

ABOUT “GENDER IDEOLOGY” AND OTHER MYTHS

A decolonial critique of Antigender Discourse in
contemporary Argentina

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Abstract

The antigender discourse emerged in Argentina after the rejection of the bill to decriminalize and legalize abortion in 2018. Due to the lack of material available to conduct a thorough research, they emerged as a group academically unexplored. This thesis aims to fill this gap while studying the discursive strategies and organizational structure of the groups against “gender ideology”. Drawing from contributions of decolonial feminisms and intersectional analyses, this study depicts the intricate context where such groups are situated, recognizing the effects of coloniality permeating their discourse. While contrasting the information collected, through online research and semi-structured interviews, this study aims to dismantle the politics of identity beyond the façade of the antigender cause.

Key words

Abortion, Antigender discourse, Feminized bodies, Coloniality, Gender ideology, Argentina, Gender, Race, Family, Decolonial, Feminisms.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the women and pregnant bodies that died as consequence of clandestine abortions in Argentina. Particularly to the memory of Patricia Solorza, who died in jail on August 2019 while serving her sentence for abortion.

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Martes 7 de agosto 2018. Ámsterdam, Países Bajos

Diario de Sofía

"Me indispuse ayer, una semana después del eclipse de luna llena. Me duele mucho, más que de costumbre.

En dos días, bueno en realidad mañana es el debate en Senadores por la ley del aborto. Mi bolsito tiene colgado el pañuelo verde... como sintiéndome así un poquito más cerca de mis hermanas en estos días. Parece a propósito que en ambos debates me vino el período. Las sensaciones, emociones y dolores me hacen pensar en mi cuerpo como un todo separado que a veces no puedo controlar... que antes ni siquiera sobre él podíamos decidir. Justo este mes tuve un atraso de ocho días, y ante el miedo y la duda empecé a averiguar sobre el aborto en Holanda. Se lo planteé a Omar y lo pensé varias veces.

En Holanda hay más de cien centros de salud donde cualquier mujer puede solicitar la práctica hasta entrados los tres meses del feto. Si hubiese sido el caso, abortar habría sido fácil en términos legales y burocráticos, mi compañero me habría acompañado al centro, y luego de unos días yo habría seguido mi vida, con mis proyectos y sueños. Con la seguridad de que decidí yo sobre mi propio cuerpo y mi propio destino.

Justo cuatro días atrás murió una chica de veintidós años en Argentina por una infección producto de un aborto mal terminado.

Las casualidades no creo que existan.

Las causalidades pueden dejar de existir.

Estoy lejos. Estoy extrañando. Pero lo que alcanzamos en Argentina ya no tiene retroceso. Pase lo que pase mañana, nos encuentra más fortalecidas que nunca. Ya llega el tren a Ámsterdam. Me bajo con dolor de ovarios, sensible y pensando en la vigilia.

¡QUE SEA LEY!"

Tuesday 7th August 2018. Amsterdam, Netherlands

Sofia's diary

"I got my period yesterday. One week after the full moon eclipse. It really hurts, more than usual. In two days, well actually tomorrow, is the debate in the Senate for the abortion bill. My bag has a green scarf hanging from it... as in this way I could feel a little bit closer to my sisters in Argentina during these days. It seems to be on purpose that I got my period during both of the Congress debates. The sensations, emotions and pains make me think about my body as a different and automat thing that sometimes I cannot control, that some time ago we could not even decide over. As a coincidence, this month I had a delay of eight days for my period, and because I was scared, I started searching information about how to abort in the Netherlands. I talked about it with Omar and over-thought it several times. In the Netherlands, there are more than one hundred health centres where any woman can have an abortion until three months of pregnancy. If I would have had to interrupt a pregnancy, it would have been easy in legal and bureaucratic terms, my partner would have gone to the centre with me and after a few days I would have continued with my life, my projects and dreams. I would have continued with the certainty that I decided over my own body and my own destiny.

Just four days ago, a twenty-two years old Argentinian woman died because of an infection provoked by a failed abortion.

I do not think that casualties exist.

I do think causalities can stop existing

I am far away. I am missing my homeland. Nevertheless, what we already achieved in Argentina has no way back. Whatever happens tomorrow, it finds us stronger than ever. The train is coming. I am continuing my journey with ovaries pain, sensitive and thinking more than ever in the green wave.

MAY IT BE LEGAL!"

Introduction

Abortion, Argentina and the antigender shift

Abortion is a crime in Argentina. I start this thesis with this statement, because it is a fact and because I was shocked by the reaction of some friends, colleagues and even feminist activists that I met in Western Europe when I explained the situation of abortion in my own country.

In Argentina, where women were granted the right to vote in 1947¹, the first country in the region to legally recognize same sex marriage and the one with the most progressive Gender Identity law, as it is the first in the world to recognize a person's gender identity without any medical preconditions; it is illegal to voluntarily interrupt a pregnancy. This means that for a woman or a pregnant body, it is not possible to have access to abortion in public hospitals nor in private clinics, and that in particular cases, one risks going to jail, as it was the case of Belén, a young teenager that was incarcerated for two years after arriving to the hospital with a vaginal haemorrhage as a consequence of a miscarriage.

Abortion is a crime despite the efforts of local feminist organizations that, since 2006, the year in which the law for voluntary interruption of pregnancy was introduced in Congress for the first time, are promoting campaigns of awareness and demonstrations in defence of women's rights.

Abortion is a crime despite the advancements in technology for providing safe pregnancy interruption and despite the sociological debates about women's rights that gender theorists and feminists have been providing for more than four decades.

Why is abortion considered a crime? This question can have infinite explanations based on the angle we assume to find an answer. Nevertheless, it is not the scope of this thesis. My interest is to analyse the antiabortion discourse and the campaigns against abortion first and "gender ideology" later, which during this thesis, will be referred to as "antigender rhetorics".

The decision to analyse the Argentinian case stems from my personal desire to understand the context while being an Argentinian myself. This country, situated farthest south in Latin America, agriculturally diverse, with unique and various landscapes, and globally

¹ The list of the first five countries in South America where women were allowed to vote are Uruguay in 1927, Ecuador in 1929, Brazil in 1932, Guatemala in 1945, Venezuela and Argentina in 1947. For more information about women's suffrage in Latin America visit the following article "The day the female suffrage began in Latin America" (in Spanish): <https://www.nodal.am/2019/07/el-dia-que-el-voto-femenino-se-abrio-paso-en-america-latina/>

famous for producing highly skilled football players, is a land full of contradictions. In Argentina, the independence from the Spanish crown is patriotically (and annually) commemorated, yet the fact that Spanish companies hold ten per cent of the country's territories is intentionally ignored. Argentina is considered a food-exporting country, and yet seven per cent of the population cannot afford food². The European roots in the Argentinian culture are proudly embraced and yet the trace in Argentinians' heritage of the *pueblos originarios* (native people) is constantly denied.

In this peculiar context, Argentinians live with a passionate and contradictory nature; while carrying the backlash of memories and omissions, distinctive features of a society which tends to forget that its history began long before 1492. Therefore, exploring the discourse of antiabortion groups while understanding the impact of colonization in contemporary days resulted in the decision to conduct a decolonial analyses of antigender rhetorics.

My intention firstly was to understand the position of fundamentalist groups, assuming that these were the main actors positioned against the bill for pregnancy voluntary interruption. In the Latin American context, the term "fundamentalism" mostly refers to groups or persons whose religious beliefs are based on a literal interpretation of the dogmas, which prevails against social norms. In the Argentinian case, fundamentalism is also related to extremist groups of Christians. However, I realized that this is a narrow concept because, under this terminology, I could only consider those individuals and groups directly associated with churches and religious groups when the anti-abortion discourse includes actors whose arguments go beyond a theological approach.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to comprehend how the antigender discourses have been reconfigured in the Argentinian context after the rejection of the abortion law.

In order to achieve this, I will analyse online campaigns, interview videos (found on YouTube), and material I gathered from Facebook, and other websites related to two antigender groups in Argentina. These groups are: *Salvemos las dos vidas* (Save both lives) and *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Don't mess with my children). The purpose is to explore their action plan and critically analyse their discourses.

² To know more about the last statistics on multidimensional poverty in Argentina, read the following article "UCA's hard report: multidimensional poverty reached 31.3% and today there are 12.7 million Argentines with deficiencies" (in Spanish): <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2019/03/25/duro-informe-de-la-uca-llego-a-313-la-pobreza-multidimensional-y-hoy-existen-127-millones-de-argentinos-con-carencias/?fbclid=IwAR3-yQ5P8-Msw7f29IS7c1aBqqHvRZuABwaSNio3fIgkosP9C5WEgZG4GNk>

In addition to that, I conducted two interviews with Argentinian women who do not consider themselves to be represented by Argentinian feminist activists, and whose position towards abortion differs from each other. In the beginning, I planned to perform two more interviews, one with a University professor where I studied Political Science, and another one-on-one with the representatives of *Salvemos las dos vidas* in Buenos Aires. However, due to different reasons, both of these interviews were cancelled on the last minute. In that sense, I believe that the fact that I am physically located far away from Argentina was an obstacle. Despite that, these overcomable obstacles did not hinder my research process.

Methodological considerations: researching as an outsider

The methodological techniques used during this thesis will be feminist critical discourse analyses of online material and of two semi-structured interviews conducted through Skype.

The analysis of antigender rhetorics from a Feminist Critical Discourse Analyses perspective (hereinafter referred to as FCDA) permit me to “show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). In this sense, the objective of this thesis is to explore strategies used by antigender groups while critically analysing and dismantling the power relations sustained by these groups’ discourse. Following a poststructuralist line, discourse is understood as a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out (Lazar, 2007, p. 145).

Furthermore, FCDA offers a “theorization of the relationship between social practices and discourse structures and a wide range of tools and strategies for detailed analyses of contextualized use of language in texts and talks” (Lazar, 2007, p. 144). Hence, exploring interviews and video conferences from this theoretical approach, equates to understanding that discourse in this context is more than just what it is said and how, but it is also understanding when and under which conditions. In addition, “in FCDA research, language is critically analysed together with other semiotic modalities like visual images, layouts, gestures and sounds, which makes for an enriching and insightful analysis” (Lazar, 2007, p. 144). Considering the aims of this thesis, this technique enables conducting a critical analyses while

taking into consideration the colonial history of Argentina, and how coloniality frames the antigender discourse on present time.

The decision to perform semi-structured interviews has to do with the fact that they allow discussions and free interactions between the researcher and the participant (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 18). The use of Skype in this case, enabled the possibility to collect data from the other side of the world without necessarily travelling there. Following Reinharz and Davidman, I do not consider that there is a "politically correct" feminist method or approach (1992) and that the potential of feminist methods and studies is the opportunity to shorten distances and challenge positivist structures of research. Therefore, I did not want to be stopped by the impossibility to conduct face-to-face interviews.

Another consideration regarding the interview data-analyses, is the fact that the interviewees mind-sets' largely differ from my own. When referring to "mind-sets", I appertain the way of thinking and the opinion towards a specific topic or social issue. In this sense, it is not only that the women interviewed and I have different backgrounds, or that we are located in geographically distant places, but also and most importantly, that we radically differ on our way of thinking in relation to particular topics that are usually portrayed as sensitive, such as abortion. On one hand, it is in these differences that resides the richness of the analyses, but on the other, I did not want to make the interviewees feel uncomfortable nor pressure them to answer. Therefore, I established that they had the right to refuse responding or to cancel the interview if they felt the need to.

I interviewed two women, aged 32 and 59, both mothers and currently living in Argentina; one in the city of Venado Tuerto, my hometown and the other one in Córdoba. Both candidates selected for the interviews had to fulfil the following requirements: being females, mothers, not considering themselves represented by Argentinian feminism, living in different parts of the country and being against abortion.

The particularities of the topic and my compromise to explore a field in which I feel personally affected as an Argentinian researcher, meant exploring the contradictions I encountered during my life being brought up by a conservative and Catholic family. In order to allow myself a certain level of reflexivity, I decided to interview a family member who is a single mother and who has always represented an example of strength and feminism to me, even though she does not consider herself a feminist, and what's more, she actually disregards

Argentinian feminism(s)³. The other woman is a psychologist living in Venado Tuerto that is married to an antiabortion politician from my hometown. I got her contact through a friend of my mother who lives in the same city.

Due to the differences between us, researcher and researched, I faced the conundrum of how not to undercut, discredit or write-off the interviewed women's opinion, considering that simple decisions over what to include or exclude on the research, also carries theoretical, political and ethical implications (Stanley 1984 as cited by Ramazonoglu and Holland, 2002, p.161). In other words, I encountered the enigma of how construing the data collected without portraying an unfavourable image of the interviewed. In this line, and taking into account the contributions made by Ramazonoglu and Holland, I recognize that the data collected will be interpreted according to the scope of this thesis, and that while doing so, I am aware of the exercise of power that this entails (2002, p. 161). In relation to this statement, I clarify that the fragments of the interviews used for the research will be analysed in relation to the antigender discourse even though the interviewees do not identify themselves as part of these groups.

Before conducting the interviews, I sent a consent form to the interviewees that was afterwards signed, scanned and emailed to me. During the interviews, I explained that their identity would be anonymous and that the data would only be used for the purpose of this thesis. As a reciprocity and ethical consideration, I offered to provide translations from English or Italian and any other favour considering my location in Western Europe. As a response, one of the interviewees required to have a copy of the thesis in Spanish to send it to a colleague, which I committed to do in a period of one year after the thesis would be published.

³ For the interviewees, feminism is seen as one and universal, usually portrayed as radical and violent. However, I consider there are different sectors and representations of feminist movements.

Glossary

During the collection of material for this thesis, a number of concepts appeared which are not defined and whose reference might generate problems as some of them may have a negative connotation. With this in mind, I will proceed with a brief description of the concepts and their signifiers in order to indicate how they will be used in this text.

Gender ideology: when used in the context of this thesis, “gender ideology” will refer to the antigender groups’ rhetoric’s. While referring to “gender”, these groups tend to confuse the concepts of gender and sex, assuming that the sex assigned at birth predetermines a person’s gender identity, always based on the binary female/male. The term “gender ideology” itself is an oxymoron; when used by antigender groups it aims to discredit feminists and sexual and reproductive rights groups (by using fear and antiscientific rhetorics). It also refers to the cluster of concepts cited by feminists groups whose foundational idea is that sexuality and gender identity are social constructs. Furthermore, the concept of “gender ideology” encompasses every topic related to feminisms. Subsequently, they create and reinforce a bias towards the idea of gender that reduces it to an ideological discussion.

As it will be explored in the coming chapters, the use of “gender ideology” shows the centrality of gender in the current discussions towards abortion, sexual and reproductive rights, and feminism. Furthermore, this concept represents a persuasive and discursive strategy that is secular and that appeals to notions that reaffirm the traditional and heteronormative sexual system (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018, p. 26).

Family: one of the scopes of this thesis is to understand the principal concepts that articulate the antigender discourse. One of them is the idea of family. There is no exact definition, but when referring to the defence of family against “gender ideology”, the antigender rhetoric’s portray an idea of heteronormative and traditional family, leaving out from this definition the plurality of family formats that a society can have (this is any type of group that lives together and can be considered as one’s own family).

Pregnant bodies: this is the translation into English of *cuerpos gestantes*, which is a Spanish expression to address bodies that can go through pregnancy without a sexual binary connotation. In the procedure of voluntarily interrupting a pregnancy, the subjects are identified as those who can get pregnant, such as cis women, transgender men and non-binary bodies with a uterus.

Feminized bodies: refers to subjects whose female performance represents a position of vulnerability in a society ruled by a patriarchal system. To expand the concept of violence against women, “feminized bodies” include those individuals that go beyond recognizing themselves as female or not. Feminized bodies is the result of social interpretations of femininity. The term here does not encompass other feminized bodies as such transgender women, transvestite men and homosexual men, understanding that the violence perpetrated against these identities deserves a different approach, which requires different theoretical considerations as well.

Argentinian feminisms: during the analyses of the data collected through both interviews, the ones I conducted and the ones I watched online, feminism is mentioned several times. In both cases, this universal concept refers negatively to the radical feminist groups in Argentina. I recognize that feminisms are multiple, with different strategies and representations. Antigender rhetoric's strategize the term to their own identity – as I will explore in chapter four. The scope of this thesis is to explore the image of feminists that is being portrayed by antigender rhetoric's and sustained by certain parts of the Argentinian society.

Context

The access to legal, safe and free abortion in Argentina is a discussion that dates back to the year 1921, when abortion was banned and included in the National Criminal Code. This bill establishes that pregnancy interruption is a crime but should not be punishable under specific circumstances. More precisely:

Abortion performed by a licensed medical practitioner with the consent of the pregnant woman is not punishable:

1. If done in order to prevent danger to the life or health of the mother and if this danger cannot be avoided by other means.
2. If the pregnancy is a result of a rape or indecent assault on an idiot or insane woman. In this case, the consent of her legal representative shall be required for the abortion (Bergallo, 2014, p. 144).

Almost one hundred years later, there is no official record of cases where this article was applied, and of the twenty-three provinces of Argentina, only ten have recognized this article on their local jurisdictions. This bill, which was modified during the dictatorship in 1974 and later in 1984, has been governing the Argentinian health system with no other effect than the total banning of pregnancy interruption.

In 2006, *la Campaña por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito*⁴ (the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion, hereinafter *la Campaña*) filed for the first time in Congress a bill to decriminalize abortion and make it accessible in public hospitals. This bill was also pushing to provide legal support for women and pregnant bodies by amending article 86 of the Criminal Code. Despite the efforts, the Congress adjourned the discussion of the bill for eleven years.

During these years, the exact number of women and pregnant bodies that performed abortions under clandestine conditions is unknown due to the lack of information. There are, however, some statistics related to maternal mortality. According to the Health Ministry, since the return to democracy and until 2016, in Argentina 3030 women died because of unsafe pregnancy interruptions. This number is not accurate, and neither provides a real image of the

⁴ *La Campaña* was founded in 2003 during a National Women Encounter in Argentina, with the purpose of promoting the struggle to legalize abortion.

violence that resides behind the cases⁵. Nevertheless, it gives us the insight that although the practice is illegal, it still exists on a large scale⁶.

