” adopted with coercion, focusing on behavior such as negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury, excluding emotions, attitudes, and cognitive appraisals (Straus, 1979). As a result, such a method was criticized due to the exclusion of culture- and society-specific dimensions, as well as individual factors in the recognition of acts of gender-based violence. Nowadays, international researchers critique such methodology and prefer to estimate data through population-based methodologies, using an interdisciplinary approach in order to consider specific geographical, historical, political, social, and cultural dimensions as well as individual factors. The WHO study uses a population-based method based on an ecological approach that analyzes acts of violence, considering individual factors (childhood, education), family history, community factors (cultural, geographical, and political dimensions) and social factors. The WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence aims to identify factors that cause violence (risk factors) as well as to incentivize protective factors, helping policy, legal and health institutions, at both national and international levels, to adopt strategies to fight against gender-based violence. The first countries selected were areas without recent war-related conflict that were aware of the VAW issue (Bangladesh, Brazil, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Thailand, United Republic of Tanzania, Ethiopia, New Zealand, Serbia, and Montenegro). The questionnaire was based on the population-based methodology, using face-to-face interviews with 24,000 women aged 15 and over with differing social and civil statuses. It was structured into 12 sections and the women were asked to respond to questions about individual and community dimensions referring to reproductive health, individual financial autonomy, attitudes towards gender roles, children and partners, and experiences of partner and non-partner violence. The *EU-Wide Survey on Violence against Women* (2014) was conducted involving FRA staff composed of experts and researchers from each EU member state. Firstly the work was focused, comparing criminal justice data, international indicators, Eurostat-collected data, and other administrative resources. Secondly, it conducted a national survey in each country according to a population-based methodology involving a minimum of 1,500 women aged 18 to 74 from each member state. Part of the survey consisted of face-to-face interviews, and another part consisted of questionnaires to be filled out using either pen and paper interviewing (PAPI) or computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). In addition, the survey portrayed general characteristics of victims and perpetrators. Both pieces of research investigate the prevalence of physical and psychological violence, sexual assault, stalking, and violence experienced during childhood, emphasizing cases of intimate partner violence and sexual harassment, otherwise excluding specific cultural and social violence such as female mutilation, infanticide, and femicide.

## **1.2 International Data: Prevalence of VAW**

The World Health Organization, an institution founded in the 1996 that fights for women’s rights and against gender-based violence, considers intimate partner violence and sexual violence as the two most common forms of violence in the world (WHO, 1996). The first term refers to the tendency of an intimate partner or an ex-partner to inflict psychological, psychical, and sexual harassment, acting in an aggressive, controlling way with the intent of subduing their partner. IPV is a similar phenomenon to domestic violence, and some studies do not distinguish between the terms, using them interchangeably. According to the third article of the Istanbul Convention, domestic violence indicates (EU survey, 2011, p. 8) all acts of physical,

sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.

Women in the family sphere suffer different kinds of violence, such as physical, psychological, sexual assault, marital rape, prostitution, genital mutilation, infanticide, honor killing, and battering. Whereas sexual assault indicates the presence of a specific sexist culture that operates by raping and using the female body sexually to satisfy personal needs. According to the WHO, violence against women constitutes a women’s rights violation and a public health problem that occurs cyclically during the life span.

| Phase       | Type of violence   |
|-------------|--|
| Pre-birth   | Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes<br>Infancy<br>Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse<br>Girlhood<br>Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography  |
| Adolescence | Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid throwing and date rape); economically   |
| adulthood   | coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy |
| Elderly     | Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual, physical and psychological abuse  |

WHO, *Violence against Women. Definition and scope of problem*, 1997, p. 2.

The WHO recognizes the presence of a *continuum* of violence during the life span of women, which includes any woman in the world regardless of differences in race, class, and culture, creating awareness on the emergency of women’s rights violations worldwide. Whereas violence against women has always existed, during the 1990s international recommendations as well as the international legal system established new offenses and penalties for the violation of women’s rights. It aimed to tackle the problem of naturalization of gender-based

discrimination from culture to culture and to individuate other forms of macro and micro violence.

According to the Violence Against Women Act, published in 1994, the risk of victimization involves both men and women. The negation of the heteronormative perspective allows all human beings to be considered in the victimization process. The WHO's engagement around gender-based violence occurred after the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 in which governments identified the lack of adequate information about the nature, the causes, and the consequences of violence, promoting relevant research into the factors surrounding VAW.

In response to this demand, the WHO created reports like the *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (1997) and the *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002). These reports offer a global overview of prevalence data, information on IPV and sexual violence regarding their impact on the health, and the psychological and physical well-being of the female gender. These studies, in particular, investigate the nature and consequences of violence in order to cooperate in the building of efficient public health assistance and the implementation of legislative reforms through a multi-sectoral approach. As a result, the findings show that globally between 10% and 50% of women suffered IPV and between 10% and 30% of women suffered sexual abuse, either as children or as adults (Heise, Ellberg & Gottemoeller, 1999). The prevalence rates of physical and sexual violence in the multi-country study reflect the existence of patriarchal societies characterized by male dominance and female subordination, which reinforce power relations through the social and political construction of masculinity as aggressive-active and femininity as docile-passive (Kelly and Redford, 1987).

In addition, even if researchers have documented VAW globally, studying different social, economic, religious, and cultural groups, there is a lack of information due to women refusing to denounce their experience of violence. According to the WHO's *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005), at a global level the most common forms of violence are:

- *Intimate partner violence* (IPV), which is any form of violence in the family that occurs through acts of physical violence, such as beating, hitting or kicking; sexual violence, which includes forced sex, rape and any form of sexual coercion; emotional/psychological abuse, which refers to behavior such as insults, humiliation, intimidation and any form of threats; controlling behavior, which indicates acts of isolation, monitoring of movement, of economic resources or any restriction related to socialization, such as access to employment, education or health care. The term IPV is also called domestic violence referring to household abuse, but the

preference concerning the use of the first term is due to its inclusion of the abuse of children and the elderly by any members of the household. The data show that more than 24,000 women in 10 countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Thailand, Serbia and Montenegro, Tanzania) have experienced IPV.

- *Sexual violence* refers to any acts, from verbal to physical harassment, that cause forced penetration including marital rape, date rape, rape by strangers or acquaintances, sexual advances or assault at school or in workplaces, systematic rape such as forced impregnation and sexual slavery in armed conflicts, and sexual abuse of disabled people and children. Sexual coercion can encompass different degrees of force, psychological intimidation, blackmail, and threats. Victims are physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they do not want to through fear, intimidation or enforced incapacity—when intoxicated, drugged or asleep—or through being mentally incapacitated. Data show the prevalence of sexual violence by intimate partners towards women aged between 15 and 49, whereas sexual violence by non-partners is prevalently committed in conflict or post-conflict areas. In fact, a wide range of studies show that women are likely to know their aggressors (Heise, Ellberg & Gottemoeller, 1999). In addition, forced sexual initiation as well as sexual abuse during childhood among girls (around 27%) and boys (around 14%) occurs around the world, in South and Central America and the Caribbean, as well as in Indonesia, Thailand, and Africa.

As Torres (2001) points out, IPV omits such acts in domestic spaces that intentionally use power and force against the intimate partner and that damage the physical, psychological, emotional, and economic well-being of women (Torres, 2001). Moreover, sexual harassment frequently occurs in institutions, such as at school, at university or at work. The term *sexual harassment* indicates, “any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction” (Council of Europe, 2011, art. 40, p. 18). It is important to emphasize, therefore, that the purpose or effect of intentionally attacking the physical or moral dignity of people also belongs to the forms of sexual coercion among boys, girls, men, and women who are battered at workplaces, at school or on the street, as well as in military institutions or in prisons.

Finally, European Commission defines further types of VAW:

- *Female genital mutilation (FGM)* is a practice that causes the partial or total removal of external female genitalia through clitoridectomy (removal of the clitoris), excision (removal of the clitoris and labia minora), infibulations (narrowing of the vaginal opening by covering the

seal), as well as any form of partial or total removal of female genitalia for non-medical purposes. Such practices are globally recognized as a violation of the human rights of the female gender. It is prevalent in African areas and in Yemen, as well as in some countries in Asia or among immigrants in Europe, Canada, Australia, and the USA.

- *Human trafficking* is defined by the UN's *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person* (2000) as any practice of recruitment, transportation or transfer of persons by the use of force, threats, coercion or abuse of power, which occurs by gaining profits through giving or receiving payments or benefits in order to gain control of people with the intention to exploit (UN, 2000). Trafficking of women and girls occur in different forms of labor, illegal trade in humans and sexual exploitation related to prostitution or pornography, which is extremely common among vulnerable migrants. It is present in many sectors, such as domestic servitude, forestry, and construction or in areas such as agriculture and manufacturing, which differ by country and region.

- *Femicide* is a term that refers to the intentional murder of females because they are women.

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#### **Box 2 Violence against men and violence against LGBT**

The focus on cases of violence against women is more common than those of violence against men. The reason for this is that women suffer a higher number of violations and their gender is socially, culturally and legally more vulnerable than the male gender. Recent studies recognize violence against men in intimate partner violence and sexual assault (General Social Survey, 1999) as a form of physical and psychological violence. Recently, in Canada the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence has conducted a study on male abuse that shows the prevalence of physical violence by beating, hitting or kicking as well as psychological abuse by limiting contacts with others, injuring, intimidating or controlling social relations and activities (Cook, 1997). Moreover, it is very difficult to compare findings among different pieces of research or to report relevant data due to the underreporting by male victims of violence practices. The common belief regarding male superiority and their stereotyping as strong, virile and aggressive debilitates their status, making speaking out difficult because of the shame or embarrassment, denounces and measurement of abuse acts. As a consequence, the context of male abuse is under-researched. Some findings refer to intimate partner violence in which 21.8 percent of younger men aged 18 to 30 experienced partner abuse (Straus, 1974; 1993). Whereas other studies highlight emotional abuse causing psychological consequences in damaging men's mental as well as physical well-being. Otherwise, in order to understand gender-based violence the discourse should be not restricted to a heterosexual paradigm, then intimate partner violence has been recognized in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) partners (Eaton et al., 2008). According to some researchers, violence against LGBTQ partners presents similarities and differences to heterosexual partners, and violence also refers to power/control relations in a misogynous context and homophobic social attitudes related to sexism (Elliott, 1993; Eaton et al., 2008). In addition, the space of oppression is duplicated then they are oppressed by social heteronormative paradigm and they are oppressed within the relationship. According to Hart (1986) lesbian battering is connoted with persistent psychological control through the control of thoughts, beliefs and conduct, and physical control through battering, hitting and kicking. Finally, such findings show how gender-based violence is widespread in all gender categories, highlighting the importance to take in account any type of violence in social, political, historical and geographical contexts within the axes of sex, class and race.

Eaton et al, 2008

Firstly, scholar Diana Russell (1976) defines the act of a male killing a female as *femicide* in order to highlight the prevalence of murder cases connoted by sexism practices. The author uses



the term “female” to include all categories of women without distinction between age, class or ethnicity, emphasizing the existence of homicidal practices from the childhood to elderly. As Russell (1976) suggests, femicide could manifest itself through racist, homophobic and marital femicide or the act of killing perpetrated by family members, serial or mass femicide, infanticide, honor killings as well as any act of violence against women which causes death. It even includes the deliberate transmission of HIV, abortions, genital mutilation, hysterectomies, and clitorectomies. The urgent need to recognize such phenomena linguistically as well as legislatively is related to the high rate of femicide caused by misogynous attitudes, patriarchal governments as well as religious denial of women’s freedom.

Originally, the term *femicide* was used in Latin American and Indian spheres because of the dramatic increase in the number of murder cases related to gender discrimination. Mexican cases in Ciudad Juarez city are well-known internationally for the mass femicide related to drug trafficking and the existence of a state of corruption, as well as the existence of a patriarchal system and misogynous social practices (Fragoso, 2000). Whereas in India cases of violence are remarkable due to religious bans, caste differences, and gender-based discrimination in social relations (WHO, 2011). For a long time femicide became a phenomenon of voyeurism towards Third World areas that were considered external to Western countries and a certain culture. Nowadays femicide is recognized as a global issue, distinguishing *intimate femicide*, as a crime committed by a husband, intimate partner, or ex-partner, from *honour-related murders*, which refer to female killings due to behavioral transgression, adultery, sexual intercourse or pregnancy outside marriage in the name of the defense of a family reputation or religious obligation (Russell, 1976; Fragoso, 2000; Lagarde, 2001). Another form of femicide occurs when newly-married women bring insufficient dowry to the family, such as *dowry-related femicide* on the Indian subcontinent (WHO, 2010). Finally, there are cases where femicide can be committed by a non-intimate partner, such as the systematic mass murder phenomena related to sexual abuse, torture, and brutal aggressive practices that are associated with the common social relevance of female discrimination and the state of vulnerability.

Otherwise, according to an EU-wide survey on VAW, in the EU there is a wide range of women who have experienced IPV and sexual assault from the age of 15. Findings show that the highest rates of partner violence are present in Sweden, Netherlands, and Denmark, whereas the lowest percentage is traceable in southern Europe, in Portugal, Greece, and Poland (EU, 2014). Generally, there is a prevalence of physical violence in the form of acts of pushing, slapping or pulling women’s hair (ibid.), whereas a low number of women experienced sexual violence from the age of 15 by a partner or someone else. Moreover, the findings show a high

range of women (ibid.) who experienced psychological violence, mostly by an intimate partner. The most common forms of psychological violence refers to controlling behavior and abusive behavior, such as humiliation, injury or threats, and a small percentage experienced economic violence (ibid.) including controlling independent decisions, family finances or forbidding employment opportunities.

Finally, whereas results of the EU survey suggest that there are few differences among IPV and sexual violence across women from 28 countries, the WHO's findings reported significant differences in levels of IPV and sexual violence experienced by women due to particular social and individual factors. All these forms of violence affect female well-being, causing long-term consequences to women, their children, and the family. For this reason, international agreements and researchers aim to recognize risk factors at individual and social levels and to draw up prevention guidelines in order to build protective factors and avoid physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems.

### **1.3 Reflections on the consequences of IPV and sexual violence**

Violence has greater effects on women's well-being and its impact can cause emotional, physical and psychological consequences. As a result, violence provokes different effects, ranging from long- to short-term, and in the worse cases it can be lethal, provoking the loss of lives. Intimate partner and sexual violence affect, in particular, a large proportion of women regardless of differences in race, ethnicity, geographical position, and cultural and socio-economic status. According to the WHO's report, even if the prevalence and forms of violence differ from country to country, it occurs against women and girls irrespective of culture, status, sex, and class due to the male domination over women rooted in social and cultural attitudes (WHO, 2012). Considering a specific country's factors which influence the prevalence of one type of consequence over others (such as war conflict's area, gender inequality, religious or cultural practices, state of impunity, institutional corruption, HIV/AIDS prevalence, demographic factors, human trafficking, lack of recognition of women's rights, low access to health and legal services), both the WHO's survey and the EU-wide survey recognize the following principal consequences on women's health among the different types of violence against women (such as psychological and physical violence, economic violence, sexual abuse, genital mutilation, obstetric violence, femicide):

*-Physical effects:* women experienced mostly physical injuries (such as being pushed, shoved or slapped) by intimate partners and non-partners. The most common types of injury are bruises and scratches, and to a lesser extent wounds, burns, fractures (such as broken bones or teeth), concussion, internal injuries, and miscarriages (EU survey, 2014). Moreover, the effects jeopardize women's health, provoking disabilities, gastrointestinal syndromes, long-term health problems, from chronic pain and HIV/AIDS infections to death caused by AIDS or femicide (WHO, 2012).

*-Psychological consequences and mental disorders:* women who have experienced violence by partners feel mostly ashamed, embarrassed, and guilty, provoking strong feelings of fear and panic after the incident. Whereas violence perpetrated by non-partners causes, in most cases, feelings of shock, anger, and aggressiveness. The EU survey shows that sexual violence provokes more long-term psychological consequences than physical violence, such as anxiety, panic attacks, vulnerability and loss of self-confidence. Such problems can become pathologies and consequently provoke difficulty in sleeping, eating and in having relationships with others, as well as stress, psychosomatic disorders, poor self-esteem, self-harm, depression, and suicide attempts. In worse case scenarios, stress and anxiety disorders provoke post-traumatic stress disorders.

*-Behavioural consequences:* such effects are in most cases associated to psychological consequences. When self-esteem or self-confidence decreases and vulnerability, anxiety, and stress increase, there is a prevalence of self-harm disorders which lead to the use of alcohol and drugs, promiscuity in having multiple sexual partners, choosing an abusive partner after the violence, and a tendency to overlook contraceptive forms.

*-Sexual and reproductive effects:* other forms of effects are spotted in genealogical disorders and trauma such as vaginal infections, chronic pelvic pain, urinary tract infections, and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS or HPV, which causes hysterectomy and cancer.

The majority of women suffer intimate partner and sexual violence from childhood until adulthood. That occurs mostly within the family or the context of marriage, but perpetrators can be caregivers, acquaintances, and strangers as well. Violence affects individuals, families, and communities, stigmatizing family and children for the rest of their lives. Negative consequences include damage to health, outcomes associated with economic and educational underperformance, unsafe intercourse, and health risks in both males and females (Mangiolo, 2009). Such consequences can manifest in childhood and adolescence, creating a kind of acceptance of violent behaviour and increasing the risk of sexual abuse as well as of pregnancy in early adolescence. More common are psychological and behavioral consequences such as

depression, stress disorders, use of illegal substances, suicide attempts, and post-traumatic stress disorders. In adulthood, IPV and sexual abuse can lead to physical problems such as memory loss, difficulty in carrying out daily activities, and chronic health problems such as gastrointestinal disorders, pelvic pain, and back pain as well as serious effects on reproductive and sexual health. Trauma and genealogical disorders are common as well as female genital mutilation and obstetric violence, such as prenatal death, fistula, hemorrhaging, infection, ulceration, pain during sexual intercourse, and permanent damage of normal genital tissue or to reproductive capabilities (women who have a caesarean births cannot give birth naturally for five years).

VAW has serious effects, even on children, provoking anxiety, depression, poor school performance, and disorders in sociability due to isolation, psychological consequences such as feeling shamed and different, as well as negative health outcomes associated with a high risk to being exposed to diseases, abuse, and harassment. A large number of studies have evidenced the association between IPV and child abuse (Holt et al. 2008), while other findings show the relation between the presence of high rates of diarrheal disease in children of abused mothers (Asling-Monemi, Tabassum & Persson, 2008; Silverman et al., 2009). Moreover, sexual abuse, rape, and limited access to condoms or contraceptives can cause unwanted pregnancy and, as a consequence, abortions performed in unsafe ways. In many countries there is no access to safe abortions because of laws that have banned abortion or due to limited access to health services. Family and social cultural aspects limit the possibility to abort in a safe way because of the prejudice that forces women to act in an invisible and silent way. The damage of sexual violence can be fatal in cases of transmitted sexual infection or HIV/AIDS, which is associated to gender inequality, the supremacy of the androcentric perspective which increase the discrimination against women, the refusal to use condoms, and increasing vulnerability and marginalization among the female sex. Finally, both IPV and sexual violence provoke femicide, which causes enormous consequences on a social and an individual level. As a consequence, woman can feel unsafe and unprotected. They have to control their behaviour in their private and public lives, living with limitations and dominated by fear, stress, and anxiety.

In addition, social consequences have greater impact, since women become vulnerable and undermined. In some cases family can have negative effects because of social norms and strong social conventions which impose harassment and discrimination upon women who have suffered violence. The community can neglect such women, provoking isolation and marginalization by the family and the society. On the other hand, institutions and legal legislation can be the main cause of vulnerability and marginalization against women due to

the lack of women's rights, the re-production of political, religious or cultural images of women as victims, as well as well the enhancement of the discourse on the objectification of the female body, capacity and independence, or the recognition of women's status as merely a mother-wife in the dichotomy of the holy-profane. Consequently, the proper identification of the risk factors might help to draw up prevention strategies in order to reduce and minimize such phenomena.

#### **1.4 Framing hidden risk factors**

Various approaches have investigated the phenomenon of VAW and created theories on the complexity of VAW, delineating risk factors, consequences, and prevention instruments. Firstly, researchers should identify the main individual, social and community factors that provoke or incentivize gender-based violence. Furthermore, it is important to recognize who the men are who batter and who these women who experience violence are. According to the WHO's report, *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women*, risk and protective factors for intimate partner violence and sexual violence should be considered at both an interdisciplinary and a multisectoral level, including biological, psychological, cultural and gender perspective concepts (WHO, 2010). Moreover, the report adopts an ecological framework, considering risk and preventive factors from an individual to a community and a societal level. At an individual level, the data show that women who are young, possess a low level of education and are separated or divorced have strong exposure to both intimate partner and sexual violence. Whereas becoming a potential perpetrator depends on low income and a low level of education. Furthermore, if both victim and perpetrator experienced violence in childhood the risk of exposure might increase, similarly if they suffer from mental disorders, like depression for women or an antisocial personality for men. In addition, the use of substances such as alcohol and drugs and the acceptance of violence are individuated as risks in both gender categories.

Misconceptions are present in the community due to weak sanctions, the lack of legislation or a general legal instrument against gender-based violence, as well as demographic and urban problems related to poverty and overpopulation. Others risk factors can be individuated at the societal level regarding the lack of gender equality norms. The following table offers a general view about each of the risk factors in intimate partner and sexual violence:

| Table 3 Risk factors for IPV   |   |
|--|---|
| Perpetration by Men of women   | Victimization   |
| INDIVIDUAL LEVEL   |   |
| <p>DEMOGRAPHICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young age</li> <li>• Low socio-economic status/income</li> <li>• Low education</li> <li>• Separated/divorced marital status</li> </ul> <p>EXPOSURE TO CHILD MALTREATMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intra-parental violence</li> <li>• Sexual abuse</li> <li>• Physical abuse</li> </ul> <p>MENTAL DISORDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antisocial personality</li> </ul> <p>SUBSTANCE USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmful use of alcohol</li> <li>• Illicit drug use</li> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> <li>• Past history of being abusive</li> </ul> | <p>DEMOGRAPHICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnancy</li> <li>• Young age</li> <li>• Low socio-economic status/ income</li> <li>• Low education</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> </ul> <p>EXPOSURE TO CHILD MALTREATMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intra-parental violence</li> <li>• Sexual abuse</li> </ul> <p>MENTAL DISORDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression</li> </ul> <p>SUBSTANCE USE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmful use of alcohol</li> <li>• Illicit drug use</li> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> <li>• Exposure to prior abuse/victimization</li> </ul> |
| RELATIONSHIP LEVEL   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational disparity</li> <li>• <b>Multiple partners/infidelity</b></li> </ul> <p>RELATIONSHIP QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marital dissatisfaction/discord</li> <li>• Gender role disputes</li> <li>• Marital duration</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational disparity</li> <li>• Number of children</li> </ul> <p>RELATIONSHIP QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marital dissatisfaction/discord</li> </ul>   |
| COMMUNITY LEVEL  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of traditional gender roles</li> </ul> <p>NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High proportion of poverty</li> <li>• High proportion of unemployment</li> <li>• High proportion of male literacy</li> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> <li>• High proportion of households that use corporal punishment</li> <li>• Weak community sanctions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of traditional gender roles</li> </ul> <p>NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High proportion of poverty</li> <li>• High proportion of unemployment</li> <li>• High proportion of female literacy</li> <li>• Acceptance of violence</li> <li>• Low proportion of women with high level of autonomy</li> <li>• Low proportion of women with higher education</li> <li>• Weak community sanctions</li> </ul>   |
| SOCIETAL LEVEL   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional gender norms and social norms supportive of violence</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• divorce regulations by government</li> <li>• lack of legislation on intimate partner violence within marriage</li> <li>• Protective marriage law</li> <li>• Traditional gender norms and social norms supportive of violence</li> </ul>  |
| Who, 2010 p.21   |   |

Similarly, the findings show a prevalence of the same risk factors both in sexual violence and IPV, stressing the role of cultural norms regarding the beliefs related to family honor, sexual purity, and acceptance of coercive sex by men. However, it is not clearly demonstrated that sexual violence is strongly empowered by ideologies and legitimized through them, provoking the affirmation of weak legal sanctions for sexual violence and the belief of male sexual entitlement (Rubin, 1974). Consequently, this kind of framework presents limitations in the understanding of the phenomena due to the lack of association between symbolic, cultural and political factors in intersection with power. For this reason, the proper use of the term *risk* is important because the WHO's report considers it, referring to its objective understanding of individual, demographic and social characteristics (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational level, marital status, mental disorders, family relationship and moreover, see table 4). In fact, an analysis based on risk factors may provoke the problem's valuation under a logic of probability, by which a certain number of women can be exposed to violence and others are not (Hierbert-Murphy et al. 2011). As a consequence, it provokes a limitative explanation regarding the reason these groups of women experienced violence, what kind of risk factors can be identified and what type of preventive factors can be applied. These kind of researchers rely on survey-based, quantitative methodology, identifying the group of women who are at risk, isolating factors related to viable occurrences of VAW, and building strategies for prediction and prevention. However, it constitutes a method for guiding national and international studies as well as reports about violence. On the other hand, qualitative researchers and the epistemological approach take into account risk factors in intersection with the construction of categories, the perception of sexuality, the grade of vulnerability and the relation of such factors with power.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of "symbolic violence" expresses the social legitimacy of the androcentric vision, since male superiority begins to be effective in the social structures, starting from productive and reproductive activities that are distributed in a society following the sexual division of work, from a biological point of view (Bourdieu, 1994). As a consequence, the naturalization of the passive female role in collective common thinking provokes symbolic violence because it occurs firstly in the spiritual and existential sphere, and therefore it manifests itself in a physical and verbal sphere. Thus, it creates systems of perception and evaluation of self and others that are bound and subsequently naturalized by the androcentric vision. As Bourdieu states, aggressive male domination affirms itself through the physical dimension, the presence of violence verifiable in human action, or through acts of knowledge and recognition, which take the form of feelings (ibid.). Subconsciously the

individual tacitly accepts the limitations that occur in the psychosomatic sphere through emotions, such as shame, humiliation, nervousness, and anxiety, which act physically on the body through the form of blushing, tremors or an increased heart rate. Both emotions and feelings are visible and sensitive traits of our life force that are revealed in the dialectal relation between life–death and love–hate.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence appears remarkably effective in order to connect the risk of violence against women with cultural and institutional factors. Thus, emotional manipulation, such the construction of ideologies, stigmatizes a minority with stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, affecting the group in the somatic dimension. In fact, the body constitutes the place in which physical injuries and psychological violence are inflicted on the victim. As a result, the body represents the space of vulnerability in which the production and reproduction of violence is located.

According to Judith Butler (2004), the human body belongs to the social sphere because of its political constitution. In this way the recognition of a human being's rights depends on institutional and social factors that value the precariousness of life according to ideologies. Psychological and physical vulnerability are part of our sociability, creating consequently a state of "subjection" (Butler, 1997). This term indicates that our life is dominated by an external political power, as stated by Althusser in his work *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus* (1970), in which he claims that interpellation and *assujettissement* enable the process of recognition of human beings linguistically. While Althusser suggests that only the state's apparatus produces and normalizes the subjectivity, giving it the faculty to produce power over subjectivity, Butler, on the other hand, argues that humans are subordinate to a normative system of control and manipulation, so that power acts upon us, defining our needs, desires, and ideas about the world and ourselves. But, in contrast, the author argues that power is unborn in ourselves as well, so there is an unconscious sphere that produces the acceptance of such control. In fact, Butler argues that subjection has a dual aspect: power acts on the subject as a condition of the subject's creation, and the individual produces and reproduces power in order to affirm his or her own agency. Finally, power precedes the individual and it is also outside himself or herself. For this reason, socio-economic and cultural factors, geographical positions, and the axes of race/ethnicity and class are considered as relevant risk factors, since the power determines the condition of recognition of life. Effective prevention strategies need, therefore, to take in account multi-level factors, unmasking the political constructions of violence and halting the process of re-victimization.



## 1.5 Responding to VAW: prevention strategies

Prevention strategies should aim for the removal of risks factors, working to enhance gender equality at an individual and a societal level, promoting a climate of respect for human rights and one that is devoid of violence and harassment. International legislation has been created in order to confront unpunished and non-tolerant attitudes, so some of the principal actions, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1979), the *Declaration on the Elimination for Violence Against Women* (1993), *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) and *The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women* (1994), are instruments for primary interventions. They allow the criminal justice system and legislation to take protective measures against violence against women. Such international instruments are very important achievements, created in order to recognize the issues, to protect victims, and to prevent future violent actions against the female gender. Unfortunately, the existence of such legislative actions does not confirm the effective implementation of the instruments. Consequently, the conventions do not assure the protection of victims or guarantee the safeguard of human rights. Moreover, actions and programs regarding prevention strategies against violence, vulnerability, and precariousness should focus on the deconstruction of the hierarchical construction of male superiority and the subordinate female role, eliminating common beliefs of female inferiority and objectification as well as dismantling structural factors which re-produce such inequalities.

According to the WHO's report, strategies and specific programs should demonstrate their effectiveness by concretely changing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding VAW, and as a final result violent behaviour should be reduced (WHO, 2010). For this reason, primary interventions aim to implement strategies that forecast violence, whereas secondary interventions are addressed to victims of violence in order to overcome physical, psychological and economical consequences.

Primary strategies focus on specific categories, concentrating the work on prevention during infancy, childhood, and adolescence in different ways from those that focus on adulthood. Child maltreatment is a common element present in intimate partner or sexual violence, so their reduction depends on preventative strategies directed at the educational system (WHO-ISPCAN, 2006). Some scholars have highlighted the presence of an intergenerational transmission of violence and abuse among the individual history of perpetrators and victims,

and for this reason home visitations and parent education programs, as well as actions that prevent IPV and sexual violence from infancy to adolescence, are considered effective (Mikton & Butchart, 2009). Firstly, in order to identify a kind of exposure to violence there are psychological interventions adopted to measure emotional disorders in children and adolescents (Skowron & Reinemann, 2005), so impulsiveness, aggressiveness or poor social competence could be indicators of experiences of violence or abuse.

Programs aim to promote pro-social behaviour to inform and create awareness about the issues, and to provide instruments to increase the capacity for empathy, emotional skills, and problem solving skills. That can be possible through school-based training oriented at the recognition of violence, human rights, and the meaning of being potentially at risk. Moreover, bullying prevention programs are effective because they reduce the affirmation of risk factors such as isolation, low self-esteem, depression or antisocial behaviours that expose children and adolescents to the possibility of becoming victims of violence. In addition, educational programs and prevention strategies aim to deconstruct the myth of female inferiority, promoting gender equality and respect for gender differences. Educating both boys and girls to think without stereotypes and prejudices can be effective against discriminative acts. Similarly, awareness about the phenomenon of rape could avoid girls' acceptance of the issue and their silence due to fear or shame, whereas it helps boys, too, to re-evaluate the male macho image and to devaluate the common belief of female objectifications (Schewe, 2007). Rape is a universal abusive practice that is greater tolerated among men<sup>9</sup>, a fact that has lead to the importance of knowledge about this violation of human rights and the enhancement of training and activities in the prevention of violence against women. Such actions have to work on different levels, from cultural to socio-economical, and should be addressed to the whole educational system, which includes family, teachers, and coaches.

Otherwise, prevention strategies in adulthood are oriented at build problem solving skills, awareness of women's rights, awareness of the definition and practice of violence against women, so that interventions include preventive action for both individuals and communities. Most significant achievements oriented at preventive interventions are directed towards health, policy and social systems in order to promote gender equality, guarantee equal health and legislative treatment, and safeguard the fundamental respect of human rights. One of the most effective approaches is oriented at building empowerment and resilience capacity among individuals and communities through education, training, public campaigns, community

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<sup>9</sup> See Fisher GJ (1986). College student attitudes toward forcible date rape: changes after taking a human sexuality course. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 12, pp. 42–46.

actions, and promotion of equal access to education, workplaces and health care. Such work is conducted primarily by governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as national and international associations. Governmental institutions take action in social policy in order to develop the economic and social empowerment of women in the society.

The main goals and objectives are orientated at the promotion of equal political participation, equal access to the workplace, legal rights, equal access to education, actions against gender discrimination in public life, political parity, and actions against race/ethnicity/class discrimination against women in public life.<sup>10</sup> Also, the European Union has implemented a plan for the promotion of gender equality, encouraging gender mainstreaming, with specific measures for equalities promotion and equal legal treatment. The EU has launched the program on gender equality for the period 2010–2015, stating its priorities in the following points (European Commission, Justice and Gender Equality, 2015):

- equal economic independence for women and men;
- equal pay for work of equal value;
- equality in decision-making;
- dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence;
- promoting gender equality beyond the EU;
- horizontal issues (gender roles, including the role of men, legislation and governance tools).

Such actions worldwide have the common aim of creating an equal basis for women in political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres, as well as of safeguarding freedom for women who have the right to make decisions independently, to participate in public life, to access education, employment and a career as well as social security, eliminating any kind of form of discrimination. However, the achievement of such aims depends on the changing of social and cultural norms which legitimize attitudes and community practices that support violence against women. Generally, men are considered superior in explicit or implicit ways so that ideologies from religion, socio-cultural common beliefs and structural factors related to particular situations create a climate of acceptance and legitimacy of sexism and physical or psychological violent behavior against women.

Finally, the impunity of the state as well as the lack of an effective legal system which supports victims of violence re-produce the socially adverse attitudes towards the female gender. Moreover, governmental activity is oriented at working in teams, so effective prevention strategies need to be conducted in partnership with governmental institutions; educational sectors; the health, police and criminal justice sectors; non-governmental

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<sup>10</sup> See Centre for American Women and Politics, <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>

organizations; and local organizations, associations and communities. Good leadership helps, in fact, to support vulnerable people and victims who often have difficulty in reporting violence. Due to the lack of denunciation, surveys and databases could not produce specific information about the range of victims of violence against women. Moreover, international non-governmental organizations collect data, create qualitative or quantitative research, and investigate issues in order to report illegal acts to the international legal system. In addition, governmental and non-governmental organizations realize media campaigns, which are important awareness-raising instruments for primary interventions. Such campaigns aim to provide public awareness regarding violence against women, the prevalence of the phenomenon, the violation of human rights and the presence of sexism and patriarchal attitudes that support violence.

A neutral representation of violent acts against women helps to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about intimate partner violence and sexual violence. It provides accurate information about national data and risk factors, enabling the public to be aware of the issues and to change attitudes and norms that support female discrimination. A multilevel intervention allows a climate of visibility among the media that mostly, in negative way, reproduces an objectified image of women through television, advertising, movies, and television series. In this regard, informational campaigns are helpful in giving specific definitions of the problem, creating awareness about the importance of laws, providing legislative support and building connections between different organizations that work in defense of women's rights. For this purpose *the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, celebrated on November 25, has been adopted worldwide, and many organizations from different countries promote campaigns in preparation for the *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence*.

On the other hand, secondary interventions are mostly entrusted to non-governmental organizations and women's organizations in collaboration with professional figures from educational, health and defense sectors. Policy and strategy development provide for the training of police officers and professional figures such as doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, and social workers. The education of professional workers needs to guarantee efficient support to victims, from legal to psychological dimensions. For this reason, the presence of crime data and economic data becomes significant, because training work needs a real comparison with socio-economical factors. Moreover, an organization's work is very important for communities because at a local level they are able to create networks among the communities. In this way, communities learn to support people in recognizing risk factors, understanding consequences and adopting secondary interventions as ways of building

empowerment, promoting resilience, defending gender equality, and offering free access to health care, legal defense, lawyers, shelters, and psychological supports. In some cases, most of these organizations have been founded in response to the governmental indifference towards female discriminations. The first effective initiatives came from emergent areas, such as Mexico and India, which reported femicide cases, honor killings, kidnapping, and torture to international governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as any kind of violence against women, from injuries to genital mutilation. Protest activities start with the victim's relatives and friends, who report the state of corruption and the persistence of misogyny in the society that legitimizes gender discrimination. Mothers of victims become activists, using their grief and their outrage as an empowered force in order to obtain justice and the recognition of the crimes as violence against women<sup>11</sup>.

These initiatives are of great importance because they create awareness about the issues both nationally and internationally, involving other communities to work together, and led to the intervention of Amnesty International, Human Watch, and the United Nations. The work of civil associations helps people to build empowerment that becomes a guideline for the community. People fight for changes and improvements in their living conditions, implementing the process of social, political and legal power. Such initiatives have strongly influenced the creation of international laws in defense of women's rights, contributing to the creation of various legislative processes to encourage the recognition of femicide. Therefore, the concept of an empowered subject refers to a kind of prevention strategy, and acting with the strength of *agency*, it cooperates for the deconstruction of hegemony and the consolidation of a counter-hegemony (free from hierarchical and discriminatory practices). As Judith Butler (1998) states, such agency is the only instrument that allows individuals to use his or her own power and reuse the power asserted over him or her. The practices of politicization contribute to the development of resilient forces within the community dimension.

The term *resilience* indicates the ability of groups or communities to act by coping, or the cognitive ability and behavior of individuals or members in overcoming traumatic events caused by political, social or environmental issues (Adger, 2000). Originally, in technical sciences, the term resilience referred to the ability of a material to withstand shock or external

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<sup>11</sup> In Mexico, for example, the activism of the civil association *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (May Our Daughters Return Home) is internationally well-known since its foundation was the result of numerable unresolved femicide cases in Ciudad Juarez from 1993 until today (Washington, 2001). Their actions aim to promote the development of a social system based on gender equality, abolition of discrimination against women in private and public life as well as reforms of the penal code. In addition, they create communication networks for the right to health, education, legal assistance, guaranteeing each citizen the right to life. The organization offers rehabilitation programs aimed at the development of a resilient force, providing legal, psychological and medical aid to the parents and relatives of the victims. They realize national and international information campaigns, creating a community network able to communicate with various governmental and non-governmental institutions.

aggressions that would cause the complete breakdown of the object. Therefore, the use of the term in social sciences and humanities has been shifted to mean to cope positively with external attacks through individual and social protective factors that allow the stabilization of the resilient force.

The first mention of the ability to take care of oneself is represented by the concept of eudemonia, coined by Aristotle. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanistic and positive psychology has paid attention to the ability of the individual to overcome positively traumatic events or stressors, developing a capacity for growth and conflict resolution (Keyes, 2007). According to Richardson et al. (1990; 2002), the activation process of the resilient capacity depends heavily on factors such as vulnerability and suffering. Every person has resilient ability but its success depends both on the relations between risk factors at the individual and collective levels (low self-esteem, family problems, poverty, and high urban density) and the ability to develop protective factors (autonomy, emotional, social, political and economic support). The individual, who is exposed to stress, turns to protective factors to protect his or her “state of homeostasis”, or the status of individual well-being (Richardson et al., 1990, p. 34). If these factors are not strong enough, individuals cannot pass to the withdrawal phase in which you try other tools to achieve the final phase of reintegration. The outcome of the final phase depends on the balance between risk and protective factors. In fact, reintegration may be a “resilient reintegration” (ibid., p. 34), in which the individual activates resilient forces to overcome the trauma, enhancing protective factors, or he or she returns to homeostasis with no signs of improvement. When risk factors prevail, reintegration occurs with loss, since there has been a period of reflection for generating coping skills in the individual, causing strong empowerment or weakening him or her with dysfunctional reintegration. In the latter, the individual refuses to deal with the pain, resorting to the use of drugs or alcohol (ibid.).

The individual perspective can be amplified and translated at the community level. In cases of a resilient reintegration the community is defined as resilient. The term *resilient community* emphasizes the result of the resilient capacity through the development of factors, such as communication, cooperation, social solidarity, unification in suffering, and sharing the same socio-economical and cultural dimension. Therefore, these aspects can be considered as a means of strengthening the protection factors. Finally, sharing vulnerability and suffering mobilizes the community to take incisive actions aimed at overcoming a state of oppression, creating a new politics of resistance from the pain that produces resilience. Both empowerment and resilience are preventive and protective factors for individuals and the community, and

consequently it is very important that organizations work in order to promote and develop such abilities.

### **Box 3 Empowerment**

The term *empowerment* refers to both the psychological and political dimensions of individuals, from a personal to a community level: according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2015) empowerment is understood as authority or power given to someone to do something and the individual process of becoming stronger and confident in order to control one's own life and obtain one's own rights. This definition suggests the relevance of personal and social dimensions for acting through power in order to become empowered. Rappaport defined empowerment as a process by which individuals, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Such understanding of empowerment highlights the importance of this process of becoming empowered, i.e. to gain the authority to accept some things and to negate others. But speaking about empowerment requires the consideration of the whole context by which an individual can gain such mastery. In psychology empowerment includes individual psychological constructs related to environmental factors, such as political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. According to Malaguti, empowerment means "different ways to search for the same path: that which leads to the discovery of the ability to resist, cope, transform, develop and build ... a path, a community, a civil society capable of integrating differences and equalities, respecting each and every person" (my own translation, Malaguti, 2005, p.79). The ecological model in psychology underlines this ability, taking in account the environment and understanding the phenomenon in a specific context (e.g. Barker, 1978; Wicker, 1979; Brofenbrenner 1979; Moos, 1984; Zimmerman, 1986; Kelly & Hess, 1986; Trickett, Kelly & Vincent, 1985). Zimmerman, in his model approach, suggests that the empowerment process presents three levels of actions: *control*, *critical awareness* and *participation*. Zimmerman distinguishes between *individuals' empowerment*, *organizations empowerment* and *community empowerment*. All the three forms present the three levels of actions. In addition, the author defines organizations' empowerment as a phenomenon in which the organization carries out the levels mentioned above, turning to structures, procedures, actions and providing assistance that aims to create a climate of awareness. Consequently, the organization coordinates and mobilizes resources, influencing public policies for the development of a critical awareness and finally channeling collective participation and creating spaces where decisions are made and aims are proposed (ibid, p.15). For the author the community dimension has common elements with the organization, but in addition it shares the same culture, tradition, history and suffering. *Empowering* communities can create a common environment where informative, participative and collaborative activities take place, allowing members of the community the access to resources and to develop skills. As a result of this process, the community becomes empowered, creating collaborative networks of organizations and individuals who together are committed to improving the conditions and quality of life (Zimmerman, 1999, p.16). Finally, the ecological model of empowerment concretely summarizes both the subjective ability to empower one's own life and to acquire power in order affirm one's own rights as well as to improve state of wellness and equal conditions.

## Chapter Two

### Women's Discrimination in the Mexican State

#### 2.1 Violence Against Women in Mexico: Antecedents

Violence within a society constitutes individual and community risk factors that cause either tangible physical and psychological harm, or problems regarding internal security and threats to human rights (Aguayo Guezada & Treviño Ranger, 2010). In this regard, the reality of Mexico is emblematic due to the continuous increase in the rates of homicide, femicide, and missing people, known as *desaparecidos/as*. The Mexican social crisis seems to be affected, in particular, by drug trafficking, political corruption, the imposition of a capitalist economy, the phenomenon of mass urbanization in the northern border area, and the installation of international industries, called *maquiladoras* (COLMEX, 2010). Consequently, the emergence of internal security in the country has called into question both the responsibility of the Mexican state and the United States of America.

Mexico's history has been riddled with corruption and structural violence owing to its colonial exploitation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the capitalistic system imposed on it by the United States. Moreover, its geographical position disadvantages society's well-being: situated between the two Americas, Mexico has increasingly become the scene for illegal drug trafficking as well as an attractive setting for international interests. However, violence represents multiple aspects in the way that it affects people's security. On the one hand, it constitutes the administrative instrument of governmental institutions in order to defeat drug traffickers, who act with extremely violent methods. On the other hand, it has become citizens' weapon of resistance against a state of corruption and impunity. As a result, violence impacts on the well-being of people who live in a state of terror and public insecurity, undermining the role of justice, and producing vulnerability and a sense of uncertainty. The term *legitimized violence* reflects, in fact, some aspects of the Mexican political system. Political practices, in particular, operate, as Scheper-Hughes (2003) suggests, through the logic of a "continuum genocide", creating both visible and invisible violence, and eventually legitimizing it within the social system. For this reason, violence constitutes a naturalized cultural aspect that is mostly reproduced in socialization practices.



Otherwise, the social situation at the northern border zone presents specific characteristics due to the political efforts of the USA to control the border zone and to eradicate illegal immigration and drug trafficking. In this regard, the border towns of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez become representative. Specifically, the use of violence employed in the border towns affected women who began to be the direct victims both of drug trafficking and political corruption. In Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez there is, in fact, strong gender-based discrimination of a cultural and institutional matrix that is transformed into lawful acts of violence against women, exercised by drug trafficking and the state.

Femicide cases in Ciudad Juarez are most internationally known because since 1993 more than 700 women have been killed, a figure to which should be added the *cifra negra*, i.e. the percentage of unsolved cases related to missing women or killed unknown women. However, it is important to highlight that gender-based violence in Mexico is widespread throughout the entire state but with different configurations. Whereas in the border towns femicide cases are related to drug trafficking harassment, the capitalistic system's exploitation of *maquiladoras* as well as socio-economic inequality in the society (Fragoso, 2000). Unlike in south Mexico, gender-based violence is practiced by an institutional apparatus that does not recognize indigenous women's rights, inciting racial and gender discrimination against these women (CDI. *Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los pueblos Indígenas*, 2010). In addition, other regions present high rates of violence against women due to different social, cultural, economic and political factors that cause drastic social inequalities as well as the persistence of a legitimated *machismo* culture and of a patriarchal system (Lagarde, 1996). Eventually, although violence against women constitutes an alarming social problem, there is a strong distrust in public policy's recognition of the existence of gender-based violence because of the enormous gap between the culture of the legislature and the culture that is actually experienced.

## **2.2 Legislative framework regarding VAW**

The Mexican reality is characterized by a colonial heritage, and it has currently been living through a process of decolonization in the cultural, social and political dimensions. Moreover, due to its geographic position and its natural resources, Mexico is characterized as a "hybrid" territory, appealing to countries in search of economic expansion. In international public debates the Mexican state is stigmatized because of illegal activities, drug trafficking, and social emergencies related to the phenomena of immigration both at the north and the south border,

as well as the public insecurity related to missing people and violence against women. Attention was first brought to the phenomenon of gender discrimination in Mexico back in 1946, when the *Convention on the Eradication of the Discrimination of Violence Against Women* (CEDAW) was founded. This convention, legally approved by the United Nations in 1980, helped to change the meaning of violence against women—which has long been considered a personal or family problem—by recognizing it as crime. The 1990s signified an important change in the fight against violence, when several governments, civil associations and NGOs started to sensitize public opinion towards the consequences of violence against women. Specifically, the UN announced the need to create a universal statement on women’s rights and rights regarding equality, security, freedom, integrity and dignity of human beings.

The UN has organized several conferences (Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995), which have been significant in the configuration and consolidation of legislative frameworks. At the conference in Beijing 189 countries adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, an agenda for women’s empowerment on gender equality concerning several areas like education, health, employment, and human rights (INEGI, ENDIREH 2006). Furthermore, at the Beijing conference it was declared that violence against women prevented countries from achieving the global goals on equality, development, and freedom, highlighting the difficulty of access to justice and public health.

In addition, the Convention of Belém do Pará (the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women*), approved by the General Committee of the USA, represents a significant achievement for several Latin American states which submitted preventive measures concerning violence against women. Specifically, in this convention gender-based violence is recognized as a “violation of human rights” and an “offence against human dignity” (OAS, 1995, introduction). Successively, in 1999 the United Nations announced the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which is celebrated on November 25. The proclamation of an international day for women's rights represents an instrument for the dissemination of information regarding the consequences of VAW. Moreover, the celebration of this day obliges countries to report about the current situation in their territory and to present further prevention measures.

In Mexico, the phenomenon of violence against women refers to intentional harassment through acts or behaviors caused by gender differences whose consequences manifest as real or potential physical, psychological or sexual harm. A significant breakthrough has been marked by the adoption of a general law on women’s rights called the *Ley General de Acceso a las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* (2007–2015). Through this document, the state

sets out administrative, legal and legislative guidelines that guarantee and safeguard the rights of women to live a life without violence, without discrimination, and in a state of equality according to the gender perspective. The latter concept is defined as “a scientific, analytical and political vision on women and men. It is proposed to eliminate the causes of gender oppression and inequality, injustice and hierarchy of people based on gender. It promotes gender equality through equality, advancement and welfare of women; it contributes to building a society where women and men have the same value, equal rights and opportunities for access to economic resources and political and social representation in the areas of decision making” (ibid, art.5., p.XI)<sup>12</sup>. Finally, it ensures women's rights and commits Mexico to pursuing a policy for the elimination of gender stereotypes and violence. In 2013 this law was modified in order to regulate legal actions with greater autonomy, transparency, and impartiality.

One of these legal actions is called *Alerta de Violencia de Género contra la Mujer* (AVGM)<sup>13</sup> and it is present only in Mexico. It represents a particular prevention strategy to fight violent practices against women, which reflect behaviours and social stereotypes. This prevention measure consists of governmental actions that, in case of an emergency, are adopted to fight and eliminate violence against women. Governmental institutions apply for the AVGM to the National Institute of Women (INMUJERES), which can admit or refuse the request in accordance with the legal procedures. Consequently, if the request has been accepted, the National System establishes an interdisciplinary committee that analyzes the local situation, creating a report with guidelines and recommendations. Finally, the qualified Ruling Commission analyzes the report and decides whether to submit the declaration. Following the reform in 2013, the non-governmental institutions (civil associations, NGOs, international human rights organizations) can request the AVGM as well. The legal procedure has been improved to guarantee transparency and autonomy. INMUJERES has to analyze the request within 30 days and, in cases of acceptance, it has to establish an interdisciplinary group formed by eight experts in women's rights. When the declaration is submitted, the region has six months' to apply the advices and guidelines established in that declaration. To this day, the AVGM has been declared in 11 states in Mexico (Baja California, Michoacan, Estado de Colima, Guanajuato, Morelos, Estado de Mexico, Estado de Sonora, Estado de Queretaro, Estado Veracruz, Estado San Luis Potosi, Estado Quintana Roo). The report is an important

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<sup>12</sup> Es una visión científica, analítica y política sobre las mujeres y los hombres. Se propone eliminar las causas de la opresión de género como la desigualdad, la injusticia y la jerarquización de las personas basada en el género. Promueve la igualdad entre los géneros a través de la equidad, el adelanto y el bienestar de las mujeres; contribuye a construir una sociedad en donde las mujeres y los hombres tengan el mismo valor, la igualdad de derechos y oportunidades para acceder a los recursos económicos y a la representación política y social en los ámbitos de toma de decisiones (art. 5, paragraph IX).

<sup>13</sup> See the art. 22–25, chapter V, second paragraph and art. 30–38bis, chapter I, third paragraph in the Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una vida libre de violencia (2007-2015).

legal document that indicates to the institutions what kind of actions they have to apply in order to eliminate violence against women in their regions. The prevention strategies focus, therefore, on the characteristics of the contexts, allowing the state to address political and legal actions.

Since 1999, the National Institute of Statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI), an organization that deals with statistical and demographic studies, established a special commission with the task of creating investigations linked to cases of domestic and public violence among the Mexican federal states. In 2003 this commission conducted the National Survey on the Dynamics in Domestic Relationships (*Encuesta Nacional sobre las Dinámicas de las relaciones en los Hogares*), known as the ENDIREH. The survey aimed to investigate cases of violence, such as killings, disappearances and feminicides related to the system of drug trafficking, institutional violence, and domestic violence. The importance of collecting data about the crime rate in the country has been motivated by the need to stem US drug trafficking (COLMEX, 2010) and the obligation to ensure national and international security. Later, the dramatic increase of the killing of women in Mexico has obligated the state to reconsider the cases of gender violence, focusing its attention on cultural and social dimension.

