

Women in Ecuador: the required scapegoat

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Abstract. Introduction. The concept of a scapegoat is a broad concept to adopt since it is associated with the unknown or something evil that must be eradicated through coercion, because it is perceived as a threat. However, the main idea of the concept of scapegoat is that it produces an existential fear, which is extrapolated as a basis for the construction of national identity. A scapegoat is required to build the warm circles in the Nation-State, meaning that the concepts threat and identity are mutually constitutive and not exclusive. In Ecuador, one of the social groups that have historically been the most coerced are women. **Objective & Methodology.** This qualitative article will argue that cisgender women in Ecuador are currently used as the scapegoat for the construction of a national identity. **Results.** During the COVID 19 pandemic, coercion towards cisgender women increased significantly despite the fact that there are public policies that sanction violence against women nationally. **Discussion & Conclusions.** On the other hand, the article explores how society in Ecuador sanctions cisgender women, the scapegoats, through social standards/roles which foster the construction of national identity. Ecuador has parity and protection laws in force that have not yet given the expected results, such as equal representation in national politics, the reduction of violence against women, and even female unemployment during and after the pandemic. All this occurs because the scapegoat is not only the cause of the problems but they are also the solution to the problem of society. Hence, the need to maintain a sustainable violence towards women which is seen in the poor institutionalization of female protection laws.

Keywords: Scapegoat; women; violence; threat; identity.

[es] Las mujeres en el Ecuador: el chivo expiatorio necesario

Resumen. Introducción. El concepto de chivo expiatorio, es un concepto amplio para adoptar ya que se asocia con algo desconocido o algo malvado que se debe erradicar por medio de la coerción, debido a que es una amenaza. Sin embargo, la idea principal del concepto de chivo expiatorio es que este produce un miedo existencial, el cual se extrapola como un a priori o una base, para la construcción de la identidad nacional. El chivo expiatorio es requerido para construir los círculos cálidos en el Estado-Nación, es decir que los conceptos de amenaza e identidad son mutuamente constitutivos más no excluyentes. En Ecuador, uno de los grupos que históricamente han sido coaccionadas son las mujeres. **Objetivo y Metodología.** Por lo tanto, este artículo cualitativo argumentará que las mujeres cisgénero actualmente Ecuador las usa como el chivo expiatorio para la construcción de identidad nacional. **Resultados.** Durante la pandemia de COVID 19 las tendencias de coerción hacia las mujeres cisgénero incrementó pese a las políticas públicas que sancionan la violencia contra las mujeres nacionalmente. **Discusión y Conclusiones.** Por otro lado, el artículo explora como la sociedad ecuatoriana sanciona a las mujeres cisgénero, los chivos expiatorios, por medio de estándares/roles sociales que fomentan la construcción de la identidad. Ecuador tiene leyes de paridad vigentes que aún no se llegan a concretar como por ejemplo la representación igualitaria en la política nacional, la disminución de la violencia contra las mujeres, e el desempleo femenino durante y después de la pandemia. Todo esto se da debido a que el chivo expiatorio no solo es la causa de los problemas, sino que también son la solución del problema de la sociedad. Por ende, la necesidad de mantener una violencia sostenible a las mujeres, que se ve en las pocas leyes de protección hacia las mujeres. **Palabras clave:** Chivo expiatorio; mujeres; violencia; amenaza; identidad.

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1. Introduction

To have a social scapegoat is required as a motor to build warm circles, meaning societal trust, which propels the construction of identity. The process of identity building/ nation-building is made up with categorical mechanisms that aim towards exclusion and not inclusion. Meaning that the concepts of threat (women) and identity in Ecuador are mutually constitutive through exclusion. According to Girard (1986, 9):“ A scapegoat

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is made up of distortions that must be identified and corrected to reveal the arbitrary nature of violence". The accusations against scapegoats are always absurd and unjust throughout history and the sentences against those deemed the scapegoat are not only legal but societal through the invalidation of people who are perceived as a threat. Distortions are a result of degraded superstitions.

