

State policies to address gender-based violence against men: A case study from decolonial feminist readings

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this article is to analyze the limits and contributions of state approaches to gender violence with men, from a qualitative perspective, using a strategy of analytical triangulation. This strategy includes the results of a systematized literature review on the experiences of state work with men denounced for gender violence in different countries, the data obtained from a local research project on a public policy of intervention with masculinities in Córdoba (Argentina), and the relationship between the two. In this way, the article examines the epistemic, theoretical and practical approaches that guide the actions of the agents involved in these policies, as well as the effects on the transformation of the relationship between masculinity and gender violence. It concludes on the need to incorporate an intersectional feminist perspective in the state's work with men, as well as the implementation of long-term studies to evaluate the effectiveness of state approaches, as they may not be sufficient to reduce gender-based violence.

KEYWORDS: masculinity, public policies, intersectional framework, gender equity.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 3, 2015, the first march called “#Ni Una Menos” was held in Argentina to denounce the cases of femicides in the country, which from that date until May 30, 2024, registered some 2544 cases. The final figure is one femicide every 31 hours in the country (Observatorio de las Violencias de Género | Ahora Que Sí Nos Ven, 2024, p. 10). The accumulation of marches and social demands for state responses to these figures led to the creation of the Ministry of Women,

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Genders, and Diversities at the national level and various policies to address gender-based violence in different national and provincial spheres.

As part of a process of rise and visibility of the Feminist Movement in the country since 2015 onwards, in 2019 and in Argentina a series of policies of inclusion and state investment in gender issues are defined. Among some of the measures, the use of non-sexist language in State documents, the registry change in the National Identity Card (to incorporate non-binary identities), the Transvestite-Trans Labor Quota, and the enactment of Law No. 27,610 on Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy in 2021 are sanctioned. This process of boiling of feminisms and institutionalization of part of their claims in the State was abruptly interrupted in December 2023, when the extreme right-wing party “La Libertad Avanza”, whose referent is the current president Javier Milei, took over the national leadership.

Among the first measures of the libertarian government, at the beginning of June 2024, was the elimination of the Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversities and the dismissal of most of the staff of the 144 hotline for victims of gender-based violence. In addition, the “Acompañar” program, which provided economic assistance to women and members of the LGTBQI+ population in situations of gender-based violence, was frozen, and the “Registradas” program, which sought to reduce the informality of female domestic workers by integrating them into registered employment, was withdrawn. Also, the use of inclusive language and any reference to “gender perspective” in public administration documents was prohibited and the government began to talk about “gender ideology”³.

By analyzing the changes in gender rights in the Argentine State since December 2023, with the assumption of a new political sign in the national administration, it is possible to understand how fragile the relationship between investment and state commitment to policies to expand women's rights, feminized bodies, and intervention in gender-based violence. This reveals that such policies, rather than a true State policy, tend to depend on the administration in office and its governmental priorities. However, there are specific policies and approaches to gender-based violence that, both

³ From sectors of the new or extreme right and traditionally conservative and religious spaces, gender studies are referred to as “gender ideology”, considering its theoretical contributions as a supposed doctrine that attempts to impose a relativistic vision of sexuality and gender that is disconnected from biology and denies the differences/inequalities that are considered natural and traditional between men and women. The “gender ideology” is said to destroy the family and the “good values” that organize social coexistence.

in Argentina and in the world, have been consolidated as intervention modalities. These policies and approaches articulate devices of the executive, legislative, and judicial power, and it is necessary to analyze them in terms of their continuity and legitimacy over time.

In this sense, this article focuses on the analysis of articles, reports, and books that address state policies of intervention with masculinities and gender-based violence as of 2015 in various countries, linking them with the data obtained in qualitative research carried out at the Comprehensive Centro Integral de Varones en Situación de Violencia (CIV) in Córdoba. Regarding the organization of the presentation of ideas, first, the main findings obtained from a systematic review of feminist debates, articles, reports, books, and studies that have been produced around the spaces of state intervention of gender-based violence with males in different countries are presented. Secondly, the epistemic-theoretical and methodological approaches to working with men that are visible in the CIV are analyzed, highlighting some of their significant components for intervention, such as demand, time allocated to socio-educational groups, and professional training spaces.