### **2.3 Mexican reports on IPV: Comparing findings between Mexico and Guanajuato**

The name *Guanajuato* refers both to the name of the region and its capital. It is situated in central-northern Mexico and its foundation dates back to 1548 during the Spanish Conquest. The region consists of 46 townships which differ in terms of socio-economical status, and which are stigmatized by an unequal distribution of wealth as well as a lack of employment and guarantee of basic healthcare. On March 20 2014, the civil association *Las Libres* submitted the AVGM in Guanajuato, issuing the alert of feminicide. According to the report presented by the association, 244 women were killed in Guanajuato in 2012 and 2013 (CONAVIM Gto, 2014a). These murders have not been recognized as feminicide, although in most cases the principal cause of the crimes relates to gender-based violence and crimes of passion. The governmental secretary (SEGOB) accepted the AVGM according to articles 33, 35 and 36 of the *Ley General de Acceso*. Later, in July 2015 the Commission established a diagnostic in which the state of alert regarding feminicide was rejected. Specifically, the commission declared that the State of Guanajuato contributed to the fight against and the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence, establishing therefore the presence of political actions

against VAW. Finally, the commission declared 13 recommendations that the State of Guanajuato had to follow in order to guarantee women's rights and to ensure cultural change in behaviors and social stereotypes regarding women and violence against women.

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| 1. Conduct training programs and professional training on human rights and gender perspective to the authorities that attend cases of gender violence.   |
| 2. Financial aid to the Guanajuato Institute of Women aimed at preventing violence against women.  |
| 3. The state should develop a state diagnosis of all types and forms of violence against women.  |
| 4. Redesign the state database and information on cases of violence against women involving all instances involved in attention and punishment of such violence.   |
| 5. Create an instance tracking femicide cases integrated by the Attorney General of the state and civil organizations.   |
| 6. The protocols used to investigate crimes of femicide, domestic violence, rape of women, and missing women are not suitable, and therefore they should be improved with the support of specialists and published in the Official Gazette.  |
| 7. Create specialized action protocols for municipal and state police that incorporate gender perspective.   |
| 8. Ensure full compensation for damage in accordance with national and international legal frameworks with a focus on human rights and gender perspective.   |
| 9. The creation of Multidisciplinary Centers for Comprehensive Care of Violence (CEMAIV) that coordinate their work with the Attorney General.   |
| 10. Create a program for the re-education of male perpetrators of violence against women.  |
| 11. Improve the message and effect of the campaign against violence.   |
| 12. Maintain and reinforce the message of zero tolerance for violence against women, all state and municipal authorities should promote the message.   |
| 13. The commission asked to change the name of <i>intrafamiliar violence crime</i> to <i>family violence</i> , and <i>erotic sexual abuse</i> to <i>sexual abuse</i> ; bring penalties of sexual offenses and domestic violence; review whether such crimes must be prosecuted ex officio; establish, within the framework of the gender perspective, full compensation for damage caused by the crime of femicide and other crimes against women. |

CONAVIM Gto, Informe AVGM, 2014, pp. 61-69.

The case of Guanajuato represents an emblematic example of cases of violence against women. In this area, gender-based violence appears to have been eradicated in the socio-cultural sphere. In addition, this aspect seems to have been normalized by the institutional system. In fact, the tolerance of VAW is visible both in the socio-cultural and political sphere. A case in point is the reluctance of the legal system in recognizing the murder of women as femicide, as well as the tendency to minimize the impact of aggression on the women who suffer violence. This happens, in particular, because the community accepts violence against women, recognizing their vulnerable position in the public and the private sphere. In Mexican society, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been understood for long time as a private issue, limiting the social problem to the individual sphere. The implications of such argumentation are multiple. Firstly, the marginalization of domestic violence into the familiar dimension has allowed institutions to

neglect the impact of the phenomena in the social dimension. Consequently, such an approach has provoked the justification and concealment of its dynamics. Nowadays, IPV has been recognized as a social problem and it constitutes the principal focus of public and social policy. Violence against women represents, therefore, a problem related to stereotypes and sexist attitudes in Mexican culture. In fact, it is perceived as the cause of wrong and misunderstood attitudes of both genders toward “relationships” and “love”. Men’s attitudes are associated with being jealous, possessive, aggressive, and controlling a woman’s life, her behavior or economical disposition. Whereas women’s attitudes are often recognized as docile and obedient, and they are often perceived as wives, mothers or partners who are easily manipulated and subdued (ENDIREH, 2003; 2006; 2011; Lama, 2002; Lagarde, 2007). In fact, several studies show that the phenomena of VAW and especially of IPV are related to cultural patterns established through stereotypes, discrimination and prejudices towards women (ibid.).

Gender discrimination in Mexico first attracted attention in 1946 with the foundation of the *Convención para la eliminación de Todas las Formas de discriminación contra las Mujeres* (CEDAW). In fact, the first researches on VAW were conducted during the late 1990s, reporting collected data on reproductive health in the *Encuesta de Salud Reproductiva* (ENSARE, 1998) and the *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Reproductiva* (ENSAR, 2003), and reporting data on the national youth in the *Encuesta Nacional de la Juventud* (ENAJUV, 2000). All these reports contain a section about violence against women but they are not entirely dedicated to the research of violence against women. Later, in 2003 the INEGI established the *Encuesta Nacional sobre las Dinámicas de las relaciones en los Hogares* (ENDIREH, 2003), with the task of investigating violence against women in Mexico. This commission identified the region of Guanajuato as one of the most violent in Mexico. Specifically, the ENDIREH in 2006 and 2011 reported on types and models of violence in Guanajuato in collaboration with the Institute of Women’s Rights (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*, INMUJERES). Finally, they produced a report called *Panorama de la violencia contra las mujeres en Guanajuato* (Panorama of violence against women in Guanajuato, 2006; 2011).

Through the 2006 survey the organization investigated cases of violence against Guanajuato women aged 15 to 50, considering specific socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, level of education, socioeconomic status, ethnic and/or racial group. These reports aimed, in particular, to analyze the dynamics of violent cases occurring within the private and public spheres, providing information about all types of violence committed at private, institutional and socio-public levels. Regarding the cases of IPV, the data shows information collected

during two different periods: one section refers to cases that occurred in the last 12 months<sup>14</sup> and the other section refers to cases manifested throughout the entirety of the relationships.

The report considers the differences in social status between married or engaged women (including widowed and single women who have previously suffered violence within the relationships) who suffer physical, psychological, sexual or economic violence. Further attention concerns the role of a history of violence within the family and the conditions that facilitate women to denounce the aggression. In its results, it found that violence in the private sphere takes place mostly at home and the identified aggressors are partners or ex-partners, family members or neighbors<sup>15</sup>. The aggression refers not only to physical assault, but also to exploitation and several coercive practices of dehumanization. According to the ENDIREH 2006, in Mexico 10.1 million married and/or engaged women suffer violence within their relationships. Results show that a greater number of women suffered psychological violence, whereas the impact of physical, sexual and economic violence is less frequent.<sup>16</sup> Psychological violence alludes to the male's tendency to control and isolate the partner, intimidating, offending her as well as charging her with domestic tasks with the purpose of subduing her. In the domestic sphere the presence of physical violence prevails, such as beating, pushing, intentional use of physical strength or weapons with the intention of injuring and/or killing the partner. Moreover, these women also admitted to having suffered sexual abuse, considering it to be an imposed sexual act committed with extortion and without the will of the women. Finally, a significant number of participants declared to have endured economic violence, referring to a partner's intention to control their incomes or expenditure, limiting their access to material or immaterial goods (ENDIREH, 2006).

In Guanajuato younger women aged between 15 and 29 are affected more than any other age group, and their aggressor is, in most cases, the husband/partner and/or ex-partner, but abuses are also committed by family members (mothers, fathers, brothers, aunts, cousins, father-in-laws, brother-in-laws, etc.) and neighbors. Socio-demographic data suggest that violence against women occurs independently of differences in age, ethnicity/race, and level of education as well as economical status. Rather, the phenomenon manifests itself as a consequence of power relations based on subduing practices between the genders. Cultural and

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<sup>14</sup> These criteria are not applied to single women or widowers, whose cases refer to the entire period of the relationship.

<sup>15</sup> Whereas gender-based violence in the public sphere generally takes place both in community and institutional spaces. The profile of the perpetrators include family members, strangers, friends and neighbors both in institutional and community spaces, such as schools or the workplace, in which the most common perpetrators are school authorities, friends, employers, and colleagues (ENDIREH, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Data show that 8.5 million women suffered psychological or emotional violence, meanwhile 6.1 million women declared they had suffered economic violence. Otherwise, a small number of women stated they had suffered sexual abuse (only 2 million) and physical violence (4.5 million), (ENDIREH, 2006, pp. 7-27).

social norms are recognized as principal forms in which violence is legitimated. The relevant role of the education received in familiar and social sphere is particularly stressed. Violence characterizes, in fact, private and public relations, regulating the socialization processes through the inferiorization of the female gender and the establishment of a hierarchy in gender roles. Consequently, the cyclical legitimacy of violence in both private and public spheres provokes the naturalization of a culture of violence:

“Behavior patterns that define the tasks and tools by gender roles are more or less rigid according to how traditional or modern the concerned family is. According to the traditional vision, the man is responsible for working outside the home, providing sustenance for the family and exercising authority; the woman, on the other hand, should look after the smooth functioning of the house and should care for the children and the husband. In this scheme there are clear positions of command and obedience, authority and submission” (My own translation, Torres, 2001, p. 69) <sup>17</sup>.

According to Torres (2001), IPV is neither related to specific socio-demographic aspects, nor does it depend on the individual psychological condition of the aggressor; its matrix takes root in the socio-cultural patterns legitimated in the family and then reproduced in the social dimension. The normalization of violent attitudes toward women provokes its legitimacy, which consequently can be recognized in the lack of denunciation of the aggressions. On the one hand, women do not report violence because they have great difficulty in recognizing it due to their lack of knowledge about their rights. Consequently, they perceive the battering practices as a normal female destiny, as in the past mothers and grandmothers, as well as well the rest of the women in the community, would have experienced the same aggression. Furthermore, there are other aspects that hinder the reporting of violence, such as mistrust towards institutions, or negative feelings such as shame or guilt that enhance the disposition of these women to hide the violence. In fact, the report showed that in 2006 only 18.4% of interviewees reported the aggression to the authorities (ENDIREH, 2006). The principal reasons were related to the high economic difficulties of those women in taking care of their family, providing basic financial incomes as well as a shelter. In addition, they declared they felt threatened by rejection from their family, who would not accept separations, so women have a cross to bear during marriage (Agoff et al., 2007). Several further difficulties are marked by the process of divorce, since women have to show evidence of the harassment in order to demonstrate the real presence of

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<sup>17</sup> *Los modelos de conducta que definen las tareas y funciones según el género tienen mayor o menor rigidez según qué tan tradicional o moderna sea la familia en cuestión. De acuerdo con una visión tradicional, al hombre le corresponde trabajar fuera del hogar, proveer lo necesario para el sustento de la familia y ejercer la autoridad; la mujer por su parte, debe dedicarse a cuidar el buen funcionamiento de la casa, atender a los hijos y también al marido. En este mismo esquema hay posiciones claras de mando y obediencia, autoridad y sumisión* (Torres, 2001, p. 69).



violence, and even if they obtain it, violence often continues after the process of separation (ibid.).

The ENDIREH 2006 on Guanajuato also reports cases of extreme physical and psychological violence, referring to those women who, throughout the relationship, have been assaulted with weapons or knives, and also cases of the aggressor trying to strangle, hang or shoot the woman, as well as cases of women being forced to have sexual intercourse. The extreme consequences of such aggression have been classified as “operations, cuts, burns, breaks, abortions, mutilations or paralysis, as well as, in the worst cases, death” (my own translation, ibidem, p. 24).

The national report identifies VAW as acts based on a coercion model in which violence against women has been manifested with mid- to long-term impacts during their lives (ENDIREH, 2011a). In accordance to the previous report of 2006, the data of the last survey show that psychological violence is the most representative type of violence that affects the dignity, freedom and security of women, in contrast to sexual abuse that represents a lower impact in the society.<sup>18</sup> Even in this case, violence in the private dimension occurs more frequently than other forms of violence, still identifying the family as the most dangerous and unsafe place in which women experience pain and humiliation. Furthermore, in comparison with the report of 2006, the survey realized in 2011 provides comparative information between the data collected in Mexico and those collected in the Guanajuato region. In particular, data regarding the forms of violence that occurred in the last 12 months and throughout the relationships present no significant differences between the national and regional contexts. In fact, in both areas emotional violence has been identified as most frequent, whereas sexual abuse has been reported at a lower percentage<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the report shows that in Guanajuato the most frequent form of violence refers to extreme physical violence and aggression with weapons (ENDIREH, 2011b).

As an extreme consequence of violence, the vulnerability of these women and the emotional disorders seriously affect their well-being, provoking forms of post-traumatic stress disorders. The ENDIREH’s report highlights that a small number of Guanajuato’s women stated they had

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<sup>18</sup> National results show that 89.2% of women suffered psychological or emotional violence, while 56.4% declared they had suffered economic violence. Physical violence appears to be less common (25.8%) followed by a lower number of women who suffered sexual abuse (only 11.7%). All data refer to crimes officially reported within the state and the information takes into account the low predisposition to officially reporting the aggression (ENDIREH, 2011a, pp. 3-40).

<sup>19</sup> In Mexico 81% of women have suffered emotional violence, unlike in Guanajuato where the percentage is 76.1. There are no relevant differences between the data collected among the cases of economic and sexual violence. However, in Guanajuato a higher percentage of physical violence (25.7%) has been registered in contrast to the lower percentage indicated in Mexico (18,7%) (ENDIREH, 2011a, p.11).

attempted suicide or at least thought about ending their lives.<sup>20</sup> Normally, women who suffered violence manifested permanent problems of mental disorders, distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, including the tendency to isolate themselves, to hurt themselves or to attempt suicide. The difficulty in overcoming the trauma could be the consequence of suicidal attitudes. In the Mexican state, generally, a high number of suicide attempts provoked by post-traumatic stress disorders have been registered (ENDIREH, 2011a) due to the difficulty in empowering these women and in helping them to cope with the stress and to build resilience.

As the most frequent causes, the survey evidenced the lack of knowledge of women's rights as well as the presence of misrecognition of female subjectivity, often perceived as being inferior and dependent on the male gender. For this reason, in the 2011 report particular attention was paid to the practices related to the unequal distribution between the genders of domestic tasks and the domestic and economic responsibility. It has been evidenced, therefore, that there is a deep relation between the cultural perception of the traditional male and female roles in the couple's life and the condition of violence. In fact, a great number of respondents declared that domestic tasks correspond to the female gender, whereas family spending is considered to be the unique responsibility of the man (*ibidem*). In addition, in Guanajuato it has been reported that single women are more aware about the laws on gender equality than married or engaged women, or widowed, divorced or separated women (*ibidem*). The most commonly collected declaration affirms the fact that single women are more against the traditional role of the female than married or engaged women, whereas women who did not suffer violence manifested a similar position (*ibidem*). All the interviewees refuted the idea that it was impossible for women to select their friendships and that men (such as partners, husbands or ex-partners) had a right to beat their wives or partners. Generally, the investigations regarding women's rights aim to analyze the rates of violence, female recognition of their own rights regarding equality, freedom, and the capacity to denounce the aggression or even hide it, as well as the faculty to choose to live a life without violence. Finally, the ENDIREH's reports have shown that single women generally have a higher tendency to agree with women's rights, unlike married or engaged women, who have manifested less accordance regarding equal access to freedom for women and men.

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<sup>20</sup> 15.3% of women declared they had attempted suicide. Within this figure, 53.9% had thought about attempting suicide, whereas 46.1% seriously attempted it (ENDIREH, 2011a, p. 15).

### 2.3.1 Cultural patterns and legislative norms

The ENDIREH's reports (2006; 2011a; 2011b) have established that the highest rates of violence occur within the family, as intimate partner violence. However, this phenomenon remains pretty hidden, provoking invisibility or underestimation of the serious impact on women's well-being. In addition, the lack of females' awareness about the role of cultural and traditional norms in violence provokes a state of legitimacy, leading them to consider men beating women normal, or even natural. Moreover, the difficulty of identifying the forms of violence has been related to the impossibility of reporting them. That lack of information from the private sphere allows, consequently, the cyclical reproduction. It occurs mostly because family constitutes the first hierarchical institution based on power relations, since, as Bourdieu (2000) suggests, family is responsible for the normalization and recognition of social attitudes that affirm, consolidate and re-produce the norms within the logic of a system of domination. In cases of IPV the most common consequence, which has been reported in national interviews, is physical damage (bruises, injuries of a different nature and even episodes of hospitalization and mental disorders such as depression, sadness, and sorrow (ibidem). Whereas in the cases of violence in the public sphere, the investigations indicate a high rate of sexual discrimination and intimidation at the workplace or in schools whose consequences are sexual abuse, and physical and psychological damage, such as insomnia, gastrointestinal disorders, low self-esteem, guilt, and social isolation (ENDIREH, 2011b).

A significant aspect that emerges from this survey is that a great number of victims do not report cases of assault, while only a few victims report the crime to the authorities or ask for support from governmental anti-violence centers, such as the *Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (DIF) or the *Instituto de la Mujer* (ibid.). In most cases victims do not consider reporting their aggression due to mistrust of the authorities, who often show reluctance in considering violent verbal or physical acts committed by partners, ex-partner, members of the family, neighbors or strangers as "aggression". In fact, most women are intimidated by family members to remain silent due to shame. This attitude, therefore, could be interpreted as one of many symptoms caused by the dominant force of prejudices and stereotypes toward women. Such facts highlight the problem of male hegemonic power naturalized through private relationships in the family dimension (wife-husband; daughter-father; sister-brother) and extended to the public sphere. The concept of "male superiority" should be considered a historical product of cultural reproduction that manifests itself as subjection in the internal and external dimensions of life (Butler, 1997). Consequently, intimate relationships are either regulated by the hierarchical

system acquired from the family, or through the categorization process that has established the stereotyped images of women and men. In the binary conception men are recognized as a “superior macho” and “dominant symbol” who affirm their own power through violence. Eventually, the understanding of violence and male hegemony should be considered as a cultural, historical product influenced by the social, political and economic dimensions (Hall, 1997; Lagarde, 2005).

However, it is important to highlight the worth of governmental reports, since they offer a national framework for the relevant data and investigate the phenomena, considering gender perspective as well as applying fundamental norms of international commissions. Each report offers, in fact, a specific section about VAW in the private and public dimensions, emphasizing demographic characteristics and gender culture in the private sphere. This highlights the problems related to male and female categorization, as well as the consequences of stereotypes and prejudices. Otherwise, in the public sphere what stands out is the lack of female equality in the political, educational and legislative systems, which provokes violence in public places (street, hospital, shopping center, etc.). In addition, it is worth highlighting that these reports focus on feminist theory both from Western and Mexican areas, emphasizing general topics regarding the definition of *sex* and *gender* as well as fundamental notions about the construction of the female category, from the first feminist wave until contemporary movements. Moreover, they contain specific conceptual frameworks for the definition and classification of violence against women, women’s rights, and women’s equality, according to principal feminist theorists with an interdisciplinary approach from social and human sciences. The fact that VAW’s phenomena has been investigated within the feminist critical discourse helps to depict the phenomena on different levels, considering social, cultural, historical, economical and political factors in gender-based violence. However, the collected data have been structured according to a quantitative approach with the aim of allowing the identification of the magnitude of the social problem and developing policy measures. The quantitative approach gives information about the types and models of violence in the geographical areas, but it does not allow for the visibility of the subjective condition of the victims. Thus, generalized information often minimizes the real effects and consequences on women who suffer violence. Consequently, an invisibility of the alarming impacts of VAW persists, obstructing the implementation of effective preventive actions and subsidizing educational, political and social measures.

In Mexico the state of vulnerability of women is due to different causes. In fact, indigenous women’s condition cannot be considered equivalent to the discrimination suffered by other

women. The multiple conditions of these women who suffer violence suggest, in fact, that empirical research about gender-based violence should “give a voice” to the subject (Atkinson, 2002), in order to show how such women perceive themselves as women, wives, mothers, partners or single women. The subjective perceptive dimension is relevant, since it gives priority to listening to individual storytelling, as well as the individual’s own point of view on family, relationship, male–female roles, violence against women, community and social life. Generally, women’s voices as well as their stories are occulted, invisible, and their realness is therefore destroyed by generalized statements offered by national investigations and cumulative, objective data. Such a problem is more perceptible in the public dimension, in which the lack of information as well as the absence of practical support from institutions provokes the increase in marginalization of these women. Socio-cultural constructions of women and men have established social and private divisions of gender roles, provoking the normalization of values, practices, rules, and norms according to male hegemony. As a consequence, a generic inequality between the genders has been recognized, which has legitimated the use of violence against women because of their inferior position and recognition, as well as the object for individual–collective pleasures and practices. Finally, as Butler (2009) suggests, it is worth establishing in which kind of institutional framework the life of a woman is recognized as human life. In most cases, victims do not receive real and effective justice because the system of power reproduces and enhances their victimization.

## Chapter Three

### Theoretical Frameworks on Feminist Thinking

#### 3.1 Gender Perspective: The feminist critical theories

Feminist theories arise as critical thinking against androcentric societies. The discrimination of the female gender provoked her exclusion in political and socio-economic dimensions, creating her objectification and detraction in the private sphere. In Western society, the demand for the recognition of women's rights has founded the basis of feminist critical thinking through which women's struggles have been questioned in all dimensions of social life. Moreover, it is important to stress that women's struggles differs from culture to culture because of cultural specificity. Consequently, feminist theory is characterized by heterogeneity and diversity. Talking about feminist epistemologies means taking in account the diachronic ways of the philosophical theories concerning women's ability to influence the concept of each epistemic agent. In fact, there are significant differences between feminist theories, i.e. existentialism, *écriture féminine*, psychoanalytical or radical feminism, post-modernism and post-structuralism, liberalism, post-colonial feminism, black feminism, multiculturalism, radical multiculturalism feminism (Amorós et al., 2005a). Such epistemologies differ historically and geographically for their evolution; therefore, the breadth of feminist theories in the world has caused the affirmation of consistent theoretical heterogeneity, depending on the particular conditions for women. In fact, it is important to stress how feminist critical thinking arises, under which circumstances and how the theories differ from each other. The dialogical way to discuss such heterogeneity allows the drawing of a chronological path of feminist critical thinking. As a consequence, feminist literature proposes the recognition of First-wave feminism<sup>21</sup>, Second-wave feminism and Third-wave feminism (ibid.). The principal axiom of each epistemology focuses on the recognition of women's subjectivity as a historical, social and political subject and it aims to disclose a cultural construction of gender identity and its correlation with political domination.

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<sup>21</sup> The feminist philosopher Celia Amorós in *Hacia una crítica de la razón patriarcal* (1985) argues that there is no pre-modern feminism, so the first wave feminism cannot be considered as feminist theory. According to the author, feminism theory as a critical tradition was born in the modernity with the Age of Enlightenment and consequently all pre-modernist forms of feminism are to be recognized as women's rights movement. In this contribution, first wave feminism is mentioned inside the feminist theory because this movement establishes the emancipator tradition.

First-wave feminism refers to the women's movements that fought for the right to vote and the political recognition of women. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century women began to require social and political equality in the society, protesting against injustice and for their political rights, asking for reform on education, employment, and marriage law. Feminist theory establishes its roots, firstly, in the Anglophone area as a fight against women's discrimination in a patriarchal society. The need to disrupt such subordinated relations between male and female is not only present in political activism, but it actually becomes the principal challenge in ideological and institutional discourse. The thoughts of female writers of the Enlightenment help to unmask the thin and unreliable universal considerations of stereotyped representations of women's subjectivity concerning concepts of inferiority, objectivity, and passivity. In this regard, the works of Olympe de Gouges, *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), are pioneering manifestos of such social commitment in favour of women's rights. They reclaim, in fact, the non-human status of women and reject the common public opinion of female passivity, refusing such dominant paradigms in favour of a moral, modest, naive image of femininity. Especially, in the *Declaration of the Rights of Women*, De Gouge stresses women's need to be considered equal to men and the recognition of the female category in public society as representative for the nation. As the author points out, "Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility" (De Gouge, 1791, art.1).

In fact, the inferiority of women and their inability to manage political issues is declared in the French discourse of *Liberté, Legalité, Fraternité*, promoted by considerable intellectuals such as J-J. Rousseau, T. Hobbes, and Locke. The fundamental ideas claimed with the French Revolution were based on the universal rights of human beings, whose position in the society is characterized by the axioms of freedom, equality and fraternity between men. The principal thinkers shared the common belief by which women's position is relegated to private spheres such as reproduction, domestic work and care of the family. In particular, Rousseau did not accept the idea of equality between male and female. As he states in his work *Emily, or on Education* (1762), women are unable to fulfil social relations because of their inferiority:

"The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance. When this principle is admitted, it follows that woman is specially made for man's delight. If man in his turn ought to be pleasing in her eyes, the necessity is less urgent, his virtue is in his strength, he pleases because he is strong" (Rousseau, 1762, p. 322).

Women are described as "weak and passive" in a dichotomous position, compared to the men who are "strong and active". So females are unable both physically and morally to understand

the issues regarding rights, citizenship and social relations in society, a condition that automatically caused their exclusion from public and political discourse. The works of de Gouges and Wollstonecraft reject discrimination and unequal perspective, and they offer an important remapping of women's perspective in which women reclaim their need to demolish this archaic dichotomy between genders.

In particular, thanks to First-wave feminism women obtain important rights in the education system, access to professions, recognition of married women's propriety rights and the right to vote (Amoros et al., 2005a). Moreover, the inversion and reconstruction of a new way of thinking is oriented to assign females the status of the historical subject promoting the need for a critical review of philosophical thoughts and the postulation of a *discourse*—free of any kind of marginalization—on feminist theory about rights, identity, and subjectivity. For this reason, First-wave feminism can be understood as the pioneering project of social transformation that stabilized itself in the Enlightenment époque and later in Marxist theory and the Frankfurt School (Amorós et al., 2005).

As mentioned, this revolution of thought was possible thanks to the literature that in England and in the United States contributed to its development and knowledge. Classical works of feminist literature are *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1937-1938) by Virginia Woolf. In these books the author discloses women's discrimination, stating the relevance of female emancipation, achievement of power and recognition of social and political rights in society. However, the central work that makes the real difference in the feminist theory will appear after the Second World War, causing the complete and irreversible change of women's identity. In this period feminist activism increases, especially, with the affirmation of anti-war movements as well as the social denouncement of discriminatory systems towards the minority population. The consciousness of such inequality suffered by women began to be present in political action as well to develop into theory in the academic sphere.

The text *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) constitutes a cornerstone of feminist literature. In this work the author declares the famous statement “One is not born a woman, but rather one becomes a woman”, which places women as constructed *others*, forcing most intellectuals to analyze and research this point of view. Regarding the recognition of subjectivity in the female gender, De Beauvoir underlines the importance of experience as a body-subject, rejecting the most common understanding of the objectification of the female body. In fact, women do not perceive their own body because the perception occurs merely through a male's gaze and perspective, so it is time to reformulate the notion of consciousness of the female body as alive:



“Thus we will clarify the biological data by examining them in the light of ontological economic, social, and psychological contexts. Woman’s enslavement to the species and the limits of her individual abilities are facts of extreme importance; the woman’s body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the Other? The question is how, in her, nature has been taken on in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of the human female” (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.71).

Women as subjects have to be aware of the experience of their body as a lived body (Butler, 1997), bringing to light the double subjectivity dimension. On the one hand, the body as “lived” is part of one's own subjectivity; on the other hand, it is an object belonging to another subjectivity. Finally, the subject should be aware of this condition of double significance, because the body as subject–object exists from the perspective of the other, which recognizes the female body as the object of another subject.<sup>22</sup>

De Beauvoir’s epistemological theory or understanding the absence of a biological destiny in becoming/doing gender. Being female is, therefore, a historical and social process that is constructed as opposed to being natural. Stressing the process of gender construction, the author promotes the beginning of Second-wave feminism characterized by essentialist theory concerning the biological and cultural dichotomy of sex and gender. This work influences the thought of many feminists and contributes to the passage from a political movement fighting for women’s rights to a theoretical discourse interested in studying women’s subjectivity.

Firstly, De Beauvoir realizes an original theory creating a dialog between existentialism, Marxism and Hegelianism, starting from the lack of a female subject in human history. According to her thinking, in fact, whereas female has belonged to the sphere of immanence, the male category has been included in the transcendence dimension. The struggle placed mostly in the Hegelian *Master–Slave dialectic* postulates the female representation as the *absolute Other*, outside of the process of recognition as a subject. De Beauvoir argues that women should take part in this dialectic, participating in the productive work and fighting for their recognition as human beings. Feminist existentialism emphasizes concepts such as individualism, self-construction, freedom, otherness, domestic work, body self-perception, and sexuality. However, *The Second Sex* and existentialist epistemology determines the development of feminist theories, there are still some points marked by an androcentric perspective. In fact, the history of women is observed through Hegelian and Marxism paradigms without criticizing them; there is a binary concept between female–male in which

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<sup>22</sup> Later such notion will be reviewed by many scholars, particularly by Judith Butler, who asserts the relevance of the social and public dimension of bodies, stressing its social construction and the intersection between oneself and the other (Butler, 1997).

the female is considered immanent-feminine-negative and the male transcendent-male-positive, and the arguments on sexuality and maternity represent the male dimension as natural and the female dimension as negative and subordinate (Schwarzer, 1984).

In fact, these theories have been criticized by post-structuralist French feminists and North American feminists. The critics of feminist existentialism focused on the belief of a universal female condition without considering differences between class, race, and social status. Otherwise, in de Beauvoir's discourse, there is a lack of reflection on the condition of suppression between women and men, creating an incoherent and hegemonic perspective of female *status*. These critics made the beginning of the Third-wave feminism possible, as a response to the limitation of the understanding of women's condition. The social context in the 1960s establishes the gaining of multiple rights, the abolishment of discriminatory laws, and the promotion of an equal legal system. Second-wave feminism had a big impact on western society, helping to change the reality, intervening in the sphere of reproduction and sexuality (the right of abortion, the introduction of the birth-control pill, the abolition of forced marriage, the reform of marriage law, etc.) and changing the cultural representation and the participation of women in public life.<sup>23</sup> In the 1970s there was a significant change in feminist theories, marked by the focus on the re-formulation of the concept of "subject", "women" and "gender" in "patriarchal system". The debate generated two different schools of thinking to which belong the "feminism of equality", which followed de Beauvoir's thinking, and the "feminism of difference", which placed itself against the existentialist perspective.

### **3.2 Beyond the debate: the struggle within the feminist theories**

The term *feminism of equality* refers to the Simone De Beauvoir tradition in which feminists aim to acquire an equal status for women's subjectivity in comparison with men's. Starting with the historical misrecognition of female subjectivity, relegated to omniscience, this school of thought aims to move beyond the binary concept of gender (male-female), emphasizing common characteristics in both sexes, and advancing the theory that sexual differences are a construction of patriarchal ideology. These arguments aim to obtain a universal status of equal rights between sexes in a non-patriarchal society. Particularly, feminists of equality try to trace

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<sup>23</sup> See S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex. The case for Feminist Revolution* (1978), in which the author discusses the political meaning of feminist theory regarding sex and identity, as well as the relation between love and violence; or the work of K. Millet, *Sexual Politics* (1970), where the author offers an analysis of the sexual relations and power relations, arguing that sexual hegemony reflects the concept of power.

the origin of the patriarchal system and the domain of the female sphere, unmasking such dogma of male superiority present in the discourse of anatomy, biology, policy, and religion. The emergent answers of this dichotomous way of thinking have been researched in both linguistic and discursive fields, which argued the existence of a dominant–dominated paradigm of sexes.

In this regard, North American feminists dedicate their analysis to the housewives' condition and the public propaganda of a female model characterized by marriage and housewifery.<sup>24</sup> As Betty Friedan states in her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), women's destiny of unhappiness is caused by the culturally and socially constructed role of wife and mother, whereas women should be awakened to such conditions and become empowered by involving themselves in public life. Published few years before the 1968 movements, this work presents a lot of questions about female representation, stereotypes and political domination, addressed by the new feminist era. North American feminists, especially, consider such social disruptions. Therefore, the ideology from Marxist and Hegelian thought became fundamental roots of the radical feminism's epistemology, directed by the Redstockings movement in New York. In fact, authors such as Gayle S. Rubin, Susan Brownmiller, Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich belong to this critical movement. These authors elaborated new concepts about sexuality and politics arguing that sexist behaviour has been constructed in the patriarchal system and asserting the presence of a politics of sex, based on the control of the body and the imposition of a heterosexual normative system.

In *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex* (1974) Rubin constructs a historical social analysis of gender construction with the intent of unmasking the mechanism of control on heterosexual norms. Her work is significant concerning the elaboration of a gender–sex paradigm, through which its diachronic construction arises:

“I call that part of social life the “sex/gender system” for lack of more elegant term. As a preliminary definition, a “sex/gender system” is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (Rubin, 1974, p. 159).

According to Rubin, the sex/gender system is a controversial space in which battles for the recognition of subjectivity are fought. she calls attention to this system due to its relevance regarding oppressive attitudes against women and sexual minorities. Rubin's work offers a fundamental framework for the understanding of relations between sex, power, and gender with

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<sup>24</sup> The feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar, in *Feminist Politics and Humane Nature* (1983), classifies second wave feminist theory in three categories. According to the author, feminist modernism is constituted by *liberal feminism* in which a major influence is realized by S. Moller Okin; *socialist and Marxist feminism* represented by A. Jaggar; and finally the *radical and cultural feminism* constituted by K. Millet.

a particular focus on race, class and age differences. She accuses the capitalistic and patriarchal state of establishing social difference and hierarchy. Such a contribution is significant in order to create a space of thinking and critical analysis regarding sexual differences within different contexts. American feminists, in particular, contributed to disclosing normative paradigms for the understanding of sexual differences, arguing against heterosexuality as a natural human condition, creating awareness about the institutional construction and control of female sexuality, imposed by male domination. Moreover, such studies allow for the affirmation of Lesbian and Gay Studies, gaining an important position in the academic sphere. Uniquely, lesbian theories claim there is a lack of gender and the postulation of a non-heteronormative paradigm for genders outside the male–women category, influencing the development of further feminist theories and the affirmation of Queer Studies.

In the 1970s years, especially, French women contribute to development of feminist theory, offering a perspective based on the concept of the “difference” of women, focused on linguistic and psychological dimensions. One of the most well-known movements, called *Psy-et-Po*, became in France an icon of the women’s movement because of its revolutionary character and its promotion of psychoanalytical theories. Otherwise, the group inspired by De Beauvoir’s teaching expressed a Marxist analysis of women’s condition and found a magazine called *Question Feminists* (1970), in which many intellectuals compared their own female struggles (Amoros et al., 2005b).

The most famous exponents of this school of thought are Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, who promoted a review of feminist theories based on the deconstructive philosophy of Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. The central concept of their ideologies is the understanding of Derrida’s concept of *différance*, referring to the act of “deferring” and “differing”. The concept of *différance* refers to the meanings in language that are related to the present, but they carry on the relation of time between the past and the present. There is no unique or natural given meaning; rather meanings are constructed depending on the relation between the elements and the present–past relation. Regarding the meaning of gender, therefore, French feminists suggest deconstructing such meaning in order to highlight the difference that is historically and culturally constructed. The value of linguistic code hides the significance of gender representation, so the act of speaking as *parler femme* (Irigaray, 1985) contains the power of the subject who expresses the thought. Moreover, the production of discourse allows the exhibition of subjectivity, so that women’s voices need to be produced and listened to in order to manifest the *différance* between the discourse produced by male’s perspective and that represented by the female’s. That is the intention proposed by

Hélène Cixous in the essays *Le Rire de la Méduse e Sorties* (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1975), in which the author offers a brief observation of the importance of differences between male and female language, underlining the feminine language as the voice of heterogeneity

French feminist theory contributed to introduce the debate about gender to the academic sphere so that there is a significant change in the field of scientific studies, methodology, and theoretical frameworks. They affirm that the word *gender* is not merely cultural and assert the recognition of the two genders (male–female) as different genders. The debate focused on the axioms that male and female differs both in sexual and moral characteristics and refuse equality feminist theory, which considers genders from a universal perspective. French feminist theory, in particular, tried to subvert the theories on female subjectivity, from a negative to a positive perspective, starting with the symbolic exclusion of women in Lacan’s theory. All in all, their school of thoughts proposed the consolidation of a pre-Oedipus symbolic experience by which women can develop their subjectivity in different ways from men. In addition, they claim the deconstruction of the “phallogentric order”, considering the body as a place of symbolic differences in which the meaning of virginity and motherhood resides.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, it is important to stress the role of the Italian feminist movement in the discourse of difference, because they emphasized the politics of difference, promoting the divulgation of the history of female thought and the divulgation of the feminist critique of difference. Italian feminists realized such a project through the foundation of the female bookstore in Milan in 1975 and the promotion of articles about the female manifesto, such as the magazines *Via Dogana*, *Sottosopra* and *The Yellow Catalogue*.<sup>26</sup> Their debate focused on the rejection of political representation due to patriarchal roots in the debate about abortion and sexual violence. Generally, Italian feminism persisted in the affirmation of a female representation in judicial issues, stressing, thus, gender differences and the importance of the role of the mother for the establishment of female subjectivity and the surpassing of the male symbolic order (Amoros et al., 2005c).

Particularly, philosopher Luisa Muraro, in *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* (1991), claims that the creation of a symbolic female order was based on the role of the mother, as a symbolic mother, starting from the metaphysic notion of early relations that place it in a superior position

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<sup>25</sup> In *Speculum of The Other Woman* (1974) L. Irigaray asserts the re-signification of the term *gender* based on difference, and postulates a definition which considers gender as “the order of the things”, neither natural and nor constructed. Later, in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977) the author returns to stress that human natural subjects are two and that the symbolic has to be made up of two symbolic orders. In addition, whereas H. Cixous dedicates particular attention to the *parler-feme*, stressing the importance of a woman’s way of writing which entails the female imaginary, J. Kristeva develops a theory based on the pre-Oedipal Order in order to demystify phallogentric understanding of the world and to create a re-signification in the symbolic chaos.

<sup>26</sup> See Amoros, C., De Miguel, A. (2005) *Teoria feminista de la ilustración a la globalización*, Vol. 2.

in opposition to male subjectivity. She finds the origin of female relations in the love towards the mother to be the principal element that constitutes female subjectivity. According to the author, the mother as a symbolic relation mediates in the constitution of the subject, so that getting close to such a relation means to regain the symbolic authority of the mother's role (Muraro, 1991).<sup>27</sup> Later, Italian feminist critical theory was developed by the feminist group Diotima from the University of Verona, one of its most famous exponents being the philosopher Adriana Cavarero, who in *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000) proposes a definition of subject intersected with sexuality as an inestimable function. Moreover, in *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (2007) the author, referring to the contemporary violent human practice of massacre, problematizes the concept of "horrorism" as an ordinary practice of destruction in which the body is the place of resistance against violence.<sup>28</sup>

The theory of feminism of difference presents limitations both in the theoretical and practical fields. In fact, both feminist movements of equality and difference do not consider *the subject as constituent*. The latter concept refers to subject's inability to subvert power relations. Post-modernist feminists, through their critical thinking, reclaim the idea of the failure of modernity, recognising the subject as constituted into the discursive dimension of the dominant ideology. Consequently, post-modernist theory rejects modernist postulates because the crisis of modernism has revealed that real events are products of a hegemonic discourse that is historically, culturally, politically and socially constructed. Third-wave feminism rises in such context, producing heterogenic theories around principal axioms such as woman, gender, constructed and deconstructed gender, body, subjectivity, identity, and the relation between power and sex (Amoros et al., 2005c). In particular, the term *gender* assumes significant recognition in the scientific field thanks to its socio-culturally constructed character that interests different disciplines. Women's condition is rather valued according to the intersectional relation between gender, sex, race, and ethnicity, and socio-cultural status in the racialized and sexist paradigm of a specific ideology. These arguments highlight the specificity of the location of the female subject.

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<sup>27</sup> Italian feminist theory begins as a political project against patriarchal system, aiming to create a juridical and political model for the representation of women's right outside the traditional Italia system. Theorists found the female bookstore of Milan, where their actions took place. Principally, they fight for the recognition of a female symbolic order in the practice of abortion and sexual violence, arguing that in such cases victims should "entrust" the issues to a female lawyer who knows and can apply feminist critical thinking of difference (Posada Kubissa, 2005). They follow such line of thinking because entrusting common law means allowing female issues to be managed by the patriarchal system, which rejects the recognition of female subjectivity.. The political proposal is related to the symbolic one, so accepting the authority of the mother as the symbolic order that mediates in the constitution of the subject means to recognize other women, as well as to establish the condition of an independent status. Finally, if women increase their condition of freedom, they could increase their need and acquire more and more such mediation between them and the world.

<sup>28</sup> See chapter 3 p. 40.

### 3.3 From the Third-Wave feminist movement to contemporaneous debate

*Decolonization ... continues to be an act of confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought; it is hence a process of considerable historical and cultural liberation. As such, decolonization becomes the contestation of all dominant forms and structures, whether they be linguistic, discursive, or ideological. Moreover, decolonization comes to be understood as an act of exorcism for both the colonized and the colonizer. For both parties it must be a process of liberation: from dependency, in the case of the colonized, and, from imperialist, racist perceptions, representations, and institutions which, unfortunately, remain with us to this very day, in the case of the colonizer ... Decolonization can only be complete when it is understood as a complex process that involves both the colonizer and the colonized.*

-Samia Nehrez

Bell Hooks, "The oppositional Gaze", introduction.

In the third-wave feminist theory central debates regard the question of gender, the trouble of the politics of subjectivity, the understanding of identity, as well as the difference between and diversity of identities, women, and subjectivities. Moreover, the affirmation of third-wave feminism of central theories concerning the definition of *women* and *gender*. They postulate the distinction of such concepts, starting from the axes of class, race, sex, religion, and ethnicity, claiming there is a lack of a proper distinction between women who differ in skin color, geographical position, and historical and social conditions (Davis, 1971). In particular, black feminist movements, post-colonial feminism and de-colonial feminism emphasize the debate around the complexity of women's condition related to the axes of class, race, and sex.

Firstly, subaltern studies and post-colonial studies criticize the hegemonic discourse aroused in the binary dialectic of *one-other* as *colonialist-colonized*, in which such logic of power re-signifies a subject's identity as "hybrid" (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha proposes the definition of *subject* as "hybrid" because it arises as a subject *in-between* the dominant and dominated culture where it becomes able to subvert and negotiate the power relation (ibid.). Therefore, post-colonial discourse is trans-national because it embodies historical and cultural displacement and migration in which subaltern and dominant cultures are mixed, re-defining constantly the circulation of the meaning and the resistant forms against the politics of exploitation. Social phenomena such as globalization, migration, and the capitalistic logic of domination such as mass-media culture demand, in feminist critical thinking, a comparison with such realities that are geographically, historically and culturally defined. Black, post-colonial and de-colonial feminist movements problematize women's condition, rejecting the Eurocentric perspective of white, bourgeois feminists. The concept of "epistemic violence" constitutes, in fact, a significant criticism of western society. This term refers to the cyclical violence based on an imperialist and capitalistic hierarchy that has occurred through submission of the *others* under the hegemonic logic of colonization.

Post-colonial perspective adopts new intersections in social, political, and economic dimensions in diachronic and synchronic ways, mapping the power relations in a society. Chandra Mohanty, in the essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial*

*Discourse* (1986), approaches the question about the category of “third world women” in their diversity and contingent geographical, historical and cultural differences. Her criticism of the Western feminist approach focuses on the relevance of the specific condition of the marginalized subject related to the idea of resistance, community and *agency* under an intersectional paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, as Gayatri Spivak stresses in the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), the voice and thought of subaltern women differs from other Western women’s condition because of its specificity in location and time:

“...*subaltern* is not just a classy word for “oppressed”, for the other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie...In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. Now, who would say that’s just oppressed? The working class is oppressed. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don’t need the word ‘subaltern’... They should see what mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern” (De Kock, 1992, pp. 29-47).

Spivak points out that the subaltern cannot speak because it is a subject without culture, history, and signification, so that its position as alogical causes its impossibility to speak. The author argues that existent knowledge about the culture of the others is a subjugated knowledge because it has been discriminated, depreciated and even eliminated by colonial perspective (Spivak, 1999). Finally, the subaltern subject does not have a culture or a history, which has caused his or her impossibility to speak, because of the lack of recognition as a subject and the lack of significance. Even if such notion could seem drastically unchangeable, later Spivak re-proposes the term *hyride* to refer to identities. Despite the bio-genetic origin of the term as a metaphor for sterility and manipulation, the author uses this term to refer to “hidden identities”, or “migrants’ identities” that mark themselves as different because of their ethnicity and subaltern identity in a globalized and post-modern society (*ibid.*). In addition, the focus of Spivak on the logic of power concerns even symbolic representation and the problem of recognition that she develops through the analysis of a narrative imaginary in 19<sup>th</sup>-century English literature. In particular, she analyzes the discursive form of imperialistic cultural representation in the literature of female writers, such as Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys.<sup>30</sup> The purpose is, overall,

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<sup>29</sup> In *Under Western Eyes: Feminism Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* (1986) philosopher C. Mohanty stresses the visibility of the oppression of women from the third world through Eurocentric discourse on women. She points out that hegemonic discourse about post-colonial realities generalize women’s status in a monolithic way, provoking the elimination of the geographical, ethnical, racial, and cultural identity of these women. The absence of specific differentiation, according to Mohanty, occurs because feminists from the first world represent post-colonial women in an exotic way, as women without education and independence without emphasizing the specific “local”, rather proposing the “homogeneous”, “global” point of view. The category of women from the third world asserts the need to consider these women in their complex, irreducible cultural difference, negating fetishistic visuality from Western eyes as well as an imperialistic discourse for the understanding of third world women subjectivity.

<sup>30</sup> See Weedon, Chris (2000). *Feminist practice & poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.



to highlight the binary logic of power/knowledge hidden in English literature that promotes discriminatory and racial symbolic representations of subaltern subjects in the narrative representation.

The contribution of post-colonial feminist thinkers is relevant to the re-interpretation of women's identity and subjectivity, according to the axiom of race, ethnicity, class, and religion. Subaltern studies highlight the need for strategies of knowledge about the notion of the subaltern subject as "hybrid" or "mestizo" inside the colonialist–colonized logic of power, starting from the fact that due to their condition of subjection, these subjects are able to negotiate with the dominant system and to displace and subvert themselves, producing other places of signification as group identity or individual interaction in marginal places (Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, theorists stress how in the era of globalization, where we witness to transnational migration of people and information, there is no pure difference between colonial and post-colonial, because both colonial and post-colonial cultures change irrevocably after contact (Fanon, 1961).

Intersectionality and post-colonial theory offer a new representation of women as marginalized subjects of the discourse, so that the *mestiza* (Anzaldúa, 1981), as a mixed identity, and the *subaltern* (Spivak, 1988) become significant notions in the configuration of women's oppression. The intersectional analysis of women's condition emphasizes politically related dynamics through the construction of women's subjectivity, so that hegemonic discourse and the criticism of imperialism and capitalism constitute new paradigms of reflection and interpretation of women's conditions. Post-colonial/de-colonial and multicultural feminist theory emphasize the concept of identification in a particular ethnical group, stressing the contextualized differences of signification. Critics of post-colonial feminist theory have criticized Spivak, in particular, because in her comparison between post-colonial Indian society and the Western model, she neglects the discriminatory logic in Indian culture, due to the caste system. According to Nancy Fraser (1997) post-colonial theory does not pursue a deep analysis of power relations in cultures and forgets to de-articulate the complex interactions between differences, hierarchies, dialectical relations between one–other, identity, exclusion, and normative models.

For this reason, the transnational feminist perspective in response to post-colonial discourse emphasizes the need to transfer the question of identities from the central to the peripheral dimension in order to move beyond the binary between "pure" and "mixed" identities. Principally, the debate focus on the *defférance* relation in language, so that one no longer speaks

about a woman in singular terms, but one speaks of women in term of pluralism, difference, and neutrality.

In this regard black, post-structuralist, post-colonial and de-colonial feminists argue that the problem surrounding subjectivity calls into the question of Cartesian epistemology in which the locution *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) determines a unique, rational, real and universal subject in western philosophy. Post-structuralist feminist thinkers claim, therefore, the existence of a unique, universal subject, positioning themselves against existentialist schools of thought, and affirming the plural, precarious subjectivity of human beings. Finally, this interpretation subverts the dichotomy between male–female, highlighting the differences from specific axes of race, class, age, and sex in a cultural system. Subjectivity is, eventually, always characterized by the particular location in the power structure, so that the subject who speaks is geo-politically and body-politically located (Grosfoguel, 2007).

### **3.3.1 The location of the subject of enunciation: changing feminist perspective**

Some feminist scholars have contributed to the affirmation of a plural understanding of women, rejecting the unique production of a white Western feminist vision (Anzaldua & Moraga 1981; Davis, 1983; Mohanty, 1986; Spivak, 1988). Re-thinking plurality's subjectivity means that the human being and the socialization practices are investigated considering different systems of power, such as colonialism, capitalism, racism, nationalism or neoliberalism, which enhance the relation between dominant–dominated. In the 1970s and 1980s black feminists rejected the “single-axis framework” on the study of women's oppression and claimed the need to investigate black women's experiences from the intersectional point of view of race and gender in multiple dimensions. Black feminist movements fought for the achievement of civil rights and against racism and sexism discrimination suffered by black women. In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s the pioneering work of Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973); Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn* (1978); and Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1983) sought to show the differences between black and white feminists, proving how the oppression of women of color differs deeply due to racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.<sup>31</sup> The struggle of black women presents specificity due the historical oppression committed with slavery and their social representation through erotic,

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<sup>31</sup> See Collins, P. (1990). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

sexual objectification. The challenge to empower black female consciousness became the principal tool of black feminists who developed theoretical and practical frameworks, such as Bell Hook's reflections in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1991), *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1992) and Patricia Hill Collins' work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990). In particular, these authors elaborated their theories according to the concept of intersectionality, referring to the overlapping of multiple forms of oppression (sexism, racism, and classism) mutually constructed in a system of power.

The term was coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and refers to a subjectivity constituted by multi-level factors such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. Such theoretical tools were empirically adopted to combat feminist hegemony and exclusivity, which is imposed by Western feminist scholars. Crenshaw discusses the multiple forms of discrimination and oppression suffered by black women. She highlights how women of color exist within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse (Crenshaw, 1992). Moreover, the discourse of subjectivity recognition does not regard solely the theoretical sphere, but it includes the political praxis of recognition within social processes. As the author argues, an institutional acceptance of differences of women's categories is, therefore, fundamental in the fight against intra-group discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice. The impact of sexism and racism at the intersection of the social dimension is summarized in the metaphor of a traffic light, which represents an overlap of two or more avenues whose assignment is to regulate the traffic. Similarly, social identities (metaphor for avenues) are negotiated in a society (metaphor for traffic light) because as the traffic, they generate complex intersections (ibid.). The theory of intersectionality evokes an anti-racial paradigm for the understanding of women, emphasizing the lack of foundation both in theory and praxis to analyze identity through a race/gender binary. First, scholars stress the relevance of plurality in identifying "binaries" in plural means because of the possible implications according to the different social-cultural contexts. This theory fills the gaps in both theory and praxis in feminist epistemology, including the marginalized subject in the normative framework of recognition of difference in race, class, and sexuality. Such contributions interrupt, deconstruct and destabilize universal feminist notions of "women", providing a concept of identity that is dislocated under Western eyes and forcing feminist theory to resolve conflicts concerning concepts of identity, oppression, and the political recognition of marginalization and racism.