The causes that make up scapegoats normally tend to be counterintuitive and make no sense at all. To invalidate and to persecute a societal group is to treat them as a scapegoat, in Ecuador cisgender women are perceived as the national scapegoat due to the tangible violence this group has suffered and keeps withstanding. Due to the statistics of feminicides and violence women have encountered, it can be seen that females are treated as second-class citizens in Ecuador. Moreover, identity building goes in hand with the perception of the *Gemeinschaft*, which is the conception of a small community where trust is high and values are common. In contrast with today's world, which is more like the *Gemeinschaft*, a big society with little trust. Even though, threat might seem mutually exclusive from identity, they are in fact inclusive. The easiest way for societies to recognize what they are is to recognize what they are not.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, Ecuador saw an exponential increase in violence against women. In 2019, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) 64.9% of women had experienced some sort of violence against their gender, 56.9% had encountered psychological violence while 35.4% had encountered physical violence (INEC, 2019). Local newspapers reported that during the lockdown there were more cases related to female violence but fewer complaints or reports. Moreover, about 60% of people in Ecuador perceive gender violence against cisgender females as something grave but do nothing pivotal against it or try to fight against it (Barredo Ibáñez, 2017). One of the weaknesses Latin-American has in general can be traced back to the colonization process that left us with weak institutions that come directly from the racial and exclusive policies the region had. Moreover, the image Ecuadorian society had of women, is of submission. "Femicides are therefore not isolated occurrences; they result from systemic and structural phenomenon, rooted in social behaviors" (Ortiz-Prado *et al.*, 2022, 2). Worldwide the region with the highest murders against women is Africa, and then the Americas follow.

The Ecuadorian identity was built upon the construction of a State and identity through complicated profound inequalities and the patriarchal power relationships the colonial period gave the region (Alcántara Sáez, 2016). The construction of the State and identity in Latin America was not an inclusive process such as the in construction of the Nation-State in other parts of the world but rather it has been explicitly an exclusive process that today Ecuador keeps repeating. In addition, violence against women in Ecuador and around the world does not have a single cause but rather is propelled by economic, cultural, legal and political causes. In addition to all of these, Latin America is one of the most dangerous regions in the world to be a woman regardless of the legal conventions countries in the region have signed and the reformation in their legal frameworks to safeguard women's lives (Barredo Ibáñez, 2017).

It is not a question of lack of legality that propels violence against women, the Ecuadorian constitution does address the problem of female inequality, but rather is a question of cultural and structural causes in the region. There is a normalization of violence and discrimination against women, which propels the problem that women are not very well represented in the State. In fact, the best way to ensure a more egalitarian society is through the political participation of women as a way to increase democracy and governance, which does not surpass the 32%.

Moreover, the wealth gap between males and females is notorious even more now that there is greater unemployment within the female population than with the male population in Ecuador, this gap increased after the COVID 19 lockdown. About 97% of women that have been victims of violence assure that unemployment is a barrier to file complaints against female violence (Barredo Ibáñez, 2017). Also, there is an idealization of the roles females should pursue in society and multiple institutions such as marriage that limits the way females could achieve their full liberty. This creates a perfect structural and cultural scenario where direct violence can be propelled. In fact, if we take into account the phenomena, it would not be a shock that females in Ecuador due to cultural violence are victims of direct violence. "The victim is a person who comes from elsewhere, a well-known stranger" (Girard, 1986, 32).

This qualitative paper aims to argue that cisgender women in Ecuador are currently used as the scapegoat for the construction of a national identity. The Ecuadorian identity thrives to build unity and cohesion through the victimization and treatment the State gives women. This argument can be seen through the cultural and structural problems females in Ecuador have to face not only before COVID but also during lockdown. For the creation of an identity, society required the concepts of both threat and identity as mutually constitutive. We will discuss the fact that the Ecuadorian society punishes women through social roles that foster violence and national identity at the same time.

Regardless of the public policies in place, reduction of female violence, has not decreased exponentially. Finally, we will argue that the COVID 19 pandemic increased violence once again in Ecuador due to the uncertainty the pandemic gave the world. Gender violence is a problem of being part of the "female experience" it not a question of whether females are of age or of different social classes. Regardless of income or educational degree every female can be a victim of violence.

2. Methodology

For this qualitative research project, the method of analysis that was chosen was a bibliographical/archival analysis of academic documents such as articles and reports. Also, local newspapers were extremely useful not only to see statistics of certain crimes such as femicides, but also to understand the general societal feeling over gender violence. In this research we employed a systematic classification of documents, the great majority of sources used were secondary because they were academic articles. However, the annual bulletins and official statements by government agencies against gender violence were the primary source of this research. Tertiary sources with newspaper articles about the increase of gender violence were also used. As a matter of fact, archival documents and their analysis is the most single important source of information for those interested in policymaking (Burnham *et al.*, 2008). This sort of methodology helped us to analyze significant events, in this case to understand the violence of cisgender women during COVID 19 lockdown and afterwards. In addition, we can develop novel accounts through documents that were authentic, credible, representative and had meaning.