Although in this period there were a few controversial cases, such as the trial to Belén, in which a young woman was in prison for two years after a miscarriage that was considered by the local court as a homicide⁷, there were no major changes in the legislation regulating abortions. Neither compliment of the exceptions recognized by the article 86 of the Criminal Code.

During the first months of 2018, the bill for voluntary pregnancy interruption (*Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo* or *IVE*) was filed for the seventh time in the National Argentinian Congress. Unlike the previous cases, this was the first time that the Congress announced that the bill would be discussed and voted on by both chambers.

During the period between the 6th of March, when the bill was presented, and the 13th of June, when the bill was voted by the chamber of Deputies, the Argentinian society started facing a reality that, until that moment, was mostly a taboo topic. The discussion of depenalising abortions unveiled thousands of stories of abused women and pregnant bodies in the eye of the public. Thousands of women and pregnant bodies that were under a veil of shame, secrecy and misinformation came forward. The debate transformed the media, political and social agenda, making abortion the central issue of the decade/ century.

The political and social scene was transformed, the debate in all media, including the most sensationalist newspapers and television programs, centred on the discussion of voluntary pregnancy interruption. From deliberations in the academic field to the satirical representation of the topic on reality TV shows, abortion became the main topic of public interest. I remember how in prime time television programs, panellists debated the abortion stories of famous people, focusing on celebrity abortion testimonials and whether there were enough reasons to justify the action or not. This also ended up in the appearance of activist groups that joined to defend a position towards the bill. For example, the *Actrices Argentinas* (Argentinian

⁵ The only available information regarding abortion on a national level comes from selected hospitalizations in public sector. In addition, abortions are reported in a single category, but the reasons are in reality numerous; from women who are admitted because of spontaneous miscarriages, women with legal abortions, to women who faced complications from abortions performed under unsafe conditions. These statistics exclude women who received outpatient care and those who accessed private institutions or had a private medical insurance (REDAAS, 2018).

⁶ The number of abortions in Argentina is estimated to be between 370.000 and 520.000 cases per year (REDAAS, 2018).

⁷ For more information about it, see "An Argentine girl who was imprisoned for an abortion for two tears was acquitted", *El Pais*, March 28th of 2017, Accessible at (in Spanish): https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/03/27/argentina/1490648400_185209.html

Actresses) group was formed by actresses promoting the legalization of pregnancy interruption and other campaigns related to women's rights.

For the first time in a long period, Argentina was also at the centre of attention of the international community. I dare say that since the 2001 economic crisis (in which dozens of people died as a consequence of police violence) our country had not been so named by newspapers, media and social networks internationally. The celebrity Twitter accounts, like Susan Sarandon⁸, Anjelica Huston⁹ and Margaret E. Atwood¹⁰ cited the situation in Argentina. Even the New York Times covered the image of a hanger published by Amnesty International in defence of the law¹¹.

The level of mobilization that characterized the streets, schools, houses and social networks in Argentina during the period from March to August 2018 was unprecedented. The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion organized interventions and demonstrations throughout the country, as well as the request for support from international organizations such as the UN and Amnesty International. The "green scarf", the identifying symbol of la Campaña since its foundation in 2003, became a very strong symbol and people started wearing the scarf as an identifying object. As an Argentinian writer stated "[g]reen ceased to be the colour of hope. We do not expect anything anymore. We have reached a point of no return"¹² (Romero Ruso, 2018).

On the other hand, green was not the only colour strongly resignified in the political national scene. Antiabortion groups retorted by using a light blue scarf as their identifying colour. Just as pro-choice organizations strengthened their identity strategies and their actions throughout the country, the anti-law groups went through a similar process.

Since May 2018, the light blue scarf became the symbol of organizations, groups and representatives against the approval of the IVE law. This heterogeneous group formed by religious factions but also by civil associations, social organizations and even groups of actresses and actors, appeared strongly on the Argentinian public scene in February 2018, a month prior to the presentation of the bill at the Congress. Under the name Salvemos las dos vidas (Save the two lives), the anti-law spaces also launched media campaigns, organized

⁸ Susan Sarandon's Tweet: <https://twitter.com/SusanSarandon/status/1026869364048494593?s=20>

⁹ Anjelica Huston's Tweet: <https://twitter.com/anjelicaheston/status/1026988336185917441>

¹⁰ Margaret Atwood's Tweet: <https://twitter.com/MargaretAtwood/status/1011297769510842368?s=20>

¹¹ To read more about this cover, visit the article "The *New York Times* cover on abortion in Argentina: The world is watching", August 7th 2018. Accessible (in Spanish) at: <https://www.eldestapeweb.com/nota/la-contratapa-del-new-york-times-sobre-el-aborto-en-argentina-el-mundo-esta-mirando--2018-8-7-8-24-0>

¹² "Verde dejó de ser el color de la esperanza. Ya no esperamos nada. Somos una ola de la que no hay vuelta atrás"

demonstrations, and in some provinces where they obtained the support of local governments, they managed to insert even graphic campaigns in public transport (see image 1).

The fact of having two similar objects with different colours identifying each of the sectors in relation to the bill for decriminalizing and making abortion legal, gives an insight of the social and political contrasts in Argentina. Two sides, two identities, two parts of the story, each of them with their strategies, their discourses and their agenda. Throughout this period and hereafter, the context was characterized by a polarization of society, where abortion became the axe and being pro or against it were the only two possible sides.



Image 1. Self-taken photograph of posters in public transportation with the phrase "do not mess with my children". 20th September 2018. Córdoba, Argentina.



Image 2. Photograph of the Congress square in Buenos Aires the morning of the discussion for the abortion bill. Taken by journalist Mario Quinteros for online newspaper Diario Clarín, June 13th 2018

One of the most symbolic images of this social and political scenario was taken during the debate of the bill in the Deputies Chamber, a photograph showing the two sectors, one on each side of the street in front of the Argentinian Congress, with their flags, posters, and coloured scarfs (See figure 2).

The bill passed the Deputies Chamber on June 13th, but two months later, on August 8th the second Chamber, the Senate, vetoed it. After a heated discussion that lasted around seventeen hours and with thirty-eight votes against, thirty-one in favour and two abstentions, the bill to legalize the voluntary interruption of pregnancy in Argentina was rejected.

The arguments presented by each representative of the Senate varied in terms of content. Some of them referred to the numbers of women dead as a consequence of clandestine abortions, others to the numbers of unborn babies that are assassinated as result of pregnancy interruptions. From those who voted "no", most of their arguments were based on the threat to life and family that it would mean to legalize abortion, the high costs that providing abortion

in public hospitals would incur for the government and celebrated motherhood as one of the most important moments of a woman's life¹³.

After the rejection, the social scenario remained divided into two sectors whose agenda took different paths. Considering that abortion remained illegal, the sector supporting the approval of the bill started pressuring the government to compliment the law for Educación Sexual Integral (Sexual Education Law or ESI by its Spanish initials) that was approved in 2006. The purpose of the law 26.150 is to "guarantee that every child and adolescent has access to an integral sexual education", this one understood as "an education that articulates biological, psychological, social, affective and ethic aspects". This bill established that every private and public educational institution should provide sexual education that promotes the respect of identity and that explains that sexuality is not limited to the physical aspect. In line with the bill, in 2008 was sanctioned the Guiding Programme¹⁴ for the accomplishment of the law, where gender is defined as a social construct, gender stereotypes for women and men are discussed, diversity is promoted and sexual orientation is not presented as exclusively heteronormative, among other ideas.

This law, sanctioned in 2006, is not yet applied in most of the Argentinian schools. After the rejection of abortion, the prochoice sector started pushing for its completion, considering that if abortion is still illegal, at least sexual education must be provided. As a response, the antiabortion sector launched a national campaign under the name Do not mess with my children (Con mis hijos no te metas) against the Sexual Education Law.

This is when the discourse of the sector against abortion got a very strong antigender connotation. Now the focus was in not only defending the unborn child, but also defending the children and families against the threat of the "gender ideology". The arguments against the ESI are mostly related to the fact that this law has an approach that emphasizes the gender perspective, and that instead of providing information it is considered as an ideology that tries to brainwash and confuse kids from an early age (Baigorria, 2018, p. 16).

Thanks to one of the women interviewed during this thesis, I got access to an article written by an Argentinian psychologist that explores the material published by the Ministry of Education in support of the ESI law. This paper analyses each part of the bill and concludes

¹³ These are some of the arguments stated during the debate in the Senate chamber, as it was streamed online everybody had access to it. The debate is accessible (in Spanish) at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91XPH_6pL_0.

¹⁴ The complete bill can be read online (in Spanish) in the following link: <http://www.inet.edu.ar/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/43-08-anexo-1.pdf>

that the guiding material provided for the compliment of the ESI “is harmful for students, generating a situation of lack of protection and violation, in which children and adolescents are exposed to a position that may lead to their corruption” (Baigorria, 2018, p. 8).

The campaign *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Do not mess with my children) was launched in the whole country, from South to North. The strategies used were demonstrations, debates in schools (most of them private and catholic) and the promotion of images defending the



Image 3. Self-taken photograph of street poster against "gender ideology" with the phrase "Con mis hijos no te metas" (Do not mess with my children), 20th September 2018. Córdoba, Argentina.

binary division of society into girls and boys, portraying pink and blue posters as a statement against “gender ideology” (See image 3).

In addition, this approach towards “gender ideology” has been portrayed by different anti sexual and reproductive rights movements around the world in different moments. In 2007 the first demonstrations against sexual education in the schools took place in Croatia, where later the same groups would be actively promoting an anti-same-sex marriage campaign in 2012. In Austria, Spain and France during the years 2012 and 2013 strong demonstrations against abortion and sexual education were organized (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018). At the same time, in Poland there was a strong antigender ideology campaign, and in Italy in 2015, the *Comitato difendiamo nostri figli* (Committee in defence of Our Children) was created¹⁵.

In South America, the campaigns against sexual education were also defined by an openly antigender position. The campaign *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Don't mess with my children) that was organized in Argentina in 2018 is also present in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador and Perú since 2016.

In December of 2016, the group *Con mis hijos no te metas* was founded in Perú as a reaction to the Minister of Education of that moment, who was promoting the inclusion of sexual education in the scholar curricula in order to support gender equality. As a reaction to this attempt, the conservative groups of the country organized marches and demonstrations,

¹⁵ Website of the *Comitato* (Committee in defence of Our Children): <https://www.difendiamoinostrifigli.it>

provoking later the forced resignation of the Minister Saavedra (Periodística, 2016). In Ecuador, almost one year after, was celebrated one of the biggest marches in Latin America of the group Con mis hijos no te metas, with the attendance of almost one-million Ecuadorians and the presence of the Catholic Church (Burneo Salazar, 2018).

In Brazil, in 2017, most of the antigender ideology street manifestations focused on the critique against including particular concepts in the school's curricula such as gender equality, sexuality and sexual orientation. One of the results of these demonstrations was the approval of a law that prohibits the use of these terms at schools in the city of Manaus (Hernández, 2017). In some countries, the demonstrations were very massive, such as Mexico, where the antigender groups proposed creating Latin-American's Front against "gender ideology". In Colombia, the antigender demonstrations were also attended by a large amount of people, and a deputy that represents this sector that was present in the marches in Mexico was one of the special guests in the debates for the creation of the Front (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018, p. 22).

Since its beginning until today, these groups applied the same strategies, street manifestations and video campaigns, which shows that this antigender rhetoric is a transnational phenomenon with contextual particularities (Wilkison, 2017 as cited by González Veléz, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta & Amat y León, 2018).

Another fact that is strengthening the antigender position is the growth of political support from local governments and international organizations, resulting in a network that is becoming larger and financially stronger. This is evidenced on the celebration of congresses, encounters and debates with international coverage defending their idea of "family" and fighting against what they call the "gender ideology". One example is the organization of the Family World Congress which on 2019 celebrated its thirteenth meeting in Verona, Italy, and that counted on the support of the Italian government, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Spanish NGO Citizen Go, and other international organizations in defence of Marriage, Family and against abortion¹⁶.

In this context, antigender rhetorics are emerging and restructuring their organization towards the same purpose, showing to the world the damage that "gender ideology" can cause in society. Hence, gender appears as a concept that redefines the political and social agenda for

¹⁶ Website of the World Family Congress: <https://wcfverona.org/en/>

feminist and progressive groups but also for the counterpart, emerging the antigender rhetorics that this thesis aims to analyse.

Miércoles 15 de agosto 2018, Ámsterdam, Países Bajos

Diario de Sofía

"El jueves pasado (9 de agosto de 2018) el Senado Argentino rechazó la ley de interrupción voluntaria del embarazo. El lunes 13 murió una mujer de treinta y dos años por un aborto realizado con perejil. Hoy Fran me pasó la noticia.

Me siento desganada, triste y lejana. Estoy esperando el metro (acabo de subir) y todo me parece tan ajeno. Las caras, los edificios que veo por la ventana. La música argentina sonando en mis auriculares quizás forma parte de la nostalgia. Pero la realidad... es la realidad la que me pega fuerte. ¿Cómo mierda hace la gente para vivir pretendiendo que todo está bien? Me duele el pecho. Fuerte en el centro. Quiero hundirme sola en un lago y olvidarme de todo un minuto. Hoy la humanidad me da asco".

Wednesday 15th of August 2018, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Sofia's diary

"Last Thursday (9th of august of 2018) the Argentinian Senate rejected the bill for pregnancy voluntary interruption. On Monday 13th a thirty-two years old woman died as a consequence of an abortion made with parsley. Today Fran sent me the news. I feel hopeless, sad and very far away. I am waiting for the metro (I just got in) and everything seems so alien to me. The faces, the buildings I see through the window. The Argentinian music sounding on my headphones might be part of this nostalgic feelings. But reality... it is reality what hits me hard.

How the fuck can people live pretending that everything is all right? My chest hurts. Very strong in the middle. I want to drown myself in a lake and forget about everything for a few minutes. Today humanity disgusts me".

Previous Research

From the study of fundamentalism to antigender rhetoric's

There are not many articles focusing on the analysis of antiabortion discourses in Argentina. Within the academic field, most of the available material is written with an accusatory tone that does not provide content for a deeper analysis or theoretical discussions. It seems that in most of the cases the position assumed to write about antiabortion groups is one that reduces their agenda, identity and arguments to the ridicule and with a negative connotation¹⁷.

In the Argentinian context, there are lots of opinion articles, blogs, and online magazines debating abortion and why it should be legal. There are thousands of academic papers written by doctors, sociologists, lawyers, feminist scholars and even artists that explore the path that pro-choice groups went through during the last thirty years, explaining the arguments for legalizing abortion. However, no study to date has examined the arguments, discourses and the strategies taken by antiabortion groups in the Argentinian context during the last decades. The available material is mainly journalistic and emphasizes on the tragic stories behind failed abortions while denouncing the intervention of religious antiabortion groups and demonizing their actions. There are blogs, online newspapers, poetry, demonstration songs, videos, interviews and so on, that talk about the antiabortion and conservative sector. However, none of those sources provides content for a proper academic analysis.

Reasoning from the previous fact, what are the consequences of this lack of material suitable for conducting research? As Jair Mujica (2007) explained in the book *Economía política y cuerpo* (Economy, politic and body), this ridiculing and negatively judging approach does not allow an understanding of the conservative groups' strategies of action. Furthermore, these presumptions give the insight that these groups are considered from a classical perspective, thus assuming that they are static and have not changed since their appearance (Mujica, 2007, p. 50). This leads to underestimating their power of influence in the public sphere and not being able to comprehend their discourses, or even carefully listening to them.

¹⁷ In some cases they are referred to as anti-human right groups (Sutton & Borland, 2019), as sheltered under "the fear to change" (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018) or generally recognized under conservative religious discourses (Garbagnoli, Sara; Prearo, Massimo, 2017).

Perceiving these groups as static and considering that their discourse is only based on religious arguments, means that we have had a biased view of what has been going on since the last century within the conservative sector. With the democratization of Latin-American states in the last decades of the 20th century, left and feminist movements became more present in the public sphere, accessing to political positions and gaining social support. Examples of these processes are the approval of progressive laws and the celebration of international assemblies and conferences regarding sexual and reproductive rights (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018; Mujica, 2007)

Contemporary to these advances, the Church and right extremist groups perceived this as a warning and a possible threat to the traditional model of society. Hence, they opted for a change in their speech, resulting in what the Argentinian sociologist Carlos Vaggione called a “strategic secularism” (Vaggione, 2005 as cited by Faúndes, 2012, p. 350). According to the author, the use of discursive strategies that are not based on religious arguments, is a reaction of these sectors against the advance of the sexual and reproductive rights agenda, where they aim to reduce the religious content and maximize the scientific and legal arguments in order to enter spaces that would hardly be permeated by a discourse exclusively based on faith and dogmas (Faúndes, 2012, p. 350).

This switch on their discourse goes hand in hand with the judicial strategy that Silvia Bergallo (2014) explains on her article “The Struggles against informal rules on Abortion in Argentina”. Although she focuses on the legal aspects of the debate, she details the different informal instruments used by the fundamentalist and conservative groups after they realized they lacked the power to foster the reform of the Criminal Code to totally ban abortion.

As it is evidenced, previous researches stated that conservative discourses and antiabortion groups had reconfigured their discourse and changed their work plan. Nevertheless, none had focused precisely on the details behind this reconfiguration. One of the gaps I identified in the academic field was not exploring the antiabortion groups, and underestimating their power of influence in the socio political scenario.

In addition, I realized that if the scope of my thesis is analysing a field that is mostly academically unexplored, the language used must be different. During the first drafts of this research, I wanted to explore the fundamentalist religious narratives after the rejection of the abortion law in Argentina. However, once I delved into the material available online from the antiabortion groups and after doing the first two interviews, I recognized that “fundamentalism” does not cover the variety of perspectives and positions that I want to

analyse, and that this is another gap this thesis aims to close, the way we refer to conservative discourses when studying them.