From a similar perspective, post-colonial scholars highlight the re-position of women identities under the lenses of specific positions and locations. In the work *This Bridge Called*

*My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), the authors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga offer a contribution centered on the experiences of women of color unified by feelings of sisterhood in race–class–sex. In particular, their speech places within the conflict of identity the Mexican people settled in the USA called *chichanos*, a new subjectivity displaced into American or Mexican categorization. The feminist thinkers of the Third World draw an articulate framework of a subject’s identity from which the “mestiza”, as subject of colonization and race interactions, represents the complexity and plurality of women’s identification. Gloria Anzaldúa proposes the term *mestizo* in *Bordelands/La Frontera* (1987), referring to such identities placed on the border and living in a kind of *in-between* (Bhabha, 1994) status. The border is understood as a place of production of meaning, as the language Spanglish, a hybrid way of speaking between Spanish and English.

In this unstable and fluid place of signification the *chicanas* struggle against the male power to obtain the recognition of their identity in such hybridism. According to Anzaldúa (1987), the ethnic-cultural impurity created by the contact between the colonists and the colonized has caused irremediable hybridity. The contact produces, therefore, the loss of a pure identity in both cultures, changing them in relational way. As a result, the word *mestizo* emphasizes such mixed identities aroused by the contact of two cultures. As Maria Lugones stresses, there is no more logic of purity in race because of the *hybridity* of identity and imaginary (Lugones, 2002). In fact, according to the author, the logic of purity in race belongs to the political project of racism, which imposed a universal unity, discriminating between differences in race, sex, ethnicity, religion and class. Both perspectives are significant in feminism critical theory because the authors promote the dialog between cultures, deconstructing the hegemonic discourse of Eurocentric axioms. Particularly, the process of the recognition of others leads to the disclosure of prejudices and stereotypes against subcultures.

In the Latin American region, the articulation of feminist epistemology distances itself from the other perspectives because of its heterogeneity and differences in geographical, cultural, ethnical, and economical contexts. Latin American feminist theory places itself in post-colonial/de-colonial, multicultural and ecological feminism perspectives. In particular, the de-colonial perspective aims to disclose the logic of power in inter-ethnic relations and the intersection of religion, race, sex and class, addressing the discourse to the interested subjects and trying to create a dialog with Western ideology. Some scholars point out, therefore, that there is no longer such a thing as post-colonial society, but rather post-colonial countries living a period of deconstruction from the capitalistic and imperialistic logic of power (Dussel, 1977; Quijano, 1998; Mignolo, 2000; Lugones, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2004). The process of

deconstruction of some beliefs regarding gender, class, ethnicity, and sex aims to enhance the de-colonization of the hegemonic perspective in different areas of social interactions. Eventually, the study of race/ethnic and gender relations should focus on the concept of “coloniality of power”, as Grosfoguel points out:

“The concept of ‘coloniality of power’ for the study of race/ethnic identities and relations is important because it enables us to understand why the present racial/ethnic hierarchy of the capitalist world system is still ‘constituted on [cultural] criteria originated in colonial relations.’ ‘Coloniality of power’ historicizes and explains why certain groups are at the bottom of the ethnic/racial hierarchy while others remain at the top. It moves beyond the tendency in racial/ethnic studies to focus only on the persistence of a color hierarchy. Such a focus can lead to the reification of color categories obscuring other forms of racialization in the capitalist world system.” (Grosfoguel, 2004, p. 326).

Therefore, it is important to stress the subjective location of “the voice who speaks” and the geopolitical (Dussel, 1977) location of knowledge (Haraway, 1988). The concept of different locations of knowledge comes from a Western philosophical discourse that has established the recognition of a “non-situated ego” instead of a situated one. As Grosfoguel (2004) points out, Western science and philosophy has produced an ethical, racial, gender and epistemic location of the subject, structured through the hegemonic system of power based on a universal knowledge, sold as true and embodied in the structure of colonial power/knowledge (ibid.). Overall, subaltern critical studies and feminist post-colonial studies highlight the importance of a subaltern epistemic location of the subject, who speaks in order to deconstruct Western a universal one point of view, which philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez (2003) called “point zero”.

Latin American feminist theory, following subaltern epistemic theory, places itself against Eurocentric structures of power, particularly regarding indigenous ethnicities. In this regard, the Bolivian philosopher Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui in *Debates Post Coloniales* (1997) asserts the recognition of identity between indigenous ethnic groups which differ from each other, as “pure” and “mestizo”, causing a discrimination in the dimension of moral values. Indigenous women, particularly, suffer discrimination due to the cultural intersection of gender, class, and ethnical status. Then, institutions obstruct their recognition in social, political and economic dimensions according to a logic of the politics of oppression and inferiorization of these minorities. As a result, indigenous people are marginalized and discriminated by institutional apparatus that do not recognize them as subjects, rejecting their language and culture as well as their political, social and economic structures. According to Cusicanqui, the case of Quechua and Aymara indigenous groups in Ecuador and Peru as well as the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (Mexico) are emblematic because this indigenous movement has been fought against

capitalistic exploitation and abuses of human rights, claiming their own identity, culture, political, and economic system.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Claudia de Lima Costa (2002) critically analyzes concepts such as representation, power and linguistic asymmetry, intending to re-elaborate the praxis of the deconstruction of the female subject within global processes, intersecting the axes of race, class, gender, religion and ethnicity with geopolitical and transnational ability. Particularly, the author insists on re-valuing the space of “translation” as a space that is able to give a voice to multiple racial, sexual, and cultural identities which are placed in this *in-between* horizon (ibid.). Eventually, third-wave feminism contributes to mapping a hegemonic construction of women’s identity, disclosing the systems of power and knowledge that enable it. In fact, dichotomous discourses such as nature–culture, body–mind, sex–gender, and male–female have provoked the imposition of a universal system of knowledge, allowing the genocide of different cultures, knowledge, and beliefs.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.4 Constructing Gender Category: Female–male binary

In Western society, the relationship between the sexes has focused on the search for differences and diversity. Originally, researchers have been oriented towards the biological

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<sup>32</sup> Feminist theory in Latin America is so heterogeneous and peculiar because of the multiple differences between the countries and in the ethnicities within the countries. It is important to stress that feminist theory focuses on the de-colonial perspective, aiming to create a discourse of women outside ethnocentric and capitalistic paths as well as stressing the relation between colonialism, racism, and economic and social inequalities in marginal spaces. In Mexico the feminist debate presents such heterogeneity because of differences of women in class, ethnicity, and race. A pioneer of feminist critical thinking is the philosopher Graciela Hierro, who in the work *Ética y Feminismo* (1985) introduces the first reflection of feminist theory in Mexican culture, regarding concepts such as “identity” and “subjectivity” in the “gender discourse” and the “sex construction” present in patriarchal ideology. Moreover, the anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, in *Los cautiverios de mujeres. Madresposa, monja, puta, presas y locas* (2011), draws a historical, anthropological and social framework oriented in the construction of the female category in the spheres of mothers, wives, prostitutes, nuns, prisoners and insane people, highlighting the implicit forced place of recognition of these women in the society. Further analysis about Mexican women and their violation, from familiar into institutional spheres, are articulated by anthropologist Marta Lamas in *Body, Sex and Politic* (2014). Moreover, sociologist Julia Estella Monarrez Fragozo dedicates her studies to the analysis of femicide cases in Ciudad Juarez from a feminist perspective, intersected with critical theory. More detailed information about Latin American history of feminist thinking, from the early rights movements in 1968 until today, are articulated by Gargallo, F. (2004) in *Ideas feministas latinoamericanas, historia de las ideas*; Gargallo, F. (2014) *Feminismos desde Abya Yala. Ideas y proposiciones de las mujeres de 607 pueblos en nuestra América*; Gargallo, F. (2007), “Feminismo Latinoamericano”, in *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer*; Armas, H. (2008), Explorar os vínculos entre sexualidade e direitos para enfrentar a pobreza, in *Questões de sexualidade: ensaios transculturais*. Rio de Janeiro: ABIA p. 59-68.

<sup>33</sup> The rejection of a dichotomous understanding of reality enables the resignification of the body, which is understood as being located geographically, historically, and culturally with a distinction of sex, gender, age, race and class. Such re-elaborated notions bring to light different views about body subjectivity. The theorist Braidotti (1994) uses the “nomadic subject” referring to the personification of a dislocated women’s subjectivity in a global, multiple, and intercultural society (Braidotti, 1994). Meanwhile, the theorist de Laurentis (1990) defines other subjects outside of hegemonic paradigms and normative systems as “eccentric subjects”. Finally, female subjectivity is represented as “cyborg” (Haraway, 1995) or “lesbian” (Wittig, 1973), referring to the multiple configurations of body experiences, sexual relations, and gender transformations outside of normative standards. See In Amoros, C. And De Miguel, A. (eds.) *Teoría feminista de la ilustración a la globalización*, Vol. 2. Madrid: Miverva

study regarding differences between male and female bodies and their sexual nature. In particular, during the Middle Ages the first anatomical studies focused on identifying the differences between the male and female sexual organs, in order to justify such inequality between the sexes. Biological demonstrations constituted, in fact, the consolidation of theological dogma and political ideology. Later, the split between “ratio” and “faith” in Western culture allows for the affirmation of the binary concept regarding "sex in nature" and "sex in culture". Male and female recognition follows, therefore, this binary conception based on the oppositional categories of active–passive, dominant–subordinate, cold–hot, open–closed, positive–negative (Bourdieu, 1994).

According to this perspective, the male universe is built on cardinal principles, such as honor, virility, power, and control from the physical plane. Seen as superior in strength, they assert themselves in the social sphere. The identity of the woman stands between pure–impure and sacred–profane. Consequently, it has been created a mysticism around the female sexual organ based on the rejection of her sexuality. In fact, women have negative emotion in talking about sexuality, unlike men have to acquire knowledge of his sexual organ in order to assert their manhood.

The sacred and the profane around women's sexuality creates in man a desire for possession and control, stigmatizing female sexuality. Therefore, in the collective imaginary the female body appears outside woman’s control and it is recognized as men’s possession. The body is a significant element in the relation between sexes, as Bourdieu states “it is always through the mediation of the sexual division of the legitimate uses of the body that it will established the link between the phallus and the logos” (Bourdieu, 1994, p.26). It means that there is a deep relationship between what designates socially masculine behaviour and his genitals. Following Bourdieu the man as the phallus is active, exercises power and control, allowing the logos dominance both public and private place in taking word and acting. Unlike the woman has a passive role sexually and linguistically, the she is recognized in the category of sacred sexuality and her objectification provokes the negation of the subjectivity. Citing Bourdieu androcentric vision of social reality has not been determined by the biological difference between the sexes:

"It is not the phallus (or its absences) to form the basis of this world view, it is rather this world view that being organized according to the division of gender relation, male and female, may establish the erected phallus into a symbol of virility, the point of honour strictly male, and the difference between biological bodies to objective foundations of the difference between the sexes, in the sense of gender constructed as hierarchical social essences" (ibid, p. 32).

As result, the biological superiority of male sexual organ has allowed the establishment of a knowledge about sexual relations based on the inferiorization and stigmatization of female subjectivity.<sup>34</sup>

As Laqueur states in *Making Sex. Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud* (1990), the female genital organ has been interpreted from the linguistic to the symbolic sphere by using the male as a starting point. Since Ancient Greece connotation and denotation of female genitalia has been established through the male one, considering that there are not two sexes, rather only the male one. Later, in the eighteenth century medicine established arousal as a biological indicator of the presence–absence of a sexual difference. Consequently, the common belief that women aim to build relations and men to obtain sexual pleasure justify to create sexual medical discourse was driven by the belief that the male sex was the unique, universal model of sex. The medical discourse, therefore, establishes cultural and political interactions based on the gender’s role connoted by female “passivity” and male “activity”. In particular, Laqueur accuses Western medical discourse reinforcing the passive and inferior sexuality of the female, citing Jacques Duval (1616) and the case of Marie de Marcis, who received a sodomy sentence for being “active” by sexual intercourse,. In addition, the author highlights the construction of female sexual pleasure<sup>35</sup> and how, in parallel, such discourse excludes indigenous women, whose female sexual genitalia are compared to animal genitalia, establishing the common belief that they do not have menstruation.<sup>36</sup>

Otherwise, in the nineteenth century female sexual pleasure regarding orgasm disappears from the medical discourse, because female sexuality as “quiet” and “hidden” needed to reflect the new social, economic, and political processes. In fact, according to Laqueur, the dual

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<sup>34</sup> The French anthropologist Marie Christine Pouchelle, in her essay *Corps Chirurgie et à l'Apogee du moyen Âge* (1984), offers the reconstruction of the vision of the female sexual organ in the Middle Ages, identifying the representation of the vulva as an overturned phallus. Until the Renaissance the lexicon of anatomy did not have a suitable term for the description of female sexual apparatus, which was described and studied only in relation to differences with the male sexual organ. This biological interpretation of sexual differences served to justify the social and cultural position of women. Moreover, towards the end of the sixteenth century anatomist and scientist Matteo Colombo Realdo published *De Re anatomica* (1559), where for the first time he mentions the discovery of the clitoris. Later, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries studies about hysterias, realized by the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, provoked the biological consolidation of male superiority. Similarly, theories of Sigmund Freud (1905-1097) on the castration complex or hysteria supported the male superiority at a symbolic level, provoking the anatomical and physiological interpretation and representation of the female sex as passive and inferior in nature. See Laqueur, T (1990) *Making Sex. Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud*.

<sup>35</sup> As well a deep analysis of masturbation and prostitution from ancient Greece to the nineteenth century, Laqueur also observes that according to Foucault (1976) human and social sciences have generated a kind of desire in order to gain control over it. Firstly, in fifteenth century the debate around orgasm regards the problem of fertility and reproduction due to the high rate of infant mortality. The author argues that the binary concept of female passivity and male activity are placed in the ejaculation process in which female sperm is described as cold and weak unlike the male’s, described as strong and warm. So central medical focus regarded the praxis of orgasm, the production of heat and reproduction in order to exclude female social roles due to biological differences.

The debate around masturbation begins in the early fifteenth century, but it becomes more important thanks to Samuel-Auguste Tissot's *Onanism* (1758), which affirms that masturbation causes sterility. Later in the nineteenth century the debate on masturbation is central, see also Eliza Duffy, *What Women Should Know* (1873); Richard Carlile, *Every Woman’s Book* (1828) R.L. Perry, *The Silent Friend: A medical work, on the disorders produced by the dangerous effects of onanism* (1920).

<sup>36</sup> Concerning the “domestication” of female sexuality, see Auguste Debay’s *Hygien et physiologie de mariage* (1850).



separation of social roles represents the validation of the discourse of power based on male superiority. Finally, Laqueur's work is important regarding the analysis of the biological construction of sexuality, considered as the central thesis for the establishment of the superior male position in public and private spheres, in all social, political, and cultural interactions. The body continues to be a central element in the construction of gender. In fact, in Western culture women, especially in public, had to hide their bodies to convey this idea of sacredness and composure. But even the postures and poses must always be contained and respectful. In the unconscious this code of conduct is still present. Despite Western women considering themselves as emancipated, there are some rules of moral integrity still reflected in the attitudes or social codes. The sex/gender discourse has been circumscribed within the dichotomy of the concepts of "sexual nature" and "sexuality culture". In fact, Sigmund Freud's theory supported female sexual inferiority.

In *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality* (1905) he states that the clitoris corresponds to a castrated phallus, marking female inferiority and the exclusion of sexual pleasure. In addition, he points out that during puberty the physiological sexual desire in females occurs through its repression, allowing consequently the development of male sexual pleasure and the intensification of reproduction (Freud, 1905). According to Foucault (1976a), the discourse on sexuality assumes a historical review of the axes within the epistemological genesis of knowledge, referring to the systems of power. Political and symbolic dimensions are the instruments by which subjects recognize themselves as sexual individuals. Considering that the cultural construction of male and female images is formed by the logic of the dominant–dominated dichotomy, male identity has been recognized under the principles of honor, strength, power, control, and masculinity. Otherwise, the female identity is stigmatized within the poles pure–impure, sacred–profane (Bourdieu, 1998). Eventually, this system of knowledge has represented the unique epistemological instrument of recognition in Western society, establishing therefore a hegemonic understanding of the reality.

### **3.4.1 Gender and Sex: the struggle on definition**

In Western society studies on sex differences have suggested that male–female category presents diversity regarding the biological status of sex. However, the biological distinction between the two sexes is strictly characterized by some attitudes and behaviors that in private and public life have been recognized as masculine or feminine. In fact, the diversity of the sexes

responds to the necessity of the hegemonic system of power to fix the relation between dominant–dominated groups. Consequently, the concepts “sex” and “gender” have been introduced in order to define natural sexuality and culturally constructed sexuality. The term *gender* refers to a learned concept through a social and cultural construction, and it indicates the representation, the definition and the encouragement of those behaviours that give rise to the status of a conventional man and woman. Otherwise, the term *sex* refers to the sphere of biology based on the anatomical differences between male and female. In particular, the construction of the male gender, as a dynamic concept like that of the female, must be historicized and contextualized, and it was negotiated socially and psychologically developed as dominant at the expense of the female (Rogers, 2011). Consequently, the recognition of subject occurs through categorization processes influenced by prejudices and stereotypes, which establish differences between categories.

According to feministic epistemologies, the construction of male–female category has its roots in the ancient Western Cartesian notion of *ego cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), which imposes the presence of a universal and rational matrix, creating dualism between mind (*res cogitas*) and body (*res extensa*) as well as between rational and sensitive. As a consequence, the notion of identity is limited to Western understanding of subject from a male, universal, non-situated and dichotomous perspective. Such dichotomies provoke the male control of the sphere of rationality in the provoking, as Simone de Beauvoir (1949) points out, recognition of transcendent dimension. Otherwise, the female category belongs to the omniscient sphere because her recognition belongs to the body–sensitive dimension. The imposition of this sexist paradigm has caused, therefore, the inferiorization of women in Western societies, whereas in post-colonial societies the androcentric view is structured both by sexism or racism. In fact, imperialistic ideology was based on the belief that white men were superior biologically and culturally. On the one hand, white people feel superior because of the color of their skin; on the other hand, their superiority has been supported by their modern and civilized culture. These concepts constituted the ideas in favour of colonial expansion, which has been represented as civilization and a salvation mission by Western society toward the so-called “primitive culture” (Todorov, 1984). Consequently, the imperialist project of the *conquistador* in Latin America could be considered a colonization mission, both in terms of territory and culture, because colonizers imposed the superiority of a male, white, Christian, heterosexual, patriarchal ideology. In sixteenth century, especially, Spanish conquistadores affirmed their system of knowledge and system of power through violence. Their expansive

mission was, particularly, characterized by brutal and violent exploitation of indigenous women who were sexually abused, tortured and treated as slaves or objects of desire.

As historicist Araceli Barbosa Sánchez states in *Sexo y conquista* (1994), the colonization has been characterized by a different understanding of colonial male subjectivity. Following on from Dussel's (1977) locution of "I conquer, therefore, I am", she suggests that the identity of a colonial man is based on the locution of *ergo phallus*, "I have a phallus, therefore, I am" (Barbosa Sanchez, 1994). The *conquista* was a violent military action of submission that occurred through the violent homicide of *indios* and the sadistic attitude toward women. In fact, colonialists considered indigenous women sexual objects of pleasure, provoking the dehumanization of indigenous women and the establishment of the objectification of them in the Western imaginary. The phallus symbolizes the colonial sword of sexuality used by colonialists to impose their patriarchal and oppressive culture (ibid.). According to Barbosa Sanchez, the hegemonic culture based on phallic superiority operated by imposing "occult polygamy, double morality, adultery, prostitution, sexual abuse, torture and dehumanizing practices of and towards females" (ibid., 1994, p. 93, my own translation). The method of Spanish colonialists consisted in the objectification of the indigenous female body. This approach established a system of knowledge, in Western and non-Western countries, about indigenous woman, which recognized her as being sexually promiscuous. Similarly, European stereotypes about Mexican women established an existential degradation of female image, contributing to the erotic consumption of female bodies and subjugating them from the symbolic to the social dimension.

Actually, as Barbosa Sanchez stresses, the whole image of America is "an invention of a Western male's mind", which recognizes it as "a virgin female to violate and deflower" (Barbosa Sanchez, 1994, p. 90, my own translation). The stigmatization of female subjectivity occurred through a cultural misunderstanding, provoking the deep objectification of females as exchanged goods, abused by multiple colonialists, violated, tortured with brutality and considered lascivious, immoral traitora.<sup>37</sup> According to Barbosa Sanchez, the process of the sexual ethno-genesis of the *mestizo* begins with the La Malinche, the woman that symbolizes

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<sup>37</sup> In *Sexo y Conquista* Barbosa Sanchez stresses that the *indios* recognized the colonists as divine creatures, thus, they greeted the colonists giving their women as gifts, according their custom. The *Mexicas*' custom was misunderstood as an immoral and licentious drive by colonists, who welcomed it as a release to all the oppressed sexual desires negated by religious and moral codes of Western culture. Therefore, colonists recognized the otherness as an inferior and primitive/uncivilized object of domination. The *conquista* as a civilization mission was based on the oppression and elimination of the *indios*' culture. In dehumanizing them, colonists could impose their ideological hegemony in the religious, moral and juridical dimensions. In addition, as the author highlights, such processes occurred by the colonists' gaze and imaginary construction of otherness, discriminating *indios*' characteristics as nakedness, exotic beautifulness and different sexual ethics. The latter term alludes to the absence of prohibition regarding sexual intercourse, of virginity until the marriage and of the understanding of the obligation of marriage. Thus, the colonialists sanctioned the *sexual peril*, but on the other hand, they fought it under the phallic logic of the rapist through sadist practices on women's bodies.

the *chingado* (fucked), provoking the female representation in the Mexican context connoted by the Western binary. On the one hand, the symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe reflects the image of the mother/wife who is devoted to the family and who fulfils her husband's wishes with a servile attitude. The opposite counterpart is represented by Malinche's image as a symbol of eroticism, fetishism, pleasure, and desire (Castellanos, 1992). Moreover, the paradigms of race and gender reflect the logic of power from a colonialist perspective..

In fact, epistemological knowledge in Latin America, as Grosfoguel (2002) stresses, occurs under the ideology of the "coloniality of power", which refers to power/knowledge practices focused on the race/racism structure. The system of coloniality is "a long historical process of colonial/racial domination over Native American, Latinos, Africans, and other non-European subjects" (Grosfoguel, 2004, p. 328). Particularly, the imposition of gender hierarchy occurs through racialized hegemonic criteria, which allows the consolidation of coloniality as a consequence for the establishment of modernity. However, as Grosfoguel (2004) points out, the system of coloniality of power is characterized by heterogeneity:

"The central aspect of the concept of 'coloniality of power' is that it allows us to understand the interface between racist cultures and social power relations with a long colonial history in the capitalist world system. It shows how social power today is still informed by criteria built over a long colonial history. Yet it is important to highlight that coloniality is not a homogeneous, but rather a heterogeneous, process. There are multiple forms of colonialities according to the different colonial powers and the diverse histories of each empire." (Grosfoguel, 2004, p. 328).

It is important, therefore, to consider the aspects of the multiple forms of colonialities in accordance to the specific historicity and cultural patterns. Regarding the study of gender relations and categorization, it is important to highlight the different factors that constitute representations of gender. Feminist theory has first highlighted, in fact, the relation between sexuality and power relations in Western society, and successively questioned the role of racism and sexism for the non-white, Christian, heterosexual, patriarchal, European subject.

### **3.5 Feminist notion of *gender***

In feminist theory the term *gender* has provoked different debates regarding its conceptual meaning and practical efficacy. Firstly, this term presents linguistic discrepancies due to its etymology, so whereas in Anglophone areas *gender* refers to sexuality and sexual differences, in romance languages its definition is limited to the grammatical area of female and male categories (De Laurentis, 2000). Moreover, in the 1950s the meaning of the terms *gender* and

*sex* became an important object of study in medicine, psychology, and feminist theory, used to refer to the analytical category of sex as biologically constructed, as opposed to gender as culturally produced (Stoller, 1963; De Beauvoir, 1949; Millet, 1970). In the 1970s years the concept of gender contains powerful significance, referring to its cultural and social construction. In fact, as some theorists stress, the subject and his or her sexuality and desires have been created in particular discourses about the understanding of reality and social relation being dependent on power systems instead of biological and natural characteristic (Rubin, 1975; Foucault, 1976a; Irigaray, 1986; Butler, 1990).

As Gayle Rubin (1975) points out, there are particular systems of power that transforms sexual biological instincts into products of society, so that people codify sexual need through a “sex/gender system” (ibid.). This concept is to be understood under her postulated criticism of Marxism, psychoanalysis and Levi-Strauss’ theory of the kinship structure,<sup>38</sup> which discloses that the socio-economic system regulates gender relations, oppressing female sexuality. In this way some societies (not only patriarchal society) convert biological sexuality as product of human activity in order to satisfy procreation needs and social interactions. The author considers, therefore, productive and reproductive activity as being related to the axes of the power system of sexuality. However, Gayle Rubin’s concept of the “sex/gender system” has been criticized due to the reproduction of binary opposition such as nature–culture (Vance, 1984). Her theory inaugurates the debate’s epoch around the concept of gender as system of power socially regulated. In particular, post-modernism and post-colonial feminist theory claim that feminist theory has considered women’s subjectivity in the binary concept of sex/gender as a dichotomous reflection of that is to say western white women subject. Both feminist theory of equality and feminist theory of difference are universalistic because they exclude social, race, class, and gender intersections, reproducing an imperialistic and colonial understanding of

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<sup>38</sup> The author argues that Marxist theory of women’s oppression is inaccurate because of the existence of female oppression in non-capitalistic societies. So female–male differences are codified through the reproductive need of human beings and the family relationship in which women function as the “gift”, according to Marcel Mauss’s concept of exchange of an object for the regulation of social interaction. The “reproduction instrument” of a society is recognized as a gift, which Lévi-Strauss (1949) in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* recognized in the female. Gayle Rubin suggests that Levi-Strauss’s theory reveals the origin of female oppression because the gift of women for marriage constitutes the institutional instrument of the dominant–dominated relationship in which women’s status is imposed as subordinate and heterosexual. As Lévi-Strauss argues, women are not recognized as subjective, but rather as a relational term between two clans. In marriage the woman is given as “gift” as a symbol of the alliance of the community. She reflects male identity in order to reproduce generations and to make possible the reproduction of paternal linear names in a symbolic and institutional way. Otherwise, Gayle Rubin stresses that the origin of patriarchal concepts is situated in Engels’ work *In Origin of the Family, Private Property* (1884), in which he identifies different sex/gender systems in societies where sexuality is satisfied due to reproductive needs; that is, not a natural but a social product. Finally, in Freudian theory she criticizes the castration complex as a subordination theory of women that through the “incest taboo” norms provokes a negative symbolic recognition of the female sex.

women and postulating a subjective construction of the female, situated in a pre-discourse location.

Subsequently, the debate has been discussed by Judith Butler (1999), who suggests that the heterosexual normative ocuses on gender recognition. Butler argues that there is no natural condition of sex in opposition to a cultural condition (gender), rather there is is as a pre-discursive element to understanding what is embodied in socio-cultural discourses in order to establish the construction of gender. (ibid.). In fact, according to the author, the question on gender depends on the normative framework by which gender category is recognized. In addition, Butler claims that the sex/gender dichotomy has limits due to its its structuralist heritage. The author stresses that Lévi-Strauss' structuralism has conceived the binary understanding of the human condition as nature–culture, opened–closed or raw–cooked, provoking universalism and homogeneity. Therefore, the limits of structuralist theory related to Saussure's and Lévi-Strauss' conception of binaries show the linguistic collapse in the relation of sex/gender. Moreover, the author highlights that sex has always been gendered, claiming that the distinction between sex and gender, elaborated by feminist theoretical thinkers like de Beauvoir and French feminist theory of differences, is not relevant. Butler argues, in this regard, that de Beauvoir's view of female subjectivity as the “other” under Hegelian master–slave dialectic is lacking epistemological consistence because her theory places the female as the negative part of the male. In fact, according to the author, if the female should construct her subjectivity starting from the lack of male subjectivity, placed between the male–female, female subjectivity results in being converted, through a male universal perspective, into the negative side of the male. Finally, women are placed in the recognition system on the outside as the other subject.

On the other hand, Irigaray (1985) claims in the essay *This Sex Which Is Not One* that “the female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis on masculine parameters” (ibid., p. 23), highlighting the patriarchal and androcentric construction of women's desire through the imaginary and visuality, which provokes the discrimination and inferiorization of women. Similarly, Butler claims that women are absent in the recognition system, which is produced merely by a phallogentric economy of signification (Butler, 1990), but she adds that it is important to re-think sex and gender in a “performative way” beyond the binary category.<sup>39</sup> In fact, individuals produce the self within the discourse, according to social norms, and behave

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<sup>39</sup> As Butler (1990) stresses, female subjectivity fails before the law because of its absence in the legislative framework, so although women have gained their political representation, they still live in a power system that represent them through stereotype and prejudice, provoking discrimination and violence against women. For this reason, the term *women* has become a complex reality since not all women have the same ontological and political recognition in a social system.

accordingly. Gender norms follow the same symbolic and social norms, codifying behaviours that belong to the female and those that belong to male sexuality. Finally, sexuality is not natural, rather it is a practice formed within the discourse, socially constructed and internalized, which became normative through the practice of reiteration of such gender norms. Butler aims to break the binary knowledge about sexuality, as she states:

“[...] *Gender* is not a noun but, neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. [...] gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler, 1990, pp. 24-25).

Butler introduces the concept of “doing gender”, taking into account the drag and travesty representation practises that disclose the plural configuration of genders, allowing the subversion of the heteronormative paradigms by the repetition of practices. Sex and gender are both constructed by performances which follow the heteronormative parameters constructed within the discursive dimension. Moreover, the author develops the idea of a performativity of gender, expanding on Austin’s speech act theory and Derrida’s deconstruction of Austin’s theory.<sup>40</sup> Finally, gender performativity should be considered a sexual identity that is socially contextualized and able to constitute itself through the reiteration practice in action (Butler, 1990).

Butler’s concept of gender has been strongly criticized by post-colonial feminist theory, which argues that Butler’s understanding of gender is situated outside the political agency, neglecting the particularity of social problems and contexts in which violence, discrimination, racism, poverty, and exploitation operate (Jeffreys, 1996; Wittig, 1997). In this regard, Monique Wittig (1997) suggests that the gender concept has to include the political difference between *woman* and *women* because while the plural term refers to social specific relations, the first one constitutes a political category constructed as heteronormative. Finally, the problem concerns the lack of consideration of women’s differences regarding race, ethnicity, class, and gender as well as the consolidation of a unique feminist perspective through white Western eyes.

According to some post-colonial and post-structuralist thinkers (Anzaldúa, 1981; Spivak, 1988; Jagger & S. Bordo, 1989; Braidotti; Lugones, 2007) *gender* as an analytical category

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<sup>40</sup> In *How To do Things With Words* J. L. Austin (1995) introduces the speech act theory that refers to language’s ability to provoke actions through words. Austin defines speech acts as locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts correspond to the linguistic structure of the language and its literal meaning. Perlocutionary acts refer to the semantic intention of the communication, in which the effect of an enunciation aims to persuade or to scare somebody. Finally, Butler is interested in illocutionary acts in which the enunciation immediately provokes the action. As Austin explains in the sentence “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, there is the force in doing things with words. However, Butler emphasizes the performativity of gender, according to the speech act theory, but based on deconstruction theory of Derrida, who, in the essay “Signature Event Context” (1972), offers a deconstruction of Austin’s acts, referring to the difference of meaning in the critical relation of words in contrast with other words.

presents limits due to its normative connotation, and the category should instead be considered in relation to power, questioning the agency capacity within processes and structures in which women are situated. According to Teresa de Lauretis (1987) *gender* as representation and self-representation is a product of different social technologies, such as digital media, cinema, etc., which are embodied in epistemological and institutional discourses. The author calls it “gender technology”, referring to Foucault’s theory of “sexual technology” (Foucault, 1976a), which considers sexuality as being regulated by systems of power. De Lauretis claims that “sexual technology” produces a homogenous male perspective, neglecting women’s struggles and the diversity between male and female subjects. In fact, Foucault argues that social technology produces the oppression of sexuality, undermining the fact that it re-produces the negation of the social relation of gender and women oppression as well (De Lauretis, 1987). For this reason, De Lauretis proposes gender technology as a discursive strategy by which “the construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 9 ). Finally, this understanding of gender takes in account differences in class, race, ethnicity, and gender, represented by a person according to specific social, historical, cultural, political and economic relation.

### **3.5.1 The system of power on female sexuality in the Western debate**

The debate of gender strongly regards the question of power and desire based on the recognition of the other sex and the consolidation of a subjectivity that is historically, culturally, geographically and politically produced. The understanding of subjectivity needs, therefore, be analyzed without the intersection with a specific discourse that has been elaborated to produce knowledge and finally to establish power.<sup>41</sup> According to Foucault (1975), there are power systems that produce subjectivity and represent them in order to achieve the regulation of political life through limitations, prohibitions, control, and discipline. The structural and institutional recognition of a subject occurs, therefore, through the representation in linguistic and political ways, so that there are specific discourses about sexuality or gender identity

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<sup>41</sup> Post-structuralism and postcolonial feminist theory elaborate different concepts regarding the term *gender*. Postcolonial feminist philosopher G. Spivak proposes “strategic essentialism” as a method by which an ethnical group represents itself, differing from the other and by doing so acting in an ‘essentialist’ way, creating a homogenous group identity. Whereas from poststructuralist theory it is important to cite Rosa Braidotti’s notion of the “nomadic subjects” for the female subject (differentiating in gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and race), by which the author alludes to the possibility that “one speaks how woman with the intention to empower women, activating socio-symbolic changes in her condition” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 4). Following Deleuze and Guattari’s (1975) concept of “becoming-minorities” the “nomadic subject” constitutes a fragmented, multiple, complex, and non-unitary subject whose condition is situated in its social, cultural, political, and economic condition in the global hybridity.



(ibid.).<sup>42</sup> However, the political construction of subjectivity works in a parallel way, excluding and accepting specific practices whose roots are so hidden and structured that they become natural in the collective imaginary. As a result, the power system produces normative paradigms that validate subjectivity, recognizing it as natural and universal.

In the work *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997) Butler discusses the subjection practices of power, starting from the axiom that subjection is a condition that supposes a power which forms the subject during the process of a subordination. Following Foucault's (1975) notion of power, she suggests that "the notion of power at work in subjection thus appears in two incommensurable temporal modalities: first, as what is for the subject always prior, outside of itself, and operative from the start; second, as the willed effect of the subject" (Butler, 1997, p. 14). Later, Butler considers that the subject constructs its subjectivity through the negation of such subordination as well. In fact, following a psychoanalytical discourse, the subject forms itself through the negation of dependency. The Self arises from a condition of dependence which creates an ambivalent existence through a polysemous understanding of agency which is not always personal but impersonal and cultural, i.e. constructed and subordinated as well (ibidem).

For Althusser (1970) the notion of *assujettissement*, introduced in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, refers to the subordinated subject formed by interpellation and nomination, so that linguistic recognition implies the subject's position. In this regard, Butler highlights that in the example of the authoritarian interpellation of a police officer toward a passer-by, Althusser does not explain why he turns when called by a police officer, since for the author the act of turning implied an acceptance of the subordinated condition (Butler, 1997). Consequently, Butler explains that the passer-by's response could be understood through the psychic subordination component placed in our conscience, which regulates in a normative way human understanding of recognition. In fact, as Butler argues, *assujettissement* should be understood as paradox since "it denotes both the process of becoming the subject and the process of subjection" (Butler, 1997, p.81).

On the other hand, Foucault (1975) stresses that the power forms the subject denoting at the same time the condition for its existence as well as its desires. Political possession of the human

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<sup>42</sup> In particular, Foucault claims that if a political system produces only what can be represented, such a dual legislative-productive function is regulated through a system of control. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) he discusses the history of crime in relation to the institutional construction of a policy of control through the discipline of the human body. Starting from the assumption that the body is the territory of historical, biological, and physiological investigation, Foucault proposes an analysis of society through the study of those systems of punishment that have been implemented through a specific political economy of the body. Also, the body becomes an object used and regulated in the relationship between politics and science, becoming the territory of subjection.

body alludes to the imposition of power relations that control and monitor the presence of the body in society, such as in ceremonies, in the workplace, and in social relationships. Consequently, the political system will retain the right to dress and undress bodies and subdue them not only through the means of violence but also through ideology (ibidem). Furthermore, power and knowledge are weapons of terror used by institutions. As Foucault suggests, in order to discover the normative reason hidden in an ideology, we should reconstruct the "microphysics of power" in a discursive way because the construction of knowledge is regulated by the exercise and the affirmation of power control. When such discourses become naturalized and legitimated through a specific regulation of a "regime of truth", the power achieves its political domination of the body (ibidem). Foucault proposes the unmasking of these "micro-powers" through the knowledge of the little incidents that have occurred throughout the history of human beings, or by deciphering all those mechanisms and processes that favor the political hegemony of the social body both collectively and individually, making it legitimate and imperceptible. Thus, control of the human body allows for the realization of a satisfactory human capital, but it also means having a decision-making power over the life and death of an individual person.

This relational conception is introduced by Foucault's notion of "biopolitics", as a place where the areas of politics and human beings will be shaped because of the reception of power (Foucault, 1978-79). In a first phase, such individual ideologies assert themselves in social attitudes, and they will be made lawful by specific economic and political changes. Moreover, the construction of subjectivity "dissociated unity". The latter term refers to the body's formation through reiteration practices of subjection by power, which makes the subordination of bodies possible. There is also a pre-existential status of subjection but the subject could become independent from the subjection status through the practices of resistance as well. Finally, the power acts on the individual and forms the individual through the destruction of the body, which becomes the territory of subjection and subjectivity, whereas the soul constitutes the deeper subjection of the body. In order to resist against such a domain, Foucault proposes to release invisible subjectivity, controlled and disciplined by juridical and political laws by refusing identity models normalized by society.

Moreover, In Foucault's view the dichotomy between male-female, sex-gender are constructed through discourse in power systems that create a strategic understanding of sexuality within a heterosexual framework. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976a) Foucault stresses how power systems can control physically and psychologically sexual desires in realizing a hegemonic language of sexuality and a legislative recognition of female

subordination. As a consequence, there is an inclusion and exclusion process of recognition which cooperates in the construction of gender identity. Personhood is embodied in social relations and regulation through cultural, social, political, and economic practices, which constitute, as evidenced by social psychology, the process of self-construction depends on external and internal factors, so that in this process people join an in-group category to make possible such recognition. Finally, we preserve and safeguard identity by sharing common beliefs and following principles regarding sex, gender, and sexuality that realize a continuum and coherent relation between me and the in-group. The outcome of such paradigms provokes stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, so there is the common idea that such cultural laws are innate and natural. Therefore, Foucault's theory of sexuality produced by social technologies from Western apparatus leads to a fictional assumption of the gender category as depoliticized and oppressed, neglecting the subjective capacity of resistance and the negotiation of the relation within the apparatus. Otherwise, Butler (1997), following Foucault's theory of "sexual technology", questions where the place of resistance is in cases of subjection. In Butler's view, Foucault's interpretation of the body-soul is limitative because of its dual signification of "interior-exterior", in which the soul is the interior psychic space embodied in the body. Instead, she suggests a dialectic relation of reciprocity through which both are formed through a reiteration process.

Butler (1997), referring to psychoanalytical theories, affirms that the unconscious constitutes the collapse of identity as a place of non-recognition of the norms or as a place situated on the border with them. Following Freudian theory, Butler argues that the place of resistance against subjection is situated in the resignification process.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, if subjectivity is formed by subjection, so that there is no desire outside the prohibition of desire and there is no subject without the attachment to prohibition, the only way in which an individual refuses a normalized identity occurs through the resignification of injuries from negative terms that became weapons of resistance through which individuals fight against subjection:

"The self-colonizing trajectory of certain forms of identity politics are symptomatic of this paradoxical embrace of the injurious term. As a further paradox, then, only by occupying —being occupied by—that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes me as the power I oppose. In this way, a certain place for psychoanalysis is secured in that any mobilization against subjection will take subjection as its resource, and that attachment to an injurious interpellation will, by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism, become the condition under which resignifying that interpellation becomes possible. This will not be an unconscious outside of power, but rather something like the unconscious of power itself, in its traumatic and productive iterability" (Butler, 1997, p. 104).

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<sup>43</sup> In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Sigmund Freud argues that the subject constitutes itself through separation due to prohibition, which provokes an addiction with the prohibited desire. In particular, Freud alludes to a distinction between the repression as result of a repressed desire without prohibition and the foreclosure as a repressed desire through prohibition.

The discourse about gender–power–desire is related to resistance practices in which women’s subjectivity has to subvert the normative system and the power relation that re-produces a *coloniality* of the physic and body. Butler invites us to reflect on such self-resignification practices, starting by re-forming language and social relations in order to overcome the historical and cultural hegemony on subjectivity. Although her interpretations do not take into account women’s exploitation and the location of subjectivity, it is important to stress that Butler individuates in subjectivity the place where both subjection and resistance take place. Thus, revaluating the subjective force of oppression or resistance against the negation of the desire as factors of *agency* and *empowerment* central to the resignification of the subject. Eventually, the contemporaneous debates concern the subject’s ability to re-signify its subjectivity in order to subjection processes both in European and non-European societies, understanding clearly the role of the colonial systems of power.

### **3.5.2 De-colonial approach: *coloniality of power* and female discrimination**

The de-colonial perspective offers a different perspective in thinking about subject, shifting the epistemological subject of enunciation from a Western to a non-Western perspective. According to Mignolo (2000), the linguistic hierarchy between colonist and colonized constitutes a form of power when the language of knowledge and communication is recognized as the language of the colonist, whereas the language of the colonized is marginalized and confined to the border of the “primitive”, “folklorist” and “exotic”. In fact, in Mignolo’s view, a language system allows human beings to mediate and communicate with reality, so it is important to stress that the only symbolical and linguistic mediation of the colonized was based on the logic of colonial regimes, which imposed their language, social categorization, religion, and culture. As a result, the articulation between desire–prohibition and negation–subjection in non-Western societies are embodied in the Western tradition. the process of sovereign power is detected in all Western policies, such as colonization, imperialism, and capitalism, which aim to achieve the full control of people, physically and psychologically. In order to contribute to a process of liberation from Western practices of domination, de-colonial theory suggests firstly to move beyond the Western epistemic location of the recognition of the subject of enunciation as universal, unisex, white, bourgeois, Western, catholic, patriarchal and heterosexual men. Such recognition of the subject has firstly focused on the philosophical predilection of non-situated ego, passing then to the *ego conquiro* (Quijano, 2000), which considers the subjects as

able to think and produces meaning as the subject of the conquer allowing the colonial expansionist project.

Western philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Hume have established Western man's subjectivity as the foundation of universal knowledge in modern times, so that only through feminist epistemologies do we see criticism of Western epistemology. The fight for recognition of female subjectivity or the deconstruction of Western knowledge of the world as unique, rational and scientific truth. Moreover, according to Enrique Dussel (1994), in the seventeenth century the Cartesian locus of *ego cogito, ergo sum* establishes the recognition of subject as a universal, unique, male and rational human being able to produce knowledge and access to the truthful meaning and explication of phenomenon in the real world. The feminist post-structuralist and subaltern perspective suggests that the definition of subject depends on geographical position and differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and class, so that knowledge is always situated (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Haraway, 1988; Mohanty, 1986; Spivak, 1988; Collins, 1990). According to this perspective, the sociologist Grosfoguel (2007) argues that the subject recognition needs to take in account, from the de-colonial perspective, the articulation of the coloniality of power.

For the author, this notion represents the matrix of the colonial/modern world whose binary superior–inferior system dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the civilization process based on the logic of *ego conquiro*. Later, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the modernization and civilization mission was supported by the superiority of the subject, *ego cogito, ergo sum*, until to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in which imperialism and capitalist and democratic policy imposed their ideology of superiority on the whole world. Overall, the project of domination and colonization is still occurring, but as Grosfoguel points out the practices of control and hegemony assume different faces during history, maintaining the same matrix of the coloniality of power. For Grosfoguel, the idea of coloniality refers to the “body-politics of knowledge” as the other face of modernity focused on domination and exploitation strategies. According to Quijano's concept (2000) of the *colonial power matrix*, the power system affects all social interactions, exercising control from the spiritual to the sexual sphere.<sup>44</sup> Coloniality of power and modernity support, therefore, the ideology of the capitalistic system established during colonialism through the idea of race and racism. Subsequently, these become normative paradigm for the configuration of all different hierarchies in the world (Quijano, 1998; Grosfoguel, 2007). Social dimension,

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<sup>44</sup> Quijano's concept of coloniality is not the same as colonialism, rather it is related to it and corresponds to the other side of modernity. In other words, the author argues that the modern project of capitalism focuses on the social dimensions of exploitation, slavery, and servitude that occurred in practical ways through colonialism. This aspect provokes, as an effect and consequence, the coloniality of power, so that humanity perception is based on the perspective of modernity or coloniality, following the binary superior–inferior, civilized–primitive, rational–irrational, and modern–traditional (Quijano, 2000).

sexuality, knowledge, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity, authority, work, collective and individual relation are also produced and organized by these two axes (Quijano, 2000). The European notion of sexuality occurred through the, classification, pathologization and racialization of gender so that an effective “resignification” of the subject (Butler, 1997), which produces resistance against negation/oppression, can occur through the displacement of the subject of the enunciation.

In this regard, de-colonial perspective offers strategic tools to escape from the cycle of coloniality, understood as the continuity of colonial forms of domination and administration (Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2007). Grosfoguel stresses that coloniality refers to a colonial continuum in cultural, political, sexual oppression and the exploitation of specific racialized groups by dominant groups, which produced an invisible colonial administration, traceable in the current struggle of global industrialization, capitalistic exploitation and the destruction of third world andn oriental areas.

Coloniality places its roots, firstly, with the consolidation of the epistemic subject of enunciation as a Western universal one. The founder of the philosophy of liberation, Enrique Dussel (1977), called this practice the “geopolitics of knowledge” by which the subject, understood historically under the philosophical and psychological Eurocentric model, is radically deconstructed in order to unmask the colonial and modernist subjection strategy of the control of others. In fact, the importance of “situating the subject of knowledge in a geopolitical context means to overcome modernity, denying its myth through a trans-modern opposition to modern epistemology” (Dussel, 1996, p. 137).<sup>45</sup> The trans-modern perspective is not critical in opposition to modernity, rather Dussel suggests the need to build a constructive approach, reinforcing the critical perspective of the oppressed. According to the author, such a project occurs through ethic human emancipation in which a positive dimension of recognition of the dignity of the other is activated, thanks to solidarity and practical responsibility, both important in the transformation of reality (Dussel, 1999).<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, trans-modern/de-colonial perspective understands the global hierarchy of the system of power as “Epistemic Racism/Sexism in the Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World System” (Grosfoguel, 2011). Firstly, epistemic racism refers to Fanon’s conception of racism structured in the “line of the human”.

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<sup>45</sup> In this direct quotation the verb “situate” has been changed to the progressive form due to grammatical coherence.

<sup>46</sup> Similarly, when Maldonado-Torres (2003) questions what coloniality is, he states that coloniality is the “matrix of power” aroused by the modernist concept that persists in subjective, intersubjective, and social dimensions, such as the “coloniality of being” because the modern praxis of domination and exploitation has required an epistemological explication of the colonial subject eradicated in the “being”

This line is divided into a superior and an inferior zone. Fanon calls the superior zone a “zone of being” in which people are recognized as human through human, social, civil, labour, and political rights. Unlike those people situated above the line, called the “zone of non-being”, who are considered sub-human or non-human and who are not recognized in any human, social, political, or economic dimension. Such division is heterogeneous and it has been constructed politically, socially, economically, and culturally during the capitalistic/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system (Grosfoguel, 2011).

In fact, each society recognizes the stigmatized group according to specific historical, cultural, social, and political backgrounds. Grosfoguel argues that both zones are not geographically located, rather they occur through the racial relation of power. Therefore, there is not a universal definition of racism, rather a pluriversal and heterogeneous oppressive relationship between class, sexuality, and gender.<sup>47</sup> Heterogeneity refers, therefore, to the different way in which a specific system of power has regulated its ideology in order to articulate the division in the “line of the human” through different forms. It means that even in the zone of being there are struggles between *I and the other*, but it occurs between privileged people because they are recognized as human. Portuguese sociologist Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2010) argues that in this zone, conflicts are negotiated through regulation and emancipation.<sup>48</sup> Otherwise, the oppression in the zone of non-being is primarily racial, since they are dehumanized. Consequently, the conflicts become negotiated through violence and appropriation. In fact, Fanon stresses that the Hegelian dialectic of master–slavery, of oppressor and oppressed (other), collapses in the zone of non-being because in this case people are dehumanized. The difference in the conflicts between the zone of being and the zone of non-being suggests that the resolution of conflicts of the sub-humans/non-humans cannot occur through the epistemic produced in the superior line of the human.

Finally, considering that the entire human history has privileged Western knowledge, as Grosfoguel argues, the non-Eurocentric perspective should deconstruct the Eurocentric one, avoiding a dichotomous and essentialist binary, such as one produced by Eurocentrism vs. Fundamentalism. In accordance with the feminist criticism Gloria Anzaldúa, Grosfoguel suggests that an essentialist binary could be avoided through “border thinking” as an epistemic response of those oppressed by Eurocentric modernity. Border thinking offers, in fact, a trans-modern and de-colonial approach by which the subject of enunciation is located, producing a

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<sup>47</sup> i.e.. in some societies black people, Muslims, gypsies or indigenous people can be more discriminated against than others, so in the USA black women belong in the “zone of non-being”, whereas in Mexico indigenous women are situated as sub-human or even non-human.

<sup>48</sup> See Grosfoguel et al. (2014). ‘Racism’, intersectionality and migration studies: framing some theoretical reflections.

redefinition/subsumption of political, economic, social, and cultural issues (Grosfoguel, 2014). The “pluriversal” (Mignolo, 2000) fights should be understood as a project of socialization of power regarding differences in ethnicity, race, gender, and class. In this way, the universal and abstract Eurocentric vision of subjectivity in relation to power/knowledge can be substituted by a plural one in which diversity cohabits without oppression, violence, discrimination, and exploitation.