Moreover, archives represent the social organization of the case being understood. “In other words, we might take the view that such documents tell us something about what goes on in a chat organization and will help us to uncover such things as its culture or ethos” (Bryman, 2012, 526). Meaning that documents are the windows to understand social reality and the culture, this is pivotal for our research because gender violence to cisgender females is a worldwide problem but it differs from regions and countries. To use this type of methodology in this paper allowed us to perceive the “blame” females have even upon the violence they are victims. The great majority of documents do not explicitly sanction males against their violent acts, they are most of the time blaming females or show this society reality of victim-blaming or simply are neutral over the fact that violence is still prevalent in the Ecuadorian society.

3. Results

3.1. The myth of Sisyphus for females

Gender violence in Ecuador has become constantly more notorious, specifically during and after the pandemic. This is not only due to the number of complaints given during the lockdown but after the pandemic Ecuador has seen certain behaviors against females that have been unacceptable. One of the most notorious cases is the current feminicide of Maria Belen Bernal, who was murdered by her husband who used to be a police officer and has not yet been captured. Ecuador regardless of the fact that its constitution has laws that support females and safeguard their lives it still runs short. According to Barredo Ibáñez: “A lot of countries that aim towards the fight against gender violence, the fight is centered in non-government initiatives, meaning that there is a lack of effective institutionalization within the public sphere” (2017, 1315). Violence against women started to become more notorious due to the time many women had to face their perpetrators during lockdown, which increased psychological problems in both men and women.

This has propelled a new phenomenon, which is to have more cases of violence against women but less reports to the authorities. During lockdown, violence against cisgender women in their homes increased and unfortunately the perpetrator most of the time is not brought to justice, this is a common denominator in Ecuador. As stated by Gonzalez (2021): “Of the 19,975 cases handled by the Prosecutor’s Office, only 1.35% have been resolved through seven channels. The convictions came in 109 cases”. In addition, further cases for incestuous rape were also reported for the first time in Ecuador, this is not because it is a rare occurrence but rather because females normally do not report it. Most of the time cisgender females do not report gender violence, whether the violence was psychological or physical, due to their own family circle that dismisses them. Hence, gender violence is an epidemic. Moreover, gender violence, and its main propeller is the differences in relational power women and men have. It is not necessarily a question of legal framework, but rather is a question of the imaginary society has of women and of men, that deliver the unequal power relationships we encounter in Ecuador and the region. According to Ortiz-Prado *et al.* (2022, 3): “Female homicides and femicides were most prevalent in urban areas (84%–N=2718) compared to rural areas”. The great majority of feminicides in Ecuador were against young women and not women of age.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a problem worldwide and the most common Violence Against Women (VAW). However, in Latin American it is often a problem that is normalized and it impacts the psyche and the body. IPV is a socio-cultural phenomenon that predicts the attitudes men have against women, nowadays considered a public health problem and a human rights violation. IPV can promote damage to the psychological, mental, sexual and reproductive health of women and also embraces “domestic violence”. According to the official statement of the National Council for Gender Equality (2020): “Many women were forced to stay with their aggressors at home, 65% of women in Ecuador have experienced gender-based violence, 45% perpetrated by their partner”. The higher the degree of violence females encounter, the less holistic their lives become and

this promotes less criminal justice responders as well as victim reporting this is due to physical victimization and sexual victimization of females.

Again, gender violence is a societal problem, and the content society influences behavioral modeling. “Most empirical work shows increased education to be protective against IPV approval, results vary across countries” (Forsyth & Ward 2022, 3). Social pressures, personal experience, and negative/positive consequences adjust behavior of both men and women. In this case, cisgender females tend not report their perpetrators because the great majority live with them, which increases social isolation, or simply because the judicial system does nothing against the perpetrators as mentioned by the Prosecutor’s Office. The economic cost gender violence brings to Ecuador is around \$35 billion per year (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2022).