Furthermore, “fundamentalism” is a concept that at least in the Argentinian context, is mainly used by prochoice, feminist groups to accuse their counter position, characterizing them as religious extremists, but none of the antiabortion groups members use this word to refer to themselves. This miscomprehension also results in a mistaken identification of the groups that are considered as conservative, placing religious fundamentalisms at the centre and avoiding a deeper analysis of their discourse and representations that, as I will attempt to show in this thesis, goes beyond theological narratives.

As a consequence of this first stage of the research process, I decided to change fundamentalism to the term “antigender rhetoric’s”. Besides the fact that this term includes a wider field of representations beyond the religious one, the term “antigender” is publicly used and repeated by the same conservative, fundamentalist and extremist groups that are against sexual and reproductive rights. Hence, addressing the subjects of study with a concept that the subjects use to identify themselves, seems to be the most appropriate language to address the topic.

The term “rhetoric” is understood as a speech or writing act¹⁸ intended to be effective and influence people. The concept of rhetoric functions as an umbrella term that permits to include those actors that beyond religion, share the same discourse in relation to abortion and gender related issues. “Antigender” comes from the national campaign *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Do not mess with my children) against “gender ideology” in schools that the antiabortion groups launched in Argentina after the *IVE* law was rejected in 2018, but that actually has been internationally defining the conservative groups’ agenda since a longer period.

As a definition of both concepts together “antigender rhetoric’s” is understood as a reactionary discourse against a theoretical and political revolution, that expresses itself under an argumentative strategy which aims to re-establish the essentialist vision that such a revolution had targeted and broken (Garbagnoli, Sara; Prearo, Massimo, 2017, p. 12).

¹⁸ The concept of speech act presented by Austin while introducing his theory of performative utterance, is defined not only as something that presents information but performs an action as well. Under this concept any statement is understood as an act that includes the same act of saying something, the content of what is said and how it is said. To read more about this theory it is suggested reading *How to do things with words* written by J. L. Austin and published in 1962.

While referring to antigender rhetoric's it is important to recognize the heterogeneity of the groups that conform this sector. The PhD in Social Studies Morán Faúndes, published a paper in 2012 analysing the arguments of conservative sectors from Córdoba, Argentina, against same sex marriage, law approved in Argentina in 2010. According to Faúndes (2012) the conservative sector that during 2010 was against same sex marriage, should not be understood as monolithic and homogenous, but as a movement formed by several organizations, whose arguments and strategies of action are similar in some aspects but also different on others¹⁹. These groups are part of the sector that today is against abortion.

Faúndes as well as Mujica, performed academic analyses of the conservative reactions in two different contexts, Argentina and Perú. Yet both papers give the same clues about the international aspects of these discourses, and their analyses provide a guide for understanding the connection between local and international networks of antigender groups.

Another work that presented an international description of the antigender demonstration is the research published in 2018 by the Peruvian feminist research centre "Flora Tristán"²⁰. In this academic work, the authors explain how the appearance in the public scenario of the group *Con mis hijos no te metas* during the last two years in Latin-America, has its connection with the demonstrations that started in 2007 in Croatia against sexual education in schools and that later spread to almost every country of Europe (González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018).

Just as feminists have been organizing themselves for a long time, groups that are against sexual and reproductive rights, have also had a trajectory of action that dates back to the end of the 20th century. The abortion debate in Argentina only awoke and brought together several sectors that, until now, seemed to be non-existent.

The Italian authors Sara Garbagnoli and Massimo Prearo (2017) recently published a book analysing the genesis of the antigender discourse, from the Vatican to the expressions of the group *La Manif Pour Tous* (The demonstration for all)²¹. In this research, they give a detailed explanation of the origins of the concept "antigender" tracing the path back to the end of the nineties, when the Vatican was concerned about the issues discussed during the United Nations Assemblies regarding topics such as abortion, homosexual marriage, gender identity and others

¹⁹ For the bibliography that is originally written in Italian and Spanish, I did the translation into English considering that no English versions were available.

²⁰ Flor Tristán was a French Peruvian socialist writer and activist known for her contributions to the workers and women rights.

²¹ *La Manif Pour Tous* (The demonstration for all) is a French association that was founded in 2012 with the purpose of promoting heteronormative families, launching campaigns against sexual and reproductive rights.

(González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018; Mujica, 2007; Morán Faúndes, 2014).

One of the contributions of this work is the analyses of what is one of the most complete written materials commissioned by the Vatican to provide a glossary and a guide exploring gender related concepts and ideas. After four years of research conducted by professionals of different disciplines, in 2003 the 1160 pages glossary named the “Lexicon. Ambiguous terms and discussions about family, life and ethical issues” was published. It says:

This *Lexicon*, by indicating the real content and the truth that must guide its appropriate use, it seeks to illuminate some ambiguous or equivocal terms or expressions that are difficult to understand. In this field, there already exists a cultural gravitation that further complicates a fair interpretation. In this case, it is necessary to patiently follow the origin and the development of the expressions and their diffusion. (...) We hope that this *Lexicon* can be a useful tool for the noble and urgent cause of family and life. We are aware that the field of ambiguity is large and perhaps a future edition could be enriched with new voices. In this effort to clarify ambiguities through a thorough search for truth, guided by reason and enlightened by faith, in total obedience to the magisterium, the reader will find, as we hope, the genuine contents and objectives that are part of the proclamation of the gospel "sine gloss" (no comments in latin) (Cardinal López Trujillo, 2003).

As Garbagnoli and Prearo argued, this *Lexicon* is just an expression of the strategies that antigender groups followed in a context where progressive laws started being approved and feminism reappeared in the international scenario. This initiative was commanded by the Vatican but not for a restrictive catholic use, it was developed with the purpose of providing a theoretical and argumentative tool to contest the progressive and feminist revolution around the world. For this reason, it was already published in eight languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Arabic, German and Russian²². Nowadays, the definitions presented in that glossary are used by antigender groups to state arguments against abortion, sexual education, same sex marriage and other subjects related to gender equality.

In the Italian case, the reference to the *Lexicon* is evidenced in the content of the more than hundred conferences organized around the country since 2016. This kind of seminars were presented in chapels and theatres with the purpose of dismantling the “gender ideology” while referring to arguments based on biology, genetics, anthropology, sexual and genetic differences

²²There is no online version of the *Lexicon*, but most of the information regarding its editions is available in the website of the Vatican, in the following link: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20090724_lexicon-russo_it.html

between men and women that explain their proclivity to perform specific tasks (Garbagnoli, Sara; Prearo, Massimo, 2017, p. 52).

The Argentinian antigender groups structured their arguments on the same line. In 2018, within the *Con mis hijos no te metas* campaign, a series of conferences and trainings were organized in catholic schools with the same purpose of dismantling the “gender ideology”. In this instance, a lawyer and a political scientist representing the antigender sector, explained to the audience through biological, philosophical, and sociological arguments why gender in schools is perceived as a great threat²³.

The transnational network, the thorough selection of the discourse and the existence of the *Lexicon*, prove that antigender rhetoric's have a complex agency and that it needs to be explored in order to understand their structure and unveil their conservative logic.

The gap that this thesis aims to close is not only present in the academic field. During the last two years, Argentina's society has been polarized into two sectors that, at times, act as if the socio-political terrain was a chess board. In the meantime, women and pregnant bodies keep having abortions in the secrecy of private clinics, or hidden in their houses, risking dying in the attempt. Beyond this deep cleavage, lives are still being needlessly lost. This fact underlines the necessity to conduct thorough research of the actors involved in the discussions on abortion access.

²³ I got the information of these conferences because my sister goes to a Catholic school which hosted a conference organized by the group *Con mis hijos no te metas* in Venado Tuerto, Argentina.

Theoretical framework

Tracing the path from colonialism to decolonize

The former territory of what nowadays is known as Argentina, was first invaded in the 16th century by Spanish settlers. The arrival of the Spanish is understood as part of the colonization that started with the Christopher Columbus expeditions in 1492, on which the Spanish ships arrived for the first time to what is known today as Central America. In 1776, Argentina became the capital of the Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata, formed also by Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay, which lasted until 1810, when Argentinians established their first national government. This is the land of a country marked by four hundred years of colonization, annihilation of entire populations and Christianisation of the local societies in the name of the Catholic Church.

Nonetheless, Argentina's history has not always been narrated through the lens of colonization. For decades, school textbooks emphasized the cultural homogeneity of the country, and even had a token chapter on the societies that used to inhabit it prior to the colonization. In Argentina, "most dominant narratives for a long time remembered indigenous groups as a wild and destructive force that had to be wiped out to give birth to the nation" (Gordillo & Hirsch, 2003, p. 5).

As a person educated by the Argentinian system, I remember studying that 1492 was the year of the "Americas Discovery" and that Columbus was the great man behind this adventure, one particularly full of risks, challenges and of infinite lands that were waiting for someone to spot them. As school children, you not only learn the names of the three ships that Columbus used, but you are also taught that when he arrived, these lands were almost unpopulated and full of treasures that later would become property of the Spanish crown. We grow up with this romantic tale about a mysterious land populated by barbaric societies who were saved by the Spanish settlers²⁴, who in turn improved the lives of those communities with their civilized habits, their sophisticated language and developed tools.

Later, when referring to the formation of Argentina as a nation-state, we are told that the south of the country was almost barren, with small, savage communities that still lived there, refusing to accept the constitution of Argentina. In accordance with this approach,

²⁴ The book "Open veins of Latin America" written by Eduardo Galeano in 1971, provides a poetic and novelistic description of the process of colonization which style in certain aspects, gives a more realistic picture of what happened during the invasion of the Americas.

different conquering campaigns were embarked with the purpose of “civilizing” the south part of the country:

The Constitution of Argentina as a nation-state in the late 19th century was based on the systematic attempt to eliminate, silence, or assimilate its indigenous population. The elites of the time defined the idea of “the Argentinean nation” in tension with what they imagined as its opposite: *el desierto* (the desert), the term then widely used to refer to the territories of the Pampas, Patagonia, and the Gran Chaco inhabited by indigenous groups that resisted the advance of the State. (...) By the turn of the 20th century, large military campaigns to Pampa-Patagonia and the Chaco, land expropriation fuelling the emergence of an agrarian capitalism, and massive European immigration consolidated the transformation of the desert into a new nation-state arising from its barbarian prehistory (Gordillo and Hirsch, 2003, p. 4).

Until 2010, in Argentina, the day of the arrival of the Spanish to the Americas was considered as the *Día de la Raza* (Day of the Race) in memory to the date when the Americas were “discovered”. In that year, this day was changed into the *Día del Respeto a la Diversidad Cultural* (Day of Respect of Cultural Diversity) after a presidential decree that was demanded by the descendants of native peoples in regards to the moment in history when the annihilation of local indigenous communities began. As Anibal Quijano explained, the idea of race does not have a known history before the colonization of the Americas and it functioned as a legitimizing domination concept imposed by the Spanish conquerors (2000).

The term “coloniality” refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerge in the context of colonialism, which redefine culture, labour, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer” (Mendoza, 2015, p. 15). As an effect of coloniality of power, the racial distribution of new social identities that appeared during colonialism, was combined with a racist distribution of labour and the forms of exploitation of colonial capitalism (Quijano, 2000, p. 537). Subsequently, is possible to affirm that coloniality of power is the process of racialization that was integral to colonization (Quijano, 2008, as cited by Mendoza, 2015, p.15).

Following Quijano’s contribution, race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification (2000). In Argentina, during the period of the Spanish invasion, from now on referred to as “colonialization”²⁵, the society was categorized according to a *Sistema de castas* (breed system) in which different status, and consequently different labours, were assigned to each person according to their ethnical/racial composition. In the

²⁵ Colonialism in this thesis applies to the process of Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas, that started in 1492 and that in Argentina lasted until 1810.

Argentinian context, the main breeds were *criollos*, *mestizos* and *mulatos*, although the classification was larger considering the consequences of the forced miscegenation. The *criollos*, descendants of Spanish, were those occupying mainly public positions and with a higher status. The *mestizos*, were a mixture of indigenous and Spanish descendants, whose destiny was also defined by the individual status of the ancestors. The *mulatos*, positioned at the bottom of this racial classification, were a mixed of black and Spanish descendants, which are represented historically as peddlers, especially the *mulata*²⁶ women, portrayed nowadays in the school acts as the female and black character selling pastries on the street (see image 4). In such portrayals, what could be perceived as an innocent dress-up is casually brushing off the violent colonization and sexual crimes committed against the slaves and *mulata* women.



Image 4. My niece showing a blackface and dressed up as 'a mulata' for the school act of the revolutions day, May 2019 Córdoba.

The *Sistema de castas* that with its modification lasted until beginnings of the 20th century is part of Argentina's recent history, and the effects of it are still permeating social relations in contemporary life. The fact that the date of "celebration" of the invasion was resignified only nine years ago, while education curricula is still taught from a colonial perspective, demonstrates how deeply rooted the "coloniality" in the Argentinian contemporary life is.

Colonialism and the *Sistema de castas* ended in the 19th century, but coloniality continues to define relations between the West and the rest (Mendoza, 2015, p. 14.), and its patterns are still permeating political, economic and social relations in the former colonial territory.

This period in the history of the Americas and its colonization, marked the establishment of a hegemonic model, based on a capitalistic, Eurocentric and global system of power. This regime is articulated in relation to two basic concepts: modernity and coloniality of power. Modernity is understood as the breaking point of America's colonization (Quijano, 2000) (Lugones, *Colonialidad y género*, 2008). In terms of economic power, the appropriation

²⁶ The theoretical model that describes the *mulata* most accurately is the concept of hybridity. While hybridity is perhaps the single most pervasive feature of colonialism, it is important to keep in mind that the term nevertheless bears the stigma of its 19th century usage in biology to refer to the grafting of two different plant species. Hybridity is embedded in the very etymology of the word *mulata*, which comes from the Latin *mulus*, or mule, the sterile hybrid of horse and a donkey (Fraunhar, 2005).

of the colonized territories and the consequent extractivism of commodities by Spain and Portugal, and later by France and England on a lesser scale, signified the emergence of a new commercial route and of a process of accumulation that affected the subjectivity of not only “this New World” but of the entire globe (Mignolo, 2008, p. 6).

In terms of religion, evangelization was particularly important in shaping the new identities created by these experiences (Gordillo & Hirsch, 2003, p. 16). In the name of the gospel and in the name of a God unknown to the locals, the Catholic Church conquered the souls and the faith of the Americas aborigine people and imposed the Catholic religion as the one of the New World²⁷. Together with the Catholic Church, the “missionaries” became important agents in this complex and shifting political landscape. They contributed to consolidating the Spanish presence in frontier areas and produced new social and cultural formations (Gordillo & Hirsch, 2003, p. 16).

During the 16th century, purity of blood and Christian religion were the two basic criteria for social classification (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 181). As Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh argued in their book *On decoloniality*, the Inquisition²⁸ was one of the first modern institutions to regulate racial classification and hierarchy (2018, p. 182). In Spain with first the expulsion and/or conversion of Jews and Moors into Christianity, and in the Americas with the colonization of aborigine people, the arrival of African people through slavery and the imposition of a monotheist religion based on guilty, punishment and sacrifice.

In the territory of Argentina, the imposition of the Catholic religion, and consequently elimination of aborigine's creeds marked the beginning of an era of strong influence and power for Catholicism in the country. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jesuits missionaries²⁹ played an important role in the economic development of the northern regions of Argentina. They had monasteries in almost every province of the country and they founded schools, universities and churches, which remain active today³⁰. Their economic power became so

²⁷ New World was the name given to the lands of (what was called) the Americas during the colonization that began in the 15th century.

²⁸ Inquisition is understood as the process carried by a group of institutions within the Catholic Church in order to combat heresies and to impose monotheist religions. Although there are different examples of inquisitions around the world, on this thesis it will refer to the elimination of aborigine creeds and the forced conversion into Catholicism carried by the Spanish crown on the Americas territory.

²⁹ Jesuits are a religious order of the Catholic Church and one of the most powerful one in the history of Argentina. They settled in Argentina in the year 1599.

³⁰ The *Universidad Católica de Córdoba* is one of the oldest of the country and it was founded by the Jesuits order; there are also Jesuits ruins along the country and some of them were declared as World Heritage.

strong that it turned into a threat for the Spanish crown. For this reason, the Jesuits were expelled from Argentina in the year of 1769.

The most conservative sectors of the Catholic Church played an important role in some moments of Argentinian contemporary history too (Carbonelli, Mosqueira, & Felitti, 2011). There is numerous evidence and articles analysing the hierarchical role of the Catholic Church during its dictatorship of 1974, a period in which the Argentinian government was headed by military forces³¹; in which thousands of people disappeared, were kidnapped, and tortured. The Catholic Church, as in other parts of the world, represents a powerful institution that influenced the course of history in Argentina, and as such, has framed the consciousness of its society since a very long period.

This is the context of which our contemporary Argentinian life emerged from, a present intertwined with a problematic past fuelled by racist structures, hierarchal institutions and power disputes. However, we could also approach our past from a decolonial angle.

The decolonial angle proposes that social practice, discourse and subjectivity contextualized in the present precedes the historical systems of power, exploitation and oppression inflicted by colonization (Quijano, 2000, p. 556). Furthermore, the decolonial option allows research that traces back the Argentinian history taking into consideration the entire experience of colonialism and coloniality.

For this thesis, I decided to borrow concepts from decolonial feminisms because while my own background as a Latina woman is tainted by the colonial experience, this framework will allow me to explore the antigender rhetoric from an angle that is not dominated by colonialist and patriarchal discourse.

Decolonial feminisms and the centrality of gender in contemporary days

The pressure unleashed across the continent to demonize and make punishable what they agree to represent as “the gender ideology” and the emphasis on defending the family's ideal as a subject of rights at any cost, transforms the spokesmen of the historical project of capital into sources of proof of what I have been affirming: that, far from being residual, minority and

³¹ For a deeper reading about the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Argentinian dictatorship, it is suggested to read the book *Iglesia y dictadura* (Church and dictatorship) published in 1987 and written by Emilio F. Mignone, an Argentinian lawyer and human rights defender whose daughter was one of the thirty thousand *desaparecidos* (disappeared people).

marginal, the gender issue is the cornerstone and centre of gravity of all forms of power (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 15)³².