Re-thinking gender in such a way means to consider female subjectivity in strategic way, overpassing universalism and the particularity of differences. It means to contextualize and situate women’s subjectivity in the marginal, fragmented area of boundaries where plural configurations are possible. As anthropologist Marcela Lagarde (1990) suggests, the condition of Mexican women is a consequence of the praxis of power in subduing females in order to establish male hegemony.<sup>49</sup> In the anthology *Los cautiverios de las Mujeres* (1990) the author defines the female category as a “to be of and for the other” (*ser de y para los otros*). Starting from the cultural conception of the lived life, the product of the dialectic relationship between humans and culture represents the peculiar distinction between groups which historically, socially and biologically give birth to different forms of socialization. Consequently, she interprets the image of the Mexican woman as a reflection of Judaeo-Christian and capitalist society generated by the hand of colonialism (*ibid.*). Firstly, the imposition of patriarchal ideology causes male supremacy over females, creating a symbolic representation of Mexican women as an object of history. Their recognition is based on the Western subjectivity of *ego*

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<sup>49</sup> Marcela Lagarde, according to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (1975), argues that the history of women’s condition is a product of ideologies that manipulate arguments about the natural condition in order to obtain power over them. According to Gramsci, the human condition keeps changing because social relation modifies it historically, reflecting the human condition. So such relationships are active because humanity depends on the individual, others and nature, and each individual is not only the synthesis of the present relation, but also the history of the whole of relations (Gramsci, 1975, p. 35-37). In *Prison Notebooks* (1971) Antonio Gramsci offers a critical theory focused on Marxist theory. During his imprisonment under the Fascist regime the author realizes thirty notebooks in which he analyzes society, political systems, education, and philosophy. In particular, he theorizes the concept of “cultural hegemony” referring to domination practices in society. Although he follows Lenin’s notion of hegemony, Gramsci understands through the concept a process in which domination is established in a specific cultural space. Consequently, he underlines the absence of coercive force by control, suggesting that there is a voluntary act of acceptance through the practice of negotiation. The hegemony resists, therefore, revolutionary resistance through mediation, assimilation, and concession. In this way, hegemony is not permanent, rather it is always contended by dominant and subordinate class. Domination is established when subordinate elements of society are assimilated, whereas the dominant class monitors the power in such relations for the maintenance of domination. The subordinate class can achieve power only through a constant process of fighting and negotiation with the contact/articulation of popular culture. Referring to articulation, Gramsci states that there are some elements that are not directly connected but their association can be helpful in a new understanding of hegemony. In particular, the author refers to individual subjectivity in hegemony, because even if it is a continual process of ideological battles, humanity is the reflection of socio-cultural relations. Individuals participate in the social circle with the aim of integrating themselves in the human category. The fight for power always occurs between the groups, so that each relationship implies power, creating real and symbolic norms for the reproduction of dominancy. Social and cultural spheres understood as places of power are peculiar for practices of subordination, because the self-affirmation of a subject to live its life is contained within the power sphere. Finally, cultural hegemony is a central component in cultural studies theory as well as in critical theories, because it became the starting point for the understanding of the production and re-production of domination: sexuality; body; the sex/gender category; work; economical, social, and political activities; religion; subjectivity, and the right of life.



*conquiro*, which practices the domination of indigenous women through sexual subjugation, exploitation at work, and dehumanization practices.<sup>50</sup>

Lagarde creates an anthropology of the Mexican woman and designates five epistemological and ontological frames, which crystallize the imprisonment of women in the logic of the “coloniality of gender” (Lugone, 2008). Therefore, she identifies the categories of “mothers-wives, nuns, prostitutes, prisoners and insane women” as places in which the political and cultural expression of female condition occurs. Consequently, the author states that female subjectivity is produced by patriarchal ideology. Moreover, the categorization of women legitimized their imprisonments: mother-bride/house- nuns/convent, prostitutes/brothel, prisoner/prison, insane/nuthouse (Lagarde, 1990). Within these frameworks an absolute stigma exists. According to Franca Basaglia (1983), Lagarde argues that female sexuality has been disciplined by the concept “to-be-for-the-others”, rejecting the idea of “to-be-for-themselves”. Consequently, negative emotions such as guilt, fear and dogmatic prejudice act on the construction of female identity, as the psychological state allows the power to practice “subjection” in order to establish the rule of male superiority (Butler, 1997). The process of liberation from these imprisonments is possible only with women’s actions through the help of feminist political construction, designed to allow the recognition of being a woman-for-themselves and not for the others. However, the naturalization of the stereotype makes it difficult to recognize the self outside the categorization, especially if the ideology of a society creates politicized discourse in female world, acting to control and dominate the body. The regulation of norms of prohibition encourages the vulnerability of the human being or even penalizes drastically the precarious conditions of life (Butler, 1997).

Otherwise, Maria Lugones (2008) proposes a theory for making visible the “colonial/modern gender system” of subjection. According to intersectionality theory and Anibal Quijano’s concept of the “coloniality of power”, Lugones develops an instrumental framework in order to theorize and produce practical propositions against the oppression of “gender”. Firstly, the author stresses that Quijano’s concept of sexuality is limited to the biological dimension. Her model of the coloniality of power does not include all aspects of gender such as heterosexuality or sexual dimorphism, rather it refers only to the general and basic area of social life (Lugones, 2008). Starting from this observation, she claims how colonialism affects and changes the recognition of the sexual category, as well as sexual production and reproduction from white bourgeois European males’ and females’ perspective. Biological sexual division of colonialism

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<sup>50</sup> Maldonado-Torres (2003) states that indigenous women are recognized by colonists as slaves and servants bodies which have been embodied in the economy of sexual abuse, power, control, and exploitation over the racialized other.

toward third world society is, therefore, a consequence of the domination/exploitation of Eurocentered global capitalism toward pre-colonial society. Moreover, she highlights that the imposition of the colonality of power causes violent exploitation and discriminative attitudes that inferiorize colonized women. As a result, women become passive, aggressive, racialized objects of white male sexual pleasure, assigned their role in the private sphere as servants or in the public sphere as erotized, exotic females. The “colonial, modern, gender system” constitutes a matrix for controlling sex, placing women in the sphere of animality, sexuality as forced sex, abuse and violent treatment, as well as labour exploitation and slavery (ibid.). Consequently, as Lugones suggests, it is important to de-construct the collective knowledge, authority, and solidarity in non-European countries. This project needs popular collaborative work and the reconstruction of empathy and solidarity as well: “we need to understand the organization of the social so as to make visible our collaboration with systematic racialized gender violence, so as to come to an inevitable recognition of it in our maps of reality” (Lugone, 2008, p. 16).

#### **Box 4 Post-colonial and Decolonial Perspective: Disagreements and differences**

Post-colonial and de-colonial perspective present differences in the epistemological and historical analysis of oppression and structure of domination. Actually, there is not a specific conversation or confrontation between these two disciplines, rather the evidence in disagreement manifests itself in the theoretical framework. Post-colonial perspective does not consider both modernity and colonality constitutive in the epistemological, racial and sexist genocide of the colonized territories (Grosfoguel, 2012). In fact, post-colonial authors tend to discuss social oppressions and discriminations within the Eurocentric racialized, sexist epistemology, provoking the reproduction of the Eurocentric gaze. Particularly, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Chandra Mohanty have shown how particular social oppression has been analyzed through the epistemology of European authors such as Foucault, Derrida, Marx, and Lacan. Consequently, theories of post-colonial authors imply significant political consequences in expanding modernity, recognizing the universal model of knowledge in colonized society whose historical, cultural and social roots differ deeply from Eurocentric universalism. De-colonial perspective invites us to consider the plurality and diversity of modernity/coloniality as a project called “trans-modernity”, which locates its epistemology as anti-racism, anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism. Moreover, the de-colonial theory understands civilization as a basis of capitalism, questioning especially the racialized and sexist structure of civilization. In fact, the prefix *post* suggests the persistence of a system of knowledge based on the divided structure of the zone of being and the zone of non-being (Fanon, 1952), in which Eurocentric knowledge still remains privileged, causing the invisibility of knowledge produced outside Eurocentric sphere. Finally, the de-colonial approach suggests the need to understand the “Epistemic Racism/Sexism in the Capitalist/Patriarchal Western centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonia World System” as a global project of the hierarchy in which universalism is privileged (Grosfoguel, 2012).

### **3.6 The Approach in Social Psychology: Recognizing the Other**

Post-structuralist and post-colonialist feminist theory investigate the problem of the negation of female subjectivity as well as her recognition intersected with the discrimination,

exploitation, and inferiorization. In social psychology, the process of recognition of the other is based on social and cognitive processes that allows human social interaction. The perception of ourselves depends, therefore, on the interaction with other people through social practices, so that our actions, feelings, and thoughts are the results of socialization, e.g. family, friends, school, and media. Individual knowledge is a product of relationships, but social categorization intertwines with the cognitive process as well. Emotions, memories, feelings, and perceptions create our comprehension of the world, so cognitive processes affect the way in which we act and understand our reality. The relation between cognitive and social practices characterizes the way in which an individual relates with others. Therefore, the research of the effects of social and cognitive processes help to understand how people interact and how people's perception can affect the other. In particular, social psychology focuses on the study of the way in which people relate in order to explain situations of conflict that erupted into crime, violence, and discrimination towards minorities and gender, concerning the understanding of social and cognitive influences on human actions and thoughts, as well as proposing solutions to social problems (Boca et. al, 2003).

Consequently, one of the researched objects of social psychology regards conflicts created in gender relations as well. In psychology, sexual characteristics have been explained through biological paradigms as a unique instrument to measure and value similarity and difference between male and female. Body, sexuality, dimorphism, hormones, and genetic inherence are the axioms in the analyses of sexual differences, considered essential principles for researchers in socio-biology and the evolutionary psychology. Therefore, the term *sex* refers to the biological category and the natural dimension. However, the gender paradigm induced social and human sciences to reformulate theoretical frameworks underlying the difference between sex/nature and gender/culture.

The arrival of feminist theory in early 1970s, in particular, helps to reflect and recognize women's discrimination and prejudice caused by patriarchal norms and the supremacy of the male category. As a result, theorists began to use the concept of gender to express the identity and subjectivity of women who fought for the right to be considered as a subject instead of an object, the right to make decisions about their own body and own beliefs, and to be considered in different social roles. The term *gender* refers to the psychological, cultural, and social dimension of women's and men's categories, a kind of recognition of subjectivity that differs totally from the sexual/natural approach. The initial focus on the similarity and difference between the genders appears in personality psychology, which seeks to understand typical thoughts and behaviour of individuals, considering cognitive and emotional spheres. In

addition, its goal is to describe and understand how individuals construct reality, how such organization occurs and what the typical characteristic of feelings, thinking, and behaviour are (Allport, 1937). In the pioneering work *The Psychology of Sex Differences*, psychologists Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) consider gender to be a constructed cultural category normalized by social practice, otherwise, the biological paradigm represents a limitative framework for explaining human relations (ibid. 1975, p. 262).<sup>51</sup>

The research on the similarity and difference between human beings starts from the comprehension of individuals' ability to perceive the other. Consequently, principle paradigms of social psychology are the understanding of individual reality as a construction through cognitive and social processes. According to this theory, the social dimension is pervasive because a person's view of the world is the result of interaction with the other, whereas cognitive processes operate coding and encoding messages through our knowledge and the perception of people's feelings. Therefore, reality's construction depends on three basic human conditions: people strive for mastery in the sense that people's understanding of the world is influenced by their will to achieve rewards; people as social human beings need positive feelings such as support, positive values, and acceptance from close people; people have positive self-esteem when comparing themselves to the others (Smith, Mackie, 2007).

These three principles are strictly connected to further processes: people have difficulty in changing their minds, they select information on the basis of their fast accessibility and elaborate on them in superficial ways, less interested in seeking further information. Individuals' perception of the world depends on these six principles, which determine both the nature of the constructed reality and the nature of the social relations. Human being's attitudes towards perceiving themselves and the world occur through the cognitive representation of the apprehended world. According to the self-perception theory, all knowledge about our personal qualities are the results of the observations of our behaviour interacting with others, the learning of our thoughts and feelings associated with those relations, and the valuation other people's reactions (Bem, 1967). The process of self-understanding operates in a way to build positive or negative clues of the self, called "self-esteem". The latter principle plays an important role for the motivation dimension, because it protect us against stress and threats to the self. Moreover,

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<sup>51</sup> Further research affirms the limitative perspective of biological paradigms, stressing the relevance of gender. The contribution of anthropology regarding the role of culture is, in particular, very important. Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of society" (Tylor, 1889), a definition that implies its socially constructed nature whose meaning is historically negotiated. Therefore, social psychology analyzes social groups' conflicts with the support of theories from many fields, such as feminist theory, anthropology and personal psychology, and it investigates deep problems in society, starting from the way in which we construct reality.

the knowledge of ourselves depends on the confrontation between me and the other in social and cultural contexts, as stressed in the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). According to this theory, when people superficially elaborate on information about reality, they can make inaccurate evaluations through first impressions, creating a pattern of deviation in judgment called “bias” or “fundamental attribution error” (Heider 1958; Kelley, 1967).

Bias is an adaptive and innate cognitive process connoted by human beings’ nature of elaborating on information quickly and superficially, saving energy. People find a balance between self-esteem and self-concept to enhance such spheres through categorization processes that establish their place and identity in the world. At the beginning, people recognizes themselves as a member of a group, realizing they belong to a specific gender, ethnic, social, and class category. In social psychology, the categorization process is a cognitive need because people are keen on simplifying reality, producing information in an easy way. On the other hand, individuals think in categories because it helps them to keep a positive evaluation of themselves and their impressions depend on their own beliefs and feelings. The group in which people find similarity and familiarity between each other is called an *in-group*, and the placement in a group establishes a specific way of being that differs to the *out-group*, the opposite group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a consequence, *in-group* people have a positive and higher image of themselves, they share the same beliefs, and behave and respect one other. In addition, they feel adversity, devaluation, and discrimination against the *out-group*, something that it is usual because individuals need to construct themselves through the missing parts within themselves, The lack of information about the outsider implicates the “homogeneity effect” (Quattrone & Jones, 1980), that is to say that there is a simplified and superficial consideration about external members who all seem uniform and homogeneous. According to the social identity theory (SIT) people think about themselves as a group category sharing the same identity and producing positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Social identity contents different elements, such as a cognitive element (people achieve knowledge about a social group’s characteristics), an emotional element (shared feelings and value) and an appraisal element (referring to the positive esteem). Members who belong to an in-group keep developing and maintaining a good image of themselves, whereas they devalue out-groups’ memberships, considering them negative and subordinate. The social categorization process is an adaptive need for human beings, so that we formulate positive and negative inferences on the basis of similarity and difference. Starting from the in-group’s relationship, Turner (1978) stresses that our identity is the result of a social categorization, that we need to belong to a group because this process helps us to proceed with self-categorization (Self-categorization Theory, SCT). The

author argues in this theory that person constructs the self through the similarities of the in-group and the knowledge of differences compared to the out-group. If we identify ourselves with a group, we depersonalize the pure self-identity to realize the development of the social identity.

Firstly, people develop a “human identity”, then when the member compares himself or herself with the other, he or she develops a “social identity”. Finally, the subordinate self recognizes itself as a unique member regarding the other in-group members, and individuals develop a “personal identity” (Turner, 1978). Both theories are very important in the comprehension of the relationship between the internal and external membership. For people, the identification with a group implies their overt positive evaluation and the devaluation of the out-group, underlying the border and the membership’s characteristics. Maas et al. stress an identification phenomenon between the in-group’s members called “linguistic intergroup bias” (Maass et al. 1989). According to the authors, people use abstract and homogeneous verbs when describing external members, whereas they adopt specific and positive verbs to describe people of their category. This tendency causes mistakes of judgment on the basis of the fundamental attribution error (bias), provoking disdain, devaluation and stereotyping effects. Even if this process could be considered universal, it is important to stress that in their application social psychologists always take into account cultural and social context, because people’s way of thinking and social interactions differ from culture to culture.

### **3.6.1 Gender-based Discrimination: The role of Stereotype in harassment behaviours**

Considering that the recognition process always provokes a split into in-group and out-group, whatever the culture or environmental conditions, we know from social psychology that such categorical splitting causes positive and negative emotions, which are assigned to the two groups. When the psychologist Allport affirms that through categorization processes “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization” arises (Allport, 1954, p.9), he refers to people’s attitude to justifying the existence of disadvantaged groups, associating it to negative beliefs, inequalities and justifying everything through ideologies. In *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954) the author identifies such “antipathy” as “prejudice” connoting these characteristics from an individual dimension within a discursive one, the dimension of “ideology”.

As aforementioned, the world's division into social groups is the result of social and cognitive processes, but people associate particular characteristics to the external membership mostly through biased or sketchy impressions. Our way of thinking generates cognitive representations of a social group, associating first impressions, emotions or specific clues to *stereotypes*. This term derives from the Greek word στερεός (stereos: firm, solid) and τύπος (typos: impression) (Rocci Dictionary, 2013), and hence it expresses a solid impression. According to Walter Lippmann, a journalist who introduces the term in the work *Public Opinion*, published in 1922, a stereotype is a mental image of individual representations as a *tableau vivant* that incorporates physical appearance and personality, which people codify through individual experiences and social learning about an out-group's members. Based on the theory of social psychology, individuals operate cognitive responsiveness through knowledge, beliefs and expectations about the other, forming stereotypes which have positive or negative effects (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986). Finally, thinking in stereotypes means to acquire automatically, in an unconscious way, information about individuals. Some aspects of the reality seem to be naturally given and unanimously shared, but this is only the result of people's cognitive activity, which has simplified the reality, helping to save energy.

Positive stereotypes refer to their capacity to facilitate individuals' understanding; they produce prototypes because people need to fill gaps quickly in cases where they do not have enough information about somebody or something (Oakes, Turner 1990). In addition, stereotyping activity defends the self from external threats, so people enhance their self-esteem through the positive judgments of their belonging in a group, devaluating the other (Brown, Collins, Schmidt 1988). Finally, people use stereotypes in order to feel part of a big social body, so that similar impressions, shared opinions, beliefs, and thinking take them closer to the in-group. On the other hand, stereotypes cause negative consequences such as discrimination and prejudice. Theories of social psychology explicate that people elaborate inferences through categorization, which is the precursor of stereotype. The production of their knowledge occurs through the "fundamental attribution error", in which the lack of interactions between two groups can provoke anxiety or irritation (Stephan, Stephan 1985) and the "illusory correlation". The latter concept refers to the association of two different variables, e.g. a negative event is related to a specific category because his group is stigmatized with negative beliefs and emotions (Hamilton, Gifford, 1976). All these three elements cooperate for the preservation of stereotypes. Nevertheless, the process of learning stereotypes depends on multiple factors. In fact, people's knowledge is the result of individual and social interactions that help to understand that family, school, all social practises, cultural context, and media communication

system are the co-worker of the generation of stereotypes. Stereotypes incorporate positive and negative beliefs about individuals characteristics like race, gender, age, religion, social class, and cultural background so that people who differ due to skin colour or gender are considered the other, dividing the world into many categories. Consequently, gender stereotype works in a dichotomous way; if women are stigmatized as sensitive, emotive, and dependent, men are aggressive, rational, and independent. The ancient binary opposition between nature and culture reflects gender’s definition, creating a common set of beliefs about women who are pure, moral, weak, in need of men’s protection, and unable to be independent.

**TABLE 5 STEREOTYPE –Gender stereotype**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Aggressiveness   | Male is aggressive; Female is soft-hearted  |
| Influenceability | Male is independent; Female is submissive, dependent                                      |
| Emotionality     | Male is strong, tough; Female is affectionate, anxious, emotional, sentimental, sensitive |
| Leadership style | Male is autocratic, dominant; Female is emotional, sensitive                              |

J.E. WILLIAMS AND BEST (1982); META-ANALYSES OF RESEARCH ON GENDER DIFFERENCES-EAGLY (1987), EAGLY AND JOHNSON (1990)

Such beliefs are problematic, because they can provoke a “sexist” reaction. This term refers to a kind of hostility and devaluation by men against women. Sexism is linked to prejudice and to discrimination. Such negative attitudes are normalized by society, shared by different ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, capitalism, as well as religion and cultural beliefs. These social norms stigmatize women in the domestic, private dimension, placing them in a subordinate position. According to the “ambivalent sexism inventory”, the stereotyped image of women generates “hostile sexism” and “benevolent sexism” (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The first term refers to very hostile attitudes and hate feelings against women, who are considered inferior from a natural, socio-biological point of view. Otherwise, benevolent sexism constitutes implicit negative evaluations and attitudes; it means that there is a consciousness regarding gender equality, but both men and women can fall into “self-fulfilling prophecies”. Men and women perceive the female category as independent and powerful, but they still have a pro-social representation of female/male categories, e.g. a rigid image of men connoted by virility, and a fixed image of women connoted by beauty and control of the domestic sphere. The roots of stereotypes are, consequently, so deep that even if people know that they are a social and cultural construction, they influence their ways of life and perception of reality. Finally, there are consequences in public life as well. In fact, men’s activities are characterized by powerful roles, task-orientation and rationality, so they are mostly employed



in specific areas like economics, politics, and engineering. Whereas, women work in certain areas like education and equal opportunity, or their role is enclosed to child-care, because they are nurturing, gentle, and sensitive (Eagly, 1987). Moreover, media communication (television, advertising, cinema, cartoons) constantly produces gender stereotypes, provoking an increased and enhanced acceptance of male and female categorizations, on the part of the viewer. In fact, women are depicted as beautiful girls, with perfect bodies, fragile, vulnerable and moody, whereas men are represented as aggressive, even violent, rational, strong, and powerful, with a high sense of self-confidence. Consequently, such stereotypes produce a disrupted impression of reality because they justify the role of gender in society as natural, inevitable, and appropriate. The impact of stereotypes becomes so invasive in social life because of its structural characteristics, embodied in the hierarchical institutions and in the system of power. Consequently, stereotypes are functional tools for the regulation of the recognition of human beings, divided between the zone of being and the zone of non-being (Fanon, 1952), establishing the vulnerability of the human being or even sanctioning drastically the precariousness of life.

Stereotypes are also inaccurate and they tend to be pervasive in the construction of thinking, so they are an efficient instrument to justify inequality, injustice, and prejudice in the society. From the in-group's point of view, the fight against stereotypes can be very difficult and deceptive, so even if individuals try to supervise their negative thoughts with the intent of suppressing them, eventually this process may fail because the self-monitoring process needs to work accurately and in the long term (Wagner & Erber, 1997). The term *rebound effect* (Macrae et al. 1994) explains, in fact, the fail of this cognitive control process by which negative thoughts can come back with a higher intensity compared with the past, provoking a confirmation of the stereotype instead of disconfirming it. In addition, people who are stereotyped feel threatened, anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence, provoking an increase of the stigmatized effect (Steel, 1997). In social psychology some theorists have suggested that contrasting stereotypes thorough positive and cooperative relations between two groups can reduce negative beliefs (Pettigrew, 1998). Researchers show that when people build friendships intergroup contact can help people to create accurate judgments; but on the contrary, it can also provoke the creation of new subtypes for the exception of the rule (Johnson & Hewstone, 1992). Once established, stereotypes can have serious repercussions, because these thoughts automatically activate prejudice, such as bad evaluations about social groups. The term *prejudice* indicates an evaluation expressed before the development of accurate information, hence people can create judgments because of inaccurate and superficial elements.

In social psychology, this term is associated with negative behaviour towards the out-group, an attitude that depends on personal characteristics, and the interaction of social and cognitive processes and beliefs system. The first research conducted after the holocaust, a phenomenon that obligated social and human sciences to interrogate themselves about its origin, developing and establishing of anti-racist ideology. In Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and Rokeach's *The Open and Closed Mind* (1960), hostility against groups is connoted by personal characteristics derived from a strict education. The psychologist Allport defines prejudice as a normal effect of the categorizing process that implies evaluation errors (Allport, 1954), so prejudice provokes social bias. Researchers show how the expression of a prejudice is related to a primitive component called "genuine prejudice", by which the cognitive system forms it automatically and, at the same time, the will to suppress such negativity arises. These two ambivalent forces fight against each other to establish attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. In addition, most theoretical frameworks consider this ambivalence between genuine prejudice and the suppression of prejudice as important components in the development of social identity (Mc Conahay et. al, 1981; McConahay, 1983; Katz et. al. 1986; Katz & Haasm 1988; Devine, 1989; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).<sup>52</sup>

All these models are very important for the evaluation of prejudice, but they present limits concerning the expression of the prejudice self. These theories stress that people tend to suppress low levels of discrimination generated from the socio cultural norms, whereas the genuine prejudice, deeply embedded, keeps operating. According to Crandall and Eshleman (2003), the first studies of prejudice considered beliefs and ideology as causes of negative evaluations toward out-groups. Considering such thinking systems as causes of prejudice, the authors made the mistake of not considering them as justification principles. In fact, if individuals have to express a judgment vulnerable to bias inferences, they produce an automatic emotive reaction and in order to protect the self, their evaluation of out-groups is negative. Secondary, until people discriminate or produce negative stereotypes, they tend to compare with their standards, social norms, and beliefs to justify or suppress the initial reaction against the other. This model called, justification-suppression model (JSM), moves beyond the two-factor models because it asserts that people express prejudice after a deep cognitive evaluation and not through an automatic and instinctive reaction. Finally, both authors stress the importance of the emotional and socio-cultural factors apprehended from family, media, and social practices, so such elements deeply form the roots of genuine prejudice, creating a

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<sup>52</sup> See in Arcuri, L., Cadinu, M. R. (1998). *Gli Stereotipi. Dinamiche psicologiche e contesto delle relazioni sociali*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

continuum and a vicious cycle. As a result, the knowledge of the suppression and justification factors is fundamental in the study of stereotype and prejudice. If people wish to reduce such negative evaluations they tend to suppress them, which only re-affirms them. Suppressive attitudes depend on external factors, such as equalitarian social norms, or internal factors, such as the tendency to control personal thinking in order to be coherent with self-beliefs. Such processes require great cognitive energy, and produce discomfort and self-fulfilling effects, enhancing negative stereotypes.

Otherwise, justification factors represent a psychological process that expresses genuine prejudice without internal or external sanctions. The justification of prejudices constitute the beliefs system about the reality, they support the *status quo* of a group, helping people to consider their social perception as right, producing positive emotions and contrasting the suppressive pressure (Crandall, 2000). Stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination basically form the largest field of research in social psychology in the analyses of differences between in-groups and out-groups. Considering the Hegelian slave–master dialectic, the development of self-consciousness needs the recognition of another self-consciousness, something that happens mostly through the subordination and the mastery of the other (Hegel, 1857). However, the recognition process is both normative and psychological, because it implies that one person recognizes the other as a subject and not as an object. As a result, people tend to enhance their own identity by devaluating the other, but in the end both live in an interdependent relationship. Such a psychological mechanism becomes important in social and political contexts, because it influences the struggle of ethnic and religious minorities, gender, and people with disabilities, highlighting the need for a “politics of difference” or “identity politics”. In fact, stereotypes limit the mutual recognition, the respect of people as subjects and the esteem of diversity. Finally, the discourse on gender takes into account the role of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination, considering that gender’s representation and gender’s role often threatens women’s well-being.

## Chapter four

### Social representation of *the otherness*

#### 4.1 Social Representation: Theoretical Foreword

Representations are significant in the communication of human beings because, as Hall (1997) points out, they refer to the recognition of identity, defining what is commonly accepted and what is not considered normal within a society. In this regard, psychologists Moscovici and Marková (2000) suggest that “we cannot communicate unless we share certain representations” (ibid., p. 274). Both disciplines of cultural studies and social psychology highlight the significant role of representation. On the one hand, theorists of cultural studies point out that the struggle over representations refers to the affirmation of identity and the inclusion or exclusion in the recognition of subjectivity (Hall, 1997). On the other hand, theorists of social psychology emphasize the role of communication, especially in the media discourse, in the growth of social representation (Moscovici, 1961) as well as the dialogical communication between groups and individuals regarding how we communicate and what we communicate about (Marková, 1998; 2000). From these two perspectives, the relationship between communication and identity depends strictly on cultural patterns and systems of power that facilitate or obstruct the meaning of reality reflected in the representation during the process of communication. Consequently, the struggle over the recognition of gender needs to be analyzed by referring to the role of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination embodied in certain social representation.

#### 4.2 *Re-presentation* Theory in Cultural Studies

When Bell Hook states “the gaze has always been political in my life” (1992, p. 115), she refers to the power of being looked at as practices of “the representation of the otherness” based on the hegemonic relation between the dominate and dominated within the axes of race, gender, ethnicity, and social status. In this regard, the author stresses the relation between the hegemonic system of surveillance and the iconic signs eradicated in the representational system.

The question about the value and the power of representation is central in cultural studies and is intersected, as Foucault (1975) declares, with the way power reproduces hegemonic control in different sites of knowledge. The etymological origin of the term representation [in Greek, φαντασία – phantasma – and in Lat., *repraesentatio*, re-present] refers to the intellectual human faculty for re-producing an image in the mind or for perceiving an emotion through an image in the consciousness. Nowadays, the meaning of the term is related to the faculty for depicting, describing or symbolizing something or someone (Oxford English Dictionary online, 2014). According to Stuart Hall “[...] Representation *is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (Hall, 1997, p.1), which involves the symbolic system of recognition and social interaction. However, in order to share meaning and to make sense of the world, communication should occur in the same system of culture.

Firstly, it is important to stress that the production of meaning lies in language, which depends both on the relation between things in the world and the mental representation of them. Representation is the practice through which language produces meaning of signifying practices. In order to do that people share the same conceptual maps, that is to say the system of language (words, gestures, sounds, and images) as a medium for meaning construction, which represents concepts and their relations through signs. Whereas visual signs are iconic, written or spoken signs are indexical because the word/sound provide indexes to a concept that is arbitrary and constructed by social convention. In addition, it is important to highlight that signs could exist only on the basis of a shared code. As a result, the code as social convention, not given in nature, enables a set of correlations between concept and sign, so depending on the culture the word *dove* correspond to the letters ‘D-O-V-E’ but the same word in Spanish corresponds to the letters ‘P-A-L-O-M-A’.

### Box 5 Cultural Studies: Background

The discipline of cultural studies should be understood as a set of theories and practices from different disciplines that investigates “popular culture” as praxis of everyday life. Its method focuses on the “linguistic turn” which considers language as a metaphor for the study of culture and embraces different theories such as Marxism and Feminism, related to globalization and mass cultural consumption. Its origin is related to the “critical reading” of classical literature, which understood “popular culture” as inferior and negatively characterized, unlike “high culture” from modern civilization, which is recognized as truthful and rational. The project of cultural studies—which emerged in a British context—originated with the foundation of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS, 1964). Theorists Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall founded the CCCS with the intention to critically analyze the literary tradition’s elitist assumption toward popular culture. Further objects of study have been the analysis of the social phenomena of “moral panic” towards subcultures and the consumption practices of mass culture. Cultural studies is a critical field that questions the power relations, oppression, exploitation and discrimination of minorities in Western society, focusing the analysis on working class point of view. The attention is particularly centred on subcultures and marginalized groups (women, black people, migrants, ethnic groups) which are excluded from the recognition system and the production of culture. The *New Left* political movement is emblematic for the foundation of cultural studies, because it represents a political engagement against the political failure of the communist project and Marxist theory. The movement questions social struggles caused by globalization, capitalistic economic and political systems, and Eurocentric knowledge, with the aim of producing a critical knowledge as a practice that deconstructs imperialistic power over social life. In *Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies* (1992) Stuart Hall draws a theoretical explanation around the criticism of the methodology of cultural studies, pointing out principle aims of the discipline as well as its epistemological frameworks. His reflection started with an emblematic declaration, in which he states that he feels like *a tableau vivant, a spirit of the past resurrected, laying claim to the authority* (Hall, 1992, p.1). This feeling reflects his real condition as a human being, thus he situated himself as an intellectual, representing the history of the critical narrative discourse of cultural studies as discipline that is critical toward Eurocentric knowledge. The author, Jamaican-born, understood personally the meaning of being the other in Western culture; in fact, his studies mainly focused on the deconstruction of the hegemonic discourse of power. Cultural studies, stressed Hall, is to be understood as a discursive formation, referring to Foucault’s notion of discourse in which culture is understood as a multifaceted structure intersected with social, political, and economic aspects. Culture is linguistically connoted and it is the place where the power relation between oppressor and oppressed are negotiated. In an academic context the methodology as well as the principle of the discipline of cultural studies have been strongly criticized by traditional disciplines, which assert a classical elitist notion of “culture”, claiming the theoretical and practical limits to analyses of social issues and struggles (Sokal, A., 1996; Bloom, H., 2000; Turner, B.S., 2001; Eagleton, T., 2003).

According to Stuart Hall, representation is a constitutive practice for the production of an idea or a social interaction reflected in the world that is meaningful inside a specific shared culture. For this reason, language and social interactions are therefore naturalized elements, unconsciously internalized by human beings that entail the symbolic sphere of life. Stuart Hall (1997) refers to three different approaches to the theory of representation in order to explain the struggle around representation’s understanding. Firstly, the *reflective approach*, which according to Greek tradition (ibid.) is based on the mimesis practices of representation and considers images as reflections of the world. Secondly, the *intentional approach*, common in the literature dimension, alludes to the individual use of language produced by the author’s intention. Stuart Hall suggests that both approaches are limitative, because the first one considers representation as merely imitation practices, so the language function is reduced to imitate or copy reality, whereas the intentional approach is a subjective and individual

representation in which language reflects the author's intention. Finally, there is the *constructionist approach*, which is based on the structuralist theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1913), who considers only the language system capable of producing meaning<sup>53</sup>, whereas the material world is not considered important in the process of the constitution of meaning. As a result, the social and cultural interactions of individuals are not considered meaningful in the practice of "representation", nor are they presented as capable of negotiating meaning in representation. Therefore, people's way of interacting in the society could not re-establish the construction of meaning. The *constructionist approach*, stressed Hall, is different from the *semiotic approach* in which the focus of the analysis shifted from language to culture because cultural practices produce meaning as language.

Hall refers to Roland Barthes' theory developed in *Mythologies* (1972), in which the author investigates popular culture, activities, and objects. In this work, Barthes investigates the social function of objects using the signifier–signified model of systems of language. Referring to Western fashion's code Barthes (1967) indicates that the *signifier* is the concept of elegance or casualness and the *signified* are the clothes used to carry such functions, so this relation makes it possible for clothes to be converted into *signs*, producing meaning in the language. Moreover, the system of language has a proper code that addresses the concept of elegance or casualness. For Barthes, the production of meaning depends on the cultural dimension and in order to interpret the code we need to distinguish the level of *denotation* from that of *connotation*. The first one corresponds to a descriptive level (this is a dress), whereas

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<sup>53</sup> *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) contains Ferdinand de Saussure's theory about language systems. The French linguist considers language's structure composed by the *signifier* as the idea or conceptual element that corresponds to the *signified* in the material word in sound and writing (for instance, the idea of a three that we have in our head as the signifier corresponds to the real image of or word *three* as the signified). The relation between signifier and signified is fixed in a linguistic code that he called *sign* which is arbitrary and conventional and that depends on social and cultural conventions. Therefore, the sign fixed in the word *red* (in which the *signifier* is the concept in mind and the *signified* its content) differs from language to language, not only because the *signified* is different but more because the concepts related to the word *red* are socially negotiated (the symbol of red could refer to blood, dangers, prohibitions). As a result, the meaning is not always fixed but it depends on the social convention. Moreover, he stressed that the meaning in language is produced by binary opposition, so that the oppositional pairs white–black or man–woman create meaning in language. Finally, each language produces a different set of signified because signifiers are organized into a system of differences in which signs become meaningful in an arbitrary way. As De Saussure observed, systems of language work *diachronically* and *synchronically*, the diachronic concept alludes to the part of languages that over history develops and produces differences, whereas the synchronic concept refers to language structures in a precise period in which it has been organized in a systematic and simultaneous way. These two concepts allude to a systematic rule-governed structure of language because de Saussure understands such a system as organized in a structural way by an oppositional binary. He identifies in such structures two components, the *langue* and the *parole*. Whereas the *langue* is the conceptual structure of language governed by rules and codes, the *parole* corresponds to the use of this system in the act of speech or writing. In fact, *langue* belongs to the collective dimension, it represents the social part of the system of language shared by a culture, whereas *parole* belongs to the individual because it constitutes the practical use of this system that each person owns when he/she communicates or interprets meaning. Stuart Hall criticizes linguistic structuralism because if the act of speaking or writing (*parole*) is individual that means that representation can be only intentional, but the rules of a language are shared by the cultural code, so that it cannot be understood as individual. Moreover, de Saussure excludes material words, such as social interactions, objects or human activities, from the system of signification, because he argues that only language can produce meaning. Finally, in de Saussure's theory the aspect of power relations is not taken into account, he only affirms that language is a social act but he does not mention the process related to thing and meaning. (The latter aspect has been criticized by Charles Sanders Peirce, who introduces the notion of *reference* in order to highlight that the signifier–signified relation refers to other objects, subjects, events or practices outside the language present in the real world).

the second one entails a conceptual classification that addresses the meaning (the idea of elegance or wealth). The connotative level is peculiar because the production of meaning depends on culture, social ideology, knowledge, and history.

However, in *Mythologies* he stresses that representation works at the cultural level of signification. Analyzing the image of *Paris Match* Barthes considers that at the denotative level we see a black soldier in uniform with the French flag, but at the connotative level we interpret it at the level of beliefs and social ideology: this image represents the French slogan *liberté, fraternité, égalité* as patriotism, freedom and respect for race differences (Barthes, 1967). In addition, there is the cultural level, what he calls the level of *myth*, so the image embodies the concepts of “French imperialism”, “colonialism” and “faith towards the Negro soldier”. The *myth*, therefore, works as meta-language because it represents the cultural message (ibid.). While the *construction approach* is limited because of the lack of consideration of the material world as signified in the meaning production and interpretation of *parole* function as merely individual as well, the *semiotic approach* seems to Stuart Hall restricted too because of the persistence of an individual interpretation of representation based only on human ability. These approaches are contested in social and human sciences after the “cultural turn”, which inaugurates a new comprehension of the term representation, questioning the components of “power”, “knowledge” and the position of the subject that is not centred in the language (as understood by the semiotic approach), claiming the fallacy of meaning production in a binary system<sup>54</sup>.

According to such perspective, meaning is produced within representation as a key moment in the *circuit of culture* (Hall, 1997), where language uses signs and symbols shared in the same culture to constitute meaning inside representational practices. Therefore, culture constitutes the basis of such a process, because it is the “map of meaning” by which members of a group share their knowledge of the world. It means that representation creates meaning by culture as a shared map of meaning. In order to understand reality in the world, members of a group have to share the same conceptual maps because of classification and categorization processes, which occur based on cultural and social interactions that allow individuals to differentiate themselves from the others. Thus, individuals become cultural subjects, creating the understanding of the world through shared conceptual maps. Moreover, such conceptual maps are expressed by language that refers to words, sounds, gestures, clothes, media communication, and all those communicative practices that make cultural and social interactions meaningful. In addition, Hall stresses that such production of meaning occurs inside the “discourse” because one needs

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida (1981) points out that the meaning is always deferred so that we cannot fix a final meaning.



frameworks to understand reality and to interpret the meaning. Similarly, there is no way to understand representations outside the “discourse of sexuality” or the “discourse of race” in a specific culture (Hall, 1997). The emphasis on the effect and consequence of representation is based on the *discursive approach*, which alludes to Foucault’s definition of *discourse* as a system of representation. According to Hall (1992a), if discourse produces knowledge through language, similarly social practices also define meaning through language, because all aspects of social life concern discourse<sup>55</sup>.

Representation constructs meaning in order to normalize knowledge regarding social interaction intersected with power, construction of identity and subjectivity. Consequently, the historical, cultural, political, and economic specificity allows the establishment of a “regime of representation” concerning the combinatory reality of body knowledge, sexuality, race, ethnicity, performance, and the scopic regime of visibility articulated in hegemonic discourse<sup>56</sup>. Finally, as Teresa de Laurentis (1987) stresses, hegemonic discourses have the power “to do violence” to people, especially media discourse concerning the representational system, so that discourses have the ability to do or undo reality in the world.

#### 4.2.1. The regime of representation

Cultural studies suggest that the analysis of social struggle takes in account the notion of representation including social interaction in order to create knowledge of agency, questioning the theory and the power relation in cultural production and mass media consumption. Stuart Hall’s concept of *cultural identity* is based on the role of representation, which influences people’s ability to construct their identity through homogenous cultural and social patterns. Society, subject and culture belong to this *circle of meaning* structured by the regime of representation, which includes discourse and difference that are culturally and historically defined. Consequently, the discourse of subject recognition embodied the discourse of “race” and “sexuality” for the affirmation of the “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980), which is never

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<sup>55</sup> Hall affirms that Foucault’s notion of representation contributes to its practices in a historical, practical and “worldly” context (Hall, 1997, p.32).

<sup>56</sup> In the *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault introduces the notion of *discourse*. He understands by the term the consolidation of a specific statement regarding social interaction, moral conducts or beliefs which in different historical periods circulate in Western culture (texts, images, etc.), producing a knowledge through language about human practice. Moreover, in *The Order of Things* (1966) the author previously defines this discursive process as *episteme* i.e. a historical *a-prior* discourse through which knowledge is produced. Therefore, when he questions the construction of human knowledge regarding issues about morality, sexuality, race, legal discipline, and punishment related to the institutional practices in a specific culture and in a specific period, he states that the meaning represented by the discourse regulates human social practices and produces subjects of knowledge. Finally, knowledge does not depend on the relation of meaning; rather it depends on the relation of power that uses representation to produce social knowledge (Foucault, 1980).

fixed due to representational practices that allow its negotiation<sup>57</sup>. Referring to the constitution of the subject, Foucault affirms that the subject is produced within the discourse, which places it into a legitimated frame. A case in point is the recognition of hysterical, insane women or homosexual/insane men whose representations are established by power relations that in a discursive form produce a normative knowledge about these subjects.

In *The Order of Things* (1970), in particular, Foucault questions the position of the subject, referring to the representational system in Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*. He observed that representation works through absence and presence, in that what is invisible in the painting constituted the significance. The displacement occurs through the gaze's practices that coordinate inclusion and exclusion. The spectator looks at the scene in an external position but, simultaneously, he is looked at by the infant who is looked by the attendants and positioned in the centre although she is not the subject's painting. The painter looks at his model, which corresponds to the place of the spectator so that the model is for him/her an absence. In the scene, there are the courtiers of the infant standing behind her, the maid of honour standing on the other side of her with a dog and in front on the right two dwarfs. All these subjects are looking in front of them, at spectator position/model position. Behind the infant there is a reflected image in the mirror of King Philip IV and his wife Mariana which reflects the position in which the spectator is looking, and on the other side the mirror there is a doorway, which frames the silhouette of a man (Foucault, 1970).

As Foucault explains, this painting regards the representation of subject as a construct placed inside and outside the discourse of recognition. The spectator looks both at the mirror and is looked at by the painted subject. In addition, the painter's gaze at the spectator corresponds to the gaze at the painting's model, which is at the same time reflected in the mirror as the sovereign (Foucault, 1970). In this regard, Hall (1997) points out that the displacement and substitution of elements in "absence" and in "presence" alludes to the constitution of the subject inside and outside the regime of discourse, which indicates in this ambivalent force in the constitution of the subject. On the one side, subject is subdued by the "regime of power", on the other side it resists against power, negotiating the meaning. For Hall, the production of

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<sup>57</sup> Foucault considers the "regime of truth" the specific truth about one knowledge (like sexuality) that is produced and regulated by the discourse, i.e. what a society understands as truth depends on the discursive formation produced by power/knowledge relations that create a normative and legitimated understanding. Moreover, the author understands the notion of "power" not as a monopolized factor that addresses one apparatus, but rather "power" circulates between oppressor and oppressed from the private to the public sphere in each social dimension of life (cultural, political, religious, economic, social). This understanding of "power" allows the author to highlight the productive and destructive ambivalence in which power acts, so power can control and oppress but it can produce desires and knowledge because of its circulation (Foucault, 1980). Finally, the circulation of power is entailed in the "micro-physics" of power, understood as educational, health, justice or work issues which operate in the body dimension. Body is central in power relations. As Foucault (1977) explains, the technology of power operates in the body regulating and domesticating it, so that as the subject, the body is produced historically and culturally within the discourse.

meaning refers to the ability to give meaning in communicating through practices recognized in the “media”, which are the most powerful practices that realize the circulation and interaction of meaning in a society (i.e. what concerns the production of popular culture in mass media communication).

This medium is considered so powerful because it substitutes interpersonal interactions and subverts “decoding” expectations, making the absent element the significant element in the production of meaning. Consequently, the media as a medium supports the circulation of meaning. The media helps to interpret and identify meanings in visual discourse through the relation between the way in which the audience looks at the image and the dispositive that supports the image. The spectator, overall, interprets an image depending on a set of elements—for example, psychic, imaginary or cultural—that are inside representation and within discourse. The fact that the interpretation of a meaning occurs within the discourse has effects on the final result of meaning, because ideology tends to exercise power in the process of meaning’s production, provoking a naturalized and fixed meaning in language through stereotype and prejudice. Visual representation constitutes therefore a central practice in the recognition process in media discourse because images always produce identification and knowledge within the discourse, communicating, therefore, through fixed meaning embodied in stereotypes.

In fact, stereotypes regulate the “politics of the image” because they exchange the meaning of identification in the psychic and symbolic sphere, as well as in the imaginary as collective, social and symbolic sphere. According to Hall, their political effectiveness is established by a different set of communications technologies in popular culture (TV programs, internet, cinema) so that there is an intentional use of “positive” and “negative” images regarding the representation of differences in “race”, “gender” and “ethnicity”. Images circulate everywhere, carrying emotions, beliefs, and feelings, which reflect the signification of the world according to the shared conceptual maps.

The representations of black people in advertisements, for instance, present differences in their accumulation through time and their circulation through different texts and media (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the research of meaning is to evaluate in the “inter-textual” context which relations disclose the “regime of representation” (ibid.). The latter term refers to the ability to read an image in relation to another one, marking the difference of *otherness* according to the principle of binary opposition. Theories from linguistics, philosophy of language, anthropology, and psychology stress the relevance of how meaning is constructed through the relation to the other (ibid.). Through language the recognition of the dimension of difference

regarding sexuality, race, and class constructs meaning both in conscious and unconscious ways in order to allow the constitution of the subject and to create understanding of shared knowledge. In such a process, stereotypes have the function of simplifying the consolidation of a dimension of difference that places the marked and unmarked term on the boundary of “we” and “they”. For this reason, Hall states that stereotypes work in the “regime of representation” to construct meaning in language and culture, creating social identity and subjectivity. In fact, a good example of this is embodied by the racialized discourse that occurs through visual representation of otherness, which began in the sixteenth century with the first European colonization of America, the commerce of slavery, and the imposition of an imperialistic ideology and capitalism system. Hall states that during the slavery the representations of black people were bipolarized through the status of “innate laziness” and the concept of “primitivism”. The recognition of the otherness implied their mis-recognition, so the “primitive status” referred to “dehumanized objects” which required a civilization mission of humanization through “religion” and “cultural knowledge” in political and economic discourse. The other is placed, therefore, into the dimension of “nature” whose destiny is associated to the paradigm of “race” as “species”

Stereotypes emphasize such differences in science and popular representation, establishing a racialized imagery of otherness and legitimizing discrimination as well as exploitation practices. According to Hall, stereotyping as a representational practice acts in order to “*reduce, essentialize, naturalize and fixe difference*” (Hall, 1997, p. 258). Moreover, stereotype helps to “split” such differences, normalizing the borders between social categories in the internal and external recognition for the maintenance of the “symbolic social order”. Consequently, Hall suggests that stereotyping is related to power, because it is used to fix the “violent hierarchy” (Derrida, 1972) between the binary opposition “we/they” in the symbolic imaginary. Stereotyping differences contributes, therefore, to the circulation of a discourse of power among knowledge, ideas, and cultural, economic and social interaction, establishing what Gramsci called “hegemony” (Lagarde, 1990; Hall, 1992b; 1997).

In particular, Hall is interested to know how power circulates in representational practices on the basis of the “poetics” and the “politics” of stereotyping. Stressing that there is ambivalence in the system of power through representation and stereotypes because they work simultaneously at conscious and unconscious levels on the basis of binary opposition, Hall points out that *fantasy* plays an important role in strategies of racialized representation. In order to explain the *fantasy component* the author harks back to the “fetishism” question. According to psychoanalytical theory, “being fetishized” means that a part of a subject is “recognized as

an object” due to “castration anxiety” so that the object displaces the lack of a phallus. The meaning in language is based on the play of ambivalence between what is explicitly declared and also its implicit meaning. Fetishism in the image works in an implicit way, covering the presence of male genitalia in the picture, the covered object is charged with power producing desire. Referring to the photography of Nuba wrestlers by photographer George Rodger, Hall argues that in this picture the phallus is displaced by another object, because it cannot be represented, its presence is forbidden.

Representational fetishism allows for a taboo or denied object of desire to be both present and absent, so the viewer’s gaze is displaced by the “disavowal” which reproduces the ambivalent force, denying a desire and the wish to own it. As a result, fetishism allows voyeurism, the pleasure in looking called “scopophilia” (Freud, 1917), becoming a strategy for the regulation of the “hegemonic discourse”, which through positive/negative images articulates cultural and social meaning of acceptance and the rejection of differences. “Scopic regime” refers, thus, to the system of the process of recognition of Others based on the practice of looking. However, the meaning is never fixed, rather it is always negotiated through cultural practices. That means that negative stereotypes could become positive connotations, deconstructing the common shared knowledge (regime of truth), or otherwise displacing the “negative” connotation can provoke the reproduction of the conservation of the binary according to the hegemonic system. The politics of representation must also include the regulation of the gaze toward differences in race, gender, and class.

The circle of meaning is always related to interpretation, which is possible through shared conceptual maps with regards to the production and reception of meaning. As Hall (1980a) points out, if the visual representation is embodied in the power relations, and the strategies of ‘the politics of image’ occur through stereotypes, the entire communication system should reproduce a structure of dominance. In order to analyze the institutional power relations implied in the production and consumption of messages, Hall suggests interpreting mass media communication in four stages through *encoding* and *decoding* processes: *production*, *circulation*, *use* (as distribution/consumption) and *reproduction* (Hall, 1973). All these stages are related but work independently from each other and are always influenced by power relations.

Therefore, in the *production* phase messages are produced in the communication system within discursive ideology and their production occurs according the rules of languages. Also, their *circulation* in the institutional structures is determined by the discursive formation, and it selects the channels of transmission in order to fulfil desires, needs and to gain effect on the

audience. The *use* phase occurs through *distribution* and *consumption*: *distribution* is allowed in certain media and it addresses a kind of reception by the audience who obviously have to share the same code and conceptual maps in order to understand and interpret the meaning; whereas *consumption* occurs when the meaning is understood by audiences and they are able to interpret it. Both *circulation* and *distribution* take place in the discursive form, i.e. in relation with the pattern of domination.

Thus, when audiences receive the message, it has an effect on them only if they reproduce it in practical life, which is called the *reproduction* phase and which refers to the practical use of representation in social interaction and conduct. The articulation of each phase, as stressed, is independent, and for this reason it is possible that during the process the passage from one level to another can fail. Hall stresses that when communication circulates the discursive form has relevant influence during the *encoding* and *decoding* phase. The two processes are independent that means that the effectiveness proposed in the production of the message cannot always be successful. *The encoding* phase consists in the production of the message according to a framed ideology, that is to say that such a process occurs within specific knowledge shared in a culture. In this moment, the production of the message must take care of its form, because the “message form” determines the appearance of the communicated story (the way in which a story is re-presented conveys the relevance of some aspects over others), allowing its assimilation in social interactions. All this undergoes “the rules of discourse and language in dominance” and “technical infrastructures”, so the effect of a message depends on the existence of a meaningful language shared by members of group and a “medium” for its transmission, which allows them to “*decode* it into social practices and consciousness” (Hall, 1973, p. 94).