Finally, based on the interpretation and articulation of the data, the information is triangulated and, based on the following questions, the final reflections are organized: How do the different approaches to working with men that organize the intervention of state agents influence the transformation of male subjectivity in these programs; Is an approach that focuses on cognitive-behavioral change but minimizes the life context of the subjects effective? To what extent are macho practices questioned and penalized without addressing the historical, social, economic, cultural, and political context that continues to legitimize and reproduce them? What are the effects of not addressing the social and historical dimension of the phenomena of violence and gender inequality and of relying solely on a punitive-psychological approach to disarm those situations whose colonial genesis was provoked by the State itself?

It is necessary to point out the relevance of the study of masculinities from the feminist perspective since it is a matter of analyzing gender relations that are neither static nor biological, but social constructions conditioned by social, economic, historical, and cultural contexts. In the case of this article, feminist studies on *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1995) were addressed, as an aspirational model based on a fictional body of pure power, where the rejection of the feminine and the exercise of power over feminized bodies and other masculinities is naturalized. However,

intersectional feminist studies (Crenshaw, 1989) show that masculinity is not constructed and experienced homogeneously, but intersects with dimensions such as race, class, ability, and sexuality, among others. In particular, this paper works with public policies that address a population of men from popular sectors, racialized and marked as violent.

In this sense, in the last decade in Argentina, multiple state initiatives have been deployed to address the problem of patriarchal violence by intervening with men denounced for gender-based violence. These initiatives are organized and developed for different populations, with dissimilar resources, plural strategies, and theoretical-methodological approaches; although they are directed towards the same goals: to intervene in gender-based violence through the interpellation of cisgender and predominantly heterosexual masculinity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND/OR BACKGROUND

The debates and approaches to masculinity from the feminist perspective in academia have an extensive but marginal genealogy that can be traced back to the 1970s onwards. Viveros Vigoya (2007) explains that representatives of liberal feminism such as Betty Friedman and the women gathered in the National Organization for Women in the United States, began to discuss equality with men in the early 1980s, when other feminist lines were developed, which proposed a moral superiority of women about men and that they expressed themselves with a voice that androcentrism did not recognize or denied. For other feminist authors such as Mackinnon (2018), male violence against women shown in pornography, prostitution, and heterosexual marriage, was characterized as inevitable in gender relations; therefore, achieving gender equity was possible only by radically transforming males and masculinity. In this perspective, men were predisposed to rape because of the power conferred by their physical superiority.

Since the mid-1980s, according to Viveros Vigoya (2007), the debate shifted from gender differences to differences among women. Black and Marxist feminisms pointed out the connections between gender, race, class, and power relations, among others; warning that men, as well as women, are not equal to each other. Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, and bell hooks have mentioned that black men are not comparable to white men and hegemonic male stereotypes

of masculinity. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine these intersections and connect gender relations with other social structures. However, feminist theories insist that even in their differences, males themselves, as a social category, collectively occupy a position of dominance over the collective of women (Bard Wigdor, 2023; Connell, 2000).

In this brief tour through the feminist genealogy of masculinity studies, the theoretical productions of Nuestra América are inscribed in the intersectional reading of gender, analyzing the matrices of oppression and privileges that are generated due to gender, race, generation, disability, geographical origin, social class, among others. Studies on gender relations in rural contexts, indigenous communities, large cities, and specific social spaces such as educational institutions are addressed, contextualizing the historical moment and the particular phenomenon under examination. A relevant author in the field is Rita Segato (2014), who addresses from a decolonial perspective violence by sexual means and masculinity as a colonial device, as the effect of a process that has been dragging on since the birth of the Nation States.

Mara Viveros Vigoya is another key author in the study of masculinity and its intersection with race, class, and the Latin American context, similar to Sayak Valencia in Mexico, who addresses masculinity linked to drug trafficking and neoliberalism. Another reference in the area is the Mexican Roberto Garda, who produces a theory on the relationship between masculinity and gender-based violence, proposing an approach to intervene in the area that has been taken up by civil associations and areas of the State that intend to work on the subject. In Argentina, the production of masculinity is mostly associated with masculinity studies or male referents who, from feminist approaches, have conducted relevant research in the area, such as Stefano Barbero, Fabri, and Jones, among others, and other authors.