The previous statement from Rita Segatos' book *La Guerra contra las mujeres* (The War against women), functions as a starting point for this section. Together with race, gender is the fundamental and historical configuration of every structure of power –economic, political, intellectual, artistic, etc. – affecting humanity (2016). The identitarian element of the antigender rhetoric and the centrality of “gender ideology” in their discourse, reasserts Segatos' allegation.

Not long ago, the concept of gender came under scrutiny and since then, different actors have resignified it in order to sustain their discourses. The new meanings attached to it go hand in hand with the particular purposes of each group. In this sense, feminist and sexual rights advocates consider gender as a social and cultural construct that needs to be dismantled in order to tackle gender inequalities. On the other hand, antigender groups use the word as an identity signifier in their struggle against gender related issues. Beyond each position, the centrality of gender is apparent, but in order to understand the connotations of the concept, it is necessary to situate its contemporary configurations in the Argentinian context.

In the lines of decolonial thought, the historical-structural configuration of the model of power described by Quijano provides an understanding of the entanglement of the structures of gender and race in a wider sense (Lugones, 2008; Segato R. L., 2016). The invention of the category of race redefines the relations of human superiority and inferiority established by colonial domination and it provides a framework to understand the historical struggles over labour, sex, collective authority and intersubjectivity (Lugones, 2008, p. 79). Under these assumptions, the current configuration of social relations are a consequence of the long-standing patterns of a system of power based on exploitation, domination and conquest.

Gender is a historical configuration that functions as an axis of every structure of power. Coloniality and modernity have also permeated the structure of gender relations in contemporary society. Characterizing this modern-colonial system of gender, allows dismantling the profound effect of the colonial imposition and its destructive scope (Lugones, 2008).

³² La presión desatada en todo el continente por demonizar y tornar punible lo que acuerdan en representar como “la ideología de género” y el énfasis en la defensa del ideal de la familia como sujeto de derechos a cualquier costo transforma a los voceros del proyecto histórico del capital en fuentes de prueba de lo que he venido afirmando: que, lejos de ser residual, minoritaria y marginal, la cuestión de género es la piedra angular y eje de gravedad del edificio de todos los poderes (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 15).

In order to understand the effects of coloniality, María Lugones provides an intersectional analysis of the entanglement of gender and race, considering these categories as intersecting one with each other. In this regard, every subject permeated by the modern capitalist system of power, is racialized and is assigned a gender. However, this does not mean that the position occupied by each subject will be the same. As Lugones established, the process is binary, dichotomous and hierarchic (2008).

As a consequence of this process, these categories have been understood as homogenous and on each group of categories, the dominant is chosen as the hegemonic (Lugones, 2008; Crenshaw, 1995). This means that the word "woman" selects as a norm the heterosexual white bourgeois females, "man" selects heterosexual white bourgeois males, "black" selects black heterosexual males and so on (Lugones, 2008, p. 82). Under these assumptions, it is understandable then that the logic of categorization exclude and harms those subjects positioned in the intersections, as it is the case of women of colour.

It is important to stress that this hegemonic categorization/invisibilization, has also a double effect. In the global context, the word "women" excludes the identity of non-European subjects, such as Latina, black and Asian women. On top of that, in the Argentinian context, the concept of Latina women is also universalizing an identity that is hegemonic, due to the effects of coloniality. As a result, Argentinian women do not include those positioned in the non-hegemonic intersections of race, gender and social class. In this sense, the second invisibilization is of the Argentinian, non-white and indigenous descendant women. Hence, only when considering the intersections between race and gender, is feasible a fairer inquiry of the life stories of indigenous descendants Argentinian women.

As stated by Lugones:

[T]he reduction of gender to the private and the control over sex and its resources and products, is a matter of ideology, of the cognitive production of modernity that understood race as gendered and gender as raced in particularly differential ways for Europeans/"whites" and colonized/"non-white" peoples. Race is no more mythical and fictional than gender, both powerful fictions (2008, p. 12).

Then, race and gender cannot be thought separately, but as conforming each other.

Following the logic of historical-structural configuration and from an intersectional perspective, Lugones (2008) contributed to the understanding of gender as constituted by and constituting of the coloniality of power. In other words, the colonial-modern system of gender is a product of coloniality, which means that the process of colonization is a condition of existence of that model.

This capitalistic, Eurocentric system of power is also evidenced in the establishment of a mandatory and globalized sexual model: heterosexuality. The modern-colonial gender system is heteronormative, as heterosexuality permeates racialized patriarchal control over production and over collective authority (Lugones, 2008; 2010). Thus, gender relations and sexuality are based on a language that sustains domination, exploitation and appropriation as well as any social practice.

Assuming the coloniality of gender as part of the contemporary gender relations in the Argentinian context, offers the possibility to conduct a deeper analysis of the antigender rhetoric's and the effects of its discourse upon feminized bodies and their access to sexual and reproductive rights. In this sense, the contemporary scenario where the discussions towards abortion, sexual and reproductive rights and feminism are situated, is permeated by the coloniality of gender.

Although the purpose of this thesis is not focusing on the effects of coloniality over gender, but more in the usefulness of this concept for understanding the context where antigender rhetoric's are embedded, I consider it necessary to clarify a point that has been central to the discussion between decolonial authors: the pre-existence of gendered social groups in precolonial Latin America. There is no doubt that colonization affected tremendously the social relations in Latin America, nevertheless, along with other authors I do consider that gender inequalities were also present in precolonial times.

One of the decolonial thinkers³³ that support this premise is the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato. Among her contributions, Segato offers different analyses and research where she affirms that even before colonial period, indigenous and Afro-American societies had a patriarchal organization but different from the occidental one. This "pre-colonial" social condition is referred to as *patriarcado de baja intensidad* or low intensity patriarchy (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 112). As Segato stated, low intensity patriarchies became more hierarchical when subjected to the logic of gender imposed under colonization (Mendoza, 2015).

The gender hierarchies of communitarian life, understood this one as the low intensity patriarchy, are transformed in the modern patriarchal system, which is of high intensity and

³³Before Segato, the Aymaran Bolivian author, Julieta Paredes and the communitarian feminists, suggested the concept of *entronque patriarchal* (patriarchal junction) referring to the particularities of the violent articulation between colonizer men and aborigine men in the oppression towards women (Paredes, 2017, p. 5). Nevertheless, for its comparative advantages I will use the concepts of low and high intense patriarchy formulated by Rita Segato.

with a larger capacity of damage. In this sense, *el mundo-aldea*³⁴/ the village-world is abruptly bumped by the expanding colonial-business-mediatic-Cristian system (Segato R. L., 2014). This means that the precolonial-low intensity patriarchy-village world is crossed by a process in which “discourse and social practices are supported and affirmed in the dominant values of development and accumulation, productivity, competitiveness and cost-benefit calculation of the full-market economy and its “theology”: the absolute faith in the inescapability of its destiny and irreversible expansion” (Segato R. L., 2014, p. 597).

The importance of this shift inside decolonial feminisms concerns the comprehension of the gender based violence to which Latin American *feminized bodies* are exposed to, including femicides, clandestine abortions, rape, kidnapping, street harassment and so on. Exposing the effects of coloniality of gender over the communitarian life provides a framework to understand better the extreme violence of patriarchal relations under the modern-colonial system of gender.

The mutation that Segato describes is based on different research that the anthropologist conducted on indigenous communities located in different regions of South America, including communities from the North of Argentina. Nevertheless, the results of her analyses can be useful to understand the logic behind discourses that are still permeated by the same colonial modern system. In this respect, the distinctive contribution of Segatos' analyses is the way she described the effects of coloniality as reinforcing the violence over female bodies and redefining the spaces of today's social life. According to the author, one of the consequences of the global modern system of power is that the domestic sphere and the woman that inhabit it are transformed into residual objects situated at the margins of the public scene (Segato R. L., 2016). With the emergence of the modern universal grid, from which emanate the State, politics, rights and science, both the domestic sphere and the woman who inhabits it, are transformed into mere remains (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 117).

The effects of this marginalization of feminized subjects manifests on Argentinian history. As stated before, it is during the colonization that the public scenario becomes the domain of white, European, men. Subsequently, European white masculinity was established as the parameter to any matter correlated to politics, and as such, considered of public concern

³⁴ The concept of “mundo-aldea” introduced by Rita Segato, refers to the communitarian life characteristic of precolonial societies. To deepen in this concept, it is suggested to explore the bibliography from the author published in Spanish and Portuguese such as *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia*, 2013 (The elemental structures of violence); *La Guerra contra las mujeres*, 2016 y *Género y colonialidad*, 2015 (Gender and coloniality).

and of general interest. This public-European-male/private-non-European-female binary permeated by the effects of coloniality, will remain until present days.

One of the examples of this public sphere exclusivity can be evidenced on the formation of the first patriotic government established during the revolution of 1810, which was constituted by an elite of *criollos* descendants of Europeans. Before this moment, the control over the former Argentinian territory was under the Spanish crown.

Within the two hundred years after the first *criollo* government, there was a process of democratization of the public sphere, which is evidenced on the approval of legislative acts that advocate for the participation of women into politics. Nevertheless, the marginal roots of the feminized political topics³⁵ remain untouched. Moreover, the effects of this marginalization are even sharper when we consider the intersections between gender and race. Such is the case of the aborigine women in Argentina, who has historically been at the forefront of the native people demands. Regardless the efforts they dedicate to reform the law regulating the territories that originally belonged to native people, no public administration until the present had payed the necessary attention to the aborigine situation³⁶, what is more, the response has been usually violent and negligent.

In this line, it is essential to understand that the previously stated consequences, are a product of modernity, remembering that the process of modernization, which is under permanent expansion, is also an ongoing process of permanent colonization (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 117). Besides, the fact that during the establishment of the republics *el Estado*/the State is transformed into a totalizing sphere of every reality, strengthens its power to control everything that might be considered as political (Segato R. , 2016, p. 20). This means that beyond legal advancements, the essence of the State will always be that of a colonizing apparatus, which roots are embedded in the colonial system of power.

In this sense, there is no other legislative action more controversial for the colonial modern and patriarchal structure than the bill for voluntary interruption of pregnancy, as it regulates the bodies of women, consequently understood as a residual object of the governing politics.

³⁵ Feminized political topics refers to any matter accessing the public agenda related to women and feminized bodies, such as abortion, female vote, feminine quota, transgender quota, among others.

³⁶ The situation of the *pueblos originarios* (native people) in Argentina became more controversial after 2017, when the Argentinian army violently attacked on of the settlements located at the south of the country, region that anciently belonged to the Mapuches community, ending on the assassination of two activists. To read more about the demand and the regulation of native peoples land visit the following link (in Spanish) <http://www.laarena.com.ar/opinion-la-deuda-eterna-con-los-pueblos-originarios-2080187-111.html>

With reference to the previous statement, I always try to explain to those western-European feminists usually shocked about the numbers and facts related to abortion in Argentina, that in the regions of the world affected by colonialism –at least those that were colonies for very long periods– the effects of it are deeply rooted in the social public structure. For this reason, any analysis of the discussion towards abortion access must consider the rationality of the context. Hence, in order to understand the logic of antigender discourses we must firstly dismantle the coloniality in which this same discourse, but also feminist one, are submerged.

In addition, in the Latin American context the division between the public and the private spheres has always been strongly demarked. As Segato (2016) explained, the Republican states founded by the *criollo* elites, represent a continuity from the colonial period in which the government was established to inherit the territories, assets, and populations formerly held by the overseas administration under the Spanish crown domains. In this sense, the independence declaration meant the change of property of those goods from there to here, but the always-external character of the administrators in relation to the administration remained as a distinctive aspect. This exteriority, inherent in the colonial relationship, sharpens the exteriority and distance of the public sphere and the State in relation to the people, thus the impoverished ones governed become inexorably marginal and remote (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 24).

This exteriorization becomes even sharper when the governed attempt to enter the public sphere –hierarchically masculine and patriarchal– demanding the right to decide upon their own subjectivities as feminized bodies. It is important to recognize as well that this exteriorization is even stronger for those feminized bodies positioned in the intersections of gender and other categories of oppression such as race or/and social class. Despite that, entering the public sphere and receiving juridical recognition becomes essential, not only for the implications of public conditions (in the case of abortion allowing a legal, safe and public access to the practice) but mostly because of the legal status that juridical process give to communities once they are considered by the law. In a context where the State is a totalizing sphere of every aspect of social relations, then its regulation becomes an elemental instrument for recognition. In other words, the legislative apparatus in the modern colonial system of power is the structure that defines what does or does not exist.

If the juridical aspects define what IS or IS NOT, then this means that the juridical field is mainly discursive (Segato R. L., 2003). The law denominates, gives name to things, and transforms the status of visibility and regulation of any practice. The Argentinian case is a clear example of this. The bill for abortion was presented almost ten years ago for the first time but it was not until 2018, when it was finally debated in the Congress, that Argentinian society started talking about abortion, naming it and unveiling the taboo connotation that surrounded it. Even though the bill was rejected, it meant a before and after for the status of the practice. Now clandestine abortions at least appear in the news headlines.

Additionally, the law contributes with the society's level of reflexivity, as it installs a new and different moral reference, or at least sometimes, it tries to. If society still had not reached such level of reflexivity, is because the effect of legal acts is not lineal and it relies upon its capacity of framing and shaping a new moral social equality (Segato R. L., 2003, p. 13). Up to this point, it is possible to ask: what a new moral social equality means? What are the implications of framing the morality of a society? How is "morality" defined?

The morality of a society is *la sensibilidad de un pueblo* (sensitivity of the people), the level of reality awareness and the empathy of being sensitive to the effects of a system that continuously marginalize and destroys individuals and communities (Segato R. , *La guerra contra las mujeres*, 2016, p. 128). As Segato (2016) already mentioned, Human Rights are inextricably linked to the progressive development of the ethical sensitivity of a society, and without this connection, the effectiveness of the law will be jeopardized.

Following the previous statement, the rejection of the bill to voluntary interrupt pregnancy can be explained by the level of sensitivity that characterizes Argentinian society. In addition, with the modern colonial system of power and the effects of coloniality upon gender and social relations, the new model of life is ruled by a new pedagogy that isolates individuals and desensitizes the majority. If we consider as well the power of decision of the groups conforming the antigender rhetoric's, understood as parastatal agencies and that I will explore in the coming chapter, then there is a logic in the rejection of laws that attempt to create a new level of morality and sensibility.

Under this system that is ruled by a *pedagogy of cruelty*³⁷, which is an effect of coloniality, the desensitization consequently originates a parameter of normality that inure

³⁷ Rita Segato introduces the term "Pedagogía de la crueldad" on her book *La Guerra contra las mujeres*, and it refers to the defining characteristics of the contemporary world where the gender-based violence over female bodies is extremely brutal and repetitive.

citizens to levels of violence that are “naturalized” and hence, turn into invisible. As a result, the life condition of individuals intersected by several categories of oppression becomes extremely marginalized and perpetuated by the media and society itself. The cases of controversial pregnancies and denied abortions are framed by this habitus of cruelty. Thus, analysing the particularities of those cases and contextualizing the effects of coloniality, might offer a better understanding of how intricate violence is in colonial contexts.

Data Analysis

General considerations

As defined in the previous chapter, the discussions towards abortion in Argentina take place in a context characterized by a complex system of violence, cruelty and oppressions. In such circumstances, some social behaviours can be analysed as framed by the pedagogy of cruelty. One of the purposes of this chapter is to understand the effects of coloniality in such context by analysing a controversial case of denied abortion in Argentina. While conducting the interviews, I collected information regarding this case in order to scrutinize from a decolonial feminist perspective the intersections between race, gender, social class, State (in)action and other categories. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will be referring to the case, the interviewees responses and decolonial feminists concepts.

Additionally, the scope of these sections is to explore the discourse of the antigender rhetoric's as a dispositive of power in a context permeated by a colonial modern and patriarchal system. In relation to the strategies and the identity of these groups, I will refer to the concept of parastatal agencies provided by Rita Segato, a definition which allows a better understanding of the power dynamics that sustain antigender discourse. The concept of parastatal in Central and South America has a meaning deeply attached to the context of dictatorships and totalitarian governments, where extra governmental entities had control over the population without being formally recognized as part of the State. Although they existed before the dictatorships period, and remained existing even after, during totalitarian times their power intensified. These parastatal agencies, where religious institutions are included, are in a constant need of strengthen their capacity of control over the bodies of the Nation (Segato R. , 2016, p. 65).

The decision to research about antigender rhetoric's had to do precisely with the urge to understand better how intricate is the context in Argentina after the rejection of the bill to decriminalize abortion. Particularly after a short visit to the country during November of 2018, when I was struck by the presence of green and light blue scarves in almost every central corner of Córdoba, Argentina, but also of public busses covered with posters against the so-called "gender ideology" and the phrase *Con mis hijos no te metas*³⁸. By this time, I was already aware of the public presence of antigender groups and their actions during the discussions of the

³⁸ See image 1 in chapter two, page 15.

abortion bill. However, coming across this polarized context meant giving a sense of reality to a mental picture.

The use that people involved in these debates make of social networks is central for this research. The dissemination of the campaigns and the invitation to demonstrations against abortion and “gender ideology” was mainly done through Facebook and Instagram, which implies having enough data to analyse at free and easy access. This is how, while scrolling through the Facebook groups of *Con mis hijos no te metas* and *Salvemos las dos vidas*, I got access to some interviews posted by the antigender activists in their promotion of videos discussing topics such as abortion, “gender ideology”, and feminism.