Furthermore, the *decoding* phase regards the reception of the message and it happens when audiences are really affected by the message in emotional and behavioural ways. The effect on them guarantees its use in social practices. However, Hall stresses that the code of the *encoding* phase does not always correspond to the code of *decoding* because of misunderstanding, what he calls “the asymmetry between the codes of sources and receiver” (Hall, 1972, p. 94). The author explains that the error variability is a standard because when the message is carried from the *encoding* phase into the discursive form and after the audience receives it (decoding process), the communicative intention of the sender cannot correspond to the meaning received by the recipient. As a result, the *decoding* phase cannot be equivalent to *encoding*, because the audience “negotiates the (original) code” during the message reception. The negotiation of the code refers to an operation in which the hegemonic code embodied in the language has a dominant position in the reception phase. Following linguistic theory, the code can be

negotiated because its nature is arbitrary and conventional. Moreover, Hall argues that the process occurs because the meanings are associated, i.e. there is not a pure literal denotative level or a pure cultural connotative level, rather both are included in the negotiation process of meaning's production. Moreover, the meaning is not fixed in nature so that the pattern of domination intersects differentially in denotative and connotative levels<sup>58</sup>. Hall explains that the unpredictability of the communication process takes place because the set of codes is placed in the message through *performative rules*. The latter notion enables the author to stress the possibility of selecting one semantic field rather than another, in order to establish a set of meanings.

According to Hall, during the *decoding* phase audiences are able to recognize the hegemonic discourse and negotiate the meaning in relation to the logic of power. Consequently, spectators can decode the message, differentiating hegemonic discursive forms, and even rejecting them. Firstly, the *dominant-hegemonic position* takes place when the audience decodes the encoded message within the dominant code. In this case, there is a correspondence between the encoded message constructed by hegemonic discursive form and the decoded message. The *dominant-hegemonic code* displaces the dominant code in the encoded message, provoking an apparently neutral position but it operates within the dominant code. The second position is called the *negotiated position*, in which the dominant meaning is understood by the audience (constructed as dominant code or professional code), who decide to negotiate with the dominant logic, accepting some aspects of it and rejecting others. Hall stressed that the negotiated code depends on "situated logic", referring to the agreement or rejection positions based on the logic of an active and passive subject. Finally, the third position is the *globally position* in which the audience recognizes the hegemonic code and decides to reject it totally. Therefore, the audience uses an *oppositional code* because its position is located in a contrary way to the encoded one and in most cases this occurs in political discourse. Hall highlights these three possible positions, questioning televisual discourse.

All three positions are possible during the *encoding* and *decoding* phases. In mass media communication misunderstandings are not uncommon, so the reproduction and reproduction of the message are to be considered independent but related phases. Finally, in mass media communication the first two positions seem to be more significant because, whereas in the

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<sup>58</sup> Hall considers that both connotative and denotative levels are constructed in the discourse. At the connotative level the meaning is not fixed in nature, even if it appears as a closed system, its code intersects with the semantic one that is culturally shared. Discourses on ideology and power are implicated at both levels, provoking a hierarchal organization of the *dominant meaning*. Each society has its own dominant structures: a set of beliefs, practices and meanings that depends on the dominant patterns recognized by institutional power relations that sanction what is allowed and what is not in the social, political dimension.

*oppositional code* the variability of error does not occur so there is no transformation of meaning from the encoding to the decoding phase, in both the *hegemonic* and *negotiated positions* the problem of misunderstanding arises. The split between absence and presence in the production of the preferred meaning allows for the result of “effectiveness” in communication. Finally, “effectiveness” is the most important point, so without it there is no articulation in practice, and therefore no consumption. As result, the communication fails.

#### 4.2.2 Visualizing the *otherness*: the role of culture

Nowadays, we witness an expansion of the meaning of culture due to the affirmation of a global capitalistic system, which has caused the emerging of “intercultural culture”, “subculture” and “mass culture”. Consequently, culture contains wider aspects of life such as social interactions and practices, as suggested in Stuart Hall’s definition:

“Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programs or comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meaning – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’- between the members of a society or a group. [...] Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and ‘*making sense*’ (my emphasis) of the world, in broadly similar ways.” (Hall, 1997, p. 2)

In this definition the author highlights the meaning of “culture” in representational practices structured in social communication in everyday life. According to the author, culture is a set of practices in which people share “meaning” through the same system of language. The wave of the “cultural turn” in cultural studies has stressed, in particular, the concept of culture as a set of things, such as popular music, art, cinema, TV programs; and practices, such as social interaction, leisure activity, and entertainment (Hall, 1997, p. 2). Cultural meaning embodies feelings, emotions, concepts, and ideas that make the understanding of the world possible, organizing and regulating social practices.

In this regard, Hall points out that cultural meanings are not fixed; they are produced and negotiated constantly through social interaction, which always occurs thanks to the medium of language. In addition, Hall’s concept of language is wider, because it includes words, sounds, clothes, gestures, expression, notes, and visual language (Hall, 1997). Moreover, the component of visibility is central because the production and exchange of meaning occurs through communication media (TV programs, advertisements, cinema, and visual technologies) and, as Hall stressed, following Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, culture is the place of struggle where



the hegemony between dominated and subordinated groups is contested (ibidem). Consequently, culture refers always to visibility making things in reality visible or invisible.

As Walter Benjamin (1936) stresses, visual experience in human beings became important in postmodernism as a crisis of modernity, in which the reproduction of images in mass media and post-industrial societies provoke effects on consumers, raising the question of visual experience and, finally, the loss of “aura”. The latter term refers to the decline of uniqueness and authenticity of works of art, which is replaced by mechanical reproduction based on political practices (ibidem). Consequently, postmodernism is understood as a threshold between the visible–invisible spectacle of everyday life, such as a “simulacrum”, using Baudrillard’s definition (1988), which does not allow a distinction between the real–unreal where images fulfil simulations of the world according to a scopic regime. In Western philosophy, the visual system has become the subject of studies in the early nineties thanks to technical discoveries such as electricity, photography, and cinema. Furthermore, different disciplines began to study the image as a subject of social interactions. In particular, visual studies coined the term *visual culture* in the essay *Visual Culture Questionnaire* (1996), referring to the “visual turn” aroused in the debate around the discipline of cultural studies. According to Mitchell (1994), the crucial question of visual studies is not limited to its definition of visibility as culturally constructed, but it regards rather the difference between “image” and “picture”. Whereas, image alludes to a visual cultural construction to be understood as a subject which lives, “picture” is to be understood as the image framed in a medial dispositive (Mitchell, 1996). Furthermore, the author explains in the work *Picture Theory* (1994) his definition of the study of the image:

“Whatever the *pictorial turn* (my emphasis) is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial “presence”: it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the pictures as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality. It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practice of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. Most important, it is the realization that while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses inescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture, from the most refined philosophical speculations to the most vulgar productions of the mass media. Traditional strategies of containment no longer seem adequate, and the need for a global critique of visual culture seems inescapable” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 16).

In this definition Mitchell stresses the central position of the term *pictorial turn*, in accordance with the famous notion of the “iconic turn” (*ikonische Wende*) coined by Gottfried Boehm (1994). The theory of the pictorial turn refers to image status as “presence” intersected with human experience and consumption of “images” and “visibility” in interplay with visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. All these “experiences” are

not, therefore, explainable through the “linguistic turn”. Mitchell states, therefore, that pictorial turn differs to the traditional understanding of media, as objects of studies in visual studies or media communication, because the notion *media* here refers to “mixed media”, hybrid visual experiences combined with image, text and view (sight, touch and hearing). Moreover, the author suggests that the visual as an historical constant is a culturally connoted mental figure that appears in different media and new technologies. As the author states “the idea that images have a kind of social or psychological power of their own is, in fact, the reigning cliché of contemporary visual culture” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 32). The problem is, as Mitchell argues, to demonstrate how the traditional function of idolatry, fetishism and totemism changes in the modern society, that is to say, how images can reproduce the meaning of good/bad or pure/impure with the power to manipulate human beings’ emotions and behaviors. In fact, images can threaten human beings, and their incessant proliferation in different new technologies is compared by Mitchell to a “cloning” process, by which images’ excessive reproduction cause their destruction. Finally, visual culture helps to “read” images that are alive historically and culturally, and it helps to create a distance between the power of images as bearer of human emotions and feelings (Cometa, 2008).

Secondly, image’s interpretation cannot occur as isolated abstract object, instead it requires, according to visual studies disciplines, a relation to the practice of visual consumption that depends on the way of seeing such as looking, glancing or gazing. According to Mitchell, the interpretation of the world as a picture is related to a *scopic regime* (as a cultural construction of what is seen and how it is seen). The term first appears in Martin Jay’s work *Vision and Visuality* (1988), where the author in the essay *Scopic Regimes of Modernity* (1988) explains the cultural construction of visuality. Jay argues, in fact, that contemporary Western society communicates merely through the visual code, what he calls “ocularcentrism”, i.e. a society in which the sense of visual is privileged than the other sense because it is associated with the truth.

Cultural studies recognizes the theoretical importance of visual image, assuming that post-modernism inaugurates the image discourse, questioning the excessive mechanical reproduction of images, the domain of hyper-circulation of images in the public spheres and its effects and consequences in the social interactions. The of the central concept focuses on the cultural construction of visuality and the presence of a “visual regime”. The latter concept refers to the visual discourse formed by the *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual practices), *visual dispositive* (mass media, television, photography, painting, cinema) and the *image/picture* (Mitchell, 1994). As

mentioned above, W. J. T. Mitchell's theory of pictorial turn focuses on the analysis of visual practices, separating itself from the traditional method of textual analysis, which interprets the world through words. Image became a window through which a spectator's gaze reflects both in the image and from the image, even provoking the negation or abolition of spectatorship (Mitchell, 1994). Finally, visual experiences and the consumption of images produce power in which hierarchy is negotiated, creating inversion, resistance, and power relations.

Regarding the practice of visualizing, it is important to stress the lexical difference between *gaze*, *glance*<sup>59</sup> and *look*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term *to gaze* indicates the act of steadily, intently looking with admiration or surprise, whereas *to glance* refers to a brief or hurried look such as a *coup d'oeil*, otherwise *to look* implies a specific direction and the verb *to see* is correlated to the act of perceiving something/someone with the eyes. As Hans Belting suggests, even the different translations produce a specific understanding of the practice of looking, so in German "the term *Blick* alludes to the term *Blitz* (storm) as a gaze that takes us suddenly by surprise, whereas the French term *regard* is associated with the meaning take care of or to protect" (Belting, 2003, p. 8). The singularity of the practice of looking is significant in relation with the visual dispositive, the image represented with the production of power and practices of observation.

The concept of "gaze theory" refers to developed theories about the way of seeing in which the gaze can be in the image, the gaze can come from the image, or the gaze can be negated, even abolished. According to Hans Belting (2003) the mirror and the window are the places by which we become conscience about our gaze, so whereas the mirror returns our gaze, the window allows us to see the world and to create our point of view of the vision. Central visualizing practices come from psychoanalysis, in particular, regarding theories about the pleasure of seeing as a perverse tendency such as narcissism and masochism (Freud, 1919), or theories that explain the process of identity, construction of the imaginary and the symbolic through the image (Lacan, 1977). Moreover, psychoanalytical theories play an important role in the field of cultural studies in which visual pleasures are understood as human visualizing practices articulated by a scopic regime that controls and manipulates social relations and world perceptions. Such discourses involve the construction of gendered-identity, starting with the perspective of the male gaze, a concept that highlights female objectification through male visual pleasure and the hegemony of heterosexual male control in media communication (Mulvey, 1972).

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<sup>59</sup> In visual culture the difference between "gaze" and "glance" are postulated by Norman Bryson in *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, which considers "gaze" as an obsessive, fixed look, whereas the "glance" refers to a mobile, fleeting *coup d'oeil* (1983).

Following psychoanalytical theory, Franz Fanon (1986) explains the refusal of recognition of the other, arguing that most racial stereotyping, discrimination and violence are produced from the visual perception of otherness that provokes the refusal to recognise the other as a subject<sup>60</sup>. Furthermore, the gaze refers to specific system of power that aims to control social practices. Michel Foucault, in the book *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975), states that the process of medical treatment between doctor and patient occurs through a specific medical knowledge that establishes the power relation in a medical discourse, based on the regime of “the medical gaze”. The author argues that such microphysics of power relations disclose the system of power/knowledge in a society which allows surveillance and punishment practices, aiming for the control and regulation of social interaction<sup>61</sup>.

Otherwise, the “imperial gaze” or “post-colonial gaze” refers to practices of control based on binary concepts such as dominate/dominated and inferiority/superiority<sup>62</sup>. The relation between race/gender/representation is central to cultural studies theory. In *The Spectacle of the ‘Other’* (1997) Stuart Hall explains the interplay between representation/difference/power, focusing on the racialized regime of representation through positive–negative images charged with stereotypes. According to the author, spectatorship produces opposite emotions. On the one side, spectatorship produces attraction but this feeling is a kind of fetishism that generates consequently a state of denial. The spectatorship creates disavowal of the other and the recognition of superiority in opposition to the inferior state of the other. In addition, in feminist theory, Bell Hooks develops in the essay *The Oppositional Gaze* (1996) an important reflection about the construction of black female spectators under the “patriarchal gaze” and imperial white authorities. Hooks’ definition of gaze has a political connotation of control by white authorities and explains that the repression of black people in the right to “look at” has provoked the consolidation of “an oppositional gaze”. In particular, black people are not allowed to look at the reality as white people did because of their inferior and dehumanized recognition.

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<sup>60</sup> See Bhabha, H. (1986), ‘The Other Question’ in *Literature, Politics and Theory*; Fernando, S. (1982), ‘Blackened Images’ in *Critical Decade*.

<sup>61</sup> Foucault dedicates different studies about practices of observations and control. In the work *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) he analyzes systems of punishment and control starting from French history of torture and the panopticon function of surveillance. Moreover, in the essay *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Foucault elaborates the concept of *biopolitic* referring to the relation of the microphysics of power that consolidate the power/knowledge of social practices controlling the body/life of the individual. Such a regime of power articulates human behaviors from sexual relations to economical relations, affirming a unique and fixed understanding of the world. Finally, sexuality is the central argument developed in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. (1975a); *History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (1975b); *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (1975c). In these works, the author studies sexuality as a construction produced by ideologies’ systems of knowledge from religious to cultural and political systems in order to establish heteronormative paradigms.

<sup>62</sup> According to Edward Said (1978), the Orient is a world constructed under Western eyes in order guarantee the system of power and safeguard Western supremacy. In *Orientalism* (1978) the author explains how our perception of oriental countries and societies focused on hegemonic and *post*-colonial visual pleasures and interesting, and how as a result such an imaginary reproduces Western hegemonic systems.

Moreover, spectatorship develops a way to look at black females that, on the one hand, produces sexual pleasure and, on the other, reproduces sexist and racist beliefs (Bell Hooks, 1996).

In this regard, Donna Haraway (1991) points out that images as “simulacra” provoke unequal social relations because they reflect social differences intersected with power. As the author states, whereas mass visual spectacles in contemporary world the unregulated visuality is still present in institutions of power such as militarism, capitalism, colonialism and male supremacy (ibid.). Consequently, there is a dominant hierarchical system of visuality that legitimizes and postulates normative criteria about the way in which people visualize social difference<sup>63</sup>. Finally, the practice of looking is never innocent, and as Grisela Pollock (1988) stressed, visual representation in cultural practices regulates and negotiates social inclusion and exclusion in the system of subject recognition.

#### **4.3 Social Representation: Comparing Social Psychology Theory with Cultural Studies Theory**

In social psychology “social representations” (SRs) refer to a system of values, ideas, and practices that enable members of a community to communicate by sharing the same codes. According to Serge Moscovici social representations are:

“Systems of values, ideas and practices with two-fold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.” (Moscovici, 1961-76, p. 13).

Moscovici elaborates a theory of social representation starting from Durkheim’s notions of collective and individual representation. Durkheim (1898) considers collective representations as social facts, which are socially constituted and are independent of individuals’ influence. Consequently, collective representations impose themselves over the community, which is forced to share a common point of view. Moreover, collective representations are static and uniform, so beliefs, knowledge, and communicative practices (relating to religion, health, economy, policy etc.) become fixed, whereas individual representations depend on a subjective, historic background. Moscovici does not agree fully with Durkheim’s notion, rather he suggests

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<sup>63</sup> In order to evaluate visual effects, John Berger (1972) proposes a study of women’s representation in Western painting, whose way of seeing is related to the image and spectators. In *Way of Seeing* he suggests that Western painting constructed sexual differences, understanding femininity as a passive object and masculinity as an active subject. Overall, the effects of visual image on spectators depend on the dispositive use from a specific culture, in a specific geographic place and historicity.

that social representations are collective, shared sets of knowledge that orient individuals in the understanding of reality and, as a consequence, they are common resources for communicating.

The different forms of communications are fundamental because they modify social representations. Considering that we think through a language that organizes thoughts and ideas on the basis of a system, the author identifies in the communication, culturally connoted, the way in which individuals understand how to codify significant messages in relation to others (Galli, 2006). Moscovici calls this propriety “conventionalization”. Subsequently conventionalized objects become “prescriptive”, imposing an early existing structure through which representations are imposed, codified and changed over time. Consequently, Moscovici understands social representations as social entities that live and communicate between each other, changing, disappearing and reappearing. In fact, social representations are alive because the collective object constitutes a social reality whose origin has been naturalized. Individuals cannot explain their origin, because social representations have iconic and symbolic characters. The iconic refers to the correspondence of an image with an idea, whereas the symbolic alludes to the fact that an idea refers to a collective attitude, like the idea of neurosis with the Oedipus complex (Moscovici, 1961).

The author shows the dynamic character of social representations and how they operate by transforming ideas in the collective experience and through social interactions, establishing the common sense of “the familiar” through the analysis of the idea of “psychoanalysis” in mass media communication in France (ibid.). In particular, he was interested in analyzing representations of healthy and unhealthy behavior, observing how science, politics, and mass media influence individuals’ knowledge and how individuals are able to change it. The plurality and variability of social representation are significant. Therefore, SRs have social, cognitive, and communicative characteristics. The social character refers to its capacity to define a system of values, ideas, and social practices in order to establish an order, allowing individuals to orient themselves in the understanding of reality. The cognitive aspect, called “cognitive polyfasia”, alludes to a human being’s need to categorize reality, enabling the construction of social identity and individual identity, so that everyday thinking may be characterized by different points of view. Subsequently, social representations allow individuals to communicate through a common shared code based on collective historic, cultural, and social backgrounds.

Moscovici (1961) highlights that the research of social representations implies the study of individuals’ attitudes to mediating a conflict between the individual and society is based on symbolic behaviors in relation to society, institutions, and social individuals. Analyzing the social construction of knowledge about psychoanalysis, the author stresses that social

representations deeply influence the structure of knowledge through communication. He considers three different newspapers in France that debate psychoanalytical arguments. Firstly, he identifies in the opinions of the press the characteristic of “diffusion”, considering a writer’s aim to create common knowledge, informing the readers in a homogenous way. Secondly, the communication produced by the catholic press operates under the principle of “propagation” with the aim of conforming psychological knowledge to a religious perspective, enabling readers to evaluate psychoanalysis in a critical way. Finally, the communist press debates psychoanalytical arguments following the “propaganda” strategy in which the communication is structured by the opposite and antagonistic vision of a reality (right–false), so that readers are obligated to place themselves in one site. These systems of communication, “diffusion, propaganda and propagation” are important, according to Moscovici, because they produce real effects on social behaviors, considering that each system of communication corresponds to different channels of categorization, such as “opinion, behavior, and stereotype”: “there is a correspondence between a system of communication and a way to construct a behavior” (Moscovici, 1976, p. 497). In this regard, the most relevant aspect refers to the relation between the structure of a symbolic system (as content) and the context in which it operates, causing different ways of acting (Palmonari, 1984). Opinions, behaviors and stereotypes become ways of expressing social representations through which individual cognitive systems and social dynamics articulate different interpretations of reality. Overall, social representations orient social behaviors, so that their analysis consists primarily in the way in which they are regulated by individuals in a specific social context.

Moscovici classifies “opinion” as an oriented continuum and an institutional external norm. Whereas typical opinions are normalized, untypical opinions distance themselves from the norm. He differentiates opinion into three groups: the “opinion common to a group” (mostly shared), “common opinion” (shared on a global scale) and “polarized opinion” (characterized by two contrasting opinions in one group) (Moscovici, 1961). The author stresses that whereas opinions are simple and clear responses, behaviors are organized and hidden responses that regulate attitudes. The term “behaviors” coined by Znaniecki (1918) alludes to an appraisal system (positive, negative or neutral judgment) that enables individuals to face everyday life. Behaviors are critical coordinators that regulate subjects in cognitive (cognitive component), emotive (emotional component) and behavioral (behavioral component) responses. On the one hand, Moscovici agrees with Markova’s opinion (Markova, 2000) regarding the fact that the acquisition of a behavior implicates the existence of representation, considering it as part of the system of knowledge (emotions, images, beliefs, etc.). However, the author highlights that it is

possible only if our representations are understood as institutions, so individuals construct new representations starting from those earlier ones. On the other hand, behaviors express relations between an object and a group and/or an individual and differ deeply from social representations, which always imply a triadic relation between the social representation, the individual representation and the object (Galli, 2006).

Similarly, Hall (1997) believes that stereotype enables individuals to maintain social and symbolic order, stressing the characteristics of negotiation, connection, imagination and resistance in the social construction of meaning within the “circle of meaning”. However, he is interested in the way in which a dominant regime of representation can be challenged, contested or changed. Moscovici, in the same way, questions whether social regulation realizes certain cognitive functions in a specific context, considering that communication has the power to differentiate, translate and combine social practices due to the transformations operated by stereotypes. The author stresses the dynamic character of social representation (transformative function), thus individuals have the capacity to influence SR, re-constructing it over time and changing its meaning. According to the author, individuals contribute to the formation of social representation through the interplay of the social structure and themselves. It occurs because individuals use a strategy to negotiate and re-construct meanings, so that representations are produced by the interaction and communication between individuals and groups, which negotiate with social representation for the re-construction of social practices (Moscovici, 2000).

Moreover, the author explains that it is possible because individuals need to “give a name” to the reality, so they associate it to a behavior and then they classify it as normal–abnormal, familiar–unfamiliar through two processes: “objectification” and “anchoring”<sup>64</sup>. Objectification refers to the capacity to transform abstract things into real things and the ability to reproduce a

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<sup>64</sup> Moscovici (2000) indicates different types of objectification and anchoring. The first process consists in transforming the unknown in reality, materializing abstract phenomena. The author analyzes the process of objectification in the media referring mostly to scientific concepts transformed into pictures (Moscovici, 2007). This process entails the capacity to convert a concept into an image through the iconic quality of the idea itself (Moscovici, 1984), affecting especially the emotional dimension (emotional objectification). Whereas the function of personification is explained as a discursive mechanism in the media by which abstract ideas or phenomena are attached to well-known people. The second process is considered less active and it is classified in naming, emotional anchoring, thematic anchoring, and metaphoric anchoring. Naming refers to the act of naming an unknown phenomenon, creating an identity matrix with a specific culture. The act of naming can be understood as a precursor of stereotypes (Lipmann, 1922), because they confirm the validity of reality. Otherwise, the term *emotional anchoring* alludes to emotional valence, as passions and desires, embodied by social representations (Moscovici, 1993). Such emotions often incorporate “basic ideas”, or “pre-existing thoughts” (ibid. 2000) that constitute the themes (thematic anchoring) which highlight the dichotomy of categories (like nature/culture). This mechanism is able to connect specific contexts with structures of new social representations, because themes can act like myths (Barthes, 1970), carrying ideological elements assigned to universal ideas, and allowing identification processes. Moreover, the capacity to think in opposition (anchoring in antinomies) depends on a specific socio-cultural context, in which such oppositions like white–black, life–death could be related to social problems or conflicts (Markova, 2003). Finally, social representations occur through the use of metaphors too, because metaphors allow for the relation of phenomenon to universal or specific existential beliefs, provoking the normalization of the dominant system.



concept in an image, controlling it through the practice of ontologizing, personifying, and appearing (Moscovici, 1961). Otherwise, the anchoring function defines the capacity to transfer something “outside” the system, anchoring it inside the system. This process occurs through the comparison with the paradigm of category and the adaptation through classification and denomination. Finally, both phases make possible the negotiation of meaning, so that social representations are constantly re-interpreted, re-thought and re-presented through their conversion into a social reality<sup>65</sup>. The aim of social representations can be resumed as a practice that “makes it possible to convert something unfamiliar into a familiar” (my translation, Moscovici, 1984, p. 24), relating the past with the present and “controlling the reality of today through that of yesterday” (ibid., p. 10). Moreover, such a process is possible thanks to the language that separates unknown objects with known objects, normal and abnormal. The author concludes that it is possible because human beings act at two levels, that is to say on the one hand, they relate cause and effect and, on the other hand, goals and meanings. If individuals try to explain an external object, firstly they relate it with themselves in order to find a logical and significant explanation (normal). Successively, if it is abnormal (lack of recognition or knowledge) there is no identification and people seek to interpret the phenomenon. The latter process occurs through the prototype that people use to measure events or behaviors considered as effects. If the effect corresponds with the prototype, the cause is external (attribution), otherwise, it is internal (inference). In this second case, people tend to associate ideas and judgments through inference, collocating the abnormal and unfamiliar in the out-group sphere, categorizing it through stereotypes and prejudices. Social representations embody the collective ideas that individuals have regarding a reality, regulating our perceptions, attributions, and interpretations that depend deeply on social context, socio-economic status, relations between categories (rich–poor, men–women, black–white, etc.) as well as prejudice toward out-group members. All these factors influence social representations between dominant–dominated

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<sup>65</sup> In a similar way, Abric (1994) argues that social representations have different functions, thus, they help to understand reality and they establish differences between in-group and out-group. Consequently, representations address individuals in behaviors and social practices, allowing them to explain in positive ways the differences in beliefs and behaviors. In his structural approach the author stresses the constructive function of social representations that acts in the central system, creating, organizing and stabilizing them. Abric (1994) defines the central system as the “central nucleus” in which the sense of other elements of representations are constituted (generating function), defining the relationships of those elements (organizing function) and providing a basis of stability to representations, making them more resistant towards changes (stabilizing function). At this level social representations can be interpreted as collective memories, cultural and historical elements that identify a social group. Whereas in the “peripheral system” social representations are negotiated, because at this level some attitudes or social behaviors are recognized as “normal” or “acceptable”, protecting representations in the central system, allowing them to gain a space of adjustment and change towards new elements without collapsing or deeply changing the central nucleus. At the peripheral level representations are flexible, because they refer to individual differences, experiences and histories that reflect the heterogeneous character of society connoted by specificities (such as differences in sex, age, ethnicity/race, economic status, educational status, cultural heritage, etc.). Finally, social representations are simultaneously stable and fixed because of the central nucleus, and they are movable and flexible because they tend to conform themselves to individual experiences and negotiations.

groups. In this regard, Hall (1973) argues that there are “common-sense-constructs” that are assigned to new domains, and like the anchoring mechanism, they need to be mapped onto a discursive dimension in order to make sense:

New, problematic or troubling events, which breach our expectancies and run counter to our “common-sense constructs”, to our “taken-for-granted” knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to “make sense”. The most common way of “mapping” them is to assign the new within some domain or other of the existing “maps of problematic social reality”. (ibid., p. 57).

The theories developed in social psychology highlight the processes of transformation of social representations, determining such change as consequences of communication, social practices and the dominant ideology as well as culture in a social context. Such processes of conversion are analyzed considering the influence of subgroups, the relationship between social struggle and social responsibility, as well as the influence determined by the relation between social categorization (stereotypes, prejudices) and social representations. In defining social representations as a “network of ideas, metaphors and images” whose meaning are negotiated by members of a group, both in the “primary genres of communication” (such as everyday debates, conversations) and the “secondary genres of communication” (such as mass communication and institutionalized discourse), Moscovici and Markova (2000) stress the “social psychological process” involved in the communicative practices and in the processes of the construction of the self and the social identity.

Hall (1997), in his theory of representation, highlights the relation between the social psychological process in social representation with the politics of communication, recognizing representations as fields in which meanings are contested and negotiated in order to establish the hegemony. The idea that ideology influences the processes of decoding meanings is the basis of Hall’s theory of representation. The author stresses the unfixed and cultural nature of representation negotiated between dominant and dominated groups in a specific social context. In the same way, Moscovici (1988; 2000) understands social representation as multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomena related to social practices, distinguishing between “hegemonic representations”, “emancipated representation” and “polemic representation”.

Hegemonic representation (HP) refers to structured representations in a macro unit shared by members of a political party that uniformly creates common beliefs in all symbolic and affective practices. Otherwise, emancipated representation alludes to independent points of view about certain social practices shared by subgroups. These representations are not often in opposition to HP; rather they can be integrated by the political dimension. Finally, polemic representation situates itself in the radical and antagonist field related to social conflicts, struggles and controversies in a certain social context. Moscovici (2000) highlights, in

particular, the role of media in creating social representations, considering that they “participate each time in the global vision a society establishes for itself” (ibid, p.160). In fact, social representations are understood as complex and holistic because they influence emotions, attitudes, and judgments. Furthermore, they are embedded in communicative practices, such as dialogues, debates, media discourses, and scientific discourses, determining the system of hegemonic representations and maintaining the dominant cultural order (Marková, 2003).

#### **4.4 Social Representation of Violence Against Women**

According to Miguel Lorente Acosta (2001), violence against women embodies the manifestation of a social conflict in which the aggression against women finds social agreement because myths, beliefs and systems of values, that constitute the symbolic order, are the basis of the reconstruction of reality. Following social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1981), the process of the construction of identity depends both on the interaction of individual and social perception of the self. In particular, social identity occurs through a categorization process, which is connoted by conflicted relation between in-groups and out-groups. Such a process manifests itself through interaction practices in different social and cultural contexts, establishing the relations between the groups through the influence of social stereotypes and prejudices.

In this regard, some theorists (Caputi and Russel, 1992; Van Zoonen, 1998; Lorente Acosta, 2003; Barfoot and Lord, 2006) identify in stereotypes and prejudices the sexist and subordinated understanding of the female image that reinforces at a symbolic level the legitimacy of a patriarchal society. For this reason, they suggest a deconstruction of the traditional image of women within society and mass media communication in order to avoid common justifications for and perceptions of the phenomena of violence against women. Similarly, the cognitive function of prejudice, understood as “an aversion based on an intolerant or wrong generalization that can be felt or expressed toward a whole group or toward a member of that group” (my own translation, Martin Rojo, 1998, p. 68), allows individuals and groups to be categorized through representations which are socially shared between the members of a group and acquired during the socialization process and communication.

Moreover, stereotypes and prejudices contribute to the production of false consciousness through justifications that mitigate or eliminate responsibilities. In general, stereotypes allow the activation of a system of justification, rationalizing an idea that legitimizes beliefs and behaviors toward the members of out-groups (Allport, 1958). In social psychology, the “system

of justification” is a concept that alludes to the recognition of status or powers hierarchies, separating people into genders, roles, classes, races, and statuses, justifying the differences between members (Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Shaff, 1984; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990). As a consequence, the disadvantaged position of individuals is supported by false consciousness in order to maintain a social dominance that justifies oppression and discrimination between the dominant and dominated relations (Mckinnon, 1989; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). In this regard, Eagle et al. (1984) show how gender stereotypes are applied to explain the social division of labor, so that female employees are more “communal” because of their association to the homemaker, whereas men are more “agentic” due to their perception as workers. As a result, stereotypes rationalize the division of labor by attributing to each sex those qualities deemed necessary for the performance of the assigned functions (Ealgy & Steffen, 1984).

On the other hand, Lerner (1980) argues that stereotypes are so powerful because they stigmatize groups in order to maintain superiority and inferiority relations, causing the common belief that people “get what they deserve”. It similarly occurs among victims of violence who tend to blame themselves, attributing the self-guilt to themselves (Miller & Porter, 1983; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In particular, Cunningham (1987) argues that females blame female victims of assault more than males because of the “false blame” which consists in the attitude of disadvantaged groups blaming themselves under the principle of “they deserve it” (Cunningham, 1987; Mackinnon, 1989). In this regard, the social representation of the woman who suffers violence appears stigmatized by the false perception of her as a provocative woman, an adjective that at a cognitive level justifies collectively the suffered aggression (Petrillo & di Matteo, 2007). Otherwise, the perpetrator is mostly depicted as a vulnerable person who, because of some addiction (drugs or alcohol) as well as economic difficulties (unemployment or debts) or emotional dysfunction (jealousy or possession) commits violence, provoking at a societal level the implicit justification of the aggression (Adami et al., 2002). In this case, a number of expressions of thought, socially and culturally connoted, enable the activation of the false belief that “everyone has what he/she deserves”, reducing the complexity of social interactions regarding violence against women (Petrillo & Di Matteo, 2007). The relation between false consciousness and the system of justification shows how stereotypes influence both implicit and explicit judgments and actions, imprisoning the female image in the sphere of dependence and weakness, and the male image in that of aggression, power, and strength (Banaji et al., 1993). Moreover, stereotypes change during the history following changes of social structure, and economic, political and sexual relations. As a consequence, it is important

to highlight how stereotypes change and how they work both as a positive and a negative (Eagle et al. 1991). In fact, positive stereotypes about women could be used to stigmatize the inferior position of females in society, so that positive stereotypes serve to maintain the dominant position based on racist and sexist beliefs.

Both theories of social psychology and cultural studies highlight the possibilities for resistance and transformation within the process of representation in communication and social practices. The genesis and circulation of knowledge occurs also within communication processes, and for this reason its understanding needs to be structured within the system of power (Hall, 1981). Hegemonic representations are more stable because they are based on ideology that is socially and culturally marked. According to Abric (1994) these representations belong to the central system and they are unchangeable. Otherwise, representations in opposition to the dominant order can be contested and negotiated, allowing the exchange between central and peripheral elements (*ibidem*). In the same way, social realities should be analyzed considering the multiple and heterogeneous character of representations.

Considering Moscovici's concept of anchoring, in which unfamiliar things are converted into familiar things, media discourse represents domestic violence presenting women as principally responsible because "she accepted it", "she did not denounce it". Otherwise, man is depicted as someone who suffered from depression and stress, and whose aggression is mitigated by financial crisis or jealousy, stating that he killed the woman because his wife is his property (Lorente, 2001). Otherwise, the process of objectification (Moscovici, 1984) produces the domestication of unfamiliar saturating beliefs, simplifying a complex reality in an abstract way, so that the dichotomous understanding of victim and perpetrator is reduced to the individual sphere, whereas the collective and social responsibility are obscured. The fact that some realities are visible and others are invisible depends deeply on the ideological battle of representations. However, as Hall (1997) stresses, there are possibilities for resistance against the dominant regime of representations and one such possibility is embodied in the practice of decoding, in which individuals can agree with the dominant reading, or they can negotiate with it, or even oppose it, determining a re-presentation and re-thinking of the reality.

## Chapter five

### First case study: A qualitative research in Guanajuato

#### 5.1 Stories of life: *un-visibility* of violence against women

Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon in Mexican society. The issue became central in international and national political agendas after the Ciudad Juarez cases that awoke political responsibility towards the enormous femicide cases that have occurred in that region from 1993 until today (Washington Valdez, 2006). In fact, the condition of vulnerability suffered by Mexican women contributes to a major exposure of the violation of basic human rights, causing the loss of safety and enhancing precariousness among women's everyday life.

In particular, the region of Guanajuato situated in the northwest of Mexico represents an alarming panorama of recent violence against women related mostly to private sphere (CONAVIM, 2014). In this region around 5,486,372 souls live and it is a post-colonial site of historical relevance (INEGI-Gto, 2015). Moreover, it presents particular cultural, political and social characteristics due to the interrupted 25 years of governance led by the extremely rightwing PAN (Partido Acción Nacional). In fact, this aspect is perceptible through the institution of abortion as a penal crime and the limitation of women's rights regarding to inheritance, conjugal norms and the policy on divorce. In addition, religious dogma strongly influences political decisions and contributes to enhance a policy of prohibition and restriction toward the female gender. On the one side, Mexican women obey religious dogma in being a loyal, domestic and devoted wife; on the other side, political norms enhance such behavioral codes because of the interest in maintaining the absence of recognition of women's economic and political rights. In fact, if a woman lives alone without a partner and has to take care of her children, she does not receive social or economic support, becoming excluded from the right to live an honest, safe life. Instead of assisting these women, the political system contributes to their marginalization and discrimination, limiting access to medical, legal or educational assistance as well as to employment (Las Libres ONG, 2014).

The absence of recognition of female subjectivity is perceivable from the private to the public sphere, so women's subjectivity is imprisoned in the dichotomous mother/wife vs. prostitute/sinner (Lagarde, 1990), causing the establishment of the objectification of the female category and its naturalization. Central aspects regard the relevance of female identity and the identification of causes and consequences of domestic violence and IPV. The elements that

characterize sexual and female identity in a specific area are helpful to perceive what kind of female subject arises in the victims and what kind is reproduced within the system of power.

Recently in Guanajuato, the case of Lucero, a young girl who was beaten until asphyxiation by her friend Miguel Angel Jasso Manríquez, provokes alarming controversies in the public opinion. The perpetrator offered to give Lucero a ride and on the way he intended to commit sexual abuse, beating and harming her. At the time, while the young girl was able to escape, the violator crashed his vehicle against a tree and both were assisted in the same hospital. Finally, Jasso Manríquez denounced Lucero for provoking the accident and the girl denounced him for sexual abuse, attempted murder and physical assault. The process, led by the justice office of Guanajuato, did not recognize Jasso Manríquez as guilty of the crime of sexual abuse. Moreover, he was not processed according the UN dispositions adopted in the Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women (1993). Finally, the court declared Jasso Manriquez responsible for provoking the minor physical injuries and for erotic sexual abuse, sentencing him to take on the financial costs (newspaper, Unión Guanajuato, 2014).

The sentence provokes the indignation of the major association of women rights, the Instituto de las Mujeres Guanajuatense, and the civil association Las Libres, which support Lucero in her fight against the injustice. They support the young girl in the press and after nine months, the National Commission of Human Rights inspected the case. The commission conducted a proper investigation of the case in accordance of gender perspective and the norms declared in the Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women. Finally, the commission declared the crime against Lucero as violence against women and accused the justice office of Guanajuato of having committed errors, excluding gender perspective and avoiding the application of the norms in force regarding the policy of violence against women. As a consequence, the case presented in the press creates two factions in favor or against Lucero's case but the perpetrator has still not received the proper sentence.

In this work such a case is very emblematic because it summarizes the importance of the problem of violence against women in Guanajuato. Firstly, for the first time a woman has had the courage to denounce in public her sexual assault, contributing to the visibility of the social problem in Guanajatense society. These stories remain mostly hidden and unspoken of because of the fear of being judged as guilty and responsible for the aggression and even of being stigmatized in public and private spheres. In fact, women's fears are comprehensible, because the justice system enhances the discrimination of women, avoiding adopting the norms in force regarding VAW. Such factors contribute to the double victimization of the victims and to the

manifestation of institutional violence.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, the act of denouncing a crime of VAW jeopardizes psychological, physical and economical the well-being of women who often do not have enough economic, social, familiar and political support to deal with the consequences of a public denunciation. Finally, the state of corruption, as well as social and religious norms, enhance the invisibility of the violence against women, provoking weakness among the victims.

Considering the complexity of the phenomena, in the empirical study an interdisciplinary and qualitative approach has been applied that takes into account relevant argumentation from feminist critical thinking and cultural studies theories pertinent to the understanding of systems of power, the use of stereotypes and prejudice in hegemonic domination, the subjection theory as well as the construction of male/female category as a cultural and historical product<sup>67</sup>. On the other side, it has given relevance to theory and praxis from anthropological and social psychological sciences, which contribute to realizing an accurate investigation of the phenomenon, emphasizing the signification of the individual and subjective dimension of each participant.

## 5.2 THE RESEARCH

### 5.2.1 Objectives and hypotheses

This research was been conducted with the aim of creating a space of visibility for all of these voices who cannot speak because of the fear of being considered guilty, insane or provocative women who have deserved it<sup>68</sup>. In particular, cases of intimate partner violence in Guanajuato society have been considered because they constitute the most common widespread phenomena that causes even femicide, recognized as “passion crimes”. In fact, a central aspect of the study regards the ability to give voice to the subject, i.e. to create a space of self-disclosure for the female victims of violence, giving them the chance to tell their stories from

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<sup>66</sup> When accused by the National Commission of Human Rights, the justice office of Guanajuato declared that Lucero’s life has not been damaged and is not in danger, so the case could not be considered as violence against women or as an act of discrimination. Such a declaration shows how recognition of female subjectivity is excluded in some dimensions, so that women’s exposure to vulnerability enhances discrimination and harassment. According to Judith Butler, vulnerability as a construction of a system of power allows the building of an empire in which some lives are recognized as *grievable* and other lives are excluded (Butler, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Qualitative research does not use statistics: mostly it is a form of research that uses empirical evidence, such as a body of in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews, life stories, non-directive interviews). Fewer statistics does not mean easier research, but rather it requires *more* experience and intuition, in both the phases of the empirical exploration and in the formulation and monitoring of the hypotheses (Ricolfi, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> In the public opinion the idea still persists that women are themselves responsible for being violated because they wear provocative dresses or are in isolated “dangerous places”, as stated by ex-President Vicente Fox when talking about Ciudad Juarez’ femicide cases. He said women are in part responsible because they expose themselves to violence (Washington Valdez, 2001).



their individual point of view (Sandoval, 2013). Women who suffer violence by intimate partners in Guanajuato live a life of loneliness because the political system does not guarantee the respect of basic human rights, neglecting social, medical, psychological and legal support for the victims. In addition, there is a low number of official denunciations of this crime due to prohibition by the family or a lack of faith in police officers or the legal support (ENDIREH, 2011b).

Research into IPV has shown that in Guanajuato's state 37.5% of women suffer violence in intimate relationships (ibid.). Following these findings, the differences in the level of education or socio-economical status do not represent risk factors. In addition, the psychological violence is more widespread (according to ENDIREH 88.8% of women suffer psychological violence) than other forms of violence, affecting mainly women aged between 15 and 29 (ibid.). Generally, researchers indicate that women do not denounce violence because they feel shamed and they fear the family, so the lack of family and social relations generates isolation (Agoff et al., 2007; ENDIREH, 2011b). Isolation and the impact of socio-cultural norms in individual and collective spheres are considered principal risk factors in intimate partner violence (Agoff & Herrera, 2015). This research aims to illustrate pertinent elements that disclose the self-perception of the participants as women/wife/mother, as well as their perception about sexual intimacy and female identity. In fact, numerous theories and studies suggest that the deconstruction of socio-cultural norms about the self contributes to the limitation of risk factors (Lagarde, 1990; De Oliviera, 2007; Merry, 2009). Furthermore, specific objectives refer to the following aspects: a) the role of family and collectivity in the perception of female roles; b) the impact of socio-cultural norms and the legislative system in normalizing gender-based violence; c) individual and social factors that allow to demolish a false image of the self, enhancing protection factors like empowerment, resilience, stronger self-image and self-esteem; d) the role of emotions such as suffering and guilty in the recovery process of the victim. Researchers have shown that the state of vulnerability could enhance resilient and empowerment ability, subverting the condition of the victim as an instrument of power (Butler, 1997; Richardson, 2002), identifying relevant preventive factors in social actions, then several studies have shown that social networks and pro-social behaviours stimulate empathy and solidarity, building effective protective factors.

Referring to the aforementioned objectives the following hypotheses have been formulated:

- 1) Family and state obstruct the recognition of the effective impact and consequences of gender-based violence on victims in private and public life. Consequently, primary and secondary

prevention measures could minimize the phenomena, if adequate and effective interventions such as information, education or legal punishment are applied in order to reduce short and long term consequences on victims <sup>69</sup>.

2) The naturalization of a negative image of women in the social imaginary seems to encourage the cyclical reproduction of intimate partner violence. Cultural and social norms codified the meaning of male/female roles both in the private and the public sphere mainly according to a hegemonic system, so a deconstruction of them could represent a preventive measure. In this regard, an intimate relationship symbolizes the space of controversy in which power is negotiated, and the relation between the dominant and the oppressed is established. As Lagarde (1990) states, an intimate relationship reflects the same hierarchy as a system of power in the binary configuration between dominant–dominated, and the determination of male/dominant role in opposition to women/dominated provokes the normalization of violence as well as its legitimacy. According to Falcón Torres (2001), there is even omission of sexual abuse when it occurs through the negation of emotional or sexual needs of women or through the creation of the sexual ritual according to male conditions and need. As a result, women’s subordination in sexual intimacy is considered a form of sexual abuse which reproduces political and religious understanding of being a wife and being a husband, normalizing female passive and subordinate roles in society. Often the perception of the aforementioned female role in the intimate relation is the primary consequence of the violence because society discriminates against single women, single mothers or divorced women. A different understanding of some concepts such as “love”, “loneliness”, “marriage”, “male/female role in the relationship”, “being a woman/mother/wife” or “being single” could encourage individuals and the community to say no to violence. The deconstruction of the negative female stereotypes should occur in the individual and social the dimension. In the individual dimension emotions such as suffering, guilt and the acquiring of knowledge seem to contribute to developing empowerment and resilience. Whereas in the collective dimension educational interventions addressed to children and the youth could reduce the impact of violence on social life, preventing discrimination of women and deconstructing the normalized role of the female in the family and in social system.

3) Authorities and institutions generate phenomena of the double victimization of women, enhancing their discrimination and perception as inferior. In addition, the legislative system does not apply the norms according to gender perspective and international measures (Megallón, 2010). In fact, if the governmental system would guarantee the respect of women’s

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<sup>69</sup> See chapter one, paragraph 1.4

rights, adopting effective preventive measures such as punishing the aggressor, protecting the victims or promoting campaigns against violence, it could contribute to the eradication of discriminatory attitudes toward women, avoiding the double victimization and empowering women's image.

4) Social actions addressed to stimulating comparison and reflections about violence could promote essential cultural change to defeat it. The development of awareness and sensitivity among the community and the society contribute to the deconstruction of wrong common beliefs about the social problem. The lack of adequate information about the social issues provokes people's indifferences. Thus, if the community becomes aware of victims' conditions and the recognition of violence against women, it can develop solidarity and sensitivity toward the phenomena, contributing to the empowerment of the female gender.

## **5.3 METHOD**

### **5.3.1 Participants characteristics**

The research was conducted with six women aged on average 45 years old and living mostly in the urban area of the city of Guanajuato. According to the method of qualitative research, a series of cases or individual cases that are statistically unrepresentative has been selected. Five women were contacted through the civil association Las Libres after the researcher had worked there for three months as volunteer. Meanwhile, one of the women became aware of the research through an acquaintance and contacted the researcher of her own accord. The other participants were not selected; instead the interviewer, with the mediation of the psychologist from the civil association, gave general information about the research to all women who at that time received psychological or legal support from the association. Later, they decided voluntarily to take part in the research, participating anonymously. For these reasons, in this report, in order to maintain anonymity, names have been changed and some data from the demographic and socio-economical characteristics are reported as averages.

Respondents were asked to declare socio-economic and demographic information in order to establish familiar and individual anamnesis (age, sex, ethnic/racial group, level of education, socioeconomic status, marital status, children, immigrant status, disability status, mental or physical conditions). In addition, they were asked to indicate the presence or absence of abuse in childhood or previous cases of abuse against women in the family. All participants involved live in Guanajuato city, five of them live in the urban area, whereas just one lives in the rural

area near the city. They affirmed they have a heterosexual orientation and that they have suffered IPV within the relationship. The violence occurred mostly within the marriage and the aggressor was identified as their ex-husband. Furthermore, among the respondents three women declared they were divorced and that they have children. Referring to socio-cultural aspects, nobody belongs to a specific ethnic and/or racial group, while all respondents declared they were Catholic but not particularly religious.

Concerning the familiar anamnesis, the six women confirmed the presence of previous cases of violence against women in the family. Meanwhile, regarding the level of education, all these women attended school and have got a professional certification. Three of them finished high school and trained vocationally. Two other women have a B.A. degree, while only one possesses a post-graduate qualification. In addition, referring to the socio-economical status at the time of the interview, five of the respondents were employed and one decided freely to stay at home. They declared they work in administration, social, health or educational sectors, and most of them affirmed they possess a low level of income and that they live in socio-economical precariousness. Finally, there are no respondents with a disability status. However, the six respondents stated they manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders provoked by the psychological and physical violence.

### **5.3.2 Procedures**

The writer's fieldwork was realized during three months between September and November 2014, thanks to an international exchange with the University of Guanajuato and the supervision of Dr. Rocío Rosas Vargas, a professor in sociology at the University of Guanajuato, Campus Celaya-Salvatierra who specializes in field researches on violence against women in rural areas. The field research was conducted in collaboration with the civil association Las Libres, a feminist organization that since 2000 has worked for the promotion and defense of women's rights. In accordance with the request of the director Verónica Cruz, before the realization of the interviews, the interviewer, who is writing, worked as a volunteer for the association, cooperating in the office for legal support and human rights, called *Clínica Jurídica de Derechos Humanos*, with the task of acquiring and offering theoretical and practical support about women's rights.

The cooperation aimed to achieve information about cases of violence in Guanajuato, contextualizing them with an individual, socio-economical, political and cultural specificity. In

addition, the social work allowed the researcher to gain confidence with the assisted women, increasing her knowledge about crucial theoretical and practical questions. Further activities consisted in working twice weekly with indigenous women from communities of Salvatierra and Tierrablanca. During the visit to the communities the team organized meetings to discuss women's rights, providing information about the different types of gender violence, about their rights regarding legal, medical, and psychological support related to cases of violence against women. Some activities included in cooking workshops or practical advice related to women's healthcare, childcare, education, and sexual prevention. After the volunteering period the interviews took place. There was no formal selection schedule for participants. In fact, they freely agreed, speaking to the psychologist, to participate in the research. In this research participants were contacted by telephone. They received a thorough explanation of the aims and the method of research. Later, the research took place on an individual basis, in different places such as houses, cafes or gardens, respecting participants' availability and preferences. The research took place mostly during the morning and lasted on average two to three hours, but the time depended mostly on women's commitments. Finally, names and some details of the protagonists have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity, whereas their opinions are entirely reported, respecting the importance of each story .

### **5.3.3 Instruments: Content Analysis**

For this study the qualitative methodology of the life story interview, proposed by Robert Atkinson (2002), has been used. According to the author, to tell the story of our lives constitutes an elementary need, the roots of our existence. Similarly, the way in which people over time pass on, preserve or depict a story, makes it possible to nurture and disseminate knowledge about the world and ourselves (Atkinson, 2002). In addition, in telling life stories the human body represents the only medium of communication, which,, on the one side, allows the reproduction of empathic relations, and on the other side, it constitutes the vehicle of knowledge that carries it out from an individual into a cultural and social dimension.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See in Atkinson, R. (2002). *L'intervista Narrativa. Raccontare la storia di sé nella ricerca formativa, organizzativa e sociale*; Robbins, R. H. (2009). *Antropologia Culturale. Un approccio per problemi*. Narrative interviews are important resources in qualitative research because they highlight the particularity and singularity of each case related to the direct fieldwork observations. This method allows the researcher to engage in a naturalistic inquiry, studying real-world settings combined with socio-historical context. In addition, in narrative interviews the speaker, telling the story in an introspective way, achieves a deep understanding of his/her self because it constitutes the most natural and ancient way in which a human being communicates and expresses itself. (Barthes, R., 1982; Gergen, M.M. & Gergen, K.J., 1984; Geertz, C., 1988; Bell, S.E., 1988; Heilbrun, C.G., 1988; Ginsburg, F., 1989; Atkison, 2002).