Forsyth & Ward research with IPV discovered that the more violence society embraces, more violence is normalized towards women. The more violent the society is by multiple reasons, then there are more reasons for that same violence to be applied towards women. Moreover, male education is also protective against IPV. Ecuador is the third country in the region with the worst public education for both males and females, which also propels violence. All of this gives us a great insight over the reasons why females started to see a rising wave of violence during and after COVID 19. According to the official statement from the Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, “During the health emergency due to COVID-19, the CPS attended 587 victims of violence, of which 47.7% have required the Human Rights Secretariat to activate responses from the Rights Protection System, that is to say: a panic button” (2020). However, this type of hotlines were not very useful against gender violence, because they were overloaded with multiple complaints that were not only about gender violence but also with other types of emergencies. Gender violence can also be aggravated due to female workload, financial instability, females in Ecuador over 30% of them do not have their own salary, and the social isolation COVID 19 brought to all of us.

COVID had terrible socioeconomic consequences in every country in the world, in the greater scope in Latin America which was the region that was hit the hardest and has not yet recovered. De Souza de Santos et al mentioned that “Latin America has one of the highest violence rates in the world, the most violent countries being Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, El Salvador, and Bolivia, which, together, account for 81% of femicide cases on the continent” (2022, 2). There is a prevalence of male dominance that compounds the female experience. Furthermore, COVID plus social isolation has aggravated violence due to unemployment and at the increased time females were locked inside a house with their perpetrators, of around 4 extra hours per day. Limiting the victim’s ability to reach out for aid.

The region and the social reality cisgender females encounter is not healthy, females are always at an economic disadvantage not only due to the framework that allows it, but due to the societal roles females are supposed to have. As a matter of fact, “the affection network and horizontal community protection are weakened and abusers gain more control over the victims “ (de Souza Santos et al., 2022, 3). The already vulnerable situation females have in Ecuador and in the region, was exponentially increased during COVID by multiple causes. One of those causes was the lack of social services, female unemployment and misinformation for women. All in all, what is alarming is that society and States know the multiple causes gender violence has and the negative consequences it can bring to the State but still Ecuador and the region chose to ignore it.

The lockdown and the pandemic proved to be a problem for everyone specially for vulnerable groups that are prone to violent behaviors, it had massive consequences on mental health. The pandemic propelled a situation of societal fear. The more fear the more need to acquire some sort of certainty and COVID had overwhelming consequences on women. It propelled “augmented depression, post traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, and grief-related symptoms” (Wake & Knadula, 2022, 2). The levels of anxiety in the overall population was overwhelming, not only for females but also males and the more uncertainty the more humanity can tilt towards a state of nature and Hobbesian attitudes. Therefore, because women unfortunately in numbers in Ecuador are in a vulnerable position due to culture and structure, they were the victims of violence that was more evident than before due to psychosocial stress. Worldwide the level of domestic violence and overall IPV no matter the region grew notoriously, about 31% increase on IPV (Wake & Rani, 2022).

3.2. On the basis of gender: the required scapegoat

To downgrade through negative perceptions the “threat” or the “other” within identity building is key for nation-building, and this is precisely what is happening to cisgender females in Ecuador and the world. The reason why humans crave identity is because of our state of nature which is prone to anxiety, we cannot know what could happen or if we can die the next day, this increases anxiety. The State and nation-building is there to decrease anxiety. Henceforth, it is not a shock to see the uprise of scapegoats around the world after the pandemic. Success within national-building is to have the other and to mistreat it as a way to avoid becoming it.

Therefore, the “other” always needs to be mistreated and regarded in a negative way. Moreover, the “other” must believe that the negative regards in which their group is perceived, must be true. According to the INEC “females that were victims of psychological violence, around 98.1%, did not report it and females that were

victims to physical violence, around 96.6%, did not report it” (2019, 8). Despite the effort put into State run psychological programs and legal assistance, the problem is still big and has not gotten an effective response, because to get an effective response it must include every cause and not only a few of them. One cause of gender violence perhaps is that females do believe they deserve mistreatment due to the philosophical approach of identity building and because they are regarded as the required scapegoat within Ecuadorian society.

To understand why many females and society itself believe that women are worthy of such mistreatment the question should be centered towards society itself and the social rules that have been widely accepted. One of the propellers within the region for nation-building is the construction of romantic love and gender roles that tilt identity building to prioritize male dominance and male attributes. This is all part of the aforementioned “female experience” and the construction of interpersonal relationships. According to Nava-Reyes, Rojas-Solis, Greathouse and Morales “gender regulates specific behaviors, characteristics, and even affections and cognitions for each sex. Thus, every individual is shaped by the parameters of the culture to which they belong” (2018, 103).