In order to explore the discourse configuration of antigender rhetoric in Argentina, I selected two interviews conducted with Agustín Laje. This young man is one of the most popular figures of the antiabortion and antigender sector in Latin America, who has been referred to as the “Spanish Ben Shapiro”³⁹, a young figure of the United States American conservatism. Laje is an Argentinian young writer and political scientist known for its controversial statements in relation to the Argentinian dictatorship and for his public discussions with representatives of the left movement in Argentina, particularly of feminism. One of his first book “The black book of the new left: gender ideology or cultural subversion” (*El Libro negro de la nueva izquierda: ideología de género o subversión cultural*) published in 2016, is an Amazon's best seller for politics books in Spanish.

The decision to analyse these two interviews, that were already posted online, relates to the impossibility of interviewing this person myself, not only because of the geographical distance but mainly because Laje is constantly travelling around Latin America giving conferences about “gender ideology”⁴⁰, which makes him a difficult target for a face to face interview. Hence, I decided to analyse the material that was available online. In addition, as my interest is to understand their discourse, I considered that using the same information that is promoted through the Facebook groups and websites could provide me interesting data.

³⁹ Tweets, YouTube video comments, and media commenters are examples of this comparison.

⁴⁰ During the period I wrote this thesis, Agustín Laje was on a tour in Latin America. In June he was in México with Nicolás Márquez, co-author of *El Libro de la Nueva Izquierda*, giving a cycle of conferences titled *Deconstruyendo el feminismo radical, la ideología de género y el aborto* (Deconstructing the radical feminism, gender ideology and abortion). For more information (in Spanish): <http://www.outono.net/elentir/2019/06/04/gira-de-conferencias-de-Agustín-laje-y-nicolas-marquez-en-mexico-sobre-el-feminismo-radical-la-ideologia-de-genero-y-el-aborto/>.

“Pedagogía de la crueldad”. Abortion and intersectionality

Today, misogynistic cruelty, which transforms the suffering of female bodies into a banal and everyday spectacle, is the pedagogy that habituates the masses to live with the arbitrary, with the ungrammatical margin of human life, with the fictional character of the institutions (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 103)⁴¹.

After the rejection of the bill for the pregnancy interruption, on January 29th of 2019, an eleven years old girl went with her mother to the public hospital on a rural area of Tucumán, northern Argentina, because she was suffering of stomachache. This pain proved to be a nineteenth week pregnancy. The local authorities and the doctors found out later that the girl was raped by her grandmother's boyfriend, and that the pregnancy was a consequence of these abuses⁴².

The mother, as the girl is underage, requested to proceed immediately with an abortion. In this case, as described previously on chapter 1, the article 86 of the penal code establishes that abortion should not be punishable as it is consequence of a violation. Nevertheless, reality is far from what the norm establishes. The local doctors declared themselves conscientious objectors and the girl was forced to proceed with a caesarean section due to the advanced state of the fetus.

The case became public when the family decided to contact the feminist organization Ni una menos (Not even one less) in order to inform them about the irregularities with which the local health system proceeded. From this moment, the story of Lucía (pseudonym used by the press) became known and it gained the attention of local and national media.

Beyond the irregularities of the case, present from the very beginning when the request of abortion was denied even though it is recognized by the law, the story of Lucía represents the violence that many young girls face in Argentina. The fact that the case happened in Tucumán, province of the NOA (North West Argentina) is also an insight of the general situation of poverty and marginalization that girls and women are exposed to in that region of the country, where in addition the conservative and religious sector have a big influence on the public sphere. In Lucía's case, the authorities of the clinic allowed the entrance of antiabortion groups during the time she was hospitalized so they can talk to the family trying to convince

⁴¹ “Hoy, la crueldad misógina, que transforma el sufrimiento de los cuerpos femeninos en un espectáculo banal y cotidiano, es la pedagogía que habitúa a las masas a convivir con el arbitrio, con el margen agramatical de la vida humana, con el carácter finalmente ficcional de las instituciones” (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 103).

⁴² More information about the case, see “An 11-year-old in Argentina was raped. A hospital denied her an abortion”, March 1st 2019. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/world/americas/11-year-old-argentina-rape-abortion.html?ref=nyt-es&mcid=nyt-es&subid=article>

them to not proceed with the abortion. As if this was not enough, a few weeks after the case became public, the governor of the province justified the actions taken by the local doctors and stressed that “they proceeded as the family requested”⁴³.

Lucía's case illustrates a situation of total negligence, where the responsible are not only the public institutions but society as well. The case became rapidly widespread and the public opinion turned their attention into the story of the family. The main newspapers, the news shows and the majority of society, focused the information on the responsibility of the mother and the future of the fetus. However, the subjectivity and willingness of the girl that went through the terrible violence cycle of rape, pregnancy and then forced to give birth, was absent from the very beginning to the end.

To proceed with the analysis, intersectionality appears as a theoretical tool that can lead to a better understanding of the particularities of this extreme and controversial case. Intersectionality, as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to the “complex system of multiple, simultaneous structures of oppression which is often the consequence of one burden interacting with existing vulnerabilities to create a new dimension of disempowerment” (1995, p. 359). Intersectionality is founded on the racial and sexual colonial differences, considering that racism and sexism are inseparable and constitutive of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 158). Thus, it opens the possibility to think about race, gender and other categories as intersecting with each other and to address the case from a more complex standpoint.

Lucía is a young girl, she is female, she comes from the rural areas of Tucumán, one of the poorest regions of Argentina, her family lives below the poverty line, she is not white, she is descendant of native communities, she was abused and she was forced to give birth. Lucía's childhood was legally erased when doctors discovered her nineteenth weeks pregnancy, since that moment the health public authorities of Tucumán defined her as a mother. The pregnant woman, acquires an identity defined by its status of pregnancy, the category of a body inside another body gives her another status in the public sphere. The fetus inside Lucía's body, changed her status as a kid, and the local institutions arbitrarily used two different categories of identity in order to decide upon her body. She was a girl, and as a girl, she was not old

⁴³A few days after the surgery was performed to Lucía, the governor of Tucumán affirmed on the media that local doctors proceeded as “the family requested” in regards to the caesarean, when on the first instance the family required an abortion. See more (in Spanish) at: https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/hizo-familia-solicito-dijo-manzur-cesarea-nena-11-anos-violada_0_iu0SOwb_GQ.html

enough to decide what to do with her body. She was a mother, and as a mother, the priority was to save her child.

As stated above, intersectionality provides a theoretical structure that allows not only to dismantle the multiple oppressions suffered by Lucía, but also to crack the invisibility cloak that covers the history of sexual exploitation and exclusion that characterize the life of feminized bodies in Northern Argentina.

This constant invisibilization is present on the way the case of Lucía was handled. Not only her desire of interrupting the pregnancy was not attended, even though it was legally recognized, but also the mothers' will and the family's authority was unheard, revealing their condition of total disempowerment.

To continue with the analysis, I will work with the data collected from the interviews I performed. After talking about abortion and the situation in relation to antiabortion groups and feminism, I wanted to know if they heard about Lucía's case and which was their opinion in relation to it. I offered the possibility of not responding as it is a topic that could affect sensibilities, yet both of them agreed to answer.

To the question "what is your opinion in regards to Lucía's case?", Elisa answered:

I do not expect you to like the answer. First, the situation of the girl seems to me a disaster because then it was said that the mother prostituted her; so many things have been said that I do not know. But let us assume that the mother did really prostituted her, please that girl does not come to me as a patient because I do not know what could I do, but I imagine she must have thousands of problems. After a pregnancy at eleven-years-old (the first pregnancy which means for any woman an absolute vital crisis), this girl who would come with zero self-esteem, an advanced pregnancy, they make a practice that is not an abortion but a caesarean section with the risk that the surgery implies for her. Then, what they did with the baby, who was born alive, they let him die without giving it any assistance. There is no good chain of all the taken steps, from how that girl lived that nobody took care of her, not even her mother, to the baby they let die. It seems to me an entire tragedy, for all who participated in the event. And well, after all that was generated in relation to public health. I do not know whether to judge, because what I am able to judge? A girl that has a tremendous social reality, who suffers from the zero minute, because who knows what the life of that girl was, and then facing prostitution, pregnancy and death of the baby she gave birth to. It is a tragedy for everyone, it is a tremendous reality (Elisa, 2019).

To the question, "do you think it could had been treated different?", the same interviewed answered:

It depends on where we can start; there should be someone who detects the reality of that girl first, the situation of abuse that she was exposed to, which was her educational background, and so on. There are many things that did not work, since prevention. With regard to the baby,

if they were going to have a caesarean section they would have waited a little and was more likely to live the baby and less risky for her.

To the question “what is your opinion in regards the case?”, Luisa answered:

I obviously think that in a case of a teenage girl, abortion should be allowed. But I would make an intermediate point first, before undergoing an abortion I show you what is going to happen with this baby, check with the family if they want or not, and if they finally decide by abortion to do so. I do believe that doctors should not be forced. Give the options, at another time they used videos showing what happened when an abortion is done. So what I think is that you have to give the options. Instead of having an abortion, go through pregnancy and give it up for adoption. What happens with the life of the baby? Because for me there was already a life. And lastly there is the possibility of letting it grow and giving it to a family that does not have one.

Elisa's answer is quite complete. She crosses the case with her own profession and describes how the situation of the girl represents a very difficult clinical case. The responsibility of the case is given to the mother, who was accused of prostituting her daughter –this was never corroborated. Elisa talks about the fetus as a baby⁴⁴ and considers that the tragically end of the case was the death of the baby, assuming this as the worst loss for Lucía. She thinks that if there was a possibility to proceed differently, the doctors could have waited in order to the baby to have a bigger chance to survive.

Luisa considers first that abortion should be legal for teenagers. Nevertheless, she stresses the instance of “an intermediate point” in terms of explaining to the family what happens with the baby when proceeding with an abortion. She also stands for the option of giving the baby in adoption, which on Lucía's case would have implied waiting for the fetus to grow and then proceeding with a C-section, similar to the opinion of Elisa.

Both of the interviewees found the case to be a tragedy, which indeed it was. The position from where they answered is also one that considers abortion as killing, hence, it is understandable that they referred to the fetus as a baby and that for both it would had been a priority to save the baby's life. Nevertheless, this is not revealing information.

The fact that in neither of both answers the attention was given to the rapist, or the father of the girl, or even to Lucía's will itself, can be analysed as part of the invisibilization, oppression and disempowerment that characterizes the way in which society and institutions regulate the life of non-white, poor women in Northern West Argentina.

Furthermore, the man that raped Lucía was portrayed by the media as “the grandmother's boyfriend”, provoking and fomenting in the public opinion a negative image of

⁴⁴ The use of baby in this chapter is as a reference to the answers given by the interviewees. For me the correct term to use would be fetus.

the female figures of the family. This effect appeared on the answer given by Elisa when referring to the mother as the main responsible of Lucía's situation.

Behind the discursive strategies just explored, there is a constant feminization of the representations of the case. The negative impact of this feminization is that it reinforces gender, racial and social class stereotypes, and that creates an otherness that perpetuates marginalizing practices.

In this line, I cite one of the interviewees, Luisa, in her opinion regarding the abortion bill:

A project regulating abortion should take into account the idiosyncrasy, the culture of the people living in the poorest regions. Because for example, I have the case of my daughter who, due to ovarian cyst problems, has to take pills, she also has her gynaecological controls and sometimes she tells me: "Mom I forgot two or three days!", then the doctor stresses to her to not forget about the pill. So I say: if my daughter, who went to school and is studying at university, forgets about it, how is possible for them to not forget? How can we know that they will have a clear awareness about the responsibility to take for not getting pregnant, education is essential for me to prevent them from becoming pregnant (Luisa, 2019).

The use of "them", evidence how installed is on society the discursive practice of othering, and most specifically in topics related to body decision and women rights when intersecting with race and social class. Here the concept of "other/them" is representing the life and the body of a subject forgotten by every sphere of society, and that at the same time is constantly marginalized by media and by institutions. Due to this, the image represented by the media in regards to Lucía's case, is not harmless and it is an effect of coloniality that continues to oppress women in the present with the colonial binarism of the One –masculine, white, property owning, the figure of public speech– and the Other –non-white, feminine, poor, excluded, uneducated. Nowadays, with the mutation of the binary structure and the contributions of intersectional analyses, this binarism is understood as perpetuated in each category of identity resulting in the continual construction and marginalization of an "other". This explains the case of the interview where the binarism is reinforced by a white woman while referring to a non-white, poor and young girl.

In another part of the interview and regarding the sexual education law, Luisa responded:

[E]ducation isolated from the family is helpless. The main problem are the families and there is a need to strengthen education for *personas marginales*⁴⁵ (poor people). (...) [T]he education

⁴⁵ *Marginales* in Spanish, and particularly in Argentina, has a stronger connotation than poor, as marginal is someone considered to be from lower social class but also positioned at the margins of society in terms of law and citizenship.

must arrive to the families with whom the children are living, because who knows since when it is that the adults living in marginal areas of the city are not receiving any education.

The answers given during the interviews are an example of the discourse that portrays this binarism, which is also sustained by media without examining the connotations that it could imply referring to lower class people as a homogenous and totalizing category.

Stressing this continuity of violence and oppression becomes essential to ignite the reality that a large number of feminized bodies go through even in the most feminist days. Here I want to stress the fact that in Argentina –as it happened in probably most of the world– feminism had potentially grown during the last ten years. The campaigns against sexual harassment and gender based violence had flooded the advertising companies, each province has Facebook groups self-organized by women in order to fight the economic crisis with microenterprises and the appearance of activist groups that turn into women unions in different professions is a major achievement of this process⁴⁶. We are in a moment of history where the concept of “sorority” became materialized in strategies of union, denounce and complicity. Nevertheless, the number of femicides in Argentina keeps growing and the brutality of gender-based violence came to unthinkable places.

In this promising but yet very violent present, understanding the different forms of gender based violence implies to understand the process that goes through society as a whole (Segato R. , 2016, p. 97). As stated before, in this context characterized by a patriarchal structure of high intensity, the *pedagogy of cruelty* that rules the social relations also permeates bodies and sexuality. Under the colonial modern system of gender, sexual practices are reshaped by a language of appropriation and conquest, characterized by the violence of rape.

The violence behind Lucía's case is a message pronounced by a society submerged in a system ruled by a pedagogy of cruelty, as defined by Segato. It is a pedagogy because it nurtures society and institutionalize a certain level of cruelty that becomes a threshold for brutality and violence. The violent scene behind the femicides and the violence to which feminized bodies are exposed to, consequently becomes the background of everyday life.

In addition, the consumerist times of the capitalistic society turns the news disposable. This means that despite how brutal a case can be, it will cover newspapers and televisions for a few days until a new case is made public. Besides the cases of clandestine abortions, in

⁴⁶ This strategy started as a form of collective sue against sexual harassment against women in working places, to then became groups of activist united by their profession and the demand of equal treatment regardless gender at the different jobs. This happened with groups of actresses, bus drivers and journalists.

Argentina the number of femicides is that of a woman assassinated every 32 hours⁴⁷, which means a permanent source of information about women violence that is waiting to be exposed. Consequently, a chain of offer-demand is installed, whereby the more morbid and detailed are the stories behind each case of violence, the more it will catch the attention of the audience.

This repetition of the violent scene generates a normalization of a reality based on cruelty that promotes among people a very low level of empathy. In such ways, the usual cruelty is directly proportional to the isolation of citizens through their desensitization (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 21). The level of exposure to brutal scenes and violence and the effects of coloniality over social relations reshape society and turn it into a mass governed by a misogynistic pedagogy of bodies' control.

In this scenario, feminized bodies appear as a new territory. Under this domain, they become a property that is private but whose regulation turns into a public matter when it is intersected with discussions about sexuality, reproduction and gender equality.

Behind this relation between public-private and sexual and reproductive rights, it is necessary to clarify that abortion is an existing practice, therefore its private character, or more accurately clandestine, is a constitutive element of its existence. Abortion stories only become public when the clandestine interruption of pregnancy has a tragic outcome. Deaths, abuses, denial of practice and negligence are the stories that we generally know of women that aborted, while clandestine abortions in safe conditions still exist and remain under secrecy, the difference is the economic power and social status of women and bodies that have access to it⁴⁸. While middle- and upper-class women can often access safe abortions at private clinics, poor women and girls must resort to clandestine and less safe terminations. This double discourse system, common of many Latin American states where abortion is illegal, sustains formal, public prohibitions in the face of widespread private violation and its worst consequences fall on poor women, young and those living in rural areas (Bergallo, 2014, p. 307). This means the continuously reinforcement of the colonial binarism.

In this complex context is situated the discussion towards pregnancy voluntary interruption. Decolonial feminism brings up the possibility to put on the centre the question of coloniality and its effects upon gender as a system that permeates social relations. In this line, the contributions from Rita Segato are particularly useful in order to decipher the complex

⁴⁷ This number was updated by a feminist organization called Mumala, according to the rate of femicides happening in from January to 15th of September of 2019.

⁴⁸ One of the latest report published regarding pregnancy voluntary interruption established that in Argentina approximately 450.000 women have abortions every year.

system of violence and oppressions to which Latin American women and feminized bodies are exposed to, particularly in cases of clandestine abortions. Furthermore, understanding the components of this violent scene from a decolonial perspective allows a wider analyses of the context, embedded in a colonial matrix of power that controls feminized bodies like puppets on a game board.

Lucía's case illustrates the story of thousands of women whose right to decide not only about their bodies but also about their destiny, was and continues to be neglected, in Argentina and around the world. Exploring her story on an academic context might not help to achieve justice but it can provide elements for a wider analysis of gender based violence.

As stated previously, under any negligence there are always people compromised and institutions that are responsible. In the case of abortion, antiabortion groups had historically play an important role when stopping pregnancy interruptions (Bergallo, 2014), even on those cases that are not supposed to be punishable, as it was the case of Lucía. Hence, studying the antiabortion groups can provide a clearer picture of their positionality, their arguments and hence, their identity. This implies conducting feminist discourse analyses of antigender groups, considering the reconfiguration of their discourse after the rejection of the *IVE* bill in Argentina.