Firstly, this method has been applied in anthropological or ethnographic research as qualitative research <sup>71</sup> (Boas, 1901; Malinowski, 1922; Radcliff-Brown, 1948; Geertz, 1973; Spradley, 1979), whereas in psychology it was introduced by Freud's psychoanalytical therapy and consolidated as a life story interview by different theorists (Murray, 1938; Allport, 1942; Erikson, 1975; Cohler, 1993; Gergen and Gergen 1993)<sup>72</sup>. In particular, this methodology allows the creation of a research on the dialogical level in which the respondent freely tells his/her story to the researcher, leading the process of the reconstruction of events, and simultaneously he/she emphasizes the individual agency and subjectivity in his/her social life (Bryman, 2001). Furthermore, in postmodernism some theories (Chamberlayne et al., 2000) repurpose the validity of such a method, questioning the importance of giving voice to the participant as well as to the role of witnesses<sup>73</sup>. Thanks to feminist research, the critical analysis of the discursive dimension achieves more importance, striving to center the social research on women's experiences (Heilbrun, C.G., 1988; Ginsburg, F., 1989). Knowing the history of these women in the form of a narrative, in particular, has the advantage of creating a dimension of meaning in which, on the one hand, the interviewee tells reconstructed facts in an introspective way, and, on the other hand, the interviewer identifies herself/himself as empathic to the protagonist, learning about a reality that is not only individual but collective and shared. This is possible because a life story interview discloses the discursive dimension of the knowledge and perception about himself/herself and the world, because it entails symbols and archetypes relevant for the interpretation of the world's meaning.

Moreover, according to Atkinson, the telling of a story helps to reveal the symbolic dimension. Thus, as mythology testifies, stories entail the mystical part of human signification, reproducing symbols and archetypes charged with meaningful interpretation (Atkinson, 2002). Such elements, inherited from mythology and religion, represent our conscious and unconscious, constituting the cultural circle of knowledge connoted by historical, cultural, social, and political circumstances in a specific geographical area (Hall, 1997). Considering that the representation of things and meaning occurs in the discursive dimension too, it influences perception and signification from the individual to the collective sphere. Representation helps the process of the recognition of female subjectivity, making possible the interpretation of the

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<sup>71</sup> In general, ethnography was accused of being a method at the service of colonialism and imperialism (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994), but in order to avoid common generalizations, it is important to highlight the role of de-colonial theory in the argumentation of the researched social problem, so the study was conducted, taking into account each particular characteristic of the participants, avoiding the use of any manipulative intervention.

<sup>72</sup> See in Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*.

<sup>73</sup> Particularly, the figure of the "modest witness" proposed by Haraway (1997) links to the necessity and responsibility to connect the feminist paradigm to scientific research for a production of meaning far from the logic of the dominant system of power. Consequently, the interpretation of meaning takes into account female subjectivity, contributing to subvert the fixed hegemonic knowledge.

events and ourselves. Furthermore, the interpretation of meaning “to be women/wife/mother” depends on multiple factors articulated in the mechanism of power relations in which women are included or excluded (Hall, 1997).

However, it is important to highlight that there are some critics of the invalidity of this method in social science. Some scholars particularly criticize the efficacy of individual narratives and the biographical method for the analysis of social problems (Stanley and Morgan, 1998; Gardner, 2001)<sup>74</sup>. In fact, they argue that in the narrative interview some aspects of an individual’s life could be omitted because it does not offer a deep description of the whole life. As a result, the reduction of information could cause issues regarding the reliability of the facts. Moreover, another scholar criticized certain aspects regarding the possibility of the interviewee manipulating the story, changing the facts, omitting some events and overstating others, so that the subjective version of the facts would not correspond to the truth. Anyway, it is important to highlight that each methodology, based both on quantitative or qualitative approach, has its advantages and disadvantages in the analysis of social problems, and that the choice of the method depends mostly on different factors, i.e. purpose of the research, researcher’s background as well as the selection of particular theoretical frameworks applied in the practice. In particular, the purpose of the research makes the main difference, as Atkinson points out:

“The way an individual recounts a personal narrative at any point in his or her life represents the most internally consistent interpretation of the way that person currently understands the past, the experienced present, and the anticipated future” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 134).

According to the author, in this case the life story interview does not aim to offer either reliability or accuracy of the facts, or to research the truth as a universal value. Rather, the method focuses on the intent to give participants a voice, emphasizing the subjective and introspective way in which an individual tells her/his story<sup>75</sup>. Finally, in this case, what is also important is participants’ ability to enhance their self-perception by reconstructing events in order to highlight the subjective understanding of the past and the process of change related to the present and the future.

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<sup>74</sup> See in Atkinson, R. (2002). *L'intervista Narrativa. Raccontare la storia di sé nella ricerca formativa, organizzativa e sociale*;

<sup>75</sup> Narrative interviews entail effective advantages both on participants and for the community. Atkinson argues that, on the one hand, participants gain personal benefits in sharing their story because they enhance their self-esteem and self-image, helping them in the recovery process, or even to develop resilience capabilities and empowerment. As the author points out, even if at the beginning people can feel themselves uncomfortable in disclosing their intimate sphere, feeling shame, embarrassment or intimidation, finally they can achieve confidence in telling their own story without the fear of being judged. On the other hand, sharing knowledge about a social problem helps the community become more aware and sensitive to the issue on social level, contributing to the demolishing of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination toward the victims of violence against women.

For the study a semi-structured, free interview has been selected consisting of a set of 50 questions (Atkinson, 2002) divided into five sections<sup>76</sup>:

- *Socio-demographic section*: it collects data about the socio-demographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural status of participants (age, sex, ethnic/racial group, marital status, children, origin and residence, level of education, employment, income level). The aim of this section is to collect specific personal information relevant for the location of the subject who is speaking. Each case is to be interpreted in its particularity, avoiding the misunderstanding of the generalization of universalism.
- *Individual and familiar anamnesis section* (items 1-14): This section assembles information about personal history, the self-perception of childhood, relationships with family members (mother, father, sisters and/or brothers, family members), influence of cultural and traditional customs, self-perception as a child, beliefs, moral and ethical values, and first contact with school. It is important to reveal information about education received by parents, perception of traditional male/female roles, the role of religious and cultural norms. In addition, these questions aim to identify the socio-cultural context in which they have grown up as well as the circumstances in which the process of identity construction occurs.
- *Education and training section* (items 15-29): It collects information about adolescence's age, school education and training, relationships with peers and with the male sex. It consists in 13 questions about the meaning and interpretation of adolescence, relationships with school members (teachers, peers, and authority), activities in leisure time, ambitions, aspirations, passions, desires, first kiss, first infatuation and/or love with a boy, first boyfriend, and general attitudes toward the male sex. Further questions ask about relationships with school activities, professional ambitions and wishes, and job satisfaction regarding current employment. These items allow the reconstruction of significant personal and social events in the private and the public dimension that have influenced their perception of male/female categories, the value of emotions, the meaning of love in friendship and intimate relationships, as well as their self-perception as women in society.
- *Intimate partner violence section* (items 30-40): This section consists in 10 questions that investigate aspects concerning the intimate relationships with the ex-partner or ex-

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<sup>76</sup> For the full example of applied interview, see annex 1.



husband. The initial information regards the beginning and development of the relationship, its characteristic elements, so the self-perception as a woman/wife and the perception of the ex-partner or ex-husband (how and why it has changed, if it has). Further questions investigate the episode of aggression, describing the type of violence, the place in which the abuse occurred (circumstances, private–social life, particular episodes), eventual risk factors, as well as psychological, physical, and economical consequences. Finally, participants are invited to discuss their feelings during the time of the violence, the meaning of such occurrences and how violence affects them.

- *Protective factors and resiliency section* (items 41-50): The last section provides information about the request for support, psychological and physical status, protective factors, feelings of guilt, accessible elements that contribute the enhancement of lifestyles, self-perception and meaning of the wife/mother roles, the development of empowerment and resilient abilities.

| <b>Table 6. BENEFITS IN SHARING LIFE STORIES</b>  |
|---|
| 1. In sharing our stories, we gain a clearer perspective on personal experiences and feelings, which in turn brings greater meaning to our lives.   |
| 2. Through sharing our stories, we obtain greater self-knowledge, stronger self-image, and enhanced self-esteem.  |
| 3. In sharing our stories, we share cherished experiences and insights with others.   |
| 4. Sharing our stories can bring us joy, satisfaction, and inner peace.   |
| 5. Sharing our stories is a way of purging, or releasing, certain burdens and validating personal experience; this is in fact central to the recovery process.  |
| 6. Sharing our stories helps create community, and may show us that we have more in common with others than we thought.   |
| 7. By sharing our stories, we can help other people see their lives more clearly or differently, and perhaps inspire them to change negative things in their lives.   |
| 8. When we share our stories, others will get to know and understand us better, in ways that they hadn't before.  |
| 9. In sharing our stories, we might gain a better sense of how we want our stories to end, or how we can give ourselves the "good" endings we want. By understanding our past and present, we derive a clearer perspective on our goals for the future. |
| Atkinson, 2002, pp.   |
| 127-128   |

During the interviews, the researcher would introduce few questions in order to facilitate the dialog without controlling it. The priority was centered on interviewees' freedom in telling their stories in the order and on the terms that they preferred, respecting personal time, breaks and a short time for reflections. In qualitative research the observer is personally involved and shares the experiences of the observed; he/she tries to become part of the culture or subculture that is being studied. For this reason, in this contribution the location of the subject who is speaking

and their knowledge about the world, influenced by individual history, geographical position and the role of the dominant system of power have been taken into account (Mishler, 1991).

In addition, in this work the interviewer intends to place herself as a white, western, feminist, middle class young woman from south Italy who is aware of the Mexican historical, social, political and economical context, and of the power relation that can affect the relationship between interviewee and interviewer. The necessity to stabilize the position both of the interviewer and interviewee is related to the aim to minimize the production of a knowledge influenced by a Western interpretation or to establish an unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewees. During the telling of the stories any comments, advice, interpretation, physical or emotional support from the interviewer has been avoided out of respect for the respondents' intimacy, sensitivity, and suffering/sorrow. At the end of each interview section, according to the individual experience, participants were given the chance to conclude their story by giving some advice to other female victims of violence or to women in general. All interviews were conducted in Mexican Spanish, transcribed and analyzed according to the qualitative method (Atkinson, 2002) and were then translated into English by the interviewer herself. Moreover, Mexican Spanish allows the reproduction of the native expressions, avoiding the perception of unequal power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee. Subsequently, the interviewer transcribed the dialogs according the procedure of qualitative research. Finally, texts were sent to the participants who were invited to read the transcription and to modify, change or delete the contents. In this research the interviewer analyzed the final transcribed and corrected version of the story checked out by participants, in order to offer the most faithful version of their opinion and avoiding any manipulative intervention.

## **5.4 RESULTS**

The stories of the respondents present common aspects regarding socio-demographic data and the individual, familiar anamnesis. The women declared they had suffered psychological, physical and economical violence within an intimate relationship. Three women referred explicitly to the institutional violence and cases of psychological and physical violence in the public sphere. According to the stories, childhood represents an important period in the participants' lives. Three of the women have good memories about that time; they state that they received love, kindness and protection. Whereas the other participants affirmed that they

remember that period as an unhappy phase of their lives due to the dysfunctional characteristics of the family. Three interviewees declared that their father had a violent and aggressive attitude and that they were alcoholics. This factor affected the well-being of the family, often causing economic disadvantage and frequent fights between the parents. However, in their opinion alcohol addiction did not affect the filial relationship; in fact one woman declared the following: *“My father was a family man, but my mother has been always subdued and violated by him. When he came back drunk, he used to beat her up, but he was always so lovely with us, he showed us that he loved us.”*<sup>77</sup> In addition, three women considered their father figures as role models, admiring their good qualities such as honesty and loyalty. In addition, five respondents remembered their father as a figure that mediated with a social life outside the home. They stated that they used to go out or to travel only with their father, whereas the mother used to stay at home.

In fact, the role of the mother appears in five stories as austere, prohibitive and sexist. These women affirmed that they received a very strict education by their mother based on religious norms and sexist attitudes. None of the respondents had any confidential communication with their mother, as one respondent stated: *“My mother did not care about me, she did not speak with us and she has always been indifferent, and she did not agree that I studied, she always told me: ‘Slacker, clean!’”*<sup>78</sup> In addition, the mother is often depicted as a matriarchal figure who managed family relationships and matters with sexist, patriarchal attitudes. Furthermore, they received a catholic education which deeply influenced their recognition of female identity as “virgin/pure”, but all respondents stated that nowadays they are not religious. Referring to relationships with brothers and sisters, all interviewees affirmed that as girl they had an obligation to take care of their brothers. In particular, four respondents said that their older brothers had the right to beaten them up. Participants perceived the family as uncomfortable place: *“I lived in a violent family, there were a lot of fights, my father was very sexist and he used to drink too much and to cheat on my mother. My mother was very traditional, conservative.”*<sup>79</sup> One respondent declared that she suffered sexual abuse in the family, whereas the others often experienced episodes of verbal and physical violence from their mother and their brothers.

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<sup>77</sup> *Mi papá era muy de la familia, pero mi mamá estuvo siempre sometida y violada por mi papá. Cuando llegaba borracho, casi siempre le pegaba mucho, pero con nosotros siempre fue muy cariñoso y nos mostraba que nos quería.*

<sup>78</sup> *A mi mamá no le importaba de mí, y no platicaba con nosotros, siempre fue muy indiferente y no quería que yo estudiara, siempre me decía: ¡Floja, ponte a limpiar!*

<sup>79</sup> *Yo viví en una familia muy violenta con muchos pleitos. Mi papá era alcohólico y muy machista, enagañaba a mi mamá. Mi mamá era muy tradicionalista, con una educación muy antigua y cerrada.*

Referring to adolescence, respondents considered it a happier time of their lives. It was the period of emancipation and independence in which they used to spend the whole time with friends. The women declared that they began to feel attraction toward the male gender at the age of 17, and three of them married their first boyfriend. In the relationship they understood the female role as passive and docile, unlike the male role, which was perceived as aggressive, violent and jealous: *“At the high school I had a very long relationship with a boy, he was very violent, jealous. I could not go out alone, he distanced me from all my friends and he got very angry due to jealousy, he beat me up, he insulted me, but I thought that it was love, I could not break up with him, it was like an addiction to violence.”*<sup>80</sup> All women experienced violence in intimate relationships, starting during adolescence. Moreover, only two of them stated that they suffered physical and psychological harassment at school by teachers. The violence in intimate relationships manifested itself slowly. The women described their ex-partners as charming, amazing and respectful men. They fell in love with them because they possessed good qualities. After marriage, the husband became aggressive and violent, manifesting possessive and manipulative attitudes. They defined these men as psychopathic because of their ability to appear lovely in their social lives, and then to turn into aggressors in their private lives.

The six participants affirmed that they suffered psychological, physical and economical violence within the marriage. In fact, they were unable to stop the violence because they were frightened of him and of loneliness, as one woman stated: *“I was so scared of him, I couldn't break with him, I was so frightened of being alone”*.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the women did not ask for help from their families. On the one hand, because they did not perceive the family as a safe place, on the other hand, because they felt ashamed. In addition, these men were very powerful and appreciated both in the family and in society, a fact that undermines women's credibility, as one participant affirmed: *“When I met him, he was the charming prince, then after the marriage he turned into a psychopath. He got angry due to jealousy, he beat me up, he insulted me and when he was drunk, he was so aggressive with everyone...I couldn't sleep. He scared me so much that I didn't have the courage to talk about it, particularly because he is a powerful, skillful man, a very good worker, and he is very sociable and charming, he has got a lot of friends. Everyone thinks that he is the perfect man, everyone is afraid of him, nobody defended me, and I was ashamed of talking about it”*<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> *En la preparatoria tuve una relación muy larga, él era muy violento y celoso, no podía salir sola, me alejé de todos mis amigos y cuando se enojaba por celo me pegaba y me insultaba, y yo pensaba que era amor, no podía separarme de él, era como adicción a la violencia.*

<sup>81</sup> *Me daba mucho pavor, no podía dejarlo porque me daba miedo enfrentarme a la vida sola.*

<sup>82</sup> *Cuando lo conocí él me gustaba mucho, era muy cariñoso y simpático. Luego después de la boda, se volvió un hombre psicópático. Se enojaba por celo, me golpeaba y me insultaba. Cuando llegaba borracho era muy violento con todos... y yo no podía dormir. Yo le tenía mucho miedo, él es un tipo que tiene poder, es muy trabajador, muy lábil, muy sociable con*

Respondents concluded that the separation was pretty difficult, and it caused them psychological and economical stress. Three of the women stated that they ended the relationship because they were afraid for their children's well-being, and in order to protect them, they found the strength to distance themselves. All women distanced themselves from the violent episodes. Only two women received support from family members after the separation. Otherwise, the other women asked for support from civil associations working with women's rights. Nobody declared they denounced the violence to the authorities or to police officers. The separation did not stop the harassment by the men, and the women affirmed that threats and insults lasted several years. They feared, in particular, that they would lose their children because the powerful of these men allowed them to corrupt any institution.

Referring to legal system, one respondent stated the following: *“Generally, women can access psychological support but they cannot access legal support, or justice at all. The law does not help us.”*<sup>83</sup> Otherwise, psychological support was very effective for the process of recovering. All six participants took part in therapy and it helped them to become empowered and to develop resilient abilities. They stated that they used to feel guilty for the violence and that the psychological support helped them to remove the feelings of guilt, to appreciate loneliness and to be aware of the meaning of “being a woman and being a wife/mother”, as one woman said: *Therapy helped me to enhance my self-esteem, to provide information and to love myself. Before the therapy, loneliness scared me, I think because we believe that we are nothing without a man. I always felt guilty and therapy helped me to remove it. Now I am aware of my qualities, my rights. I interpret relationships and love in a different way.*<sup>84</sup> In particular, participants agree that psychological violence is underestimated in the society, but it constitutes a significant risk factor: *“I think that only knowledge and information can empower people, if you do not know violence, you cannot recognize it. My whole life people told me that I was crazy and fat, and I did not know that all these insults were violent, making me feel more vulnerable and weak. But it is so common in Mexican society and particularly in Guanajuato, if you are a woman, you are all the time controlled by society and family, people mark women with stereotypes and the men are so sexist, they believe that they can order women around and if you do not share these beliefs, you are crazy and it is only your fault!”*<sup>85</sup>

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*muchos amigos y muy seductor. Todo el mundo lo ve como el hombre perfecto y todo el mundo tenía miedo de él, nadie me defendía y a mí me daba vergüenza hablar de esto.*

<sup>83</sup> *En general, hay apoyo psicológico pero no hay apoyo legislativo, tampoco acceso a la justicia, las leyes no nos ayudan.*

<sup>84</sup> *La terapia me ayudó a levantar mi autoestima, a informarme y amarme. Antes de la terapia, la soledad me asustaba, pienso por qué nosotras creemos que no valemos nada sin un hombre. Siempre me sentí culpable y la terapia me ayudó a quitarla. Ahora estoy consciente de mis cualidades y mis derechos. Yo interpreto las relaciones y el amor en manera diferente.*

<sup>85</sup> *Yo creo que solo el conocimiento y las informaciones es el poder, si no conoces la violencia, no la puedes reconocer. En toda mi vida me decían estás gorda, estás loca... y no sabía que todos estos insultos eran violentos, haciéndome sentir vulnerable y débil. Pero esto es tan comun en la sociedad mexicana y en particular en la guanajuatense, si eres una mujer,*

In conclusion, all these stories differ due to the particularity of the individual and familiar backgrounds, as well as due to the forms in which the intimate partner violence occurred. They suffered violence in different ways, and each woman presents various level of physical and psychological consequences provoked by the aggressors. However, all these stories are characterized by common patterns. Firstly, regarding individual and familial anamnesis, the six respondents described their family as violent and unsafe places. The relationship with the father is better than that with the mother. The mother is depicted as a conservative, sexist and prohibitive figure within the family. The interviewees used to be beaten up by their brothers and they received a traditional and discriminatory education regarding the recognition of female roles in private and public life. Five respondents suffered intimate violence within a marriage, whereas the youngest suffered it in an intimate relationship. The aggressor is described as a powerful, charming, psychopathic man and all women felt scared by him. They stated that they could not end the relationship because they perceived their female identity as a wife and a mother. In addition, they could not afford a life of loneliness without a man. Finally, they agreed on the importance of psychological support, and the necessity to acquire knowledge in order to empower themselves. All these characteristics entail information about the role of cultural and social norms, the sexist perception of male/female categories and the lack of a reliable legal system. Moreover, other aspects reveal the protective factors employed by the participants. These principal patterns are presented through the stories of two participants in the next paragraphs.

#### ***5.4.1 Paloma's story during childhood and adolescence***

Paloma is a single mother of two children, she is 45 years old and was born and grew up in Guanajuato. In her life she has moved to different cities and she used to work, but nowadays she has decided to stay at home to take care of her family. Her childhood was pretty difficult and painful. She depicted her family as chaotic and dysfunctional; the father was absent and pretty aggressive and violent. Whereas the mother's personality was "castrated and prohibitive" and as Paloma explains, she remembers her as a strong and fighting woman who took care of the family in all aspects, from financial to educational, because of her husband's alcohol addiction. The mother took care of the children, and at the family experienced financial

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*todo el tiempo te controlan, la sociedad, la familia. La gente te marca con estereotipos y los hombres son muy machistas, están a la idea que pueden mandar a las mujeres y si tú estás fuera de esto es como si fuera culpa tuya, si estuvieras loca.*

difficulties. Moreover, she taught the children moral norms such as honesty, truthfulness, the value of family as well as the meaning of being a woman/wife/daughter/sister. As is common in Mexican society, the respondent went to school in which the female role consisted basically in taking care of the family and the house. In particular, as a sister she was responsible for the older brother, so she had to cook for him regularly, wash his clothes and tidy his room. Referring to her childhood she stated that:

*From the root my childhood became very gray, I did not want play with the other children, I was not like other children who spent time together, I became more and more withdrawn and sad. [...] I remember that the first thing that they taught me [she refers to the mother, the aunts and the grandmother] was that women must take care of men, they have to wash their socks, prepare food, do the bed and the oldest brother has the right to order me around, hitting and yelling me. But I stopped him when I was 14 years old, I distanced myself, I protected myself<sup>86</sup>.*

The relationship with her brothers was sterile, especially because often the older brother beat her up if she did not take care of him, whereas she had a good relationship with her twin and her other sister. Regarding the role of religion, Paloma stated that it was fundamental to her education, her family was very religious, they used to pray every day and to go to church. Religious dogma imposed by the family influenced deeply her self-perception as a woman and the recognition of female subjectivity, as she declared:

*Religion is fundamental in the upbringing of the whole family. In my family we used to recite the rosary every afternoon at 6p.m., we used to go to mass, we used to pray every day. In fact, I remember a thing that I could never forget. When I heard for the first time the word “virgin”, I asked my aunt, the younger sister of my mother, what the word meant and she answered that “women must be virgins”. So I asked her what it meant, and she told me: “Well, a woman is a virgin when nobody has touched her body, when nobody has seen it.” So I asked, later: “And what about those women who are not virgins?” She told me that nobody wants these women because they are dirty and tainted and they are worthless and these last words (“they are worthless”) marks all my life because I realize that this was the way in which the family saw you, so I said no thank you<sup>87</sup>.*

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<sup>86</sup> Desde la raíz mi infancia se volvió muy gris, yo no quería jugar con los otros niños y no era la típica niña que se juntaba con los demás, me volví retraída y triste. [...] Lo primero que nos enseñaron es que a los hombres tienes que limpiarles los calcetines, calentarle la comida, tenderle la cama, y el mayor es el que tiene el derecho a llamarte la atención, a golpearte, a insultarte, a los 14 años no se permití más, me largué y me defendí.

<sup>87</sup> La religión es básica en la formación de toda la familia, en familia se rezaba el rosario a las seis de la tarde, se iba a misa, se hacían oraciones todos los días, de hecho tengo una frase que hasta la fecha nunca se me olvida. Cuando empecé a escuchar la palabra ‘virgen’ le pregunté a mi tía, la hermana pequeña de mi madre, qué significa la palabra ‘virgen’ y ella me dijo que ‘las mujeres tienen que ser vírgenes’, y yo le pregunté: ¿y esto qué es? Y ella me dijo: ‘pues una mujer es virgen cuando su cuerpo nunca se lo han tocada, nunca lo ha visto un hombre. Y yo se le dije: ¿y que pasa con las que no son virgen?. Y ella contestó: pues nadie las quiere, son tan sustas, están manchadas, ya no valen nada. Esto ‘ya no valen nada’ marcò mi vida, el saber que ésta es la cara con la que te va a ver tu familia, me dije que no, gracias; mejor no!

Paloma's life changed really at the time when her family moved to the house of a mother's relative because their low income. She affirmed for her whole life she felt strange and perceived a big hole of sadness but she could not explain why. Later she depicted the fact in the following way:

*During my whole life I had some strange flashbacks and nightmares, I felt wrong but I could not explain why. Later when I became aware of the reason, nobody believed me, but all these memories became more clear and I thought ... "you are dirty, you are tainted, you are bad!" When I began to speak about it with the doctors it was funny for me because I thought that you cannot have memories from when you are three years old but the mind is incredible, it protects you from yourself and it encapsulated bad memories and then suddenly they appeared. When I was three years old I was sexually abused by my cousin, but when I became aware nobody believe me. I felt obliged to remain in silence because I was afraid and particularly because in revealing it I feared I would not be believed and would be threatened by my relatives. I could never say the truth to my father because he was very violent and aggressive and if I had told him, it would have been a tragedy. I spoke with my mother but she did not believe me and she did not take care of it. I wanted to forget it but it happened and this event affected my whole life, as a watershed. If I had not experienced it, maybe my life would have unfolded in another way but it happened and I needed more than ten months to understand it. My family educated me strictly, asking me: "Are you crying? Why are you crying? Only weak people cry and if you go to the psychologist that means that you are crazy. Ask for help as a last resort, otherwise keep living your life." During my whole life my family enclosed me and held me in a corner. For this reason, my house and my mother's relative represent the place where I was abused and violated for a long time, the place where I felt unprotected and vulnerable<sup>88</sup>.*

The respondent declared that the first episode of violence occurred within the family when she was three years old. The lack of trust toward parents and relatives forced her to not speak out about the abuse and this event definitely affected her well-being. During adolescence Paloma's life changed and got better. On the one hand, she began to distance herself from her family and to learn to deal with the blows and the harassment from her older brother, on the other hand, she developed a capacity for protecting herself thanks to the support of friends. In fact,

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<sup>88</sup> *Para toda mi vida tuve siempre recuerdo raros, pesadillas, me sentía rara y no sabía por qué. Luego cuando me di cuenta de esto, nadie me creía, pero todo era más claro y yo pensaba.... estás sucia, estas manchada, jeres mala!. Desde cuando empecé a hablar con los doctores pues, fue muy chistoso porque pensaba que una niña de tres años no podía tener memoria. Pero la mente es increíble, se protege y encapsula los malos recuerdos y de repente resurgen. Cuando tenía tres años estuve sexualmente abusada por mi primo, cuando me di cuenta, nadie me creyó. Y obligada a callarme por todo lo que implica el temor y las amenazas de mi familia. A mi papá nunca le pude decir esto, porque era algo típico, algo violento y agresivo, y si le hubiera dicho esto, habíamos tenido como una tragedia. Recurrí a mi mamá, pero no me creyó, no me hizo caso. Yo no quería recordarlo pero de repente resurgió y fue una situación que marcó mi vida como uno sparta agua. Si no hubiera vivido esto, quizá mi vida se había desenvuelto en otro sentido, pero pasó. He venido saliendo con diez meses para entender, porque a mí me educaron como... '¿lloras? ¿Para que lloras? Llorar es de los débiles y si vas a los psicólogos es porque estás loca'. Y 'ayuda, un favor solo lo pides cuando de verdad no lo pudiste, mientras tanto sigue con tu vida'. Como ves, a mi me cercaron y acorralaron, yo crecí así. Por esta razón la casa de la familia de mi mamá representa para mí el lugar adonde yo fui abusada y violada por muchos años y siempre adonde yo me sentía desprotegida y vulnerable.*



secondary school is considered the most beautiful time of her life, defined as “the era of innocence”. In this period she built very solid friendships and she learned to share moments with her classmates. They used to play basketball or spend time just talking, doing funny things and even shared all they had to buy something to eat or drink. Moreover, she affirmed that during her adolescence she was not interested in boys or in love, but it was a time of being carefree, when the most important was being together. Adolescence marked her life positively, particularly thanks to the role of friends and to the social interactions she experienced. However, the situation changed when Paloma finished school and had to move to elsewhere to gain a professional education. The interviewee affirmed that this had been a traumatic event because she separated herself from her twin and her friends. Otherwise, from this period she began slowly to distance herself from her family because they did not respect her privacy and they tried to control and manipulate her decisions and behavior. The time passed and the vocational school deeply marked Paloma’s feelings and beliefs about herself and the world. At that time she worked hard and simultaneously she studied at a vocational school. She personally considers this period as one of the most difficult times of her life. Firstly, that depended on the fact that she consciously faced for the first time physical and verbal violence:

*When I attended the vocational school, there was a teacher that used a strange method for one of the most important subjects, he gave us very few resources. I remember that I complained to him about it but he began to harass me. Afterwards I changed school and there I met another teacher who harassed me sexually. He told me to be kind toward him, and that if I did not sleep with him together and was not amenable with him, I would not obtain a good grade at the end of the semester. I left this school because he never let me pass the exam<sup>89</sup>.*

The violence occurred at the school and was committed by two teachers who asked her to be kind with them. At that time she tried to reject their intimidation and to manage the situation alone but had no success. She affirmed that it was very difficult to go through the harassment because at that time she felt threatened, helpless, and alone. Eventually, in order to avoid further difficulties she decided to change school. Later Paloma joined a religious group but even in this context, she declared that she received verbal sexual harassment. Finally, she distanced herself from the Church, learning that the will and the protection of God is in the self, because nobody can blindly have faith in the priests’ words. She stated that in her life she has learned that nothing is more important than to listen to oneself.

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<sup>89</sup> *Cuando me fui a la Preparatoria me tocó un maestro que le reclamé el metodo de enseñanza de una asignatura muy importante y nos dio un tomo muy corto y cuando le empecé a reclamar, él empenzó a molestar me. Despues me fui a otra escuela y tuve otro maestro que me molestó sexualmente, él me dijo de ser amable con él y que al final de semestre no iba a tener buena calificación si yo no me acostaba con él, si no era condescendiente con él. Yo salí de esta escuela porque él nunca me aprobó en la materia.*

#### 5.4.2 Paloma's story of intimate partner violence

After changing vocational school, she met the man who became her husband. The meeting occurred at the workplace, because he worked in the same place where Paloma did some work experience. In that moment, he was her superior and he was considered an important, prestigious man at the workplace. Moreover, she explained that she fell in love with him, in particular, because he made her feel like someone special, giving her attention and courting her. She described the circumstances:

*When I changed the school I met the father of my children. I saw him as a gentleman, he was so caring ... the typical charming man. I met him at the workplace, for me he was a good man because he treated me so good and he was very good at work too, he helped poor people and disabled people. So, he began courting me, inviting me to go to the cinema or just to go out together. At that time I was 17 years old, and what can be expected from a young girl who never received such attention in her life and who is taken to the cinema, receiving attention and love... and for me he was my prince charming. A lot of people thought that I fell in love with him because of money but they were wrong, I fell in love because he was a good, honest, lovely man, I trusted him. In fact, when I met him, he told me that he had a background in theology and he did not finished the seminary and decided against becoming a priest. At that time he was having a bad time because he broke up with his wife and he was getting divorced. But the process was very long and for this reason he had to wait one year before getting married again.. Later, he asked me to move with him to another place. He explained to me that he had received a good job and that I could work with him, but the most important point was that we could get married there because nobody knew us. So, I decided to escape with him, I didn't say anything to anybody, we just left Guanajuato and moved to another city, got married and started a new life. After two or three months living with him, the prince transformed into a toad. I knew his bad side. He was a different man from the one I first met.<sup>90</sup>*

Firstly, when the respondent met her charming prince, she fell in love with him because of all his positive qualities; he was a religious, lovely, honest, respectful and charming man, well

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<sup>90</sup> *Cuando me escribí en una nueva escuela, conocí el padre de mis hijos, yo lo ví como una persona caballerosa, atento...el típico encantador. Lo encontré en el lugar de trabajo, para mi era un buen hombre, me trataba bien, y era muy bueno en su trabajo, ayudaba a la gente pobre y a los desvalidos. De hecho él empezó a llamarme la atención, me invitaba a salir, a ir al cine. Yo tenía 17 años y qué te puedes esperar de una jovencita que nunca ha recibido nada y se la llevan al cine, la megatienden, la procuran, le hablan bonito... era como haber encontrado el príncipe azul. Mucha gente pensaba que me enamoré de él por el dinero, pero se equivocaban, yo me enamoré de él porque era un hombre bueno, honesto y caritativo, confiaba en él. Cuando lo encontré, me dijo que venía de una formación de seminario y le faltó solo un año para ordenarse como sacerdote y que estaba viviendo una mala etapa porque había acabado la relación con su mujer y que estaba terminando un proceso de divorcio. Pero este proceso era muy largo y por esto tenía que esperar un año antes de volverse a casar. Luego me dijo que nos fuéramos a otra ciudad. Me dijo que allá tenía un buen trabajo y que yo habría trabajado con él y que lo más importante era que allá nos podíamos casar pr que nadie nos conocía. Así yo me fui con él sin decir nada a nadie. Dejamos Guanajuato y nos mudamos a otro lugar, nos casamos y empezamos una nueva vida. Después de dos o tres meses viviendo con él, el príncipe se volvió sapo, conocí la cara mala. Era un hombre diferente del que conocí yo.*

appreciated by the community. All these good qualities persuaded her to get married and she did so without introducing him to her family or telling anyone about her intention. At that time Paloma was pretty happy, she affirmed that she had what she needed in the life—a good husband and a good job—so she felt satisfied. However, the respondent realized slowly who that man really was. She became aware of his aggressiveness after living together because just after the marriage he changed his attitude. On that occasion, she realized that this man cheated on her, because he was still married and progressively she began to lose confidence and to feel scared. She described the transformation of her ex-husband's personality and the beginning of the violence in the following way:

*In fact, I suffered all possible forms of violence because of him: sexual abuse, physical, psychological and economic violence. He beat me so hard, particularly if I disobeyed him. The rule was that I could not speak with men without his presence except at the workplace. I remember that at that time I was pretty happy and I felt satisfied, I loved my work and I was so fascinated with the campaign for the first vaccination. The first time that I was scared was at the workplace, when we were waiting for the materials of this vaccination campaign. The person who brought us the materials, when he left, he shook my hand to say goodbye. He flew into a rage and he began to shout at me. The second time, we were travelling by car and we gave a ride to some people, and on this occasion one man took a seat near me, and asked me what I did there...I had no time to answer because he immediately stopped the car, took me out and threatened me with a gun against my temple. He said: "Either you stay quiet or you die". I don't know how but I said that if he wanted, he could kill me immediately. But he did not. After this event, the situation got worse. I managed to remain in silence, to avoid any fights but it was impossible. He yelled at me: "You are crazy! You asshole! You are worthless without me! You idiot!" And so on... Once violence starts, it doesn't stop but it gets worse, it imprisons you. At that time there was shouting, insults, then they turned into yanks, slapping, hair pulling, beatings as though I were a man. Until he killed my son when I was a few weeks pregnant. He controlled me, he had me captive, taking away my salary, leaving me without a peso, and I had nothing for myself<sup>91</sup>.*

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<sup>91</sup> De hecho, con él yo sufrí todas las formas de violencia: violencia sexual, física, psicológica y económica. Solía hecharme golpazos sobre todo cuando no le hacía caso. La regla era que no podía hablar con los hombres sin su presencia, pero podía en el trabajo. En aquella época recuerdo que estaba tan feliz con mi trabajo, estaba satisfecha, me gustaba mucho lo que hacía y sobre todo estaba fascinada con la primera campaña de vacunación. La primera vez que le tuve miedo fue en el trabajo. Estábamos esperando los materiales de la campaña. La persona que llegó a entregarnos el material se despidió de mano de mí... y él se enojó muchísimo y empezó gritando. La segunda vez veníamos en un Geap y recogemos algunas personas, en ese momento un hombre se sienta a mi lado y platica conmigo preguntándome que hacía para acá.. yo le estaba contestando cuando él paró, me baja a mí y me encañó con una pistola y me dijo 'o te calmas o aquí te tiro'. Y yo en este momento, no sé cómo, le dije que si quería matarme que lo hiciera. Pero no lo hizo. A partir de aquí la situación se empeoró. Siempre intentaba la manera de callarme y hablarle con tranquilidad para evitar que se enojara pero fue imposible. Me gritaba: ¡estás loca! ¡Estás pendeja! ¡No vales nada sin mí! Y por allí a adelante fueron gritos, insultos, que se volvieron en jalones, y en cachetadas, jalones de pelo, golpizas como si fuera un hombre. Hasta el día en que mató a mi bebe y estaba embarazada de algunas semanas. Me controlaba, me tenía retraída, le entregaba todo mi dinero y me dejaba sin un peso y yo no tenía nada para mí.

Paloma suffered multiple episodes of violence during her marriage. He blamed her constantly, he hit her and abused her sexually every time that he decided to have sexual intercourse. The signs of violence affected her psychological and physical well-being. She began to lose weight and to get more closed off and quiet, feeling sad and depressive. Paloma stated that he used to hit her so hard that she often blacked out. Moreover, the signs of violence were evident; she had physical injuries such as hematomas and cuts. The worst consequence of the cyclical beatings was the loss of the baby when she was six weeks pregnant. She stated that when it happened, she promised herself not to allow it anymore. Even if she did not break up with him, she managed his attitude by being compliant and quiet, and they had two children. Paloma explained that she was pregnant with the second child after losing the first one, but he did not know because they usually did not communicate with each other and he usually did not worry about her.

During that time she did not ask for help. The interviewee affirmed that family members were aware of her discomfort within the marriage. Moreover, she stated that one time her mother tried to speak with him but nothing changed. Then, she added that her brother-in-law lived for a while in their house and became aware of the physical and psychological violence, but he never had the courage to stop him or to protect her.

Finally, she found the strength and courage to leave him, because she worried about her children and could no longer tolerate the violence at home. She was particularly scared that the babies could be hurt by him or even that she could die. At that time she had a three-year-old child and a baby of three months, and the most important thing was to protect them. Paloma said that one time they fought so hard and the babies were crying and screaming so loud that she lost control and began to pack all the most important things with the intention to leave. When the man understood her intention, he confronted her, offering to give her a ride because he was pretty sure that she could not survive without him. He thought that in 10 or 15 days she would come back asking for forgiveness. During the journey back to Guanajuato they fought heavily too and he left her with the children, alone, by the road. The interviewee managed to get to Guanajuato alone with the two babies thanks to the help of some strangers that offered her a ride. She said that her new life began without anything, only the wish to escape from those tortures. In this city she lived together with her mother, began to work hard and to take care of her children. Firstly, Paloma declared that the beginning was difficult because she felt marginalized. Being a single mother in a society like Guanajuato is not common and this condition affected her integration into the social life. The respondent affirmed that the greatest difficulties were finding a job and being part of the community. Despite these obstacles she

managed to get a good job and provide a better life for her children. However, she did not achieve the serenity and the peace that she wished. After moving, the ex-husband threatened to kill her and her family and to kidnap the children. At that time Paloma lived under threats and fears, she started becoming obsessive because she was scared that the man could take away the children at any time.

The situation changed thanks to the support of some colleagues at work. After breaking up with him, the respondent affirmed that she began to tell her story of violence to some colleagues and friends. She was particularly scared losing her children, and she began to ask for support at the workplace. In fact, she stated that there was a good relationship with her colleagues, and that she was appreciated and loved. She said that she was lucky because she had a good in her job, and had good qualifications, but also because they admired her for her personality. Moreover, the interviewee affirmed that she could overcome this situation mainly because she felt independent economically and because she was not alone. Finally, the ex-husband stopped threatening her because he feared the legal consequences in case that she denounced him. In fact, he had committed several crimes, and within Mexican state polygamy is a crime and violence against women as well. For this reason, a period of time in which the intimidation decreased followed and nowadays he no longer represents a danger.

However, violence caused her great consequences. She felt, especially, psychologically overwhelmed and a difficult period of feeling scared, sad, depressed, and anxious followed. Paloma explained that the pains and suffering were so great that she attempted suicide various times. After the last suicide attempt, she decided to ask for help and began psychological therapy. The interviewee declared that during the psychological counseling she talked about all the episodes of violence suffered in her life and even of the abuse when she was three years old. During the same period, her son began a process of divorce and Paloma asked for custody of her grandchild because both parents were unable to take care of the baby. Later, she received the result of the sentence in which she was declared unable to take care of the child because she was psychologically unstable and was dangerous to herself and to others. This judgment was promulgated according to the report written by the psychologist who monitored her. He wrote that the patient was affected by borderline personality disorders, defining her emotionally unstable and sexually promiscuous. Referring to this event, she explained the following:

*When I read the document I was astonished, I could not understand why and I asked the psychologist to give me some explanations. He got angry and told me that it happened because "I was scandalous and nosy". So I lost the control and I flew into a rage, they took me away and brought me to the psychiatrist. They forced me to go periodically to the psychiatrist and to take medicines. They told me that my diagnosis was confidential and that I had to*

*sign the document. I asked again to get a copy of the full document but they only gave me the summary and forced me to sign something that I did not understand. For the state I was insane, this document declared that according to the psychologist and the diagnosis of the psychiatrist, I was sexually promiscuous because I have 31 sexual partners. In the diagnosis my mental insanity was established as a borderline personality disorder but there were no words about either the sexual abuse or the psychological and physical violence. Not one word about the violation of my body. I felt humiliated, like going naked through the street. Everyone said that I was mad. At that moment I realized that I had been violated another time, but this time my aggressor was the institution<sup>92</sup>.*

In total Paloma underwent 36 clinical checks. She was diagnosed as insane and she had to take psychiatric drugs. The Institute for Health had declared her to be in a permanent state of insanity, refusing her the right to defend herself. In fact, Paloma felt confused and she began to investigate the meaning of this diagnosis. After much research she found out that the symptoms declared in her diagnosis did not fit with her case. Rather she affirmed that she presented symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders, provoked by all the violence she suffered throughout her life. The respondent suspected that her case was treated with incompetence and a discriminatory attitude against women. Paloma declared that she was pretty sure that the state violated her rights, so she decided to investigate her case, providing information from books about violence against women, as well as about the penal, civil and health codes, because she wanted become aware of her rights as a human being and as a woman. After collecting the information, she denounced the discrimination to the Committee of Human Rights and The Ministry of Health. During that time she met the director of the civil association Las Libres by chance and explained her case. Firstly, the association, which works in defense of women's rights, offered her psychological support through which she attended therapy on a weekly basis. The psychological support helped her to disclose all the pains provoked by violence and abuses, building up empowerment. According to the psychologist, she presented symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders due to the multiple episodes of violence suffered in her life. Simultaneously, she began a long process against the hospital, accusing them of having violated her rights. The processes are still in progress and she keeps fighting and asking for justice.

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<sup>92</sup> *Cuando leí la carta me quedé sorprendida, no podía entender el por que y me fui a hablar con el psicologo para que me comentaba. El se puso mal y me dijo que esto paso por que 'yo ando de scandalosi e de metiche'. Perdi el control y en plena crisi me llevo a la consulta con el psiquiatra. Me obligaron a visita psiquiatrica periodica, a tomar medicamentos. Me dijeron que tenia un pronostico reservado para la vida y que tenia que firmar la copia de mi diagnosi. Pregunte muchas vecez para la copia integral del papel pero solo me permitieron de leer el resume de mi expediente obligandome a firmar algo que no conocia. Por el estado estaba loca, en esto expediente esta escrito que segun el psicologo y el psiquiatra yo tuve 31 parejas sexuales y me ponen como promisua. Ellos declararon que yo tenia un trastorno de personalidad borderline pero ni una palabra sobre los abusos sexuales, la violencia fisica o la psicologica. Ni una palabra sobre la violencia hacia mi cuerpo. Me sentia humiliada como si iba desnuda por la calle. Todo dicen que soy loca. En este momento entendi que me habian violado un otra vez pero que esta vez el agresor era la institucion.*

### 5.4.3 Paloma's ability to overcome the trauma

Nowadays Paloma states that she has overcome the stress, and thanks to the support of Las Libres and the knowledge acquired through reading books about violence against women, books on psychology, as well as the penal, civil and health codes, she has learned to protect herself, re-signifying the meaning of life and the way in which she perceived herself as a woman/mother. In particular, Meggy, the psychologist at the association, helped her to develop empowerment and resilient abilities, as she declared:

*I am really grateful to Meggy [the psychologist at Las Libres] because she helped me to protect myself and to recognize the people and the things that affected me. I suffered violence throughout my whole life and it helped me to distance myself from the injuries and aggressiveness of my mother, from the control and the judgments of my sisters as well as from all the false beliefs imposed by others. But it is so strange that I received support, but in general the aggressor and the perpetrator did not receive any help and keep being the same... My family makes me believe that the woman is responsible for the man's behavior so I felt at fault my whole life, I thought that it was my fault for being beaten, abused or yelled at by the father of my children. But now I know that the blame kills because if you don't learn to mark the limits in a relationship, the person will overwhelm you. The only way to survive is to learn to say no, marking the limits and defending yourself. I think that without support one cannot survive violence, the worse condition is being alone. Meanwhile I think that if one does not deeply experience the dimension of suffering, they cannot understand how dramatic the situation you are going through is<sup>93</sup>.*

Furthermore, she added how it is important as a mother to pass her story onto her children. She tried to make it clear to them that every relationship needs communication, respect, love and confidence because without communication people do not understand each other, without trust one will only lie, and without respect and love there is no way to maintain the relationship. Unfortunately, their children also experienced violence within intimate relationships. As a mother she does all she can to help them, providing psychological support and trying to explain that the word *love* has nothing to do with jealousy, control, possession, and physical injuries.

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<sup>93</sup> *Agrezco mucho Meggy por que ella me ayudo a protejerme y a reconocer las personas y las cosas que me hacen daño. Tuve violencia para toda mi vida y lo que me ayudó fue largarme de las ofensas y agresividad de mi mama, y de los controles y juicios de mis hermana como de todo lo que me impusieron. Lo extraño es que me dieron ayuda pero a los agresores y los violadores no lo ayudan y siguen siendo lo mismo...Mi familia me vendió que la mujer es siempre responsable de los hechos de los hombres y yo siempre creí que estuve mi culpa, toda la vida yo era la culpable, yo tuve la culpa por los golpes, los abusos y los gritos del padre de mis hijos. Ahora se que la culpa te mata y si no marca los limites en una relacion te van a abusar. La unica manera de sobrevivir es aprender a decir no, a marcar los limites y a defenderte. Sin el ayuda no se puede sobrevivir a la violencia, lo peor es estar sola. Ademas si no se reconoce la dimension del sufrimiento no se puede entender que situacion dramatica estas viviendo.*

She tried to teach them moral beliefs such as dignity and freedom because as she stated, there is nothing more important in life as dignity and freedom, and human beings are forced to preserve these values. Referring to the condition of loneliness as a woman/mother, she affirmed that she loves being alone. Citing her words, she stated that “*she loves the loneliness because there is loneliness in being together and being alone. But everyone needs to reflect, to analyze themselves and criticize themselves*”.<sup>94</sup> Paloma’s attitude toward future seems to be very positive. She realized that life is a very precious present and so she has learned to be grateful for this present. Moreover, she is very hopeful that things can be better and that she will win her case against the state. Finally, the most important thing in her life are her children and her granddaughter, who positively changed her attitude toward life, giving her the strength to believe in love, dignity, freedom, and justice. In her own words:

*My children mock me, they told me: “Not in heaven or on earth do they want you.” Then, I tried to kill myself several times and it was always a failure. Now I know why... I have to stay here because I have not yet concluded what I started and when I have done it, I will go in peace. I see my future as a new opportunity, day after day, as Alejandro Corchs says in his book ‘13 Questions About Love’, ‘I am a seed traversing recognition and growth’.*<sup>95</sup>

Eventually, she found the strength to keep living thanks to the support received in her private and social life, as well as to the love toward her children and grand-daughter, which makes her feel able to overcome all the difficulties.

#### **5.4.4 Guadalupe’s story during childhood and adolescence**

Guadalupe is 50 years old, she was born and grew up in Mexico City but she has lived in Guanajuato since 1988. She is divorced and during her marriage she had three daughters. Referring to her childhood, Guadalupe stated that it was pretty happy and she felt very loved and protected. She had a particularly good relationship with her father, who she considered a respectful, good, honest man. The respondent said that her father was a relevant figure within the family, since he was very devoted to it and he educated his children in a very “strong and cautious way”. Guadalupe affirmed that the image of the father was crucial in her upbringing,

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<sup>94</sup> *Yo la adoro la soledad por que hay soledad acompañada y no. Pero la necesitas es obligatorio reflexionar, auto analizarte y auto criticarte.*

<sup>95</sup> *Mis hijos se hacen burlas de mi y me dicen... ‘ni en el cielo ni en la tierra te quieren’. Esto por que intente matarme varias veces y siempre no lo conseguí. Ahora se el por que... tengo que estar aqui por que aun no termine lo que empecé y cuando lo haré me iré en paz. Mi futuro lo veo como una nueva oportunidad cada dia y como dice Alejandro Corchs en su libro ‘trece preguntas sobre el amor’, yo ‘soy una semilla haciendo un recorrido de reconocimiento y crecimiento.’*



and as a hardworking, lovely and respectful man, he represented a role model for her. Whereas she considers her mother an imposing woman, with a very patriarchal and sexist attitude. In the family, there were five children, three boys and two girls, and Guadalupe explained that the brothers had the right to hit her or even to destroy her things without consequences, because the mother used to say that they were right in doing it. For this reason the relationship with her mother became more and more difficult, and she felt rejected and underestimated. Both sisters felt deep resentment toward their mother because she imposed her will upon them. She did not agree with them continuing their studies, but instead thought they should work and get married as soon as possible with a good, rich man. While the sister was willing to do this, Guadalupe opposed to her and kept studying. Regarding her mother's personality, she stated: "*My mother took control over me, she imposed upon me how I had to live, and she is the kind of woman who thinks 'if I find a good husband for her, I will be free, she will live in a good, comfortable state and I get a good dowry'*".<sup>96</sup> Moreover, she affirmed that she used to have a good relationship with her brothers but she particularly loved the oldest, because he was great, intelligent and she identified herself with him. Referring to religion, she said that her family was religious and used to go to mass as well as celebrate the main advents, but she did not remember particular events that marked her life both positively and negatively.