Both identity-building and nation-building goes hand in hand with the parameters of culture, where in the great majority of the world have assigned males to be involved in decision-making and to play an active role in society, which entirely deviates from an egalitarian society. Gender roles are mutually inclusive and not exclusive to identity-building, where positive and negative attitudes are generated between the “us” and the “other”. Regretfully nation-building elevates males attributes forming the “us” while female attributes forms the “other”. Gender differentiation is part of the patriarchal structure, where it explicitly states female inferiority. To establish attributes that are inferior or superior is part of identity-building and those attributes that should be apprehended by the “us”, which in this case forms the great “majority” of citizens within a country. Gender differentiation is even stronger in Latin America due to the ties religion has in gender roles and social worth.

Gender roles and the construction of threat have the same binary issues language has, is rather fictitious, absurd, deceitful, and irrational. The perception cisgender females have within society is equally as irrational as the threat or so called “scapegoats” have within society. Nava-Reyes, Rojas-Solis, Greathouse and Morales stated that “Female participants expressed the highest level of antagonism towards their own sex, which may reflect, among other things, the reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes and the fact that they blame themselves for the violence and other behaviors” (2018, 107-108). While on the other hand, males are quite accepting of the construction of love-abuse bonding with females due to the romantic love that is shown to both genders.

Hence, gender roles and the negative perception females and feminine attributes have (within the scope of cisgender females) is irrational and have no basis whatsoever, in fact, they are all distortions, which is the same as with the perception of a scapegoat. Both male and female identity have the building blocks of nation-building and the perception between the “us” versus “them”. The scapegoats just as with females accept their inferior reality, and blame their misfortune on themselves because something might actually be wrong with that societal group instead of asserting that the perception society has of females as inferior is a distortion.

The great majority of violence against women is not reported by married women, but rather by divorced or unmarried women in Ecuador, about 77%, this can be tied with the idea that if the husband leaves, she has lost more than just her husband but rather her social role and worthiness. This perception of gender violence is a consequence of gender-power and of IPV. Regardless of the fact that IPV in modern times is sanctioned, States try to “eradicate it” and society frowns upon male that promote IPV with their wife or partner, there is still violence. Moreover, in most Hispanic families, family interdependence is valued more than independence... and personal problems stay within the family instead of talking about them with a professional (Galanti, 2003, 182). This is also the case of Ecuador, where IPV used to be seen as a private matter and therefore IPV is mostly seen and propelled by the partner of the female or within their family circle. Because the family and romantic relationships are often inside the personal/private life.

Finally, if we take into account nation-building, inclusivity or diversity is seen as a threat to national unity and the formation of a warmth circle. Hence, the need to build the scapegoat that is also regarded as a second-class citizen that a society might have. For identity, meaning and belonging go hand in hand, all these concepts are built upon exclusion and never through inclusion due to the differentiation of binaries. Innate, social and biological differences give us social worth or unworthiness that is crucial for identity development. There is an imaginary element in society that people crave violence and the persecutors are convinced that violence is justified to eradicate the bigger evil (Girard, 1986).

Women in Ecuador are overloaded with responsibilities, blame and guilt, this allows for when something goes wrong in society to have a scapegoat whom to blame and accept to take the blame. As stated by the State Attorney General’s Office (2020): “In Ecuador, 65 out of every 100 women have been victims of violence in some area throughout his life”. Gender violence is a direct consequence of the attributes of compliance “other” versus authority “us” meaning power relations between females and males that promotes emotional problems and lack of self-care that can be seen at the end through direct violence and the Hispanic value of interdependence and the concept of family unity.

The relationship between the “other” and “us” is not always used with the same strength but rather it is mostly used in times of uncertainty. This is because the construction of an identity or a nation is much rather a myth, it is not something real but something made up by humanity to decrease uncertainty and to have purpose and belonging. As mentioned by Girard (1986, 51): “Extreme distrust is as destructive to the understanding of myths as an excess of belief”. If the myth is not believed it could compromise the accuracy of the whole interpretation and of the self. Interpretations that do not propel persecutions are regressive with time because interpretations are linked with identity and the magical thought of myths. Magical thought is always trying to find the source or cause of despair in society, is the same logic for which the witch hunts happened in the US to achieve corrective intervention. Those that suffer are not interested in finding the rational cause of their misfortunes but rather the magical reason that will make everything go away. This is a great example of the schizophrenic nature of our culture.