Mainstream vs radical: introducing antigender discourse

During the introduction of one of the interviews conducted during a radio show in Dominican Republic, Agustín Laje is presented as “el crack de los progres” which means the master among the progressive ones, as the man that is breaking the masquerade of the neo-Marxist feminism in Latin America (Laje, 2019). The interview takes place in a radio studio, composed by a table with five men and two women, and in an atmosphere of jokes, laughs and compliments to the “radical” words of the interviewed. The male journalists, whom monopolize the discussion and interfere whenever the two female interviewers attempt to talk, ask most of the questions. Additionally, during the interview there is a constant cheering from the male journalists to the answers that Laje provides.

The other interview takes place on a TV studio from the YouTube channel of the Argentinian branch of *Con mis hijos no te metas*. The interviewers are a man and a woman, and during the introduction they also put emphasis on the educational background and the popularity of Agustín “a very busy man to whom interviewing is not also an honor but a

difficult job because of his tight schedule” (Laje, *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas TV* - Guest: Agustín Laje., 2019).

Laje is presented as a popular figure, with a strong academic background and with followers around the world. On one of the interviews, they asked him what was the reason for his visit to the Dominican Republic and he answered that this was the second time he visited the country to host different conferences, and that this time he was giving four Masters' classes at the Universidad Católica Santo Domingo. He pointed out as an interesting fact that this time the conferences were sold out during the first week. He also explains that the first day he arrived in the country he went to the Federal Court to have a private meeting with judges, lawyers and representatives of the Dominican government. This private meeting had the purpose of “sharing the concerns about the current cultural problematics related to feminism, gender ideology and abortion” (Laje, 2019).

As pointed out previously, feminist critical discourse analyses permits a thorough scrutiny of the data collected while understanding the contextualized use of talks and texts (Lazar, 2007), which implies considering besides words also body language, the reactions of the people present during the interview and other elements that compose the scene. Considering this, the cheering of the male interviewers, the ridiculing tone with which is presented feminism and gender, and the interrupting of the female interviewers when they try to ask questions, are elements creating an atmosphere that sustains the discourse of antigender rhetoric's. The effect that this scenario, along with the answers provided by the interviewer, seeks to generate is legitimizing an ideological position while taunting the counterpart and convincing the audience.

In line with this purpose, one of the first strategies applied at the very beginning of the talk is that of separating the church from the position of the interviewed. While giving the details of his educational background, Laje explains that his arguments are not based on religion, but mainly on scientific facts. This is understood as “strategic secularism”, defined as a reaction of these antigender sectors against the advance of the sexual and reproductive rights agenda (Faúndes, 2012, p. 350). In order to extend the audience to not necessarily religious sectors, the church is presented as an ally but the discourse is not based on theological dogmas:

I speak from outside the religious speech. I speak in the name of political science, mixed with philosophy, anthropology, biology, anatomical genetic issues, psychology, social-psychology. I make a medley of disciplines that have nothing to do with theology. But there are religious sectors that say that what we believe in is coincident with what modern science says today, or

actually what modern science has already realized. The most advanced modern science for example, already realizes that there is a human being from the moment of conception, there is no need to go to the bible to know this. The arguments I give are from another sphere, not because I do not believe in God, but because it is what I studied (Laje, 2019).

In both interviews, gender is already presented from the very beginning as a “cultural problem” and as the centre of the debate, reaffirming once more what Segato stated in regards to the centrality of gender as a core that articulates every power structure (2016). In order to present his position, he firstly underlines that he has been studying feminist theories and left movements for a long time, stressing that his book is based on the reading and analyses of more than one hundred fifty books talking about “gender ideology” (Laje, 2019).

Most of the interviews and conferences offered by Agustín start with a definition. He first explains concepts such as gender, sexuality and deconstruction and then starts dismantling them. With this strategy, he is informing and forming the audience while stating his position. This has a particular effect if we consider that gender has not been introduced in the public scenario as an informed topic. What I am trying to say with this is that in the Argentinian context, the word “gender ideology” started to be used after the antigender campaign became public. Gender as a concept that can be redefined and analysed as a structure of power is only discussed like this in activist or academic contexts. In fact, there are not TV shows or mainstream newspapers defining gender as a social construct crossed with other abstract concepts such as power or ideology. Laje is giving a definition of a concept that probably people attending to his conferences and hearing his interviews have not scrutinized before. According to Laje:

“Gender ideology” is a cluster of ideas that are anti-scientific about our sexuality. It is not like any other ideology; moreover, it is an ideology that has been politically instrumentalized by the government and by international organizations. The core of this ideology is assuming that our sexuality is not based on a substantive and individual fact, but rather that it is a social construction that had been imposed by an oppressive system that made of some of you a man and some of you a woman and that you were not allowed to choose freely how to be a woman or a man; and that now you have the chance, thanks to gender ideology or gender perspective, to discover the deconstruction of your femininity and masculinity. To become a sort of blank page, a *tabula rasa*, in which you can rewrite your reality through your self-perception. Completely anti-scientific, meaning that what you perceive of yourself, is what you are. If you feel like superman, you can jump right now outside the window and you will fly [In this moment, the male interviewers celebrate and laugh at the joke] (Laje, DEBATE: Agustín Laje debate con periodistas feministas en República Dominicana, 2019).

In the other interview, the definition provided is:

The gender ideology is like an octopus that has many tentacles, each tentacle is an interest, there are people who benefit from the gender ideology, as it is the case with the left sectors because it allows them to replace the place that the worker once had in its Marxist dialectic. They placed the worker against the capitalist and from that class struggle, the revolution would emerge and we know how it continues. As that kind of ideology is no longer working, now the gender ideology provides new revolutionary subjects, not economic but cultural. They place woman against man, homosexuals against heterosexuals, what is coming now are children against parents, we must be careful! So these ideologies allowed the left groups to renew the dialectic that was before applied in the economic field and are now applied on the sexuality field (Laje, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas TV - Guest: Agustín Laje., 2019).

During the interview in the Dominican radio show, while responding about feminism, Laje provides more information about what he considers the origin of “gender ideology”:

In 1948 when Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist, wrote the book *The Second Sex*, which most important phrase is “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman”, this is the book that founded the gender ideology; Why? Because if you are not born a woman, that means that woman is not a specific essence, is not a distinctive nature in relation to man, because that thing that “becomes to be” is something that is done artificially. Therefore, the condition of the women is a condition socially constructed. And this is not true. I was born a man, I was a baby man, then a kid man, then a teenager man, now I am a young adult man, later I will be an elder and old man. The genetic condition of man was inscribed on me genetically since the moment of my conception. And we know that thanks to the most modern genetics, the same is for her that she was born as a woman and that she will be that forever. Is not true that someone becomes a woman as a consequence of the social aspects, what is true is that our sexuality is enriched culturally, but that enriching, that we call gender, is settled on a base that is natural and preexistent. This has a lot of arbitrariness, the fact that women use earring is not written on your genes, but there is a huge difference between assuming that there are cultural components of our sexuality to say that our sexuality is entirely product of a culture (...) (Laje, 2019).

So far, the interview's structure is firstly preparing the audience while legitimizing the position of the interviewed and secondly instructing the audience about “gender ideology”. While defining the concepts and groups related to “gender ideology”, Laje refers to deconstruction, quotes feminist authors and connects it with Marxist concepts such as revolution, class struggle, and capitalism. Resuming the answers, according to Laje gender is an ideology supported by an international network of public and private institutions, based on anti-scientific facts and that promotes deconstruction. Considering these three ideas isolated, it does not look like gender would be such a threat, the negative connotation is on the way this definition is discursively contextualized as a destructive weapon. In such respect Laje states:

(...) [T]hey said that there is no truth, there is no beauty, there is no sex, that religion does not exist, and that identity does not exist. They said that everything is part of a social construction even our sexuality. If you consider that human beings are a product of a social construction, you are saying that it is arbitrary, so you can call to its deconstruction, one of the most fashionable words of these times: “deconstruct yourself and you will be very cool”. What does deconstruction means? Exploding all those things that makes you who you are. And who will you be? That one that the powers tell you to be... [T]hen deconstruction is more a destruction (Laje, 2019).

But destruction of what? Can a person be destroyed because of choosing its own sexuality or gender identities? What is understood under the idea of “being destroyed”?

Deconstruction is presented as the sinister interest of those groups promoting “gender ideology”. Behind this interest, the idea of gender as a social construct is discursively opposed to an idea of natural order or *status quo*, which is what gender supposedly attempts to destroy. This *status quo* is ruled by an assumed naturalness of binary sex that is based on an epistemological regime known as *realism*, from where the existence of a reality is assumed objective and independent of the subject, a *natural* reality that conditions it as such, framing it in a certain sex (Halperin, 2004 as cited by Morán Faúndes, 2012). As cited above, Lajes’ statement “I was born a man and always will be a man”, is based on a genetic argument that beyond being true or false, it refers to a natural order of things based on real facts, such as chromosomes or reproductive apparatus or genitalia. In other words, this means that biological sex determines gender identity.

For this reason, any political project promoting a deconstruction of structures and a consequent (re)construction of the self, will be perceived as a threat. This threat becomes more hazardous if the *status quo* attempting to be deconstructed is presented in connection to ideas of family, children and teenagers. The use of teenagers and children by antigender discourse, for example during the campaign *Con mis hijos no te metas* or the images exhibited⁴⁹ by Laje when referring to the effects of “gender ideology”, has a discursive effect that disgrace even more the image of prochoice and sexual and reproductive right movements.

This effect manifests in the idea that some people have of “gender ideology”, which tends to be related with children and portrayed as potentially dangerous. To the question “what do you think about the concept of “gender ideology”?”, Elisa responded:

⁴⁹ During the “Iberoamerican Congress in Defence of Family and Life” offered in Uruguay in 2018, Agustín Laje gave a speech of one hour while demonstrating his statements with pictures of kids on a kindergarten playing with jewellery and make up, stating that these are the brainwashing and dangerous effects of sexual education.

From a psychological perspective, I think it is wrong. I was reading a little about Judith Butler last year, and although I consider interesting the philosophical part, I do not share what she says. I think that the identity of a person must be supported by biological sex. And, for example, there are some things happening in other countries like Canada, where they give to children from a very young age hormonal treatment. I do not think this can have a positive outcome throughout the years in a person. At least in my clinical experience, when there are these sort of sexual identity problems, they are difficult problems. I do not think it is as simple as they state like “I choose my sex and that is all”.

The image of children as a property that must be defended from “gender ideology” is related to the paradigm of realism. Along with this epistemological regime, which aims to defend the alleged *natural* aspects of humanity, is introduced as well the traditional idea of family. This concept, as defined by antigender rhetoric's, is mainly based on the precepts of heteronormativity and the relation between a woman and man (Faúndes, 2012). Following this ideological assumptions, the presumed deconstructive project of gender, becomes a threat to this *natural* idea of family. These allegations help to understand the negative effects of using children on the arguments against feminist and sexual and reproductive rights. This representation has a stronger effect if we consider the Argentinian context as one extremely permeated by the idea of traditional family. In regards to the idea of family and the sexual education law, which will be analysed in the following section, Elisa responded:

[E]ach society have its idiosyncrasy, we have ours. I think that one of the most important things for Argentinians is the family, getting together, preparing the asado (Argentinian barbecue), it seem to me that the law goes against this. In this context of being so familiar and that we care so much for the unity of the family, appearing something proposed by law to separate the family from the school it is a nonsense for me.

Another supposed characteristic of “gender ideology” is the imposition of an identity. As stated by Laje, after the self is erased by the “deconstructive project of gender ideology”, “the subjects become that one that the power tells them to be” (Laje, 2019). Following this statement, who you are ends up being an imposition of an establishment promoted by feminism and consumed by society, particularly, by teenagers that are targeted as a group easy to persuade by fashion and mainstream culture. In the words of Laje:

These groups have a strategy that is functional to psychosocial interests of the adolescents. Why? Let see two antithesis, the girl with an amazing body that goes to the gym every day and on the other hand a girl that is not that beautiful. What does feminism have to offer them? To the one with an amazing body, the possibility that if she wants to take a picture showing her underwear she can do it. Covering the modesty of being naked with a phrase such as “let us be

free, my body is mine”, so it gives a discourse pseudo subversive to channel the egocentrism of an adolescent that the only thing that she wanted to do is to show herself in a thong. On the other hand, the girl that is not comfortable with her body, she also finds a comfort on the feminist discourse that says that there are beauty standards imposed by a machista (sexist) society so you shouldn't feel bad if you weight 40 extra kilos, you need to feel good because you are a different kind of women and that who made you feel bad were men and etc. So this discourse will be perfectly matching every kind of adolescent. But you know to who this will not match? The authentic rebel, because the authentic rebel is the one that rebels against the established order. The one that goes against fashion. And which is the establishment today? You have artists, media, academia, international organizations, the government, everything goes there (...) (Laje, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas TV - Guest: Agustín Laje., 2019).

Here is evidenced one of the main discursive strategies applied by Agustín but that can be identified in other discourses of extreme right groups as well⁵⁰, which consist in constructing an image of the counterpart as a mainstream discourse and then trying to “dismantle” their identity and interests. As a matter of fact, Laje introduced his perspective and the one of those sectors against abortion as being the radical rebels, he stated that “being against those mainstream discussions is actually an act of rebellion” (Laje, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas TV - Guest: Agustín Laje., 2019).

From these allegations, two assumptions can be done. First: if feminism is considered to be mainstream, beyond the discursive strategy of this representation, means that it is recognized as an actor involved in the socio-political scenario. When using the concept of “mainstream discussions”, Laje is recognizing that feminists had successfully invaded the public agenda, where topics related to sexual and reproductive rights are now being debated. Second: that the public space occupied today by left, feminist and pro-abortion movements is highly troubling for antigender groups. The need to constantly stress the popularity of these discourses and define them as mainstream, is an attempt to delegitimize a discourse that had successfully transgressed the boundaries between private and public. This strategy of minimization of feminist or prochoice groups, is then an attempt to reduce their power as residual, to move them back to the margins of the public sphere, the place that feminized bodies are supposed to occupy according to the colonial system of power.

As described before on the chapter 2, one of the effects of coloniality is that of positioning the women and every topic concerning their existence at the margins of the public scene and as a residual subject of politics (Segato R. L., 2016). Hence, the fact that the bill for

⁵⁰ As previously described on this thesis, the antigender conferences offered in Italy utilize the same discursive strategy of portraying a negative image of local and international feminist groups.

abortion was finally debated in the Congress and the consequent strengthening of feminist movements, has disrupted the colonial structure that reduces “the female rhetoric”⁵¹ strictly to the domestic sphere. Becoming mainstream meant, in this case, disrupting the division between domestic and public spheres while placing their demands on the political scenario, thus this explains the discomfort of antigender rhetoric's towards the evident (re)appearance of feminism and its demands.

On a similar line, the previous statement shows that under the name of defending the individual's right to think and act as he/she/they pleases while being an authentic rebel, the conservative ideologists protect existing structures and practices from all critical scrutiny and even moderate attempts of reform (Scott, 1991, p. 13). Under this premise, the conservative ideology appears as a reaction of a multiculturalist context. This idea of multiculturalism, presented by Joan Scott almost three decades ago while referring to the project of diversity sustained by progressive groups in the U.S.A., is what Rita Segato considers as the characterizing aspect of the democratic period post-dictatorships in Latin America (2016).

Rita Segato refers to the contemporary situation of fundamentalist reactions as a conservative turn to the moral discourse that was characteristic of the period of Human Rights promotion in the 1990s. During that period, the promotion of multicultural representations was based on a liberal interpretation of multiculturalism that understood cultural diversity as an objectifying and mechanic concept (Segato R. , 2007). As a result, different minority elites emerged –of black people, of women, of aborigine, etc. – but without affecting the unequal economic structure that sustains capitalistic society. Segato finds similarities between the liberal multicultural project of that time and the antigender discourses of the present day, asking herself why today there is a return to the moralist and family defence speech (2016, p. 16).

According to Segato, the turn to a moral discourse, at least in the Latin American context, is due to the discovery by antigender groups that the pillar and pedagogy of all power, for its historical profundity that makes it foundational and for the constant renovation of its structure, is patriarchy (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 16). Patriarchy is understood as a gendered system of social relations based on inequality and which structure is the most permanent in the history of humanity (Segato R. , 2016, p. 18). The proliferation of minority elites unveiled the fact that even though the multiculturalist period did not affect the capitalistic foundation, it attempted to distort the traditional structure of gender relations.

⁵¹ Understood here a cluster englobing every kind of discussion that concerns women and feminized bodies.

In the current context, characterized by a high intensity patriarchy and a pedagogy of cruelty, “gender ideology” appears as a disrupting spectrum before the eyes of antigender groups. Under their assumptions, the sinister deconstructive project of feminists and sexual and reproductive rights movements would imply dismantling the traditional binary structure that sustains gender relations, but also and most importantly the foundational pillar of the capitalistic, colonial and modern system of power. Hence, positioning antigender rhetoric’s in the place of the anti-hegemonic discourse is a strategy of marketing in a context where reality is discomfoting, because if there is something that antigender groups cannot stand, is the fact of feminism becoming public, stronger and popular.

The interview in Dominican Republic finishes with the following Laje’s statements:

[T]hinking different is not a crime. Having an alternative vision in regards to what is obliged today to think is simply an exercise of freedom of speech”. (...) “[T]he richness of diversity is not only about sexual diversity but also about intellectual one (2019).

Family as one of the axes that articulates the antigender discourse

At the end what is “family”? A group of human beings in a mutual bond
LaBeija, the mother of drags, “Paris is burning”, 1990 Documentary

During the “Iberoamerican Congress in Defence of Family and Life” organized on December of 2018 in Punta del Este, Uruguay, Agustín Laje gave a talk that lasted more than one hour and which title was “El futuro de nuestros países gobernado por la nueva agenda de derechos” (The future of our countries ruled by a new rights agenda). The conference consisted of a presentation where he introduced the presumed adverse consequences of “gender ideology” for society, exemplifying an apocalyptic scenario of indoctrination with newspaper articles from around the world. He also quoted different authors such as Paul Preciado, Judith Butler and Monique Wittig, in order to later deconstruct the quotes while ridiculing their position and reinforcing his statement of “gender ideology” as a dangerous project of social indoctrination.