In general, she highlighted that she had beautiful memories of her childhood because her father always did everything he could to make them happy. Whereas her adolescence was marked by a terrible mental disorders, the cause of which remains unknown. Guadalupe said that when she was 13-14 years old she began to experience moments of unconsciousness, i.e. she suffered mental paralysis, which caused short moments of mental dissociation from herself. This scared her a lot and for this reason when she woke up from this short paralysis, she used to scream and cry. Moreover, during these absences the brothers and her mother used to hit her, trying to re-stabilize her. The parents decided to take her to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed that the girl had developed a bipolar hysterical personality, maybe due to the hormone change caused by menstruation. She remembered that episode in the following way:

*They branded me as bipolar, crazy and hysterical. I asked for help but nobody helped me, instead my mother and my brother used to hit me, and my father wanted to put me in a mental hospital because he was manipulated by my mother. All that reduced my security, my integrity as a person and my strength as a woman.*<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Mi mamá tomó rienda de mi vida, ella es una persona que piensa 'si la caso con un buen marido me voy a liberar, la entrego bien y gano dote.*

<sup>97</sup> *Me marcaron como bipolar, loca y histérica. Yo pedía ayuda pero nunca me ayudaron, mejor me golpeaban mi mamá y mi hermano y mi papá quería meterme al manicomio por que era muy influenciado por mi mamá. Esto meermó totalmente mi seguridad, mi integridad como persona y mi fortaleza como mujer.*

When she got to secondary school, she changed her life positively because she made important friendships. On a daily basis she would stay away from home, spending time at the school and with her friends, since she did not feel comfortable and appreciated at home. Instead, for her the house symbolized frustration, sadness, and pain. She felt unprotected and unloved because both her brothers and her mother used to beat her up and humiliate and intimidate her constantly. In her adolescence, she fell in love with a boy for the first time. Guadalupe described him as a gorgeous and clever boy who used to play sport and used to be a very good student. The memories of her first relationship are positive, but she stated that she always found it hard to manage relationships with the male sex, maybe because of all she suffered at home. After school, she lived in Europe for a period, and although she had the possibility of working there, distancing herself from the family, she moved back because she felt scared, alone and she did not believe in herself enough. Therefore, she decided to go back to Mexico, and in the meantime she broke up with her boyfriend. Just after she came back home she met the future father of her children. Actually, Guadalupe knew him very well because he is the best friend of her brother.

#### ***5.4.5 Guadalupe's story of intimate partner violence***

When she met the love of her life, she stated that she was sure of his personality and qualities, since they were friends for a long time. Moreover, he was lovely and appreciated by both her mother and sister because he was a very charming, clever and amazing man who had a very good job, a high level of income and he came from a very rich family. Guadalupe explains that she fell in love with him because of these positive qualities:

*When I broke up with the first boyfriend, he flirted with me immediately and I fell into his trap. He was older than me and he had a stable economic position, a stable job and he was a gorgeous, professional man. He is a charming man; well it is his plan to appear so, he seems to be polite, to be clever, cautious and he made a lot of money that gave him power over a lot of people and situations. Who could refuse all these good qualities in a future husband... Moreover he was a good friend and he had more experience than me. So I thought that he taught me a lot of things [...]<sup>98</sup>.*

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<sup>98</sup> Cuando terminé con el novio con el cual duré mucho tiempo, él me abordó inmediatamente y yo caí en sus garras. Él era un hombre mayor que yo, con una posición económica estable, trabajo seguro, buen profesionalista y guapo. Él es un hombre encantador, al menos es su apariencia muy estudiada, aparenta ser un hombre muy educado, muy inteligente, muy prudente y además ha hecho una cantidad de dinero impresionante, lo que le permite tener dominio de mucha gente y de muchas situaciones. Quien podría negarse a tan buena opción de un futuro esposo.. Además, era mi amigo y con mucha mayor experiencia de la vida que yo. Pensé que eso era una gran ventaja pues él me iba a enseñar muchas cosas. ¡Que error! Al ser tan ingenua y al confiar en él me recargué en él sin darme cuenta me cortó las alas y me robó mi energía. Durante 27 años interrumpidos jugó con mis emociones de manera artística.

Guadalupe got married believing that she had found the perfect man. However, she realized immediately that he had a double personality and he manipulated and to controlled her. It was clear for her since the honeymoon. She says that she had imagined that moment as fabulous but it was not, since he did not touch her, but instead she had to get closer to him for intimate relations. Moreover, he got angry because she was virgin. Finally, when they returned from the honeymoon she felt pressured by his mother because she questioned her about sexual intercourse and pregnancy. When they started their life together, they had no privacy or intimacy. Firstly, because the man imposed that they both lived in an apartment together with two friends. This attitude marked their life, because he used to impose the presence of other people at home. These episodes happened because there were people who needed accommodation for a short period or their privacy was threatened by the constant interferences and intrusiveness of the mother-in-law and sister-in-law with whom, she stated, she had a pathological relationship. She described the relationship in following way:

*At the time his tactics changed radically towards psychological and physical harassment, or he did what he wanted or he managed the situation dishonestly, and I am referring to flirtation, lies, long periods of absence, lack of interest in intimate relations, victimization in front of others, he always complained about me with my family and later with my daughters. He was only the image of an excellent husband in front of society and I was his parapet in front of society, as a beautiful, clever, kind woman. I lived with a psychopathic, pathological liar who controlled and imposed upon what he and his mother wanted.*<sup>99</sup>

The relationship with the husband was very problematic, connoted by the lack of communication between each other. Also, their intimacy was affected by his indifference and objectification. In addition, the amount of lies, psychological tricks, and psychological and physical victimization made her more vulnerable and weak. She stated that during the marriage he refused to touch her or to have sexual intercourse. In general, she had to get his attention because he avoided moments of privacy. In fact, she did not remember ever having travelled alone with him or even going out to the cinema or eating something in a restaurant. Moreover, the sexual intercourse was sterile and mechanical, he refused to use sexual protection and when she asked for it, he mocked her, interrupting the sexual intercourse as a punishment or sexually abusing her when he wished. The respondent affirmed that his abnormal ways of interacting

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<sup>99</sup> *Con el paso del tiempo su táctica cambió radicalmente hacia el acoso psicológico y físico, o se hacía lo que él quería o negociaba de manera sucia la situación, a esto me refiero con coqueteos, mentiras, ausencias prolongadas, falta de interés en la intimidad, victimización ante los demás, quejas de constantemente con mi familia y luego con mis hijas. Era solo una imagen de excelente esposo ante la sociedad y yo era su parapeto ante la sociedad, mujer bonita, inteligente, agradable. Yo vivía con un mentiroso patológico y psicópata que mantenía el control y la imposición sobre mí, para hacer conmigo a fin de cuentas lo que su madre y él querían.*

intimately made her believe that he had homosexual tendencies and that the marriage was only a way for him to protect his image in front of society and his family. For this reason, his attitudes toward her were manipulative and unreliable.

Guadalupe says that he changed his mind constantly, making her feel crazy. He promised her things and then he did what he wanted without taking into account her opinions. She felt constantly controlled. When she had the first child, the situation got worse because he imposed the presence of his mother and her mother at home. Everyone believed that she was unable to take care of the child because she was strange. After the first childbirth, she had two abortions and had a second child five years later. According to the doctors, she had serious problems with her uterus, so they recommended that she opt for a hysterectomy because another pregnancy could be very dangerous for her life. Finally, she decided to agree with them and authorized the operation after the birth. When she woke up after the anesthesia, the doctor told her that her husband had not allowed the hysterectomy. She stated that he decided to neglect her health and integrity because he wanted a boy and his plan was clearly to have another child. The relationship got increasingly worse and Guadalupe felt resentment, rage, and hate. However, she declared that she repressed all these emotions in return for the comfortable status in which she lived. He used to make her beautiful presents and act in front of friends and family as a sweet, caring husband. This attitude provoked, on the one hand, Guadalupe's tendency to conform to the situation, and on the other hand, the protection of his image in society. Then, when she complained with family or friends about his manipulative and perverse attitudes, they did not believe her. Most of them thought she was crazy and uncontrollably extravagant. Finally, her credibility was undermined in front of everyone, and she felt alone and unprotected. In addition, he circumscribed her social life, allowing her friendships only within his circle and discrediting all experiences that she made outside of his social sphere. Guadalupe always manifested the wish to have a job and gain economic independence. Initially, her wish was to do a post-graduate degree. The idea of conducting her own life made her happy. Her husband allowed it, after various discussions and much intimidation, and finally she began her post-graduate studies.

She explained at that time he made her life impossible. He would not to manifest his disagreement, but instead manipulated her psychologically. She said that she had employed a maid to help her in the house, but some things began to be stolen and her husband used to accuse the maid. For this reason, she changed maids several times, until one day she discovered that all the stolen objects were hidden in the garage. The manipulative attitude of this man aimed to discourage Guadalupe's plan of getting a degree and a job. Later, when she finished studying,

she received different job offers, but the husband abused her sexually several times in order to make her pregnant. The third pregnancy marked her life, since he abused her sexually with the aim of impeding her independence, jeopardizing her well-being. His attitude was to gain total control over her. She could not have a social life outside of his sphere, and could not make decisions independently. The third birth caused her serious health problems; she had two operations and stayed in intensive therapy for one month. Guadalupe stated that it was a terribly painful period and that she was able to see her daughter after one month of therapy. Later the girls grew up, moved abroad to study, and at the same time the economic violence began. Then, he progressively denied her access to money. On the one hand, he said that he had financial problems and she had to reduce her outcome, but on the other hand, he was able to afford the expensive education of their daughters abroad. Guadalupe explained that at that time the priority was her daughters, so she did not care too much about money, even if she suffered because she could not visit her daughters and could not attend their graduation. During this period, the relationship with the husband became more and more difficult and unlivable. In addition to the constant intimidation, humiliation and lies, he began to flirt with the secretary at his office. He did not return home to sleep, or he disappeared for a weekend, always lying and distancing himself further. Finally, she decided to separate from him and to move into another house with the youngest daughter. However, the separation was a nightmare:

*I separated from him and I had trouble, it was a heavy economic and emotional stress, and from one moment to other I lost all my friends and as well as the people I grew up with (she refers to the family). I could not have a dialogue with that man, there were only lies, double standards, strategies of manipulation. Nowadays that I can be more objective I think that this relationship was co-dependent because of the way he dominated and imposed his tantrums. Several times I thought I was going crazy but my strength helped me to keep fighting.<sup>100</sup>*

With the separation, began a very hard period for Guadalupe. The man distanced the two oldest daughters from their mother, depicting her as a monster. Moreover, he kept controlling her life, going to her house or taking the youngest daughter from school without warning. What followed was a period of control and manipulation, with the aim of isolating Guadalupe and persuading her to return. Slowly she began to build her own social life, getting a job and making friendships. She felt that life was going well and that she was powerful and independent enough.

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<sup>100</sup> *Lo abandoné y eso me costó la vida, fue un estrés económico, emocional impactante, pues de un momento a otro los que supuestamente eran mis amigos no existían, al igual las personas con las que crecí (se refiere a la familia). No podía haber diálogo con ese individuo, eran mentiras, doble moral, manejo de bajo perfil. En fin hoy lo puedo analizar de manera más objetiva, mi relación con este individuo también fue codependiente ya que es la forma como él domina e impone sus caprichos. En muchas ocasiones sentía que perdía la razón, pero mi fortaleza me decía que podía salir adelante.*

However, at the time that her condition got better, she had a terrible car accident. This car belonged to the husband's business and it had a problem with the brakes, so she asked him several times to get it repaired, until one day she lost the control and crashed against a tree. After the crash, she was operated on because she broke three vertebrae and was in recovery for six months. Guadalupe stated that she could not prove the brake's defect because the mechanic's workshop disappeared. To this day she believes that the ex-husband planned it all, with aim of killing her or making her more vulnerable. In fact, after the accident, he moved into the house with the excuse of taking care of the children and he stayed there several months because later she found out that she was suffering from cancer and began chemotherapy. In that period, she felt very depressed and thought often of suicide:

*He manipulated me, driving me crazy, and he let me be controlled by my daughters or my family, he accused me to my brothers of my difficult, intractable personality and bipolar character, and said he was the victim. He said and promised things and then he did other things, and he punished me, disappearing during vacations and leaving me alone without money. He stopped buying medication; he had no money for medical check-ups, food or clothes. After three years living like that he demanded a divorce, affirming that it was impossible to live with me and that he had done everything he could for us but we did not appreciate him, so he took everything away from me. My daughters distanced themselves from me and so did my family, and so once again I had to start again from zero.<sup>101</sup>*

The request for a divorce arrived suddenly and she lost everything in a very short period. On this occasion, she became aware that she was the holder of some stocks and that he had sold them before the request for a divorce. This man had forged her signature and let the whole world believe that she had done it and that she was aware of it. Guadalupe felt, once again, like a hysterical crazy woman, and she lied to her family and her daughters. Despite all economic, emotional and physical difficulties, she did not lose the hope. Fortunately, the youngest daughter stood by her side and together they started a new life.

#### **5.4.6 Guadalupe's ability to overcome the trauma**

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<sup>101</sup> *Logró hacerme desatinar muchas veces, de nuevo, coqueteos descarados pero sutiles, pues se cuidaba de que mis hijas o algun familiar me observara, acusarme con mis hermanos de lo difícil que se tornaba cuidarme por que yo ero una persona intractable con un character bipolar y el la podre victim. Decia y prometia cosas y hacia otras y me castigaba dejandome solas en vacaciones y sin dineros. No compraba medicamentos, ni habia dinero para los medicos, comidas o ropas. Despues de casi tres años viviendo asi el me levanta una demanda de divorcio, adjudicando que era imposible vivir con una persona tan complicada que él habia dado todo por nosotras pero que no supimos valorarlo y me quitò todo. Mis hijas se largaron de mi, mi familia tambien y yo tenia que empenzar todo desde 0 un otra vez.*

Nowadays Guadalupe lives alone with the youngest daughter and works hard to take care of her family. She stated that even if she has economic difficulties and she is alone because she distanced herself from her family, she is very happy because finally she lives without him. The respondent affirmed that being a mother was one of the most beautiful experiences in her life. She has educated them with love and passion, allowing them independence, giving them responsibilities and supporting them in their studying and travelling. Moreover, she stated that her education made it possible for her daughters to become the women they are now. She tried to teach her daughters moral values too, such as the meaning of being independent, well-educated women who should live with respect for themselves and others. Referring to the past, she stated that at one time she felt guilty for all that had happened, but nowadays she understands the facts and she mostly regrets that she did not react in time. The most terrible enemy for her was/is fear, such as the fear of being alone or the fear of losing her daughters. She affirmed that initially she was able to overcome the trauma thanks to books:

*I like reading and I began searching for books that could help me to find the self that I could not find, it helped me to analyze things. If I had been a standard woman, I would be a woman of society that lives in a comfort, but a woman without sex and happiness in her marriage. But I did not resign myself to that, it was not what I wanted. I wanted a partner, a friend, an accomplice, but I had none of these because that man lived in another dimension, he is a psychopath with an amazingly well hidden wickedness.*<sup>102</sup>

Guadalupe is aware of her guilt in this story. She stated that all these things happened mostly because she allowed the manipulation and she could not admit to herself the violence committed against her. Over time, she began to tell her stories to her new friends, who helped her find the right support. She took part in a women's support group, asking for psychological and legal support. At that time she learned about the existence of violence against women, and she felt free and not guilty anymore because she was not the only case. In this group, she found empathetic people who helped her without judging her. She stated one of the hardest problems to hearing the opinion of her friends, who believed that she was stupid for having tolerated such humiliation. All these situations caused her psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and paranoia. Later, she found support from a psychologist who asked for an expert's report on her personality. Guadalupe wanted to find out if she really was bipolar or if she had a hysterical pathology, as the doctors had said since her adolescence.

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<sup>102</sup> *Me gusta mucho leer y empecé a buscar libros que pudieran ayudarme a encontrar el YO que no encontraba, lo que me ha ayudado mucho es analizar las cosas. Si hubiera sido una mujer de la clásica, ahorita sería una mujer de sociedad que vive en mucho confort pero una mujer sin sexo, sin felicidad en mi matrimonio, pero yo no me conformé con esto, no era lo que yo quería, yo quería un compañero de vida, un amigo, un cómplice pero no había nada de esto por que este hombre está en otra dimensión, es uno psicopata con una maldad impresionantemente disimulada.*

The results of the analysis showed that she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorders provoked by the violence experienced in her life. Moreover, her difficulties to manage stressful situations depend mostly on her background and not on a mental illness. When she heard these words, she affirmed that for the first time she no longer felt that she was wrong and that she felt empowered. The cyclical emotional and physical instability affected her capacity to believe in a better future and to fight for it. Regarding loneliness, she affirmed that this is a state of double standards, because on the one hand, it could be a perfect partner in life, but on the other hand, it could kill you. Overall, it depends on the balance between excesses. Finally, she dreams about stabilizing her life, finding the love that she never met and improving her career. Guadalupe wants to improve her life conditions and to empower herself, but at the same time, she stated that she still perceives her destiny within two profiles. Even if she dreams about realizing herself despite the age and all the difficulties, she feels lonely, sick, and abandoned. A part of her did not fully believe because she felt guilty for having been suppressed and dominated by her ex-husband. Finally, she concluded that a woman's destiny depends merely on their own will. As she stated:

*Women should find the answer in themselves and not in others, because they have enough strength to achieving all that they wish... and I keep searching for this strength in myself, I don't know if I will die with this dream or if I will realize it, but I prefer to believe in myself and think that I will realize my dreams.<sup>103</sup>*

All in all, the interviewee hopes for a better future thanks to specific objectives that help her to keep believing in herself. The hope to gain the dreamed job, to reconcile with her daughters, to have a respectable social life and to fall in love with a man are all positive expectations that re-signified the meaning of life.

## **5.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The stories of the participants suggest that the patriarchal relationship in the family is considered one of the principal risk factors, causing the naturalization of a mechanism of power based on androcentric hegemony. Women have difficulties in perceiving the forms of violence related to family and intimate relationships due to their recognition of male/female roles in the private and the public sphere. According to Lagarde, "women violence occurs without the

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<sup>103</sup> *Las mujeres deberian buscar en ellas mismas y no en los demás, ellas tiene la fuerza suficiente para lograr todo lo que quieran...y yo sigo buscando esta fuerza en mi misma y no se si me voy a morir con el sueño o lo voy a llevar acabo, pero me inclino mas en creer a mi misma y pensar que lo voy a conseguir.*



mediation of any prior social relationship, except the generic belonging. Thus, violence against women represents a kind of patriarchal relationships established between individuals prior to relationships; the forms, that violence assumes, are related to the sphere in which violence occurs” (my translation, Lagarde, 1990, p. 258). In fact, in both stories, there are differences about the forms and places in which violence occurs, but in both cases the family represents the place in which violence is legitimated.

Generally, the interviewees did not trust in their parents. Paloma stated that the cousin had sexually abused her in her childhood and when she became aware of the abuse, she could not speak about it with her parents, because she was afraid of her father’s reaction. The father appears often as violent or even addicted to alcohol, however he is mostly considered lovely and caring with the children. Otherwise, the influence and the manipulation of the mother within the family represents one of the most common causes for the legitimacy of violence. In this regard, Paloma and Guadalupe declared that the mother was sexist, hostile, and austere. There was no communication between mother and daughter, nor any education about sexuality or self-respect. Meanwhile Paloma’s mother never believed her and acted with indifference and austerity, while Guadalupe’s mother was particularly strict and conservative. Furthermore, both participants affirmed that the mother educated them to become a wife and a passive, docile and compliant woman. Their role in the family was to take care of the brothers, who were allowed by the mother to mistreat the sisters. In fact, the violence suffered during childhood and adolescence caused a state of tolerance toward it, perceiving violence as a natural status.

Generally, in Mexican society men beat women up, because they can (Merry, 2009), and this normalization of violence occurs, firstly, in the family, mainly because of the mother’s education. Paloma stated that in her family a woman had to be virgin until marriage and that the lack of such status causes the loss of esteem, marking her as an impure, sinner and prostitutes. On the other hand, Guadalupe did not receive a strict religious education, but she always preserved such social values and got married as a virgin. Arguments such as sexuality and menstruation were taboo in the family; the girls received a prohibitive and punitive education, which caused the negation of sexual identity. The stories highlight how cultural and social norms promote a binary understanding of female/male roles, provoking the legitimacy of female passivity, inferiority and discrimination. In fact, in Mexican culture the categorization of gender plays a relevant role in the conscious and the unconscious dimension. According to Bourdieu (1994), the understanding of male/female category is still embodied in the binary conception of active–passive, dominate–subordinate cold–hot, open–closed, positive–negative. In this regard, primary and secondary prevention measures should focus on the deconstruction

of stereotypes, as well as the cultural and social norms that encourage violence against women. In particular, the family as an institution should be the place in which violence should be rejected. However, the family constitutes the first institution in which power relations are embodied, according to hierarchical and androcentric ideology, and it represents the place in which violence is re-produced (Bourdieu, 1998). Preventive measures consequently should encourage effective education on the gender roles in the family relationships, stimulating reflections and promoting awareness and sensitivity toward the impact of violence in the private sphere.

Regarding adolescence, it represents the time of socialization in which respondents experienced first happiness and serenity. The support received by friendships as well as the role of the first love constitute a way to escape familial coercion. In this period of life, gender roles are not strictly marked, in fact they affirmed that they never felt discomfort in socializing with the male gender, but rather there was a good bond between the friends characterized by love, trust, kindness, protection, and respect. This opinion is probably enforced by the symbolic role of the perception of gender. Paloma declared that she suffered violence during her time in a vocational school, and two respondents described their first boyfriend as aggressive, violent, and jealous, believing that this was the attitude of a boy in love. The legitimacy of male sexist and violent attitudes is pervasive both in private and public spheres, and reporting the aggression causes their marginalization in society.

The stories suggest that norms of female conduct legitimize the passivity and submission toward male dominance. When the interviewees described the manifestation of violence in intimate partner relations, they often referred to the aggressive, manipulative and possessive attitudes of the partner. They were beaten up because they did not accept their conditions and tried to escape the role of the passive and subordinate woman. Similarly, both aggressors are depicted as charming, respectful and good men. Firstly, all these good qualities made them the perfect man, the charming prince of their lives. After the marriage, both women became aware of their partners' personality. They had a split personality. On the one hand, they acted as lovely and serious men; on the other hand, in their private lives, they were manipulative, aggressive, violent, jealous, and possessive. These partners aimed to control the lives of these women, domesticating them, controlling their behavior, limiting their social lives, and depriving them of financial income. The submission occurs in the sexual sphere as well. In both relationships, there is a total absence of love, respect, and kindness. The marriage seems to be understood by men as a condition of supremacy in which the man considers the female as objects of pleasure and as slaves, who as wives had to take care of the partner, house and children. These declarations suggest that the social-cultural meaning of marriage and love is based on a

patriarchal and androcentric ideology. Marriage, as an institution, represents in the symbolic and social spheres a place in which power relations are consolidated through violence. Similarly, love is perceived as an emotion characterized by the aggressive and violent attitude of men. All respondents considered it normal that men beat up women because they received this representation of masculinity in their individual and social lives. In fact, even if within Mexican society there are enough social actions against IPV, they do not seem to be effective. In Guanajuato, it occurs because in social and cultural spheres a kind of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and implicit acceptance of violence against women persists, provoking social indifference and the minimization of its impact.

In the stories, interviewees asked for support mainly from civil association because the approach is more empathetic and they received psychological support. These declarations contrast with collected data from the Mexican national report on domestic violence that shows victims' tendency to ask for support first in the family and then from police officers or the authorities (ENDIREH, 2011b). In the most cases, the lack of public denunciation is provoked by the social and cultural sanctions, and is reinforced by the mistrust toward the legal system. Women are aware of the gap between the idea of the legal system and its application. The impossibility of accessing justice reproduces marginalization and double victimization. Furthermore, the legal system has a relevant impact in the symbolic dimension, because it makes visible the states of vulnerability of women and their recognition as human beings without wills (Torres Falcon, 2001). As a consequence, the visibility of injustice in the legislation intersects with socio-cultural factors in the socio-political and economical dimensions, provoking the legitimacy of symbolic violence and androcentric hegemony.

The consolidation of female inferiority and objectification occurs firstly in the spiritual and existential sphere, and therefore its normalization passes through discourses of sexuality, political and economic ideology as well as religious dogma, which promotes social relations based on the logic of the dominant–dominated (Foucault, 1975). In Guanajuato, institutions and authorities maintain a right-wing political outlook that does not promote equality between genders, likewise the legal system contributes to jeopardizing women's well-being through the lack of support regarding the custody of victims' children and the absence of equality healthcare. Participants stated that they were declared mentally insane with a diagnosis of a bipolar personality disorder, whereas symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders, caused by violence, were completely neglected.

In the interviews participants highlighted the role of emotions in the interpretation of events. What stands out, in particular, is that the dimension of pain and suffering constitutes the place

of resistance against the trauma. Interviewees declared that the suffering experienced enabled them to subvert their condition, from being victims to becoming empowered women. This process occurred after the deconstruction of some beliefs about loneliness, guilt, and being a woman/wife. They added that the knowledge and the psychological support helped them to empower themselves and to demolish prejudices about female identity. This ability to develop a strategy of resistance against stressful events and the capacity to cope with change is recognized as resilience.

The ability to be resilient is a protective factor that can be enhanced both in the individual and the social sphere. Success in building resilience depends on the individual dimension, on personal background, subjective perception, self-esteem, family support, environmental factors and addiction. According to interviewees, the psychological support enhances their ability to cope with the trauma through empowerment. In this case, the therapy based on gender perspective, in particular, helped them to acquire knowledge about the meaning of violence against women and to deconstruct the traditional female role. Moreover, respondents affirmed that the integration into the social sphere as independent and empowered woman allowed them to enhance their powers to cope with positive change. Further attention should focus on protective factors in the social dimension. According to the interviewees, social and political actions regarding violence against women do not allow for the building of solidarity and sensitivity within the community in the long term. In this regard, the stories make it clear how the dimension of guilt in the victim plays a relevant role in the acceptance of the violence. In IPV, the victim often accepts responsibility for the violation, projecting onto herself the aggressor's guilt. It seems relevant to investigate the power of guilt referring to IPV. In fact, its subversion on the social level could help to build empathy, enhancing pro-social behavior in the collective dimension. The latter concept alludes to the promotion of positive traits of marginalized people, helping, sharing and co-operating for the resolution of the social issue (Branscombe & Bertjan, 2004). The next chapter focuses, therefore, on the analysis of the impact of stereotype on the social representation of women who suffer violence.

## Chapter six

### Second case study: Qualitative research on social representation

#### 6.1 Effects and consequences of stereotypes on the social dimension

During the 1970s, feminist theorists investigated the phenomena of violence against women, focusing on the relation between the process of recognition of the female category and the role of stereotypes and prejudice. The need to highlight the meaning of gender categories originated from the binary conception of natural sexuality and cultural sexuality. These concepts promoted the opposite representation of sex and gender, including the first term in the biological sphere and the second in the culturally constructed sphere. As a consequence, the recognition of gender roles and the knowledge about sexuality is rather produced in the discursive dimension, which establishes power relations (Foucault, 1976c). Violence against women is caused mostly by these social and cultural norms derived from the binary gender category, promoted by patriarchal ideology. The establishment of power relations occurs, therefore, through the recognition of the other in which male hegemony prevails over females through the use of negative stereotypes in representations.

In the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, stereotypes and prejudice are recognized as cultural and social norms that cause violence against women.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, states are obligated to adopt norms in favour of an equal recognition of gender roles and to modify conducts and beliefs based on the idea of inferiority and superiority. Stereotypes, because of their inaccuracy, are used as political instruments to justify inequality, injustice and prejudice in society. On the one hand, individuals need to think in stereotypes because they incorporate physical appearance and personality, which people codify through individual experiences and social learning about out-group members.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, individuals operate cognitive responsiveness through knowledge, beliefs and expectations about the other, forming

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<sup>104</sup> Art. 5

<sup>105</sup> Following Social Psychology theory, the perception of ourselves is connected with other people through social practices, so that our actions, feelings and thoughts are the results of socialization with external interactions, e.g. family, friends, school and media. Moreover, the categorization process is a cognitive need in human beings; it allows people to simplify reality, producing information rapidly. Otherwise, individuals think in categories in order to maintain a positive evaluation of themselves, and their beliefs and feelings. Consequently, they create an *in-group* that includes all individuals who share the same beliefs, moral norms and feelings, whereas in contrast the *out-group* represents diversity, which generates a negative and discriminatory perception in order to allow the high positive self-esteem of the *in-group* (Tajfel, Turner, 1979). Citing Allport (1954, p.9). In the categorization process “*an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization*” arises, so people have to justify the existence of disadvantaged groups, associating them to negative beliefs. However, the problem arises when the differences between categories are incentivized by ideologies, for the establishment of power relations. See paragraph 3.5

stereotypes which have positive or negative effects (Hamilton, Troiler, 1986). However, cultural and social norms based on gender stereotypes cause a naturalization of gender differences.

The use of male/female stereotypes in political, economic, and legal systems provokes the legitimization and normalization of beliefs, conducts and norms based on the idea of male superiority vs. female inferiority. In Mexican society, stereotypes and prejudice against women have a pervasive role in the socio-cultural dimension. Society recognizes male identity under the characteristics of aggressiveness, independence, strength, dominance, and autocracy. Meanwhile, men are emotionally violent, tough, jealous, and possessive. Female identity is perceived, therefore, in opposition, as soft-hearted, submissive, dependent, and emotionally sensitive, anxious and sentimental (Lagarde, 2001; Tepichin et al. 2010; Agoff & Herrera, 2015). Several studies have shown how social perceptions of gender-based violence are based on stereotypes and prejudice about male/female conducts, in which male aggressiveness is often justified by alcohol or drug addiction, mental disorders (depression) or individual conditions (unemployment), whereas female conduct is considered as provocative and guilty (Adami, Basaglia & Tola, 2002; Petrillo & Di Matteo, 2007).

The categorization of genders has consequences in the organization and representation of private and social lives. According to Hall (1997), stereotypes are instruments of power because they produce meaning about the world within representation. In order to understand reality in the world, members of a group have to do so based on classification and categorization processes, which occur through cultural and social interactions, allowing individuals to differentiate themselves from others. Thus, individuals become cultural subjects, creating understanding of the world through shared conceptual maps. Such conceptual maps are expressed by language that refers to words, sounds, gestures, clothes, media communication and all those communicative practices that make meaningful cultural and social interactions. Overall, representations produce the meaning of the world within the “circuit of cultures” (Hall, 1997). In this process, stereotypes regulate “knowledge” because they exchange the meaning of identification in the psychic sphere as well as in the collective, symbolic sphere.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, Hall affirms that stereotypes work in the “regime of representation” for the construction of meaning in language, culture, social identity, and subjectivity. The capitalist system and patriarchal ideology emphasize differences through stereotypes, in science and popular representation, for the establishment of dominated imagery of otherness and the legitimization of discrimination. So, stereotyping as a representational practice acts in order to

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<sup>106</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 1.3.

*essentialize, naturalize and fixe “difference”* (Hall, 1997, p. 258) in the internal and external recognition of the maintenance of the “symbolic social order”.

#### **Box 6 - Social Representation of women who suffer violence: The case of Lucero**

On 12 September 2013 Maria Luz Salcedio Palacios, known as Lucero, suffered aggression and attempted sexual abuse and murder by her friend Miguel Ángel Jasso Manríquez, who attempted to force the girl to have sexual intercourse, hitting and asphyxiating her. The young girl reported the crime, however the Public Ministry did not arrest him or even sentence him with a restriction order. In the article *Young guanajuatense is brutally beaten; his assailant remains free despite being known to the authorities*, the local newspaper *SinEmbargo* (19/09/2013) reported the crime, highlighting with pictures the brutal signs of the violence and the shameful impunity of the State.



The young woman has physical signs of brutal violence, such as strangulation, bruises, and bumps. The aggressor had offered the girl a ride home, but in return he attempted to sexually abuse her. Lucero was brutally assaulted for refusing the sexual advances, and the young man did not accept the refusal and tried to strangle her. She declared: "His intention at that time was not to rape or touch me, he did not try to take my clothes off, his intention was to kill me. And I suddenly had the courage to defence me and beat him up too so I was able to shove my nails into his eyes". During the aggression, some settlers called the police, reporting it, and afterwards two police cars from the Directorate General of Public Safety and two ambulances arrived; a police officer led the ambulance to the crash and that was when she realized that her aggressor had crashed. Upon arriving at the Public Ministry they were checked into the General Hospital of Guanajuato. In the hospital she found herself on the couch beside her attacker, who was attended to for the blows he suffered in the accident. The State Attorney's Office has not even made the psychological report to continue the legal process. Now that she has presented her case to the Public Prosecutor, Raquel Blanca Tapia, the agent handling her case, who decided the psychological assessment would be made the following Wednesday. The complaint was for attempted murder, violence and abuse. Lucero denounced the aggression on the social network Facebook and the media and the community of Guanajuato supported her case, unlike, the institutions, which ignored the impact and consequences of such aggression. In fact, this crime the protocol of assistance to women victims of violence was not considered, and the judge has not issued any condemnation of the identified aggressor. "In Guanajuato there are so many cases, but there is fear about speaking out because they say: 'If I expose myself, what will happen with my family, or what about shame of going out? Better not!. There should be a law to give us the assurance that we will go to the Public Ministry and that people will be arrested immediately."

Judge Paulina Iraís Medina Manzano refused to sentence Miguel, arguing that the victim was not in danger based on the opinion presented by the doctor, who determined that Maria de la Luz did not suffer injuries that endangered her life. It is not the first time that the judge has given verdicts marked by impunity and sexism. She has been responsible for other cases that have favoured the aggressor, approving abuse and violence. The case of Lucero provoked critics in the national and international press, who accused the governor of Guanajuato and his government of being unable to guarantee and safeguard human rights in the community.

Newspaper *SinEmbargo*, 19.09.2013

In Mexico, several researches have shown how the social representation of gender-based violence is regulated by a regime of representation that emphasise female inferiority and male superiority (Lagarde, 1990; Torres Falcon, 2001; Agoff and Herrera, 2015). In Guanajuato, in particular, violence against women is represented as an invisible phenomenon due to the lack of denunciations (ENDIREH, 2011b). As demonstrated by the national findings, violence in the public sphere occurs in dark and isolated places, in which the aggressor is mostly recognized as a criminal or crazy, whereas the woman who suffers violence is represented as provocative, irresponsible (ibid.). In intimate partner relations, violence is recognized as a private problem that affects individuals due to their psychological condition. The aggressor is often depicted as a psychopath who commits the crime because of jealousy, separation, depression or alcoholism. Meanwhile, women are submissive and weak (ENDIREH, 2011). In Mexican society the common belief is that a male has the right to beat up his partner, whereas women believe that the men beat the up because of love, considering it as their destiny. They believe deserve it because it is their destiny (Agoff & Herrera, 2015).

The second phase of the qualitative research focuses on the analysis of the role of stereotypes in the representation of violence against women. Further attention regards the identification of the social representation of both aggressors and victims in cases of violence against women. Finally, the delineation of a discursive framework about the phenomena contributes to highlight which kind of knowledge, ideas and interactions fix the violent hierarchy (Derrida, 1972) in the social representation of violence against women.

## **6.2 THE RESEARCH**

### **6.2.1 Objectives and hypotheses**

The second phase of research aims to identify the level of stereotypes about women who suffer violence and the collective social representation of them at the imaginary level. Results should identify the type of collective knowledge and the structures of social representations in order to verify which kind of frameworks reproduce the social representation of violence against women. In particular, it seems important to reveal which framework of knowledge about the social problem is present in the community. Nowadays, society has changed its way of seeing the perception and representation of violence against women (Romero, 2000). International and national legislative measures on violence against women as well as social and political actions have allowed for the recognition of the impact and consequences of gender-



based violence, stimulating awareness and sensitivity within the society. However, representational practices occur according to a regime of representation in which power circulates among knowledge, ideas, and socio-cultural norms, reinforcing dominated–dominant relation (Hall, 1997). Moreover, the family, the school, institutional language and mass-media communication creates social learning, influencing the level of stereotypes toward the out-group and the knowledge about reality (Boca et al. 2003), so that visual and verbal representations have the power to minimize or enhance prejudice and discrimination.

Firstly, the principle goal of the research is to identify the general understanding of violence against women in the collective dimension. The questions regard people's ability to define violence against women, framing their perception of the phenomena. In addition, it is important to verify what kind of image professionals have of a hypothetical victim, aggressor, place and circumstance that characterize a crime of gender-based violence. Thus, it is important to highlight how verbal and visual stereotypes produced in public discourse are reflected in the collective imaginary at a symbolic level, considering that social and cultural norms eradicated in the symbolic dimension, allowing for the understanding of subjectivity and reality.

It seems that society contributes to the legitimacy of patriarchal ideology, and for this reason it is necessary to take in account the differences and similarities of the social representation of violence against women in the public dimension. Further objectives regard the manipulation of naturalized ideas, beliefs and social interactions in the process of representation, and in the end such processes enhance the normalization of female inferiority through benevolent sexism. Secondly, regarding the role of authority, it is important to identify if professional figures, such as police officers and teachers, have socio-cultural knowledge about violence against women. In fact, information allows them to act without sexist attitudes and beliefs regarding the social representation of women who suffer violence. Authority, in particular, has the task of guaranteeing justice and security. Otherwise, professional figures such as teacher should promote a culture of equality between genders. The identification of their knowledge about violence against women aims, therefore, to verify their ability to promote equal understanding of gender categories. Finally, public employees in educational and health should possess knowledge of women's rights as well, in order to guide users without sexist or racial discrimination. In this regard, the notion of the principle of responsibility constitutes a central element in social representation, because it refers to individual, collective and institutional responsibility to fulfill a role in the fight against gender-based violence (Petrillo, 2005; Nizzoli & Montali, 2008).

In addition, it is important to highlight both frameworks of knowledge about women's rights – access to justice – and the representational framework of women who suffer violence in the socio-cultural collective dimension. In fact, there are different patterns through which institutions and society look at the problem. At a social and institutional level, the relation between man and violence is deconstructed, there is more awareness of gender relations and violence is rejected as a instrument of social regulation (Rigliano, 1998). According to art. 4 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), authorities and police officers should receive both training on the legislative norms in force and an education in order to stimulate a sensitive approach. In Mexico, however, police officers and authorities are not properly educated on women's rights, and their attitudes sexist and corrupt. They obstruct access to justice, neglecting the application of gender perspective in legislative norms on violence against women, causing the visibility of double victimization, as well as committing institutional violence (Agoff & Herrera, 2015). Although police officers receive proper training on human rights and women's rights, they seem to have sexist attitudes towards women, committing sexual abuse as well as physical and psychological violence against women (*Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Guanajuato*, PGJEG, 2016). According to the Institute for Justice, in the last four years there have been 561 registered cases of sexual abuse in Guanajuato State (Zona Franca, 21 February 2016; Am, 23 February 2016). Most of the victims are young girls aged between 15 and 20, and some of the aggressors have been identified as polices officers. In fact, Guanajuato State has been declared as the Mexican state with the third highest number of sexual abuses, and in most cases the aggressors are polices officers (UnionGuanajuato, 25 July 2013; PGJEG, 2015).

According to Torres Falcon (2011), the public discourse in Mexico depicts violence against women as a problem outside governmental responsibility. Regarding femicide or violence in public places, aggressors are often identified as criminals or drug-traffickers. Whereas the women who suffer the violence are considered responsible for the abuse, because they were accomplices with organized criminal activity, or just because they provoked it by wearing sexy clothes, acting with ambiguous attitudes, or even because they were in unsafe, isolated places, attracting dangerous circumstances (Washington Valdez, 2006). Otherwise, intimate partner violence is often described as a "passion crime" or an "honor crime". Representations in mass-media communication contribute to the re-victimization of the women who suffer violence (Petrillo, Di Matteo, 2007) omitting the relevant role of cultural and social norms. In this regard, it is necessary to verify how stereotyped representations contribute to displacing social responsibility into the individual, private dimension. In accordance with the aforementioned

objectives and the presented theoretical frameworks, the following hypotheses have been formulated: a. Social representation of women who suffer violence is regulated by the regime of representation that establishes power relations based on racialized and sexist knowledge, ideas and beliefs; b. Collective imaginary, regarding the recognition of gender-based violence and the role of aggressor and victim, is affected by a naturalized binary perception of gender roles which causes benevolent sexism; c. The presence of benevolent sexism legitimizes violence in the symbolic dimension, reproducing stereotyped representation; d. The female sex seems to tolerate more sexist attitudes and misogyny than the male sex, provoking the legitimization of female inferiority; e. Professional figures such as doctors, police officers, judges, lawyers, teachers and professionals reproduce a culture of violence toward women, maintaining the power relations of patriarchal ideology and undermining access to justice.

## **6.3 Method**

### **6.3.1 Participants**

The research was conducted during two periods, firstly in 2014 (September–November) and then in March 2015. During the first phase 29 participants were interviewed, and in the second phase more police officers were involved. Three groups were selected: police officers, teachers and governmental employees. The selection of participants took place thanks to collaboration with the University of Guanajuato. All respondents were asked to declare socio-economic and demographic information in order to establish individual anamnesis (age, sex, level of education, profession, marital status, and residence).

The first group is composed of 102 police officers, among which 10 were involved in 2014 and they are municipal police officers, whereas the other 92 (46 municipal police officers and 46 state police officers) participated in 2015. A great number of participants belong to the male gender (73.5%), while there were a smaller number of female participants (26.5%). Male participants were aged on average 29, whereas female participants' average age was 28, as shown in the table below (table n. 1). Regarding marital status, a high number of participants were married (47.8%) or single (34.8%), whereas less people were divorced or widowed. In addition, most of the police officers had a high-school certificate, whereas few of them had obtained a bachelor's degree. All participants were originally from Guanajuato State and they lived in different cities, but at the time of the interviews they lived in Guanajuato city.

Respondents were asked to indicate the zone of residence, referring to the difference between urban and rural zones.

| <b>TABLE 7. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ABOUT 102 POLICE OFFICERS</b> |        |            |
|--|--------|------------|
| <b>Level of Education:</b>                                       | number | percentage |
| - Primary school certificate                                     | 1      | 0.98%      |
| - High-school certificate  | 87     | 85.29%     |
| - Bachelor's degree  | 14     | 13.72%     |
| Total  | 102    | 99.99      |
| <b>Marital Status:</b>   |        |            |
| - Married  | 44     | 47.8%      |
| - Civil Union  | 11     | 11.9%      |
| - Divorced   | 4      | 4.3%       |
| - Widowed  | 1      | 1.1%       |
| - Single   | 32     | 34.8%      |
| *10 participants did not answer                                  |        |            |
| Total  | 92     | 99.9       |
| <b>Place of Residence in Guanajuato State:</b>                   |        |            |
| - Urban zone   | 88     | 86.3%      |
| - Rural zone   | 14     | 13.7%      |
| Total  | 102    | 100        |
| <b>Age on average:</b>   |        |            |
| - Male participants  |        | 29         |
| - Female participants  |        | 28         |
| * 75 males participants and 27 female participants               |        |            |

In the second group teachers from secondary school Escuela sec. general No.2 Quanax-huato located in Guanajuato's capital city were invited to participate. Participants were contacted through the help of the school's director. In fact, only 14 people participated in the qualitative research. The majority of respondents belong to the female gender, and the rest of them are males. All participants are originally from Guanajuato and they live Guanajuato's capital city in an urban zone. Male teachers were aged on average 47 (between 40 and 54), whereas the female group is composed of 10 participants aged on average 39 (between 28 and 47). Regarding marital status, more than half were married, and in addition generally mostly of respondents had a bachelor degree.

| <b>TABLE 8. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ABOUT 14 TEACHERS</b> |        |            |
|--|--------|------------|
| <b>Level of Education:</b>                               | number | percentage |
| - High school certificate                                | 1      | 7.1%       |
| - Bachelor's degree                                      | 10     | 71.4%      |
| - Master's degree  | 2      | 14.3       |
| - PhD  | 7,1%   |            |
| Total  | 14     | 99.99      |
| <b>Marital Status:</b>                                   |        |            |
| - Married  | 8      | 57.1%      |
| - Single   | 6      | 42.9%      |
| Total  | 14     | 100        |
| <b>Place of Residence in Guanajuato State:</b>           |        |            |
| - Urban zone   | 14     | 100        |
| <b>Age on average:</b>                                   |        |            |
| - Male participants                                      |        | 47         |
| - Female participants                                    |        | 39         |
| * 4 male participants and 10 female participants         |        |            |

The third group is formed of four respondents who work in administration at the University of Guanajuato. The group is formed of one man and three women, all of them come from Guanajuato and they live in Guanajuato's capital city in an urban zone. The man is aged 32, he possesses a bachelor's degree and his marital status is single. Otherwise, the females are aged on average 38 (between 24 and 49). Only the oldest woman has a high school certificate, whereas the other two have a bachelor's degree. Two of the female participants are married, unlike the youngest one is single.

### 6.3.2 Procedure

The low number of participants involved in 2014 did not represent the whole population, and consequently in 2015 more police officers were involved. At the beginning, the aim of the research was to involve three professional categories and one from the authorities. The professional category should include doctors, teachers and public employees who work in educational, whereas only police officers form the authority category. Forty participants should have been selected for each group; half should have been female and the other half male. Consequently, the researcher aimed to involve 160 persons. At that time, only 29 respondents agreed to participate in the research. The greatest difficulty was engaging the group of doctors, who did not participate at all in the investigation. The researcher attempted several times to fix appointments, however participants did not turn up to the meetings. Moreover, in order to

maintain anonymity not all participants were asked to declare personal information such as names or surnames.

Before the application of the research a pilot examination was conducted in order to prove the efficacy of the investigation's structure. This examination was distributed to four people, two men and two women, who work in administration at the University of Guanajuato. The results have suggested the pertinent structure of the instrument of analysis. Then, the researcher started to contact participants divided into three groups. The first group is composed of police officers, the second group is made up of secondary school teachers, and the third group is formed of employees in administration at the University of Guanajuato.

Respondents of the first group were selected according to their experience at work with cases of violence against women. The researcher, who is writing, personally asked the respondents if they were interested in participating in the investigation. However, in 2014 the qualitative research was carried out personally by the researcher; rather it occurred through the mediation of police station's attorney. The attorney tried to involve as many police officers as possible. Participants had one month to take part in the qualitative research. As a result, only ten officers delivered the questionnaires. In this case, it was possible to involve an even number of participants in terms of female and male. The rest of the respondents did not get involved because according to the official declaration, they did not have time to complete the tasks. Finally, the attorney collecting the results contacted the researcher.

In the second phase, conducted in March 2015, thanks to the help of the technic-operative coordinator of the State Institute of Formation on Public Security (INFOSPE), 96 participants were involved, 46 municipal police officers and 46 state police officers. Respondents were selected according to their different training as state and municipal police officers. It is important to stress that at the time of the interviews they were undergoing a traineeship at the training institute. Municipal police officers already experience in their field, and they have to attend the institute in order to keep their professional skills up-to-date. Their training lasts eight months, divided into four terms. The curriculum entails a module on human rights in the second term (introduction to human rights), but at the time of the survey they had not studied this subject, and anyway their curriculum does not include much information about women's rights.<sup>107</sup> State police officers do not have previous experience in the field. Their training lasts

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<sup>107</sup> The subject on human rights consists of the introduction to the general national and international legal systems, and it is structured in four modules (1. introduction to human rights; 2. formal contents of human rights; 3. defence institutes of human rights; 4. police officers and human rights). In the second module there is a section called "human rights of vulnerable subjects" that includes the rights of women, children, seniors, ethnic groups, and others. It means that municipal police officers gain information about women's rights in a very generic and superficial way. Effectively, the activities consist in the introduction to the subject, the contextualization of the argument, the exposition of it in a conference, the definition of the theoretical

eight months and is divided in four terms. At the time of the survey, they had attended the first term and they did not have knowledge about human rights or women's rights. In fact, these subjects are taught during the second term. The curriculum includes a specific module on women's rights called Gender Perspective in Public Security. Thus, at the end of the training they have to acquire deep knowledge about the concept of gender perspective, the legislative protocol of police officers as well as skills in primary and secondary prevention.

Originally, the aim was to hold the interviews personally in order to avoid influence of external factors and to reproduce an informal dialogue between interviewee and interviewer. Due to participants' commitments and the difficulties in finding free time during the training, participants were divided into two groups and the interviews were held on two different days in a classroom at the institute. Thus, participants who were asked to take part in the research were assigned questionnaires by an executive police officer and the researcher. Before the research the author, who is writing, introduced herself and the aim of the qualitative research, inviting participants to ask any questions in case of doubts or misunderstandings. Respondents could answer the questions without a specific limit of time, but it lasted 30–50 minutes.

In the second group involved 40 participants: 20 males and 20 females. These teachers teach in a secondary school in Guanajuato's capital city. The director of the school selected participants for the research, giving them one month to fill out the questionnaire. After this period, the director contacted the researcher to collect the results. Unfortunately, several teachers did not agree to participate because of personal commitments. In addition, it was not possible to select an even number of participants of the opposite sex because in this school there are more female teachers than male. Later, during the short investigation conducted in March 2015 it was not possible to contact more teachers for the research to increase the number of participants due to the lack of time.

Participants from the third group work at the University of Guanajuato in academic orientation and counseling. The engagement in the research occurred through the mediation of the general secretary of the University, who informed employees about the aims of the qualitative research. In this case, 40 participants both male and female should have been selected, but only five people participated. Moreover, respondents had one month to fill out the questionnaires and when all the information was collected, the secretary in charge of assembling the results contacted the researcher. For the second research period the researcher decided against asking more university employees to participate because at that time it a protocol had

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frameworks, the development of debates in the classroom, reference investigations, reading books and articles, and finally they have to pass a written exam, work in teams and present an essay.

been for professors and students on gender perspective and women's rights (Universidad de Guanajuato, Committee for gender equality-Protocol for the prevention of Violence Against Women, 25 February 2016). Such a decision occurred after the recent denunciation of a student, who declared she had suffered sexual harassment by a professor of the University of Guanajuato, provoking a state of alarm within the university community (newspaper ZonaFranca, 28 January 2016). After this episode, students demanded the creation and application of a protocol for the prevention of violence against women with the aim of sensitise the community of this institution to equality between genders, in respect of women rights. These conditions invalidated the possibility of acquiring individual perceptions of the social problem without the influence of external factors (such as controls before delivering the questionnaires; fear of declaring subjective opinions after the condemnation of the student; deep influence of the recently applied protocol on gender equality).

### **6.3.3 Instruments: content analysis**

The instrument for collecting data is composed of a questionnaire based on the study conducted by Italian psychologists Giovanna Petrillo and Cinzia Di Matteo in the research *Finally, she deserved it: violence against women and social prejudice: stereotypes, prejudices and social representations* (my translation, 2007). The instrument belongs to a qualitative methodology that allows for the investigation of social issues with interdisciplinary patterns. According to the authors, social prejudice regarding the representation of violence against women provokes a tolerance of male violent behaviour and a victimization of female attitudes (ibid. 2007). Several studies have shown how the role of stereotypes and prejudice affects the social representation of women as an inferior category compared to to the male dominant position (Lorente, 2001; ENDIREH, 2006-2011; Torres Falcon, 2005; Tepichin et al., 2010).

In that study, the authors propose a qualitative method focused on the analysis of social representation of violence against women. Following their methodology, key concepts for the understanding of representation are stereotypes, prejudices, false beliefs in the "right way" and categorization processes. Stereotypes are instruments that human beings use to simplify their social perception. However, as a result they generate positive beliefs about the same category and negative beliefs about the external one (Arcuri & Castelli, 2000). Stereotypes are connected to prejudices, which are socio-cultural judgment based on a system of ideology. Both categories influence the symbolic collective sphere and knowledge about individuals and the world. For



this reason, they contribute to realize “a regime of representation” (Hall, 1997) based on false beliefs in the “right way” that re-produce a state of legitimacy toward violence against women.