In this brief overview, the proposal developed is framed within feminist studies of masculinity with a decolonial approach, understanding masculinity as a fictitious construction, an aspirational stereotype that men try to approach through daily routines, practices, and discourses, which shape and materialize gender, as well as social relations (Bard Wigdor, 2023). The search for approximating the stereotype of masculinity, which is heterosexual, colonial, and whitewashed, as a social norm, generates invisibility concerning the real plurality of masculine existences that cannot recognize themselves or each other; even when most men produce failed copies of the model/norma to which they aspire to resemble. A model that is the effect of aesthetics, values,

tastes, desires, emotions, and exercises of power over others, which highlights the colonial genealogy in the way of being a Western man (Bard Wigdor, 2023).

Thus, how men have been socialized in the patriarchal, colonial capitalist order constitutes them as subjects whose practice is based on violence and control, especially of feminized bodies and territories (Segato, 2003). Thus, becoming man is a daily configuration from the socio-historical structures that make the family, the productive and reproductive order; culture, and socialization, and these to the representations, emotions, sexuality, and all subjectivation devices through which the legitimacy of the power of control and use of violence against feminized bodies is transmitted (Bard Wigdor, 2023).

In that sense, when men do not assume and problematize their privileges, disregard responsibilities in the domestic sphere, abuse the labor force of women to care for and assist, and exercise control and dominance over their partners, they are producing patriarchal masculinity. For this reason, low-intensity violence is the daily foundation of gender inequalities and not only those that are usually documented as spectacular, such as femicides or physical violence. Because of the so-called low-intensity violence, women show a deterioration of self-esteem, impotence, fatigue, and abandonment of personal projects, among other unique symptoms that affect their conditions of good living (referring to the proposal of indigenous movements and community feminism). These situations constitute the social phenomenon of gender inequality that engenders violence, which makes it difficult to address individually. Hence, men's groups are thought of as collective initiatives for critical reflection on masculinity, inequality, and gender-based violence (Lugones, 2012; Bonino, 2002; Segato, 2014).

Non-biological feminisms have addressed gender-based violence as an issue, not of males but of patriarchy, sexism, racism, and male domination (Hooks, 2017). Indeed, assuming a relational perspective of gender, feminisms have made important and valuable contributions to the study of masculinities. It is especially relevant for the analysis of these policies to recognize that in state agendas, the absence of debate and analysis around the hegemony of the “masculine” and the “white” has strengthened, even without seeking it, the regimes of race, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism (Viveros Vigoya, 2007) inherited from a colonial history (Quijano, 2019; Castro-Gómez and Grosfogel, 2007). Therefore, a decolonial feminist epistemology that addresses the particular configuration of gender-based violence and traditional masculinity in Latin America

needs to address the problem of patriarchal domination in its intersection with aspects such as racism and colonialism, as multiple structures of oppression that operate and permeate social relations in territories marked by conquest.

To address the violence experienced by women and feminized bodies from a decolonial perspective is to address the multiple oppressions produced in co-determining and simultaneous structures of domination, according to what Lugones (2012) named as Coloniality of gender which is a colonial heritage that governs social relations since that time and configures the State itself. In this framework, from the community feminisms of Bolivia (Guzmán, Paredes, Cabnal) the category of patriarchal torque is developed, which is how the power relations of the ancestral patriarchy were strengthened with the colonial European patriarchy at the time of the invasion of the ancestral territory (Cabnal, 2010), reconfiguring gender relations and making them hierarchical, exploitative and oppressive. Thus, the contribution of a decolonial reading of categories such as patriarchy makes possible an analytical and methodological effort to connect the historical contexts of the production of gender inequality relations from the configuration of the Nation-State itself, mapping its translation into contemporary hetero-cis-sexist, racist, classist and empowering relations, which structure gender relations and among men themselves as Rita Segato explains, but also how state power is exercised.