One of the supposed consequences was presented as “the violation of the family rights” (Laje, 2018). Concerning this, Laje emphasized “[w]e should not forget, that the parents’ right to educate their children according to their principles and moral ideas is a human right, so when we talk about sexual education, this human right is being violated.” He continued portraying

on a big screen newspaper articles with examples of German and British schools where the curricula supposedly included conversations about anal sex⁵².

The oppositional image of gender ideology versus family is a repetitive argument on the discourses against sexual and reproductive rights movements. Evidenced on the different campaigns, congresses and conferences organized around the world, the defence of family has been the main cause articulating the antiabortion and antigender discourses for a long time (Mujica, 2007; González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018; Faúndes, 2012). As a matter of fact, in Argentina, the groups opposite to the divorce law in 1987, the same sex marriage law in 2009 (Faúndes, 2012) the abortion law in 2018 (Carbonelli, Mosqueira, & Felitti, 2011) and the sexual education law, have had the same anti-law foundational argument of family and children defence.

Immediately after the examples, Laje presented a screenshot of the bill for sexual education approved in 2006 in Argentina. He highlighted the last sentence of the introduction where it says that one of the purposes of the integral sexual education law is to “denaturalize the sociocultural manners of being girls and boys in order to generate already from childhood, more democratic participation”. As explained on chapter one, in Argentina, it was the demand of implementation of the sexual education law or *ESI* what triggered the antigender shift on the antiabortion discourse. Therefore, it is not surprising the use of the bill to exemplify the threats of gender ideology against family. Nevertheless, it is not an innocent quoting and it is part of the speech act aimed at delegitimizing a counterpart.

The sentence cited by Laje to introduce the *ESI* during the conference, is understood as a discursive strategy that seeks to portray a negative image of the topic that is being discussed. In fact, the concept “denaturalize” –understood as opposite to the idea of natural– by itself it is already alarming for the antigender groups. As it is explored on the previous section, the antigender discourses are aligned with the epistemological regime of *realism* under which the aim is to defend the alleged natural aspects of humanity. Subsequently, these discourses deny any possibility to question neither, the essentialist truth of binary sex determining gender identity (Faúndes, 2012, p. 151) nor the heteronormative idea of family. Under these assumptions, “denaturalize” or “deconstruct” are part of the presumed destructive project of

⁵² Examples of this headlines are: “German education: kids are taught about anal and sadomasochist sex at schools” “Schools in Chicago teach anal sex to students of the fifth grade”. From minute 48:56 of the Conference in Uruguay, that can be seen (in Spanish) on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Utamqu-4jw>

“gender ideology”. Therefore, any narrative attempting to dismantle this “naturalness” will be perceived as negative, perverse and dangerous.

Moreover, the bill for sexual education, as quoted by Laje, aims to “denaturalize the sociocultural manners of being boys and girls”, meaning to deconstruct the social stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. The rest of the sentence not only reinforces the effects of the word denaturalize, but it also connects it to the idea of children as innocent victims. As stated on the previous section, the use of children in the arguments against “gender ideology” denotes a recurrent discursive strategy that seeks to reinforce a negative image. As a result, the bill is defined by one threatening sentence that disregards the rest of its content.

The depiction of a presumed naturalness affects as well the representation of “family”. The idea of “family” sustained by antigender groups provokes a homogenization of the concept, assuming a monolithic representation that erases any references to alternative family compositions (Faúndes, 2012; Mujica, 2007). Consequently, the concept reinforces an image that is not only exclusively heteronormative but also based on parenthood, stressing the importance of the reproductive function presumed as inherent of every family. Under this model, the children are portrayed as their parent’s property and the family becomes the core of society.

An example of this portrayal is evidenced during the interview. To the question, “How would you define the concept of family?”, Elisa responded:

A group of people, it can be the mother and children, a couple and their children. There are also families of grandparents and grandchildren. But ideally, it is a father and a mother who take care of the upbringing and education of their children.

Elisa considers parenthood as a defining element of any family composition. Her definition stresses as well the function of the family as responsible for the education of the children. Elisa’s answer and Laje’s statements at the conference converge in the conception of family as the main educator. In the case of Agustín, this is portrayed when assuming that the family has the right to educate their children, and that then sexual education law would be violating a human right. This answer led to understanding the position of the interviewee in relation to the sexual education bill. When asked about the ESI law, Elisa responded:

I have been working with the content of the law from a psychological perspective here in Venado (city of Venado Tuerto, Argentina). In addition a colleague psychologist disaggregated the law and analysed every article explaining why it could be harmful for children. The law has some parts that I consider that could be useful, when it refers to emotional education, preventing abuse and having knowledge of the body, which is necessary. But then there is a whole section,

a large amount of articles, that is really shocking. It is tremendous because it proposes the separation of the family from the school; that the boys have to undress in the classroom and touch each other to know each other's body, and this cannot happen. From any point of view a boy can undress at school in front of the teacher and display his genitals, that is no, no way. And the fact of the separation of the school from the family, and in Argentina! Because of our culture, we always work with our parents next to the school, we are very attentive to what happens with the children, there may be some isolated cases in which the parents are not involved in the school. But the general case is that parents are all worried about what happens to their kids, whether they go if they have friends or not, from that side I don't think it is good for our idiosyncrasy as Argentinians.

[T]he State cannot replace the functions that are proper to other organisms, it cannot replace the family. It cannot tell me how I must educate. For sure, it has to take care of certain basic things like health, or that public schools are available. But if there is a parent's willingness to say NO, we must have the possibility to choose to which school I want my son to go, or if I want to educate him in some faith. In relation to the law (ESI), I must be free to teach him or not at certain age certain subjects. The State cannot impose on me that in kindergarten at the age of three, the kids have to show their genitals because I consider it wrong, that it negatively affects his psychic health. And nobody can force me. So the role of the State also has to be limited from the family functions.

Elisa scrutinized the subject, she researched and analysed the content of the bill, and yet the conception of sexual education is framed by an interpretation of the articles that is based on the same arguments presented by Laje. Furthermore, if we compare the statements in regards to the dichotomy Family vs. State with the guiding programme for the application of the law, there is actually a contradiction behind the answers of Elisa and the statements made by Laje on one side, and the content of the bill on the other.

The guiding programme published in 2008 concerning the sexual education law, contains a chapter devoted to the rapport between the State and the family in subjects concerning sexual education curricula. In several articles it underlines the importance of the family in the commitment for a complete and updated education, understanding sexual education as a human right as well.

The sections 3.4 establishes:

[R]ecognizing the rights and obligations that attend mothers, fathers and/or guardians as first educators of their children and the role of families as an institution inextricably linked to the socialization and education of people; from the State should be encouraged, at the same time, the conditions for schools to be the institutional space with the duty and the capacity to generate conditions that ensure equal access to information and the training of all students in the construction of their identity, autonomy, inviolability and dignity⁵³ (Programa Nacional de

⁵³ [R]econociendo los derechos y obligaciones que asisten a los padres madres y/o tutores como primeros educadores de sus hijos y/o representados y el rol de las familias como institución indisolublemente ligada a la

Educación Sexual Integral. Lineamientos Curriculares para la Educación Sexual Integral, 2008, p. 3).

[T]he families of the students do not appear from this perspective as secondary recipients of the actions, but as genuine interlocutors, bearers of rights and responsibilities, among which is the education of their children (Programa Nacional de Educación Sexual Integral. Lineamientos Curriculares para la Educación Sexual Integral, 2008, p. 4).

Beyond the contradictions between the previous statements in regards to the law and the content of the law itself, what can be deducted is that the interpretations made by Elisa, her colleague and Laje, are all framed by a similar rhetoric. In such ways, the idea of the heteronormative family, the concept of children as endangered property and the discursive strategies portraying a negative image of every topic related to “gender ideology” characterize the discourse that frames such interpretations.

In addition, the effects of coloniality are also evident on this conception of family, understood as the terrain of the privacy, the domestic and the isolated concern where the government should not interfere. The marginalization of the domestic sphere in contrast with the public quintessential political space, affects also the way the family is assumed. When the family becomes nuclear, locked into four walls, characterized as a heteronormative scheme of mother, father and children, it also becomes depoliticized (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 167). The idea of the private life, of protecting the privacy and of giving such a high value to the property, in this case the children and the family, is a product of modernity, which is also individualistic and anti-communitarian (Segato R. L., 2016, pág. 168). As a consequence, the colonial binarism of private vs public is reinforced as well by this family portrayal.

Continuing with the analysis of the anti-sexual education arguments, the interpretations of the law are not the only part of the antigender discourse that can be read as contradictory. The presumed danger of “children indoctrination” is also an inconsistent argument, considering that in terms of education every curricula is indoctrinating. The concept of *adoctrinamiento* (indoctrination) is defined by *La Real Academia Española* (The Royal Academy of Spanish)⁵⁴ as the action and effect of *adoctrinar* (indoctrinate), this last understood as “to inculcate to

socialización y educación de las personas, desde el Estado deben propiciarse, a la vez, las condiciones para que la escuela se constituya en el espacio institucional con el deber y la capacidad para generar condiciones que iguallen el acceso a la información y a la formación de todos los alumnos y alumnas en lo que hace a la construcción de su identidad, autonomía, inviolabilidad y dignidad (Programa Nacional de Educación Sexual Integral. Lineamientos Curriculares para la Educación Sexual Integral, 2008, p. 4).

⁵⁴ I quote a definition from the dictionary of the RAE because it is also used by the psychologist Baigorria to contrast some of the content of the bill for sexual education law. Nevertheless, I consider this institution as one of the strongest colonial remnants of the Spanish colonization.

someone determined ideas or beliefs". Therefore, any curricula, institution or system committed with education can be understood as indoctrination. The use of this as an anti-law argument, denotes that is not the act of indoctrination what disturbs the antigender groups, but mostly the content of what is being discussed.

In relation to ideas and beliefs that seek to indoctrinate, another question to pose would be why the curricula of religious schools –institution at the forefront of the battle against sexual education– are not assumed to be indoctrination. During the Conference in Uruguay, Laje showed some pictures of children in the kindergarten playing with make-up and dressing up, portraying this as a horrific scene. In contrast to that exemplification, I hereby show a personal photograph from my primary school years at “Escuela del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús” (Sacred Heart of Jesus School) in Venado Tuerto, Argentina. Coincidentally, Laje gave a conference at this same school in 2018. In image five, there is a picture of myself dressed up as Mary, the mother of Jesus, when I was six years old walking next to another six years old student dressed up as Joseph, Jesus’ father, but who never had sexual intercourse with Mary as she was pregnant while being a virgin. In the photograph, I am acting as a pregnant woman. I remember during religion classes asking to the teacher how was possible that Mary was mother of a baby whose father was a god who, by sending the Holy Spirit –represented in a white dove– impregnated her. I do not remember the answers provided by that time but I do remember that as Catholic school students, we learnt the story as an unquestioned truth.



Image 5 Myself dressed up as Mary. Christmas school act, December of 1998. Venado Tuerto, Argentina.

The question to arise would be why the image five is not understood as a disturbing scene of indoctrination. The answer is that under the epistemological regime of realism, which sustains as well the Church discourse, women's mandate is exclusively reproduction and maternity (Mujica, 2007; González Vélez, Castro, Burneo Salazar, Motta, & Amat y León, 2018). Furthermore, for the antigender discourse fragility, sensitivity and taking care of others are innate gifts of females, and contrary to the *ESI* law that considers these as social stereotypes, they are posed as inherently natural of every women (Baigorria, 2018). Hence, the idea of motherhood attached to a girl is perceived as natural, meanwhile the idea of a boy dressing up as a girl is denaturalizing. This can be associated with the case of Lucía, whose state of

pregnancy redefined her subjectivity when being a mother was counter imposed against being a girl.

Consequently, is not indoctrination by sexual education or/and “gender ideology” what is threatening for antigender sector, but the idea of a society that goes against a presumed natural order.

Antigender Identity, resignification and symbolism

A community, in order to become one, needs two conditions: symbolic density, which usually is provided by a religious system or set of dogmas; and a self-perception of a common history by its own members, and that is projected to a common future. In other words, a community is such because it shares a history. In effect, the referent of a community or of a pueblo is not a patrimony of plastered costumes but the project of giving continuity to the existence in common as a collective subject (Segato R. , 2016, p. 28)⁵⁵.

While analysing the discourse of antigender groups and how they represent their counterpart, it is possible also to understand the process of identity construction that these groups are performing. Behind the conferences, videos, interviews and marches, there is a collective project of reinforcing an ideological position; hence, there is also a communitarian identity. In this sense, antigender groups are also understood as a community, and as such, it is important to expound their constituting elements.

The huge effort dedicated by antigender groups to delegitimize feminism and sexual and reproductive rights discourses, can be consequently read as the need to strengthen their own position and identity, trying to convince and recruit the audience. This identitarian project, is inscribed in a context with a new territoriality, meaning that the battle against “gender ideology” is not circumscribed only to the territory of Argentina as a nation-state, but rather is a global struggle that transgresses geographical limits. Hence, there is a local project of identity construction framed by a transnational objective, defeating “gender ideology”.

The concept of territoriality is understood as dynamic as it relates to the idea of government and power, which are both framed historically by different social stages. Today the State and other institutions are framed by the logics of biopower, which is enacted through

⁵⁵ Una comunidad, para serlo, necesita de dos condiciones: densidad simbólica, que generalmente es provista por un cosmos propio o sistema religioso; y una autopercepción por parte de sus miembros de que vienen de una historia común, no desprovista de conflictos internos sino al contrario, y que se dirigen a un futuro en común. Es decir, una comunidad es tal porque comparte una historia. En efecto, el referente de una comunidad o un pueblo no es un patrimonio de costumbres enyesadas, sino el proyecto de darle continuidad a la existencia en común como sujeto colectivo (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 28).

the biopolitic, understood as the government of people as biological beings through the control of their bodies (Foucault, 1997, as cited by Segato R., 2016, p. 66). As an effect of biopower, the bodies of a Nation become the new territory. In addition, the advanced modernity and the life style characteristic of liberal economy, affect the way populations are organized resulting on a network that crosses and interacts with the state jurisdiction, but are not necessarily circumscribed to it (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 66).

This is the context of (re)emergence of parastatal agencies. This concept refers to jurisdictional entities –where can be included corporations, political identities, religious groups and mafias– that affect the process of decision making and the access to resources (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 68). The parastatal agencies coexist with the State and compete with other institutions in the control of the population, understood as a network of bodies in constant movement. They are also applying strategies of bodily inscription in order to exhibit the affiliation of who does or not belong to the groups (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 67) .

Taking the previous description into consideration and applying it to the case of antigender rhetoric it could be assumed that these groups act in similar ways as the parastatal agencies presented by Segato. If we consider that conservative groups, which today are part of the antigender discourses, historically succeeded to consolidate the informal prohibition of abortion services (Bergallo, 2014, p. 147), and that the bill for voluntary pregnancy interruption was rejected despite the strengthening of feminism, it can be agreed that antigender groups affected and continue to affect the decision making in the Argentinian political context. Furthermore, as it will be explored in the following paragraphs, the identitarian elements are also acting as affiliation symbolism of a group identity. In this sense, antigender groups are understood as parastatal agencies and as such, they are constantly seeking to reinforce their collective identity and power of influence (Segato R. L., 2016, pág. 67).

In such ways, as a parastatal agency, the antigender groups in the Argentinian context are dedicating an enormous effort in the creation and strengthening of a collective identity. As explored previously on this thesis, these groups are continuously framing a discourse that not only provides definitions and critics of their counterpart but mainly that defines their own identity as a community.

On one hand, the concept of identity can be understood as the “referential sign of a fixed set of customs, practices, and meanings, an enduring heritage and an identifiable sociological category” (Scott, 1991, p. 14). On another hand, it can also refer to the relational aspects that qualify the subject's belonging in terms of categories such as race, gender, class,

nation, sexuality, work and occupation, and thus in terms of acknowledged social relations and affiliations to groups. This means that identity as a concept always directs attention to the relational aspects of subjectivity (Venn, 2006 as cited by Hollway 2016). Applying these two definitions to the idea of collective identity, it means that a group to define itself needs a set of shared symbolic elements and a demarcated idea of who does or not belongs to it. This is also part of the binary opposition principle of language, where the meaning of a concept or word is often defined in relation to its direct opposite (Hall, 1997).

Hence, it can be assumed that the identitarian elements of a group are framed as well by the way the “anti-groups”⁵⁶ are defined. For example, while underlining that feminist demonstrations are violent and aggressive, the antigender groups are portraying themselves as pacific and non-violent without necessarily having to exemplify this statement. The result then is constructing the own identity while negatively portraying the others.

Scrutinizing the antigender discourse, one sees that feminism is presented as an enemy from the very beginning. Agustín Laje in several opportunities described the feminist strategies as useless in the battle against women violence. Although he recognizes that there can be different kinds of feminisms, he does this distinction mainly in terms of a diachronic narration. Nevertheless, in the case of Argentina, he universalizes the identity of feminism with a negative and ridiculing tone:

[I]n Argentina was born [the platform] *Ni una Menos* around six or seven years ago, in Argentina we apply gender policies every year, and every year is better financed, nevertheless violence against women keep growing. Why? Because when we design a public police we need to go to the cause of the problem we seek to solve. What does feminism establishes about the cause for violence against women? “They kill us and hit us because we are women”. That is not a scientific explanation. I do not see men creating clubs on the street to kill women just because they are women. We reduce the causes to a sex war, of men versus women, that is not reality. And that is the official discourse. Why we are not studying the relationship between drugs in the family and the violence against women? Or psychologic pathologies? We just go to the ideological explanations; we based the arguments on ideologies, the patriarchy, the *machismo*. Those abstractions are not the solution. Patriarchy is a word that was introduced by anthropology to refer to a moment in history were the man was the political authority on the family, today this is not like this, today patriarchy does not exist. Today the chief are the governors, the presidents, today the man is a unity of production that is all (Laje, 2019).