Trust is a key predictor of a society’s well-being. According to Basabe (2021): “In 2008, for example, Ecuador ranked second in Latin America in terms of interpersonal trust (35.70%) behind only the Dominican Republic (37%), in 2020 personal trust declined to 9%”. Trust is the most pivotal value to maintain a rather smooth society, by having a high level of trust society sees everyone as equal. Hence, if everyone is equal people can propel projects and interests alike. If societies have a high trust in people, then they shall have them with State institutions. If one of these variables fails then overall trust declines and this is precisely what happened in Ecuador and in the world. When there isn’t trust, then society implicitly is not the same and violence to turn those “others” into the “us” is triggered.

According to Yang, Young, Wan & Sullivan (2021, 2): “Universally, people may react to the anxious uncertainty of loss of personal control by scapegoating—disproportionately blaming and/or aggressing against—particular viable targets”. Scapegoating, no matter the social groups that are targeted in a negative regard is a control maintenance mechanism, it is normal for human beings to search for control while in uncertainty but it is urged to control it. It is easier to attribute the blame on others when life goes sideways instead of embracing it inclusively and this is what happens with gender violence and IPV. Male unemployment and being inside a house for a long period of time, can make a situation that increases vulnerability towards females that might also be unemployed. This is why female employment is a way to circumvent IPV.

4. Conclusion and discussion

Many might argue females are to blame for gender violence in Ecuador and in the region. However, this distortion of violence is not something we choose but rather inherit, gender violence is something that is not normal. It is a disease, a pandemic that unfortunately is not conscious. It has the same logic as with colorblindness regarding race but towards gender, which is impossible within society, because there isn’t another mechanism for identity construction of nation-building that is inclusive because language does not work that way. However, these are all myths, the myth of “you cannot be something while being another thing”. This is all the same logic behind racism and why certain people and societies tend to have racist behavior towards minorities.

What is shocking out of all the previous information above mentioned is that IPV is frowned upon in western societies but it is still prevalent. In Ecuador young men generally rejected IPV but justified it as men’s response to increased women’s power and autonomy, meaning that too much egalitarianism propelled IPV (Goicolea et al., 2015). Young men recognize and acknowledge the presence of IPV and knew it was an escalating process, they had strong views against males that are considered *machistas*. Regardless of this, young men in Ecuador still have the perception that women are a vulnerable group that require men’s protection.

Even though society perceives violence negatively, especially violence against women. IPV is still prevalent in the world and in Ecuador. As a matter of fact, Hispanic cultures such as the Ecuadorian have a commonality which is the sense of group or family bonds, which increases empathy. Polychronic societies with increased empathy do not only regard the group more important than the individual, but the shame or guilt is also shared upon the group and not the individual. This leads society to condemn acts against cisgender females as something bad but the shame of it is shared with everyone. In fact, this attribute of Ecuadorian society propels ideas in young men where IPV is understandable due to infidelity or as a way to calm women down (Goicolea et al., 2015). This leads to our current problem that gender violence has not progressed as expected regardless of information younger generations have, due to ambivalence and contradictions. In addition, violence is seen as the “dark enemy” of society and society does not embrace it but rather runs away from it, this promotes the problem with gender violence in the region to subsist.

Society has a problem with cisgender females, there is judgment on those that try to not be feminine but those that are, keep being victims of gender violence and this is the ambivalence that Ecuador has. It has laws against gender violence, society condemns violence but still violence is promoted. This is to be found in the societal practice of “benevolent violence”. This happens due to distortions within society that at the end are false. Cisgender women are the perfect scapegoat for identity-building, they are not only the problem within

society and the “other” that are negatively perceived and “eradicated” up to a point, but they are also the solutions to all of our problems.

At the core a negative reciprocity brings people together in opposition to the “other” and at the same time it unifies their attributes and their identity, hence, the key for identity building (Girard, 1986). States, because they are made out of people, they always dream towards the purging of society of the impure elements, and cisgender women have biblically been attributed to having impure elements. This can be seen since the myth of Adam and Eve. Goicole et al. (2015) during their research on young men in Ecuador found that “Participants expressed caution regarding the law enforcement measures against IPV. They claimed that women were taking advantage of these measures, or even ‘abusing’ them to oppress men and were portrayed more as a way of exacting revenge than justice” (Goicole et al., 2015). Cisgender women are without a hesitation treated as a scapegoat. They are perceived as victims due to their innocence but at the same time their negative imaginations are made by a collective polarization.