METHODOLOGY

The present research was carried out from a qualitative methodological approach, due to the relevance given to interpretation, subjective understanding, and flexibility in the data collection and construction strategies. This approach allows addressing complexities inherent to groups of men, investigating their contexts and power relations about other corporealities and everyday life. Indeed, the interpretative nature of the qualitative approach allows us to understand how the public policies analyzed in this work are linked to the practices and discourses of professionals and other actors, from where they construct, negotiate, and reinterpret their experiences in specific contexts; as well as to interpret the probable effects of the devices under analysis.

Based on techniques such as the systematic review of bibliography (SR) on public policies on the state approach to gender-based violence in different geopolitical contexts; semi-structured interviews with professionals of the CIV in Córdoba; non-participant observations of the socio-reflective groups generated in this institution in Córdoba and the preparation of a field notebook by the author; a series of information was gathered and subsequent construction of data that are analyzed in the results section.

In this sense, in the first place, this work proceeded in the systematic review of articles (SR) that analyze state devices of work with men from the 80s onwards, a decade where the need for the study of masculinity and spaces of work with men is recognized (Vivero Vigoya, 2007). Subsequently, from 2015 onwards, there has been a general outburst of feminist demands and state responses to the problems that organize them, with gender-based violence and femicide being the main issues identified.

Methodologically, the systematic review (SR) provides a rigorous and systematic framework for conducting literature reviews, which are a mandatory phase of all new academic research (Booth et al., 2016). The exploration was mainly virtual (from 2015 onwards), through keywords such as State, devices for working with males, gender-based violence, and public policies, to identify epistemic contributions and empirical research linked to the topic of interest. The search sites were the main academic text databases such as JSTOR (Journal Storage); Social Science Research Network (SSRN), PsycINFO, Social Sciences Citation Index (SSC); Scopus; Google Scholar; SAGE Journals; ProQuest; EBSCOhost and Academia.edu. Local libraries were also visited. A total of 15 scientific articles and 5 book chapters were scanned for analysis and presentation of preliminary results.

This bibliographic search made it possible to recognize that there is not enough evaluative production on these policies for working with masculinities and that, therefore, it is a vacant topic. Except for researchers from the United States, where the main academic texts on the area are located, little information was obtained from other contexts and realities, partly because this type of approach is new and because there is little time for experiential accumulation in the State. Therefore, linking or relating the scarce analyses found in SR with the ways of intervening in gender-based violence from the case study was central to the results shared here.

Data collection techniques

Specifically, the research consisted of non-participant observations in the socio-reflective groups with men that took place in the institution on a weekly basis for the entire duration of the groups, and semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the team of professionals of the VIC. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with CIV professionals, non-participant observations of 4 socio-reflective groups (of 12 meetings each) during the entire duration of the same; at different times and days (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday) with varying coordinating pairs, and 10 non-participant observations were applied in the first interviews of men attending the VIC for the first time. Also, a bibliographic and documentary review of the institution's background was carried out, consisting of record cards of the first interviews (from 2016 to 2022) and available institutional reports (years 2020 and 2021).

According to Guber (2001), the semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection technique in which the researcher is guided by a guide of questions prepared in advance, but always with the flexibility to reformulate, add, or remove questions according to the course of the conversation with the interviewee. Thus, in contrast to a structured interview, this type of technique allows us to clarify, deepen, or give rise to emerging themes and explore areas of interest of the interviewee or that arise in the process of the conversation itself. At the CIV, 7 interviews were conducted with professionals currently working at the CIV and with two former workers, one interview with the staff member in charge at the time of joining the institution (a psychologist), and another with the staff member who is currently in charge of coordination (a psychoanalyst). All of them are psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers of the institution and the topic of conversation was about different dimensions such as the theoretical-methodological approach with which they worked in the CIV, appreciation of the policy, the subjects with whom they work; work dynamics, working conditions, training and projections in the space.

Likewise, the other technique used, non-participant observation, involves recording in detail a situation, practices, relationships, and discourse between subjects in a systematic manner and a given context. It is a qualitative data collection technique where the aim is not to actively intervene in the activities or interactions of the subjects included in the research. Therefore, a conscious and deliberate distancing is maintained, to minimize the influence of the researcher on the subjects of his research. Guber (2001), analyzes how a descriptive and detailed vision of the situations to be

documented is impossible to achieve from the search for neutrality; therefore, it is necessary to assume that achieving a position of distance is complex because every observation process implies a subjective interpretation of the researcher and a presence that necessarily generates affectations in the subjects. In the case of the CIV, the presence of the researchers was noticed, discussed with the groups attended, and agreed upon with everyone. In any case, as time went by, their presence in the groups became naturalized, and thus, a non-active participation in the weekly observation of their meetings was achieved.