In the previous arguments, Laje is reducing the feminist cause with the cases of femicides in Argentina, assuming that the efforts applied until today by feminist movement has

⁵⁶ Anti-group refers to those collective identities referred to by one group in order to stress what is not belonging.

not been effective. Once more, he uses the strategy of defining a concept (patriarchy) that is usually enunciated by feminist and left movements, but with the purpose of delegitimizing the idea and the discourse sustaining it. The use of the term “sex war” is not minor neither, as it is part of the universalizing image portrayed by antigender rhetoric's but also by media when speaking about feminist groups and their strategies of demonstration. The feminist group *Ni una menos*⁵⁷ (Not even one less) was formed in Argentina in 2015 in order to start actions against sexist violence in a context where the rate of femicides arrived to one woman assassinated every eighteen hours. Presenting its identity as promoters of a “sex war” and reducing the cause to ideological explanations, is not only erroneous but mainly has the effect of reducing feminist movements to a universal and negative identity.

Another example of this negative and totalizing image of feminism appeared during the interviews conducted for this thesis. To the question “do you know the *National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion*?” one of the interviewed answered:

I do not agree with this type of demonstrations when it is used with a political purpose and when they are aggressive in the manifestations, I do not share them. I do not like that, in aggressive manifestations they end up hurting the other. That annoys me. I agree with the demonstrations out of respect for women's lives, of course. Those that manifest peacefully, those that are engaged with the cause in many ways. But I do not agree with any kind of aggression, from graffiti on the streets up until assaulting religious issues, I neither see the need to undress in the street, I do not like it. So, for me some manifestation can attack the respect of others, because the other also deserves respect, let me manifest in a way that does not irritate the other” (Luisa, 2019).

Luisa did not focused on the particularities of or in the actions taken by these groups in the struggle for decriminalize abortion; instead, she started with a statement that shows disagreement and even a tone of irritation in regards to the manifestation strategies applied in some cases by feminists.

In a similar line Elisa answered:

I do not feel represented by women who undress in the street and ask for abortion and break things, churches and that say that men are a disaster. That posture does not represent me at all. (...) [I] do not believe that a generalization can be made of all the people who are in favour of abortion. I think there are people who do it to obtain certain fame or recognition, like the group of actresses who I do not know why they do it because I do not think they know the realities they are talking about. And there are other people who are really convinced that for some women it is a good. They work with the most needed and with women that suffer very painful

⁵⁷ To know more about this movement visit their website on the following link: <http://niunamenos.org.ar>

situations. I sincerely think they are convinced that abortion would solve many situations, I do not share it but I think it that at least you can talk with them, because it is a sincere posture.

In both responses, the first image that came across the interviewees wording when referring to la Campaña was the same one that is present on Laje speech: feminists are considered to be violent, aggressive and men haters. The discursive strategy used by antigender rhetoric's of describing feminist groups and ridiculing their position, is perpetuating an image which is already installed on society and that reinforces a totalizing identity. La Campaña has been present in the Argentinian context since 2003 and its principal demand has been for the decriminalization of abortion, nevertheless, asking about it opens up the discussion of feminism as a movement that tends to apply violent strategies of action.

Taking into consideration the relational aspect of subjectivity, the purpose of these representations is also constructing the group's own identity and identifying the individuals belonging to the group. As stated before, in order to control the population, the network of agencies must intensify their pastoral control capacity and their biopolitics as much as possible, as well as their strategies of body marking to exhibit their affiliation (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 67). What means having identitarian elements that people relate to the antigender groups, or in Segato's words, having a symbolic density.

This symbolic density includes the representative elements that are part of a collective group, such as signs, images, phrases, etc. For the antigender groups, one of the most important elements is the light blue scarf or pañuelo celeste. The appearance of this object resignified the whole antigender rhetoric, allowing the sectors conforming it to identify as part of the same collective identity. Agustín Laje, referred to it as "the light blue wave":

What happened in Argentina with abortion, was an inflection point, because finally we were able to break a silence vote that was making us believe that we were a political minority. They thought that the cultural battle that prepares the terrain for the legislative battle, was already won. But they got a surprise, because we are quiet, we are silent, and they thought we were nonexistent. Then politicians realized that not everything was green, there is also a light blue wave. (Laje, 2018).

One of the interviews confirmed this "colored polarization" stating that during the discussion towards the abortion bill "[t]he situation became so polarized that it ended up being a matter of which color you are, green or light blue" (Elisa, 2019).

The light blue scarf or pañuelo celeste, is a piece of coloured fabric used to identify the groups that are against the bill for pregnancy voluntary interruption. The light blue colour evokes the Argentinian flag, which relates to a nationalistic and patriotic identity. While

defending the idea of family, the arguments portrayed by antigender rhetorics appeal to a notion of “true Nation” that represents a set of values that, as already stated, are heteronormative, binary, and traditionalists. This core of ideas, are presented as opposite to the demands raised by sexual and reproductive rights movements. Hence, using the colours of the Argentinian flag as an identitarian element while appealing to the idea of Nation, is another strategy of representation. In relation to this, the president of the association Más Vida (More Life), stated: “the organizations thought about identifying as a Nation, so we chose the light blue because of its resemblance to the national colours and because it is related to our identity”⁵⁸.

The use of the scarf, however, is understood here as an appropriation and a resignification. The light blue scarf used by the antigender sector and introduced by the group Salvemos las dos vidas, and the green scarf, used by la Campaña, are both a resignification of the white headscarf that historically represented the identity of Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo Square). This is a non-governmental organization created in 1977 whose objective is to locate and restore to their legitimate families all the children disappeared by the last Argentine dictatorship of 1974⁵⁹. This group of mothers and grandmothers started wearing a white piece of fabric in their heads while doing the silent marches in front of the house hall in Buenos Aires in order to secretly recognize each other in a context of ideological and political persecution.

In this sense, the *pañuelos* represents a sign that is creating a particular meaning. Sign here is understood from a linguistic perspective, as the union of a form, which is the image, word or photo (signifier) and an idea or concept in our head with which the form is associated (signified). Both are required to produce meaning, but it is the relation between them that sustains representation (Hall, 1997, p. 31). In line with this definition, the coloured scarf represents a sign, the different colours are the signifiers and the position towards abortion is the signified.

The resignification of the scarf adds to the hypothesis that beyond their arguments, antigender groups seek to strengthen their collective identity. The violent speech aimed at denigrating their supposed enemy, leave undercover their collective project of becoming stronger in the public space. Consequently, the struggle towards the bill for voluntary

⁵⁸ Raúl Magnasco is the president of the association *Más Vida*, which has been at the forefront of the antiabortion sector. On 2018 during an interview with the Argentinian newspaper *Clarín*, he provided the explanation of the light blue scarf. To read the article (in Spanish): <https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/nacio-panuelo-celeste-identifica-a>

⁵⁹ For more information about the organization, visit their website: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/>

pregnancy interruption is not a struggle for making abortions possible, but more a battle between two collective subjects that are seeking for public recognition in the territory of a nation (Segato R. , 2016, p. 131). Recognizing this, enables a better understanding of the action plan displayed by antigender groups. Defeating the deconstructive project of gender ideology is not about defending children or families, but mostly about reinforcing an identity and weakening the counterpart. Thus, it becomes a fact that each group has their own identity, their symbols and representatives. However, both sides are characterized differently, and their struggles have different connotations.

Conclusions

General findings

The purpose of this research was to explore how the antigender discourses have been reconfigured in the Argentinian context after the rejection of the law to decriminalize abortion. Considering that the topic was unexplored academically, this thesis aimed also to fill an academic gap while defining antigender rhetoric as a subject matter.

By applying decolonial feminists' concepts and intersectional analysis to the findings of the study, I aimed to explore discourses and subjectivities contextualized in the Argentinian present. In this sense, the decolonial option proved to be the appropriate tool for understanding the effects of colonization on the resignification of social relations. With the contributions of decolonial feminists authors, it was possible to unveil the impacts of colonization towards gender and how this affects feminized bodies in contemporary life. Finally, intersectionality facilitated discussion of the history of sexual exploitation and exclusion behind the case of Lucía, and to understand this case, not as isolated, but as representational of the pedagogy of cruelty, that rules society. These theoretical tools allowed revealing the intricate violence characterizing the Argentinian context where the antigender discourse (re)emerged.

Concerning the antigender groups' structure, the research showed that these groups are dynamic, heterogeneous, constitutive of an international network, and supported by public and private institutions. In addition, they have applied similar strategies worldwide and their origin dates back to the end of the 20th century. What is more, it was determined that antigender groups' appearance in the public sphere, corresponds to the strengthening of feminist, sexual and reproductive rights movements. In such respect, the antigender rhetoric (re)emerged as a reactionary movement. This reaction understood through the lenses of decolonial feminisms, suggests that antigender discourse is sustained by the traditional, Eurocentric and colonial system of power, under which feminized political topics⁶⁰ are presumed apolitical and residual.

The information collected while interviewing two Argentinian women reflected some of the arguments stated by one of the antigender representatives. When comparing the material, it was deducted that "gender ideology" speech appeals to concepts and beliefs projected by society. This finding could indicate that the communicational strategies applied by antigender

⁶⁰ Feminized political topics refers to any matter accessing the public agenda related to women and feminized bodies, such as abortion, female vote, feminine quota, transgender quota, among others (as defined on the footnote³⁵, chapter 6, page 36).

groups produce or/and reinforce general assumptions, which are sustained as well by media, local governments and other institutions.

By exploring the antigender rhetoric through the lenses of Feminist Critical Discourse Analyses, I intended to comprehend their organizational structure and identify their plan of action. In such ways, the discursive and representational strategies recognized in the interviews proved that the main objective for antigender groups is constructing and reinforcing a collective identity. The resignification of symbols, the constant use of antagonisms, and the negative portrayal of feminist groups aimed to create an identity in addition to defend a legitimate cause.

Politics of identity vs. identifying a public concern

The discussions towards voluntary pregnancy interruption and later integral sexual education reframed the Argentinian context. The polarized background provoked the reconfiguration of both sectors, those against and those on favour of these legislative acts. The research showed that both groups, antigender and the counterpart, have their own representational and identitarian strategies.

Nevertheless, the struggles are not framed by the same causes. On one side, for feminist and sexual and reproductive rights groups, the main cause is reducing the risk of death for pregnant bodies. On the other side, for antigender groups, the cause masqueraded under the argument of family and children defence, proved to be constructing and reinforcing a collective identity. On Segato's words, "the cause of conservative groups against abortion is characterized by the politic of identity (*política de identidad*)" (Segato R. , 2016, p. 129). Under the logic of politics of identity⁶¹, the core of any action is to strengthen the creation of networks and portraying clear symbolization (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 71). Therefore, the importance of these findings allures to dismantling the politics of identity sustaining the anti-gender ideology discourse.

In fact, a recent event complements this conclusion. On November 1st of 2019, Agustín Laje was awarded by CitizenGo for the "cultural battle he is conducting around the world in defence of freedom, life and family"⁶². The institution organizing the event was the Spanish

⁶¹ Politics of identity refers particularly to the strategies applied by antiabortion groups in their effort to strengthen their identity and reaffirm their public presence in Argentina (Segato R. L., 2016, p. 131). It is different to the concept of Identity Politics, which consists on a theoretical framework with its analytical tools and methodological techniques.

⁶² To watch the video (in Spanish) of the award, visit the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dhmk4o7mmE&t=104s>

non-governmental organization that financed the World Congress of Family held in Verona, Italy on March 2019. This proves the effort dedicated to strengthening an international network and reinforcing a collective identity beyond geographical limits.

Last but not least

Listening and transcribing the online interviews I analysed was not an easy task. I studied political science at the same University as Agustín Laje in Córdoba, Argentina. The fact of finishing our bachelors in the same institution and at the same time, being extremely opposite in most of our opinions, has always triggered me. I tried to imagine what he would be thinking back then when we learnt about feminist theories and read authors such as, Chantal Mouffe, Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. I suspect he could have been doing the same I am trying to do now, explore the territory of what you always considered as the enemy from an ideological perspective.

That was one of the biggest challenges of this research process. Submerging myself in the antigender field, where I am an outsider, and trying to analyse the antigender discourse, which I am opposed to. Before the thesis, I had never listened carefully to a whole interview of Laje. What is more, I underestimated his figure, considering him as an irrational and conservative character whose words are not worth my attention. I realize now that my indifference was not only a mistake but also the product of considering my point of view as “the right one”, when actually, there are no rights or wrongs, but groups defending a cause. My ideological framework has not changed, but I comprehend that my positionality needs to be different. Laje is not just a character; he is part of a global phenomenon supported by a social, cultural and political project, whose aims to defend a model of society based on binary, traditional, and heteronormative structures. As researchers, we ought to approach such cases pursuing to avoid biased analyses. Therefore, if any social change is expected to happen, academics should submerge themselves in uncomfortable spaces more often.

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Appendices

A. Form of consent

FECHA:

LUGAR:

Consentimiento Informado para Participantes de Investigación

El propósito de esta ficha de consentimiento es proveer a los participantes en esta investigación con una clara explicación de la naturaleza de la misma, así como de su rol en ella como participantes.

La presente investigación es conducida por la *licenciada Sofia Antonellini, estudiante de posgrado de la Universidad de Linköping, Suecia*. La meta de este estudio es recolectar datos para la **realización de una tesis de posgrado de la Maestría en Estudios de Género, Interseccionalidad y Cambio Social de la Universidad de Linköping**.

Si usted accede a participar en este estudio, se le pedirá responder preguntas en una entrevista. Lo que conversemos durante estas sesiones realizadas online a través del programa Skype, se grabará, de modo que la investigadora pueda transcribir después las ideas que usted haya expresado.

La participación en este estudio es estrictamente voluntaria. La información que se recoja será confidencial y no se usará para ningún otro propósito fuera de los de esta investigación. Sus respuestas a la entrevista serán codificadas usando un nombre de identificación distinto al real y por lo tanto, serán anónimas.

Si tiene alguna duda sobre este proyecto, puede hacer preguntas en cualquier momento durante su participación en él. Igualmente. Si alguna de las preguntas durante la entrevista le parecen incómodas, tiene usted el derecho de hacérselo saber a la investigadora o de no responderlas.

Desde ya le agradezco su participación.

Consentimiento:

Acepto participar voluntariamente en esta investigación, conducida por Sofia Antonellini. He sido informada (o) de que la meta de este estudio es recolectar datos para la realización de una tesis de posgrado de la Maestría en Estudios de Género, Interseccionalidad y Cambio Social de la Universidad de Linköping, Suecia.

Reconozco que la información que yo provea en el curso de esta investigación es estrictamente confidencial y no será usada para ningún otro propósito fuera de los de este estudio sin mi consentimiento. He sido informada (o) de que puedo hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto en cualquier momento y que puedo retirarme del mismo cuando así lo decida, sin que esto acarree perjuicio alguno para mi persona.

Entiendo que una copia de esta ficha de consentimiento me será entregada, y que puedo pedir información sobre los resultados de este estudio cuando éste haya concluido.

Nombre del Participante

Firma del Participante

Fecha

B. Outline of Interview Questions

TEMA/SUBJECT	Pregunta, disparador	TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH
Introducción: dejar a las entrevistadas presentarse	Pequeña presentación de sí misma: cuál es su edad, estado civil, a qué se dedica, tienes hijos/as	Presentation of the interviewee, leave them define themselves.
Familia: subjetividad	¿Cómo definirías el concepto de familia?	How would you define the concept of "family"?
Aborto	¿Has oído hablar de la ley para interrupción voluntaria del embarazo? ¿Cuál es tu posición con respecto a la ley?	Have you heard about the bill for voluntary pregnancy interruption? What is your position in relation to the bill?
Grupos antiaborto	¿Conoces el grupo Salvemos las dos vidas? ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre su postura?	Do you know the group " <i>Salvemos las dos vidas</i> "? What is your opinion about them?
Grupos proaborto	¿Conoces a La Campaña por el derecho al aborto legal, seguro y gratuito? ¿Cuál es tu opinión?	Do you know the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion? What is your opinion?
Colectividad	¿Haz participado alguna vez de alguna marcha? ¿Cómo te sentiste? ¿Cuál consideras es la herramienta más útil que tiene una sociedad para hacerse escuchar?	Have you ever participated in a march? How did you feel? What do you consider to be the most useful tool a society has to make itself heard?
Feminismo	¿Conoces el movimiento Ni una Menos? ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre su postura?	Do you know the feminist group Not even one less? What is your opinion about them?
	Si el aborto llegara a ser aprobado por el Congreso Argentino, ¿cuál sería el accionar a seguir por parte de los grupos que están en contra de la ley?	If the bill for abortion was approved, which would be the action to take by the groups that are against the law?
Educación Sexual	¿Escuchaste hablar de la ley de Educación Sexual Integral? ¿Cuál es tu opinión?	Did you hear about the bill for sexual education? What is your opinion?
Educación Sexual	¿Conoces el grupo con mis hijos no te metas? ¿Cuál es tu opinión?	Do you know the group <i>Con mis hijos no te metas</i> ? What is your opinion about them?
Educación Sexual	¿Cuál crees que debería ser el rol del Estado en la educación?	What would be the role of the State in education?
Ideología de género	¿Has escuchado hablar de la "ideología de género"? ¿Cuál es tu posición al respecto?	Have you heard about gender ideology? What is your opinion?
Presentación del caso de Lucía. A principios de éste año hubo un caso muy controversial en Argentina sobre una niña de 11 años, embarazada a consecuencia de una violación. ¿Escuchaste hablar del caso? ¿Qué opinas sobre el modo en que procedieron las autoridades médicas? ¿Crees que se podría haber actuado de otra forma?		Presentation of Lucia's case. Earlier this year there was a very controversial case in Argentina about an 11-year-old girl, pregnant because of rape. Did you hear about the case? What do you think about how the medical authorities proceeded? Do you think they could have acted differently?
Leave the end open, ask if they feel like adding something to the interviewee and ask how they felt during it. Ask again if there is something that I can do as a contribution.		