In the Mexican context, the social representation of women who suffer violence is reduced to common idea that “she deserved it”. Otherwise, the social representation of aggressor who committed the violence is simplified to the idea “men can beat up women”, “if he beats up, he loves me” (Merry, 2009, p. 6). This idea includes several stereotypes about the female category, recognized as provocative, unmoral, dirty, and whore-like; unlike the male category, which is legitimized as macho, aggressive, and violent (Lagarde, 1990; Tepichin et al., 2010; Agoff and Herrera, 2015). Furthermore, the legitimacy of male aggression is often tolerated because this is the way in which men love women, i.e. love is recognized as true love only within specific male attitudes: jealousy, violence, and control (Lorente, 2001). This occurs because individuals simplify their understanding of the world through social representation that produces false beliefs in right way, through which everybody has what he/she deserves. As a consequence, nobody thinks about women’s rights or about the crime attempted by the aggressor, rather social categorization reproduces binary concepts of stereotypes (Petrillo and Di Matteo, 2007). However, it is important to highlight that this process is caused by a regime of power based on a patriarchal ideology and an androcentric vision, which established power relations between genders (Hall, 1997). Finally, the naturalization of gender categorization as male-dominant/female-dominated provokes the tendency to jeopardize the female category, undermining the recognition of her subjectivity.

Qualitative research based on this questionnaire (Petrillo and Di Matteo, 2007) allows for the investigation of the collective imaginary regarding violence against women in order to identify the most common social representation of the hypothetical author of the violence, the hypothetical profile of the victim and the hypothetical place and type of violence that occurs most in Guanajuato’s society. The questionnaire is composed of a series of open questions divided into three sections:

- First section: The interviewee is asked to express a spontaneous definition of violence against women in which he/she has to classify the types of violence in order of importance (example: the first type is more important than the fourth).
- Second section: The interviewee is asked to describe a hypothetical and common situation in which a woman can suffer violence in a public space. In particular, the interviewee provides information about the profile of the victim (age, physical aspect, clothes, social status), the type of violence committed, the place where the violence

occurred, what the victim was doing before the violence and finally, the emotions and opinions of the victim.

- Third section: The interviewee is asked to describe the hypothetical profile of the aggressor in the same case of the aforementioned violence. In particular, the interviewee gives information about the profile of the aggressor (age, physical aspect, clothes, social status), about the relationship between aggressor and victim, the victim's location before the violence, and the emotions, opinions and thoughts of the aggressor.

Interviewees are asked to express opinions regarding the image they have of a hypothetical victim of violence and a hypothetical author of violence (attached document 2).

At the beginning, the idea was to extend the questionnaire to five sections, offering interviewees the chance to describe cases of violence in both private and public spaces. Later, after the application of the pilot interviews it became evident that an extension was unnecessary because interviewees identify different types of violence, such as domestic or labor violence, predominantly in public spaces rather than in private or invisible spaces. Furthermore, in this way interviewees have a greater opportunity to describe the hypothetical case of violence without specific clues, so that they are able to offer a more individual and spontaneous declaration.

## **6.4 Results**

In this research results have been collected in accordance with the most common declarations depicted in the stories. The selection of data occurs based on differences and similarities between the opinions of the respondents. The social perception of violence against women is assembled into three groups. The first group includes the imaginary of police officers. 102 participants form this group. The majority of stories describe cases of intimate partner violence, such as physical and psychological violence.

A woman who suffers violence is depicted as powerless, she often has low self-esteem and she feels subdued. Otherwise, an aggressor appears as a normal man, in terms of appearance, who has high self-esteem and a negative image of the female sex. Secondary school teachers form the second group. Fourteen participants, mostly of female, constitute this group. In these stories most cases of intimate partner violence, such as physical and psychological, take place in private places (at home). The woman is usually married and described as docile, quite, and

introverted. Even in this case the woman considers violence as normal part of an intimate relationship. The aggressor appears as a good-looking man with sexist attitudes. Finally, in the third group is made up of public employees, constituted by five participants (three females and two males). In these stories intimate partner violence in the public sphere is described. The main forms of violence are physical and psychological. In this case, the woman appears as a young married woman who feels powerless, whereas the aggressor is depicted as a powerful man with sexist attitudes. Finally, in three stories respondents declared their own opinion about cases of violence against women. In particular, two female teachers and one male police officer highlighted the role of the education in the recognition of male and female roles:

*In reality there are women who suffer different forms of violence because social norms allow it as something natural and normal, there is a need in educating women as a complementary part of men and an important person in their lives. female teacher of secondary school).<sup>108</sup>*

*[...] Violence is a socio-cultural problem, sexist ideas, stereotyped attitudes, superiority complexes are accepted in society. For this reason violence affects all women regardless of age, physical aspect or social status [...] people need education, because if an attractive woman walks along the street, normally a man will say obscene words to her, offensive compliments, looking at her with a perverted gaze (male police officers).<sup>109</sup>*

The following sections will present the specific characteristics of the social representations of violence against women that arose in each group.

#### **6.4.1 The imaginary of police officers**

The analysis of the stories described by police officers allows the identification of the perception of the most common cases of violence within Mexican culture. Furthermore, the stories suggest different types of the most common profile of hypothetical victims and hypothetical aggressors. Results were collected according to the great number of correspondences present among the stories. Most respondents identified in order of importance cases of physical violence (42.1%) and intimate partner violence/domestic violence (24.5%),

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<sup>108</sup> *En la actualidad hay mujeres que sufren de diferentes tipos de violencia, ya que el medio social en el que se desarrollan lo permite como algo normal y natural, hay que educar a la mujer como complemento del hombre y parte importante de su vida.*

<sup>109</sup> *La violencia es un problema social y cultural, ideas machistas, conductas estereotipadas complejo de superioridad son aceptados en la sociedad. Por eso la violencia se comite hacia todas las mujeres, sin diferencias de edad, aspecto físico, y estado social [...] la gente necesita educación, por que si una mujer camina por la calle con vestimenta atractiva el hombre le dice palabras obscenas, agradecimientos ofensivo o incluso con mirada pervertida.*

considering domestic and physical violence as more important than other types. Otherwise, they indicated cases of harassment at the workplace as the lowest form of violence against women, followed by sexual abuse as the least frequent type of violence.

|                               | Number     | %          |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| - Sexual violence             | 8          | 7.8        |
| - Psychological violence      | 17         | 16.7       |
| - Physical violence           | 41         | 42.1       |
| - Domestic violence/IPV       | 23         | 24.5       |
| - Harassment at the workplace | 2          | 2          |
| - Femicide                    | 7          | 6.9        |
| <i>Total</i>                  | <i>102</i> | <i>100</i> |

As a hypothetical and typical story of violence respondents mostly described cases of IPV, such as physical and psychological violence that occurred in public places like parks, bus stops, restaurants, streets, and shopping malls (38.2%), and IPV as physical and psychological violence committed at home (28.4%). In these two types of stories the protagonists are in intimate relationships: married, engaged and cohabiting or engaged without cohabiting (70.5%). In addition, a few of the mentioned stories regard physical, psychological and economic violence as domestic violence that occurs between married couples (2.9%). On the other hand, sexual violence appears few times (10.8%) and harassment at workplace is mentioned only by three respondents. Moreover, the stories of physical aggressions in public space refer to assaults, robberies, and extortions (15.8%).

|   | Number     | Percentage |
|---|------------|------------|
| - Sexual abuse (public places)                        | 11         | 10.8%      |
| - Physical and psychological violence (at home)       | 29         | 28.4%      |
| - Physical and psychological violence (public places) | 39         | 38.2%      |
| - Physical, psychological and economic violence       | 4          | 3.9%       |
| - Violence at the workplace                           | 3          | 2.9%       |
| - Physical aggression (public places)                 | 16         | 15.8%      |
| <i>Total</i>  | <i>102</i> | <i>100</i> |

In the stories of sexual abuse, harassment at workplaces and physical assault in public spaces respondents identified the aggressor as a stranger or known person (boss at work). Most of the described women are aged between 20 and 30, they are middle class and their look is casual. At the time of the harassment they are in an isolated and obscured place, thus before the aggression, these women were walking at home after work (sexual abuse and physical aggression). The emotions of these women are very negative, they feel fear, intimidation and they think that it is their fault. The perpetrator of the sexual abuse is a man aged between 30

and 50, he is middle class and he manifests emotional and social disorders, like drug and alcohol addiction. After the abuse he feels satisfied, he believes that men can subdue women without consequences. Otherwise, the aggressor who commits physical assaults is aged between 20 and 40, he is poor, and addicted to drugs and alcohol. Generally, he batters women because he needs money and believes that they are weak and vulnerable. The profiles of the hypothetical perpetrator of harassment at the workplace is depicted as a man aged 40, middle-class, he is the boss and he feels superior, powerful, and takes pleasure in exercising control. Most of the stories refer to cases of intimate partner violence, such as physical and psychological violence, which occurred both at home and in public places. The stories allow for the identification of the three most common profiles of hypothetical victims and hypothetical aggressors.

Regarding the stories of physical and psychological violence in public places, it has been possible to trace two profiles. Mainly, the woman who suffers violence is described as a young woman aged between 15 and 35, they have low self-esteem, and they feel guilty, scared, intimidated, and powerless. The violence occurs mainly during the day, in visible spaces such as restaurants, shopping centers or on the street in front of strangers. Two participants concluded the story with a condemnation of violence that had actually happened. The stories suggest the identification of two typical profiles of women who suffer violence:

- 1) The first profile includes girls aged between 15 and 20 who suffer “physical and psychological/verbal violence”. This profile appears in nine stories within cases of intimate partner violence. The respondents described this hypothetical girl as a middle class student or employee, good looking, and with a comfortable social life. Her feelings are negative, so she feels threatened, intimidated, humiliated and she has low self-esteem. This woman is in love with her partner; she defends him and believes that he will change. The physical and psychological violence occurs in public places such as restaurants, parks, shopping centers or bus stops in the presence of strangers. Before the act of violence, on a daily basis the girl would leave the school, talk or eat with her boyfriend, or walk home after work.
- 2) The second profile regards women aged between 25 and 35 who suffer “physical and psychological violence” within the marriage. This story appears in ten stories. The respondents described a married working class woman with children, generally poor and with a sloppy physical appearance. She is assaulted with blows to the face (slaps or punches), brawls or violent pushes and verbal insults. The woman feels subdued, she

has low self-esteem and she thinks that she is not worth anything without her man. In addition, she believes that she is powerless because the husband is the father of her children and without him, she could not provide financially, so she should be thankful to the husband for being with her. This woman suffers from emotional disorders and has low self-esteem. Moreover, before the aggression the woman was mainly on the street, discussing general issues with her husband. The assault occurs in the presence of the children in three stories. Finally, respondents did not mention the possibility of reporting the crime or of someone intervening in defence of the woman.

The other profile refers to cases of intimate partner violence, such as physical and psychological violence that occurred at home. From the stories, one profile that was mentioned in the 29 stories arises. Three of these stories have been included in the cases of physical, psychological and economic violence because of the similarities of the described protagonists and the circumstances in which the violence occurred. The violence occurs at home in the presence of the children. Three participants concluded the story with five cases of condemnation of the violence, considering that two of these cases are real. The stories suggest the identification of one typical profile of a woman who suffers violence:

- 3) The profile of the typical woman who suffers domestic violence at home corresponds to a young middle class woman aged 20, who feels low self-esteem, sadness, rage, and powerlessness. On the one hand, she wishes to denounce the harassment, but on the other hand, she believes that he will change. Before the harassment, she was dealing with domestic tasks such as cooking, taking care of the children, or she was coming back home after shopping.

The profile of the aggressor corresponds to the aforementioned stories. This person is recognized as a husband/partner/boyfriend, he is considered a man aged between 16 and 35 with sexist behavior (macho). The aggressor has high self-esteem, he knows that he is violent but he does not care because he likes that she feels scared and intimidated. Generally, he thinks that he is powerful, he recognizes the female category as negative and inferior, whereas the male category is considered powerful and superior, so the aggressor thinks that the wife/partner/girlfriend has to obey him because women have an obligation toward men. According to the high number of correspondences in participants' descriptions, three aggressor profiles have been assembled. Each profile of the aggressor corresponds to the mentioned

profiles of the woman who suffers violence, so that whereas the first and second profiles of the author of violence belong to the cases of IPV in public spaces, the third profile belongs to cases of IPV cases in private spaces:

- 1) In the first profile respondents described a middle class boy aged between 16 and 20, good-looking, corpulent, humble, He is a good student and/or hard worker. This aggressor commits “physical and psychological violence” intimidating and humiliating his girlfriends. All the stories talked about intimate partner violence. The aggression occurs in the same circumstances described in the first profile of the victim. The boy has high self-esteem and his attitude is sexist and egoistic. Mostly he is very jealous and possessive, and he batters the partner because he believes that she is unfaithful and that she lies. He feels proud of the power he has over his partner, but after the humiliation and intimidation, he shows remorse and he asks for forgiveness, promising that it will never happen again.
- 2) In the second profile participants described a working class man aged 35, whose appearance is sloppy and aggressive. This person is sexist with social disorders such as drug and alcohol addictions, and economic problems. The aggressor’s thoughts are based on a negative and inferior image of the female gender. He seeks to control, isolate and regulate his wife’s life. Finally, he has emotional and economical power over the woman, controlling her attitudes or behavior, as well as limiting her access to financial income. In assaulting the wife, he feels satisfied and powerful.
- 3) The aggressor reconstructed in the third profile is mostly the husband, he is aged between 25 and 30 and he is upper-middle class. The description indicates a humble person, good-looking, with sexist attitudes, who believes to be in a superior and dominant position. He experienced violence in the family during childhood, and he batters his wife because of jealousy or a desire to control. He believes that his wife has to serve him; she has to perform domestic tasks, taking care of the children and the cooking. Her life should be circumscribed at home. He has control of financial spending and without his permission the wife cannot decide to leave the house or to spend money. This man does not feel guilt; he firmly believes that his attitude is right.

## 6.4.2 The imaginary of teachers

The stories elaborated by the teachers at the secondary school indicate the most common violence suffered by women is physical and psychological. It is important to highlight that in this case it was not possible to analyze the differences or similarities between male and female respondents because of the 14 participants only four of them were men. Half the respondents situated psychological violence in first place in the order of importance, whereas the other half recognized physical violence as the most significant. In second and third place were psychological violence (7 respondents), physical violence (4 respondents), sexual violence (3 respondents).

|                          | Number    | %          |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| - Psychological violence | 6         | 42.9       |
| - Physical violence      | 8         | 57.1       |
| <i>Total</i>             | <i>14</i> | <i>100</i> |

Meanwhile the least important types of violence are, generally, sexual violence, economical violence (mentioned twice in last place) and violence at the work place (mentioned twice in last place). Results have been collected according to the great number of correspondences present between the stories. Three stories present an absence of information regarding the profile of the victim, the profile of the aggressor and the type of violence occurred<sup>110</sup>.

|   | Number    | Percentage  |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| - Sexual abuse (public places)                        | 1         | 7.1         |
| - Physical and psychological violence (at home)       | 6         | 42.9        |
| - Physical and psychological violence (public places) | 3         | 21.4        |
| - Violence at the workplace                           | 1         | 7.1         |
| *3 respondents did not answer                         | 3         | 21.4        |
| <i>Total</i>  | <i>14</i> | <i>99.9</i> |

In the stories two types of most common profile of hypothetical victims and one profile of the hypothetical aggressors have been identified. Mainly, the woman who suffers violence is described as a young, middle class woman aged between 20 and 30, she is married or in a common-law-marriage and she has children. This woman is good-looking and attractive. Her behavior is described as introverted, docile, and quiet. The woman believes that the

<sup>110</sup> These respondents completed only the socio-demographic section and the first section of the questionnaire. They did not express their opinion about a hypothetical victim, aggressor or the type of violence. Rather, they stated that violence could occur to any woman regardless of differences in race, social class or economic status, and declared that in most cases the victim and aggressor know each other. Furthermore, regarding the emotions of both victim and aggressor as well as the hypothetical case of violence, they added that one must witness the act in order to express an opinion.



husband/partner assaults her because of love or because he improves her as a person. In addition, she accepts violence because she thinks that this is the way in which people show love. The violence occurs mostly at home. All cases of violence describe intimate partner violence, and in most cases, it is physical and psychological violence (in eleven stories violence at the workplace is depicted only once, whereas economic violence is not mentioned). In these stories, the women who suffer violence do not report the aggression; rather they accept it, isolating themselves. The stories suggest the identification of two typical profiles of women who suffer violence:

- 1) In the first profile a young woman, aged between 20 and 30, who suffers intimate partner violence has been depicted. In most cases respondents mentioned physical and psychological violence. This profile appeared in seven stories and the violence occurred mostly at home in presence of the family (children or family members), whereas only in three stories did it occur in public places (bus stop, shopping center, park) in the presence of strangers. This young woman is a housewife, she has got children (only in three stories appears a young woman living in a civil marriage), and in her everyday life she takes care of the house, the children and the husband. Generally, she is good-looking and her appearance is casual. Emotionally, this woman feels subdued and selfless. She thinks that she has to fulfill her husband's wishes, and that he loves her. Therefore, she believes that she has no other choice because he is the father of her children. Similarly, she does not react against violence, but rather she accepts it, believing that it is her destiny, and she is pretty unsociable, quiet and docile. The common violent episode depicted occurs at home. The husband intimidates her, firstly verbally in an aggressive way, and then he assaults her physically (slaps, punches, violent pushes, sexual abuse). Before the act of violence, the young woman would usually be cooking lunch/dinner, talking to her husband or doing the shopping with him. Violence is provoked by the woman's disobedience in leaving without permission or coming back late, or even because the woman disagrees with her husband and tries to explain her opinion. Respondents do not mention the possibility of reporting the violence or of someone intervening in defence of the girl.
- 2) In the second profile is a young woman aged between 20 and 25, she wears tight-fitting clothes and she is good-looking. Respondents did not provide further information; rather they depicted this woman in a general way. This description appears in three stories and

it described sexual violence and sexual harassment. In addition, violence occurs in dark and isolated places (carpark or street). This woman feels negative emotions such as fear, hate, and rage. Before the assault, the woman was walking home after work. Finally, participants did not mention an eventual reporting of the violence by the victim.

Regarding the profile of the aggressor, it was only possible to recognize one profile. This person appears in only six stories, whereas the other participants did not answer the questions about the aggressor. In these stories the author of the violence is the husband/partner, he is a man aged between 20 and 35, and is middle class. This man is good-looking, gorgeous, a hard worker, with a very good economic position and job. In addition, he has a bachelor's degree and he is appreciated by colleagues, friends, and family. Aggressor has high self-esteem, he is sexist (macho), overbearing, and powerful. Generally, he thinks that he can do what he wants, and he manipulates situations and his wife's opinions, so that he has the power in decision-making. This man recognizes the female category as inferior and subdued in comparison with the male gender. In most cases, he commits violence when he feels he is losing control over the wife, especially if she disobeys him or she contradicts him. After the assault he feels satisfied because he has the power in the relationship.

#### **6.4.3 The imaginary of public employees**

A low number of participants forms the third group. It was only possible, therefore, to collect five stories from three women and one man. In fact, it was not possible to realize the aim of collecting information from an even number of males and females. Participants mostly described cases of "physical, psychological and sexual violence". In three stories, violence occurred in public places as at the bus stop or on the street. In these cases, the assault happened during the day in normal circumstances. Only one story described a type of violence committed by a stranger, whereas in the other stories intimate partner violence was depicted. Moreover, one participant located the place in which the violence occurred as in the private sphere (at home). Finally, most of the participants declared that the violence took place in public places in the presence of children. Mainly, victims did not denounce the harassment. In one story, a participant mentioned that the woman who suffered sexual harassment and robbery by a stranger denounced the assault to the authorities (public ministry).

Following the most common characteristics of the victim depicted in the stories, it has been possible to assemble a profile of the woman who suffered violence:

- 1) Respondents described a young woman aged between 20 and 25. Referring to the marital status, she is married and she has children. She is middle class, and she is good-looking and attractive, but she has a simple and humble appearance. This profile appears in three stories and the violence occurs mostly in public places (bus stop or street). Participants depicted a case of intimate partner violence in the form of “physical and psychological violence” in which the woman suffers physical harassment (slaps, punches) and verbal humiliation, mostly being called a bitch (in Spanish *perra*, *zorra*, *puta*). Emotionally, she feels powerless, she believes that she had no other choice because he is the father of her children. In addition, she thinks that she could not provide economically for the family, and for this reason she accepted the violence. Before the assault the woman was waiting at the bus stop or walking with the children. Violence is provoked by jealousy and a mania for control over female behavior, because she said “hello” to a male acquaintance or because she left without his permission.

Otherwise, based on the most common characteristics of these three stories, it was possible to delineate one profile of the hypothetical aggressor:

- 1) In this profile the aggressor is a man aged 30. This person has a good economic and social status; he is a good-looking, humble person with an athletic build. His character is discreet, introverted, jealous, and possessive. This person holds sexist attitudes and uses vulgar language. He thinks that his wife has to obey to his orders and agree totally with him. This man perceives the female sex as inferior, he tends to dominate his wife and he is satisfied in having power and control over her. In this case he commits physical and psychological violence within the intimate relationship. He does not take care about his wife’s condition, but rather he is proud of himself.

Finally, the heterogeneity of the participants’ opinions has been helpful to trace a common profile regarding the hypothetical woman who suffers violence and the hypothetical aggressor who commits the aggression.

## 6.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the qualitative research suggest that in the three groups intimate partner violence is perceived as the most common form of violence that affects women. In particular, all respondents agreed that physical and psychological violence has a greater impact than other forms of violence (sexual, economic violence and harassment at the workplace). In the analyses of the results the profiles described by participants of the second and third group have not been considered. The low number of respondents does not constitute an efficient measurement due to the unreal correspondence with the representative population. As a consequence, only the stories depicted by the police officers constitute valid resources. Respondents recognized physical and psychological violence in intimate partner violence as the most common type of violence in Guanajuato's society.

Similarly, in the research conducted by psychologists Petrillo and Di Matteo (2007), which has been adapted in this work, the authors interviewed 229 police officers, of which 156 described stories about sexual and physical violence.<sup>111</sup> From their descriptions, the authors reconstructed three profiles of the hypothetical woman who suffers violence and three hypothetical profiles of the perpetrator. Firstly, Italian police officers mostly described episodes of psychological, physical, sexual violence committed in isolated and obscure places, and those connected with the workplace. Moreover, they recognized as hypothetical stories the cases of psychological violence committed against women who are public employees, sexual abuse committed against personal assistants and harassment against students. In the first profiles, women are described as attractive, eye-catching, middle class women, who suffer violence in an isolated train or bus station. The employer feels positive feelings toward herself and feels indifference toward the perpetrator, whereas the assistant feels repugnance at the author of the violence and she wishes to return to everyday life to forget the abuse as soon as possible. In the third profile the student appears as a simple girl who suffers harassment in crowded public transport, her feelings are negative (humiliation, shame) and she feels repugnance at the men. Whereas, in the profile of the hypothetical perpetrators there are three men who commit the same aforementioned types of violence. The first profile belongs to the employer/colleague, a middle class man aged between 30 and 40, elegant and strong in appearance, who feels personal satisfaction and fulfilment in committing violence and at the same time positive feelings (affection and love) toward the victim. In the second profile is the

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<sup>111</sup> Psychologists Petrillo and Di Matteo (2007) conducted research with 274 students and 229 police officers in Naples, Italy. In this work the results showed in the research on the students' opinions has not been considered, since the most relevant factors are present in the police officers' stories.

director, an upper class man aged between 41 and 60, his feelings correspond to satisfaction and fulfilment, and in addition he believes that women are provocative and they want to be abused. Finally, in the third profile, the man suffers from mental disorders and he is described as a working class man aged between 30 and 40, and as attractive and strong. He does not know the victim and he perceives the victim as provocative, and in committing violence he feels powerful and proud.

At the beginning, police officers' opinions were considered less stereotyped due to their knowledge as professionals. After the research, the results suggest that police officers possess a stereotyped image of both hypothetical women who suffer violence and hypothetical men who commit violence. In fact, women who suffer violence feel guilty for having suffered the aggression and are perceived as provocative and attractive. Meanwhile, it seems that the male's act is justified because women are attractive, wear provocative clothes and they are in obscured and isolated places, which means that they deserve the violence.

Moreover, there are some similarities and differences between the Italian and Mexican research regarding the social representations of violence against women. In the research of Petrillo and Di Matteo (2007) the police officers mostly described cases of physical and sexual violence that occurred in public isolated places by well-known perpetrators. Unlike in the research presented in this work, in which the police officers of Guanajuato mostly described cases of intimate partner violence both in private and public places. Such results suggest that in the Italian context IPV is still perceived as a private conflict, a perception contestable through the low number of denunciations, and the tendency of the cultural attitude to undervalue partners' aggressiveness. According to the authors (2007), the stories of police officers portray an implicit legitimacy of violence against women, so the stories do not conclude with official condemnation by the women nor are their feelings positive (*ibid.*). In fact, women's feelings are indifference (case of the employer), a wish to forget it all (assistant), and disgust and repugnance (student). All these emotions do not provoke in the women the need to report the crime to the police officers. Similarly, the hypothetical women who suffer violence described by Mexican respondents feel guilt, low self-esteem and they mostly accept the aggression because they think that they deserve it. In both cases the stereotype of "subdued, passive women" appears eradicated in the social representation, so despite the differences between the individual stories reported in the Italian and Mexican research, the image of women still remains stigmatized as guilty and responsible for their own condition (Lagarde, 1990; Lorente, 2001; Petrillo and Di Matteo, 2007). In the same way, both pieces of research indicate that the hypothetical aggressor feels powerful, satisfied and fulfilled in committing violence, so the

male's image is recognized in a legitimated superiority. The absence of negative feelings in the stories described by Italian respondents reinforces such a thesis (Petrillo and Di Matteo, 2007). Similarly, in the description of Mexican interviewees, even if in some stories the hypothetical men show regret and remorse, they do not feel negative emotions. In fact, the regret seems more a strategy for controlling women's behaviour, which the partner/ex-partner uses in order to persuade and manipulate women (Lorente, 2001; Agoff & Herrera, 2015). Finally, the stories described in both pieces of research suggest that there is a higher awareness about the socio-cultural causes eradicated in the phenomena of violence against women. Respondents in both pieces of research mostly recognize that gender-based violence can occur to all women regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and educational level, and that all men can commit violence against women regardless of class, age, social status or educational level.

In the research realized in the Mexican context, cases of psychological and physical violence are mostly mentioned, indicating a significant relevance of the phenomena in the social context. In fact, this information agrees with several studies that have shown the high impact of psychological and physical violence on the victim, like verbal intimidation, humiliation, blackmail, blows, slaps, pushes within intimate relationships (Tepichin et al., 2010; ENDIREH, 2011)b. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight the absence of the impact and the consequences of economic violence, sexual violence and violence at the workplace. According to the regional data elaborated by INEGI, economic violence occurs more than physical (ENDIREH, 2011b), however in the stories, it did not represent an alarming type of violence. This fact suggests that the society of Guanajuato persists in recognizing the right of patrimonial goods in male authority, whereas the figure of wife is represented by the model of the "housewife" whose task is centred on taking care of the family. The female gender is outside the sphere of economic legitimacy. Rather, society still believes that if a man provides financially for the family, he has the right to "subdue" the wife, normalizing the common belief of the "right way" based on the principle that "everyone has what he/she deserves" (Petrillo, Di Matteo, 2007). Respondents recognized domestic violence/IPV as a kind of violence that occurs between partners who cohabit (it includes marriage, civil union or cohabitation), whereas the violence between engaged couples is considered more as physical or psychological violence.

Moreover, following the collected data on reported violence in intimate partner relations, sexual violence constitutes a widespread phenomenon in the private sphere (INEGI, 2011, p.16). Despite the low number of denunciations (12.6%), sexual abuse represents a common violence that often is not recognized due to the negative stereotype of the subdued woman who, as a wife, has to fulfil her marital obligations. In fact, only eleven stories described cases of

sexual violence. Respondents associate sexual abuse with public, dark and isolated places, describing the aggressor as a stranger and the victim as attractive and good-looking. These declarations confirm the common belief that women are at fault in being violated. The stereotyped image of attractive women who wear provocative clothing, provoking behaviour in an isolated place, justifies the sexual abuse, re-victimizing the image of the female gender.

Following the stories of participants, intimate partner violence is a visible phenomenon in society that occurs mostly in public places (39 stories). However, the visibility of violence does not produce the need for “social responsibility”, so in the stories no family members or strangers intervene in defence of the victim. Social indifference indicates the absence of collective solidarity and empathy towards the victims. According to some research, intimate partner violence is a private problem that should be solved within the nuclear family (ENDIREH, 2006; 2011b). This attitude provokes, therefore, impossibilities in developing pro-social behaviours regarding violence against women. On the other hand, this fact suggests both a lack of solidarity at a social level and a state of denial between the communities.

Otherwise, respondents show awareness regarding the influence and impact of socio-cultural norms. They explain how sexism and patriarchal ideology constitutes the main cause of violence against women. In fact, the profile of the victim always appears in a negative, subdued and powerless role. This woman is depicted as a person with low self-esteem, powerless, scared, subdued, intimidated, and guilty. The common beliefs of this woman are rooted in the patriarchal ideology, particularly because she believes that violence is synonymous with love, so the man can hit her. The stereotype of the “weak and inferior woman” is reflected in the image of this woman/housewife, who believes that she is worthless without a man and that she cannot provide economically for the family. Socio-demographic information does not constitute relevant a paradigm to identify violence, rather it seems that the social problems mostly affect women who have low self-esteem and perceive themselves as inferior and socially isolated without a man.

Furthermore, the disvalue of female subjectivity is regulated in the dimension of the guilt, because a woman perceives her destiny in being a wife/mother, so she has to fulfil her obligations, accepting her lot. Finally, the profile of the hypothetical victim is characterized by mostly negative stereotypes because respondents only depicted her with negative emotions that re-victimize the woman. The fact that this woman accepts her lot in being harassed physically and psychologically indicates the symbolic legitimacy of violence in intimate partner relations, as well as the recognition of women as inferior and weak. Sometimes respondents even affirmed that this woman believes that the man educates her. Consequently, social representations reflect

socio-cultural norms that discriminate against female subjectivity in the private and the public sphere, producing a system of legitimacy and even phenomena such as re-victimization, stigmatizing the woman as “crazy” and as someone who does not fulfil her obligations as a wife and a mother (Lagarde, 1990; Lorente, 2001; Lamas, 1998).

This image of a woman suggests that even if the way of seeing violence against women changed, thanks to social, political and legal acts, there is no change in perceiving a woman as a “woman who deserved it”. Participants are aware of the social problem and they possess basic knowledge and information. According to respondents’ declarations, the acceptance of violence is based merely on socio-cultural beliefs about female roles. The fact that the victim does not reject violence indicates that she is herself at fault in suffering it. In particular, respondents did not mention the responsibility of the legal system or the socio-political system in defending women rights. In addition, these stories suggest how the education received during childhood reproduces a cyclical legitimacy of male violence. On the one hand, the woman believes that the man is educating her; on the other hand, the aggressor is violent because he understands his attitudes to be normal. Finally, in the imaginary of police officers violence against women is a problem caused by sexist ideology and the common beliefs of male superiority.

As Lagarde states, women are prisoners of their obligation because patriarchy and globalization have promoted a culture of gender roles in which the natural dimension of the woman is in “taking care of the others”, such as men, husbands, children, the family, and the home (Lagarde, 2003). For this reason, women often appear in the stories as guilty, believing that they have done something wrong to deserve it. The recognition of the impact of intimate partner violence as the most common case of violence indicates that respondents associate mostly violence with the private sphere. Interviewees did not allude to social responsibility, because nobody acted in defence of the victim, or to the existence of sexist and patriarchal attitudes at an institutional level. Rather, violence is a problem concerning attitudes regarding gender and the wrong perception of female/male roles in private and public life. According to Lagarde, the problem appears more in male reluctance to accept female subjectivity:

*Contemporary men have not changed enough to alter or his relationship with women, nor its position in domestic, industrial and institutional spaces. They do not consider taking care valuable because, according to the predominant model, it means to neglect themselves: Using their time in the relation body to body, subjectivity to subjectivity with others. Leaving their interests, using their subjective resources and goods and money on others and, above all they do not accept two things: not being the center of his life, giving that space to another and placing himself in a subordinate position compared with others. All this because in the dominant social organization taking care means to be inferior (my translation; Lagarde, 2003, p.2).<sup>112</sup>*

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<sup>112</sup> Los hombres contemporáneos no han cambiado lo suficiente como para modificar ni su relación con las mujeres, ni su posicionamiento en los espacios domésticos, laborales e institucionales. No consideran valioso cuidar porque, de acuerdo con el modelo predominante, significa descuidarse: Usar su tiempo en la relación cuerpo a cuerpo, subjetividad a subjetividad con



Finally, the regime of representation of violence against women agrees with this framework of knowledge, based on the binary categorization of male–dominant–superior/female–dominated–inferior. This aspect reflects the condition of the victim before the harassment. Most respondents describe this situation as any ordinary one: the woman was talking with the husband/partner or she was cleaning, cooking or walking. In general, this woman was dealing with everyday situations, but the act of disobeying the partner (leaving the house without his permission, contradicting him, or even saying “hello” to another man) provokes his aggression. The fact that she displaces herself, crossing the limit of accepted attitudes and behavior for the female category, produces in the husband/partner the desire to punish her.

Otherwise, the hypothetical aggressor appears jealous, possessive, and sexist. This is a man, aged on average 30. He is good-looking and in appearance a humble person. Participants recognized the aggressor as a normal person, an aspect that contrasts with the common opinions which consider the author of violence as a drug addict/alcoholic, insane with deviant social behavior or mental disorders (Adami, Basaglia and Tola, 2002). Rather, he is a respectable man with sexist attitudes who has high self-esteem. This man is aware of the recognition of his superiority in society and he has a negative image of females as inferior and weak. For this reason, his attitudes to isolating, regulating, dominating and controlling the woman is legitimated. In addition, in committing violence he feels satisfied and powerful. Moreover, it is evident that aggressors have a psychological obsession or fear of being cheated on, so that even the idea that his partner could have an interest in other men allows him to batter her physically and psychologically. The sexist and patriarchal beliefs are rooted in the myth of La Malinche, as an impure, deceitful woman in the Mexican collective imaginary (Paz, 1950). As Moscovici (1961) argues, the tendency to address the violence at the symbolic level of socio-cultural norms converts the unusual to the usual, familiar reality, allowing the naturalization of gender roles in which men have the right to hit women, whereas women have to obey the husband, taking care of his desires and needs.

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los otros. Dejar sus intereses, usar sus recursos subjetivos y bienes y dinero, en los otros y, no aceptan sobretodo dos cosas: dejar de ser el centro de su vida, ceder ese espacio a los otros y colocarse en posición subordinada frente a los otros. Todo ello porque en la organización social hegemónica cuidar es ser inferior (Lagarde, 2003, p.2).

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of abuse and victimization practices against women in Mexican society present heterogeneous factors depending on the specificity of the socio-cultural and economic context. However, IPV represents mostly a phenomenon based on abusive relationships whose dynamics seem generally rooted in the natural recognition of the subdued, inferior and weak status of the female identity in contrast with the dominant, sexist and powerful position of male subjectivity. The establishment of this cultural and social construction of gender identities has been considered, in this work, as a product of the socio-cultural dimension that legitimates the discrimination, starting from the hegemonic use of stereotypes and prejudice in the discursive sphere. According to Torres Falcón (2009), the inequality between genders has been articulated in the process of the social construction of legitimated violence, highlighting the multiple possibilities in the process of the deconstruction of violence. In fact, such a process should start in the linguistic dimension in which meaning is produced and re-produced according to the hegemonic power relations (Hall, 1997).

Considering that meaning entails specific cultural and historical roots, the focus should regard the concept of a woman who, thanks to the feminist theory, has been critically analyzed and showed as a social construction of modernity. As Lagarde (2001) argues, the understanding of women's rights is constructed under the Western point of view, which, on the one hand, presents heterogeneity due to the specificity of social context, and, on the other hand, always manifests itself as the result of colonization and post-colonization processes. What stands out, in particular, is that women's rights are considered privileges for individuals living in the zone of being, and they are denied for those who live in the zone of non-being (Fanon, 1952). In the case of Mexican society it is important, therefore, to consider a critical deconstruction both of the meaning of the concept of women and women's rights according to a de-colonial perspective, which takes into account the heterogeneity of Mexican women regarding age, class, ethnicity as well as their geographical position (rural/urban). A specific contextual analysis of the concept of women needs to be located in the cultural and historical context.

The life stories of Guanajuato women suggest that the dimension of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem plays a relevant role in the acceptance of violence and the difficulties in breaking with such dynamics as well as reporting it to the authorities. According to the statements of the interviewees, their emotional status, characterized by sense of guilt, seems to be the result of the expectation that females tolerate violence, whilst hoping that it will change in the future. The submissive female behaviour are therefore rooted in the gender roles due to the educational

heritage from childhood. These women used to recognize the legitimated image of a battered mother who assumes the passive and subdued role because she deserves it. The intimate relationships are commonly accepted within such power relations, in which each partner relies on the other in order to play his/her role and stabilize the balance of power. This means that the hegemonic role of the man depends on the domination of females, who as good wives/mothers/daughters have to act in a passive, docile and weak roles and tolerate it all, in order to maintain the balance between gender roles (Torres Falcon, 2001). Thus, the responsibility falls on the female, whose incapacity to tolerate violence means to be defeated as a woman, provoking in her feelings such as shame and a negative image of the self. The sphere of self-esteem is meaningful, since following Marcela Lagarde, “it becomes memory and we forget what we have been and who we are” (my translation, Lagarde, 2001, p. 29). Consequently, if low-self-esteem causes a sense of guilt and negative emotions (shame, powerlessness, sadness, isolation), exposing women to the risk of suffering violence, it seems necessary to enhance self-esteem as an ability to love the self, deconstructing such beliefs, perceptions and ideas related to negative socio-cultural images of females.

Intimate partner violence reflects male domination and female subordination, and male abusive attitudes obstruct both females’ and males’ capacity for developing care of the self and the possibility of living life as a independent and free subject. In Mexican society, domestic violence seems particularly to be accepted due to its recognition as a private problem, thus wives have to accept their lot, to act in a docile and submissive way, understanding violence as an act of love (Agoff & Herrera, 2015), whereas men have completely economic control of the family and they recognize their wives’ submission and devotion as a right. The meaning of being a wife and being a husband needs to be deconstructed in order to prevent violence in both the female and the male imaginary, thus it is considered one of the most significant causes of domestic violence (Lagarde, 2001; Torres Falcon, 2001). The fact that women and men are especially devoted to their role according to the traditions of their culture, supporting the tolerance of violence, whose consequences are dramatic from an individual to a societal level.

At the individual level it is important to highlight the role of resistance of women who suffer violence and the relevance of self-esteem. Firstly, as Torres Falcon points out, women resist against male power and the consequences of violence in different ways, and for this reason the preventive measures against VAW should take into account the deconstruction of the concept of power in political ways (Torres Falcon, 2001). It means that women should participate in political life and public debate, making possible the visibility of the violence and the ways they resist against it. Thus, the ability to cope in stressful conditions, developing resilience abilities,

produces the re-signification of power relations, enhancing empowerment and agency (Foucault, 1980).

Moreover, a new understanding of the institution of family needs to be promoted, because in this sphere gender roles and social relationships are primarily established. In fact, the first form of power relation is rooted in the nuclear family, so preventive measures should aim to eliminate negative stereotypes and prejudice toward the female gender, which promote a culture of violence and the dominance of male roles. The family often contributes to the acceptance and establishment of a culture of violence against women. In the life stories of the respondents the mothers are often depicted as women who imposed the passive role on the female (who had to take care of the housework, as well as brothers and the father), and they are considered the principal people who legitimate physical aggression against women's affirmation of the male ability to develop power and dominance.. As a consequence, children became direct spectators of the process of the legitimation of violence against women, assimilated in the nuclear family, in which men learn to express strength and power through violence. Finally, physical, psychological, sexual and economic harassment appear to be regulator tools used by males in order to maintain the unbalance of power in the relationship and to hide the negative emotion as guilt, humiliation, anxiety and frustration.

In fact, in the qualitative research on the social representations of intimate partner violence what stands out is that the hypothetical victim feels negative emotions (low self-esteem, powerlessness, sadness) and the hypothetical aggressor has positive values about the self and he often feels satisfied in committing violence. It may occur because the violent act allows the re-establishing of the unbalance of power in the relationship, and it seems necessary in the regulation of gender roles. A relationship model like the kinship model suggests the relevance in transforming the role of stereotypes and prejudice that provoke stigmatized social representations regarding the impact and consequences of violence against women and the profile of women who suffer violence as well as the profile of men who batter women. The eradication of stereotyped social representations of VAW should support sensitive and informative action, from the familiar to the societal level, which stimulates awareness and knowledge about the dangerous consequences of such a culture of violence. In this regard, researchers have shown that social networks and pro-social behaviour stimulate empathy and solidarity, building effective protective factors (Wellman, 1988; Sluzki, 1996; Branscombe & Bertjan, 2004). In particular, the arising of feelings like empathy and solidarity allows for an external conflict to be considered as a personal conflict, enabling the recognition of collective

responsibility. The community needs to be sensitized regarding the condition of these women, recognizing its role in the process of the acceptance and reproduction of violence.

Furthermore, if society recognizes impacts and consequences of VAW, rejecting culturally negative ideas, attitudes and beliefs that invalidate female well-being, the legislative framework will be able to offer women access to justice and safety. In fact, the legislative system has a symbolic function in the regulation of social life, because if a society is not culturally able to accept a social change imposed by laws, as a consequence the existent norms could not be applied. Each norm is susceptible to interpretation, whose determination depends on the socio-cultural context. Finally, the efficacy of the law is, in most cases, the result of societal acceptance.

According to Torres Falcon (2009), the form of punishment towards the violence entails a huge symbolic charge in the understanding of the social conflict within the community. There are some legal debates referring to the possibility of managing the crime in the court or through the victim's complaint, the form of sanction for the aggressor (prison, fine, social work) and the possibility of acquiring significant evidence of the crime (ibid.). In fact, the public institutions tend to approach the conflict through a strategy of forgiveness and resolution in the private sphere because some judges keep considering the phenomena of VAW in a superficial way. As a consequence, in most cases the aggressor was mildly sanctioned and their freedom provoked violent repercussions for the victim. In Mexican society within the institutions, like the police, the courts and the public ministries, there are patriarchal deals between public servants and aggressors (ibid.). The legislative framework appears, therefore, an obstacle for the justice of these women due to the patriarchal ideology. If gender perspective aims to constitute a program of re-education and rehabilitation of victims, it seems necessary that instead of looking for a practice of forgiveness and resolution of the conflict by the victim, the state should focus on the re-education and rehabilitation of the aggressors as well. In this process, the state could not act alone, because it requires the participation of all institutions, especially the contribution of the educational and health system. At a legislative level the process of re-education of aggressors could constitute a significant aspect in the resolution of the conflict, but as Torres Falcon (2009) stresses, its efficacy is determined by the level of shame and guilt felt by the aggressor himself. A legal framework could be successful only in the way in which such factors are considered and applied, and it is possible only through cultural acceptance. In this regard, Spanish legislation represents a meaningful example, because since 2010 it has promoted a re-education program for prisoners accused of intimate partner violence. The project, called the Offender Intervention Program (*Programa de Intervención para*

*Agresores*), aims to employ structural intervention measures for the eradications of sexist attitudes and beliefs, and the development of the recognition of gender equality. The groups takes part in weekly for one year, which includes therapeutic sections, sensitive and information trainings, enhancing empathetic abilities with the direct victim (women and the children), recognizing responsibility and guilt in the crime inflicted, and eliminating justification and defence practices assumed by the aggressors. Such action constitutes a way in which the penitentiary system promotes prevention measures, recognizing its role in the process of education.

Moreover, the difficulty in providing evidence in cases of psychological violence suggest the need to deal with the conflict, emphasizing the subjective dimension of the battered women, the dynamic of the intimate relationship with the aggressor and the cultural meanings of genders' relationship. Firstly, the difficulty in sanctioning psychological violence regards the subjective ability of each woman to resist against humiliation and intimidation. Secondly, IPV is characterized by the dynamics of affective relations in which the charge of the positive and negative emotions (such as feeling in love or perceiving intimidation, fear and threats) depends deeply on the communication and attitudes of the couple. In fact, when Mackinnon (1979) reflects about how much it is worth the *yes* of a women, if it will interpreted always as *no* "no", she highlights the role of the cultural construction of reality, which deeply influences all political, legislative and socio-economic aspects of a society.

For these reasons prevention measures adopted by the state have to take into account that in most cases the legal punishment appears inefficient for the understanding of the dynamics of interaction in the relationship. The de-articulation of all these aspects could change the social imaginary in which the idea of the guilt of the victim survives, justifying violence as women's responsibility. Public politics should enhance actions that disclose the deeply unequal ideas and attitudes regarding genders, provoked by negative stereotypes. The visibility of the consequence of intimate partner violence depends eventually on the adoption of efficient legislative norms and the public sanction of a familial structure that reproduces vertical and asymmetric power relations through the recognition of male dominance and the submission of women.

The practice of re-education on equality between genders includes actions at a macro-structural level. According to Torres Falcon (2009), such actions should consist in the elimination of stereotypes in the media and schoolbooks, regulation of divorce and marriage, guaranteeing easy, free and speedy access to justice in cases of VAW (*ibid.*). Overall, significant actions are embodied in the promotion of pro-social actions as well as the application

of proper codes of re-education of aggressors. The State has the obligation to promote these actions, taking into account that the process of construction a policy of democracy and equality should occur with respect for socio-cultural differences. The recognition of the other is the process that enables the structure of a social life, keeping in mind Octavio Paz's words that "being yourself is always to become that other who we are and who we carry hidden within us, more than anything else as a promise or possibility of being" (my translation, Paz, 1950, p. 73).

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## Appendix A: Biographical interview: Español

### UNIVERSIDAD DE GUAJANUATO TARJETA DE IDENTIFICACIÓN

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Nombre Entrevistada/                        | 2. Número de identificación de transcripción: | 3. Edad                                 |
| 4. Residencia<br>- Zona rural<br>- Zona urbana | 5. Estado Civil<br><br>6. Niños               | 7. Nivel de Educación<br><br>8. Trabajo |

- 1) ¿Qué recuerda de su infancia?
- 2) ¿Como describiría su relación con sus padres?
- 3) ¿Como describiría la personalidad de su madre?
- 4) ¿Y su padre?
- 5) ¿Explique las relaciones con su familia? Por ejemplo abuelos, tías, primos....
- 6) ¿Tiene hermanos o hermanas?
- 7) ¿Explique su relación con ellos o ellas?
  
- 8) ¿Recuerda fiestas, tradiciones particulares que haya significado mucho para Usted?
- 9) ¿Su familia es religiosa?
- 10) ¿Cuánto es importante para usted la religión?
  
- 11) ¿Cuando fue niña se sentía amada y protegida?
- 12) ¿Estaba animada o desanimada a hacer nuevas cosas?
- 13) ¿Qué valores y morales le han transmitido sus padres?
- 14) ¿Ellos iban de acuerdo?
  
- 15) ¿Que recuerdo tiene Usted de su adolescencia?
- 16) ¿Que ha significado para usted este período?
- 17) ¿Cuales son los recuerdos que más le agradan y los que no le gustan?
- 18) ¿Como pasaba su tiempo en aquel periodo?
  
- 19) ¿Le gustaba ir a la escuela?
- 20) ¿Que recuerdos tiene de su compañeros/ras y de su profesores?
- 21) ¿Cual asignatura le gustaba más?
- 22) ¿Por qué?
- 23) ¿Le hubiera gustado continuar sus estudios?
- 24) ¿A que se dedica Usted?



- 25) ¿Que significa para usted hacer este trabajo?
- 26) ¿Recuerda su primera cita con un chico que le gustaba?
- 27) ¿Que ha significado para usted su primer beso?
- 28) ¿Su primera relación con un chico?
- 29) ¿Cómo describiría la relación con los chicos en su adolescencia?
  
- 30) ¿Como conoció su esposo/novio/ex-esposo?
- 31) ¿Qué le gustaba de él?
- 32) ¿Cuáles fueron los momentos mejores y peiores con el?
- 33) ¿Como la trataba?
- 34) ¿Se sentía amada, protegida, respetada?
  
- 35) ¿Fue el violento con usted?
- 36) ¿Que tipo de violencia le han infligido?,
- 37) ¿Quiere contarme como ocurrió, en que periodo de su vida ocurrió?
- 38) ¿Que ha significado para Usted vivir episodios de violencia?,
- 39) ¿Cómo se sentía?
- 40) ¿Tuvo problemas físicos, psicológicos?
  
- 41) ¿A quien pidió ayuda y por qué?
- 42) ¿Como la ayudaron?
- 43) ¿Como estas ahora?
- 44) ¿Se siente culpable de lo que ocurrió?
- 45) ¿Crees que podía/ podría hacer algo para protegerse?
- 46) ¿Que le ayudó a mejorar su vida y encontrarse asi misma, mediante la religión, un trabajo, un hobbies, personas, familia?
- 47) ¿Qué ha significado para usted llegar a ser esposa y madre?
- 48) ¿Usted piensa que tiene fuerza interior para superar situaciones difíciles?
- 49) ¿Piensa que Usted ahora tuviera capacidad de cambiar la vida?
- 50) ¿Que significa para usted vivir ahora?
  
- 51) ¿Cómo son sus hijos?
- 52) ¿Cuales valores y morales les ha transmitido?
- 53) ¿Cómo organiza su vida familiar y laboral?
- 54) ¿Qué valor le da a la soledad?
- 55) ¿Cuando piensa en su futuro, que es lo que no le gusta?
- 56) ¿Que le da mayor esperanza?
- 57) ¿Como se imagina en 5, 10 años?
- 58) ¿Tiene consejos o mensajes que quiere dar a las mujeres?

## Appendix B: Qualitative interview: Español

Por favor compile este espacio

|  |
|--|
| Sexo: F / M  |
| Edad:  |
| Nivel de educación:                                      |
| Estado civil: casado/a, divorciado/a, soltero/a, viudo/a |
| Residencia: (zona urbana o rural)                        |
| Empleo:  |

1. La violencia contra las mujeres es un problema muy actual. ¿Que tipo de violencia conoce Usted? Enumera los tipos de violencia que conoce en orden de más importancia para Usted:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Imagina que una mujer ha apenas ha sufrido una violencia en un lugar público. Cual es la típica situación para Usted en la que pudiera suceder esto? Utiliza frases y no sólo una palabra para contestar:

- a. ¿Quien es esta mujer (edad, aspecto físico, ropas, estado social)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- b. ¿Que tipo de violencia le han cometido?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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c. ¿Dónde estaba la mujer cuando ha sucedido el episodio la violencia?

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d. ¿Que estaba haciendo antes de la violencia?

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e. ¿Qué opina la mujer (ideas, opiniones sobre a sí misma y a los otros), que estado emocional vive la mujer (emociones, sentimientos...)?

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3. Describe el autor de la violencia en la misma situación. Utilice frases y no sólo palabras.

a. ¿Quién es esta persona (edad, aspecto físico, ropas, estado social)?

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b. ¿Víctima y autor se conocen?

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c. ¿Dónde estaba la mujer cuando se cometió la violencia?

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d. ¿Cuáles son los pensamientos del autor (ideas, opiniones sobre sí mismo, sobre la víctima) y cuales son sus sentimientos, sus emociones?

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