The CIV: a state device for addressing gender violence against men

This paper takes a local experience in which the authors participated as researchers in the framework of a project called: “Public Policies and gender in Córdoba: analysis and Recommendations for the Strengthening of integral health, the Role of the Media and the Approach to hegemonic masculinity” (2021-2024)⁴, where participation was linked to the axis of *masculinities*. From a decolonial and interdisciplinary feminist approach, one of the programs of attention to gender violence of the ex-Ministry of Women of Córdoba (MMC) now secretariat, called “Centro Integral de Varones en Situación de Violencia” (CIV from now on), was examined.

The CIV is located in the province of Córdoba and has a series of public policies aimed at addressing gender-based violence and, in particular, attention to men denounced for different types of violence, as contemplated in Law 9283 against family violence in Córdoba. It was this law that prompted the creation of the Ministry of Women, which was downgraded to a Secretariat in 2024. Within the framework of this Secretariat, the current Polo Integral de la Mujer (Integral Women's Center) and the Centro Integral de Varones en Situación de Violencia (CIV) (Integral Center for Men in a Situation of Violence) operate there. The men who attend this program arrive as a result of an ex officio demand that is generated when the police, judges, the Public Prosecutor's Office, or other public agencies initiate a judicial or administrative procedure against a man. This initiates a state intervention in the life of the denounced man, which does not require his consent or interest, but rather the State obliges him to answer for his alleged acts of violence before the pertinent

⁴ Impactar en Ciencia y Tecnología was a nationally funded program that was abruptly terminated with the arrival of Javier Milei to the government and the elimination of the Ministry of Science and Technology. We were able to implement it from 2021 to 2023.

institutions and to begin the treatment defined there. The cost of refusal may be imprisonment, restriction of visits to his children, or economic penalties.

The CIV building is located in the center of the city of Córdoba, although it serves people from all over the province and its entrance is guarded by two policemen. Then, users are met at an entrance desk where they are received by the administrative staff and must complete the relevant procedures. Afterward, they meet the institution's team of professionals, which is made up of 13 people, most of them psychologists, except for a social worker and a lawyer. The director is a psychoanalyst and in the year 2024, they added a psychologist as coordinator of the institution.

To come to the site, men are referred by court order due to gender-based violence and the technical team must carry out an interdisciplinary assessment, to define “the treatment” that corresponds in each case, to generate a process of change on the part of the perpetrator of violence. To this end, the device assesses whether the individuals present situations that require psychiatric care and/or alcohol/psychoactive substance use, for referral and treatment, or whether they can be included in socio-educational groups that operate in the institution. As an objective, they aim to avoid the recidivism of men in the exercise of violence, although they do not have follow-up mechanisms for men once they “leave” the facility (Author's field notebook, 2022, December, 2:00 p.m.).

During the exploration and collection of data in the CIV, the fieldwork strategy assigned great relevance to the voice of the subjects involved throughout the research, which motivated it to be based on the precepts framed in the “Free, Prior and Informed Consent” (FPIC). This implies the full decision of those interviewed and observed to participate in the investigation consciously, anonymously, and with the correct protection of their data. For this reason, and to guarantee confidentiality, the interviewees and observed persons were notified of their right to remain anonymous concerning the data they provided and signed an informed consent form explaining the characteristics and objectives of the study and the confidential and ethical treatment of the data. Since participation in this process is voluntary, participation in the project could be withdrawn at any time and without the need to justify the reason. Furthermore, anonymity was respected and cared for throughout the research process. Also, the project data were protected in a safe place, as well as the participants were constantly informed about the commitments, responsibilities, tasks, and benefits of their participation. In addition, transparency of information and availability of data was guaranteed in writing, as well as consensus for future publications of the research results.