The scapegoat within society is the innocent group that is blamed for everything but at the same time because of guilt, they can be used as the ultimate sacrifice of society to reach the solution to their problems. As mentioned by Girard himself “Violence casts itself out by violence, as the foundation of all human societies” (1986, 187). Cisgender women are perceived as innocent and at the same time a person who bears attributes of bestiality and damnation to the world. Violence, regardless of the fact that it is sanctioned by the western world, is not eradicated because violence is part of all societies. Hence, gender violence in Ecuador is not eradicated not because of disinformation but because of history and culture that has allowed and normalized the mistreat of women.

Women are to be blamed for economic downturns, the wage gap, to be blamed upon their own violence and of “asking for too much rights”. At the same time, women are a sign of unity and of national cohesion during crises while they act as the “other” in Ecuador and in the world. Gender violence against cisgender women in Ecuador during lockdown, was not a shocker and in a way the “increase” was not an increase as it is normally perceived, but rather violence has been the same, it has simply just become more notorious. As stated by Yang, Young, Wan, & Sullivan (2021, 2): “Cognitively and motivationally, it is reassuring to see evil in the world not as due to random, unpredictable forces, but rather as stemming from focal individuals that can be politically or economically held accountable”. This is shaped by cultural imperatives that are not very different around the world, it is a human motivation to eradicate evil/suffering through magical ways. All in all, females are given the necessary amount of violence, a sort of violence that is always constant but shall not eradicate all females, it is a sustainable violence that is accepted by everyone and is taught to be normal for women themselves.

The best way to ensure a scapegoat is that the scapegoat believes they are to be blamed for everything wrong in their societies, to accept the shame of being part of that negatively perceived group. The greatest type of IPV against cisgender women is seen through psychological violence and not physical violence, this is due to the legal sanctions imposed against physical violence to the perpetrators. Specifically psychological violence aims towards the decrease of a woman’s self-esteem and to promote isolation from society, leading to depression, which is hatred of the self. Moreover, psychological violence might be even more dangerous for females because it is indirect violence meaning that it can also be seen as cultural and structural violence that is “normal”.

The FGE estimates in 2020 that in the social, labor and educational sectors the most seen type of violence is psychological (2020). The greatest problem of this type of violence it is that it can increase to reach femicide. The laws in the legal framework in Ecuador are helping but they were imposed quite recently. Meaning that IPV in Ecuador and perceiving it as something negative is something quite new. As mentioned by Ortiz-Prado et al. (2022, 5): “Prior to 2014, there was no criminal procedure to hold perpetrators accountable for attacks of violence and discrimination made against women and girls”. Additionally, budget allocations for the fight against gender violence in Ecuador are still not enough, normally the central government invests less than what it normally mentions during government runoffs. Institutional changes do not promote real change by themselves, these sorts of changes are only superficial.

The pandemic at the core was a context of increased uncertainty and decreased control of the self, which propelled motivations to aggress females and minority groups. Aggression towards vulnerable groups might magically turnaround the current situation the world is facing due to the pandemic. Regardless of the fact that young people know the reasons and consequences of IPV, society is still quite schizophrenic which promotes scapegoating mechanisms that reassess some level of “control”. According to Wake & Kandula (2002, 7): “If we do not campaign seriously to increase awareness and apply quick action for IPV, and other forms of interpersonal violence, the harmful effects on individuals, families, and communities will repeat for decades”. This is one of the causes why young males in Ecuador still feel negative when females are more rights or are stronger than males. Hence, their perceptions that females use feminism or parity laws to achieve a more egalitarian society “for vengeful reasons or unjust reasons”.

This can be linked to the mistrust the pandemic gave not only in our personal life but also in the trust we had over State institutions that were absent during lockdown. To consciously know that another group, in this case the scapegoat is worse off than the “us” gives a sense of control over the self. This is why all in all, to

eradicate gender violence Ecuador and the world still have a long way to go because we need to fight against unfortunately a Hobbesian behavior within societal rules and most of the times are unconscious. Cisgender women and minority rules that are not purposely represented within the “us” will always be unjustly targeted as the needed scapegoat for cognitive and societal reasons.

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