Finally, it is essential to relate the SR carried out with the fieldwork developed in the CIV state device (2022 and 2023), in order to understand the local and situated dimension of the same phenomenon. It is believed that, although it is a particular experience of the province of Córdoba, it may allow understanding of a situation that is replicated, even with its differences, in different state proposals.

RESULTS

Bibliographic review on mechanisms for dealing with male perpetrators of gender-based violence

Based on the SR on work experiences in state mechanisms for the care of men who have committed gender-based violence in different contexts, the following theoretical-methodological approaches are predominant in the interventions of professional teams: psychopathological approach, cognitive-behavioral approach, social learning approach, psychodynamic approach, and Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional ecological model. De Stéfano Barbero (2023), recognizes the predominance of the multidimensional ecological model in state devices since it is considered that its perspective would provide an integral, relational, and complex view of the various factors underlying situations of violence.

Whatever the approach, the effectiveness of programs for men who perpetrate gender-based violence has been debated since their inception in the late 1970s on the continent and has intensified over time, due to their limited effectiveness in reducing gender-based violence (Gondolf, 2011). In the main states of the continent where specialized programs for men have been implemented, such as the USA, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, and Argentina, and also in Europe, especially Spain and Scotland, it was found that the work approaches detected range from psychodynamic approaches for attachment disorders, motivational techniques that address readiness to change, specialized counseling, to couple therapy for mutual violence or dynamics adapted from Narcotics Anonymous (especially the 12 steps). However, the predominant one in all state areas is the cognitive-behavioral approach and to a lesser extent the gender perspective,

although no practical evidence has been established that these succeed in transforming the violence practices they address (Price and Rosenbaum, 2009).

The cognitive-behavioral perspective, within psychological theories and from the study of violence, produced an important change by addressing not only the internal world of the subject but also the external factors that influenced the internal processes and how this was expressed in a particular situation, taking into account observable and measurable behavior (Medina et al., 2014). Indeed, for Echeburúa et al. (2010), who developed a behavioral psychological theory with cognitive-behavioral strategies of influence in the design of interventions for men who exert violence, violent behavior in the home was the effect of an intense emotional state: anger, which interacted with hostile attitudes and a repertoire of poor behaviors with deficits in communication and problem-solving skills, added to precipitating factors such as stressful situations, problematic alcohol consumption, jealousy, etc. It can be seen from the fieldwork that these same factors are also taken into account in the first interview conducted by the professional team of the CIV when the users enter the institution for the first time, just as these issues are part of the theoretical content of the psycho-socio-educational workshops (Author's field notebook, 2023:15h).

Regarding the effectiveness of the approach developed, in a report by Morales Peillard et al. (2013) for the Lazo Blanco campaign, it was established that no differences in effects are found between interventions based on the ecological model, cognitive-behavioral, or other forms of intervention. Thus, it was observed that the interventions evaluated have minimal impact on reducing recidivism of violence by males. Other rigorous reviews of studies that have evaluated batterer intervention programs include Layton MacKenzie (2006) and Babcock and Steiner (1999). Both studies analyzed state programs with cognitive-behavioral approaches and gender-sensitive interventions and their effects, from which they concluded that those that applied gender-sensitive reading were approximately three times more effective in reducing recidivism. In addition, a study by Feldman and Ridley (1995) concludes that gender interventions do significantly reduce levels of physical violence, but that other forms of abuse, such as psychological and emotional, are generally not modified by treatment.

In this sense, the lack of success shown by these programs in working with men may be due to Cavanagh et al. (2001) when, based on a study of various devices implemented in different parts of Europe, they argue that men's decision to commit violence against a partner may sometimes be

unconscious or spontaneous, but that it is generally accompanied by a complex process of defining the problem. Therefore, any episode of violence only contains the potential to be defined as violent if the actor himself recognizes it as such and if the cultural and social context in which he lives also identifies it as such.

As explained by feminist approaches, we live in a hetero-patriarchal society where values, practices, and work organizations are based on sexist criteria, so it is difficult to sustain concepts such as “*cognitive distortions*” as proposed by the cognitive-behavioral approach of the CIV. Rather, men present representations that are over-adapted to the context. Thus, personal definitions of gender-based violence are the effect of discursive adaptations to structural inequalities between genders, where white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class males hold more power in all spheres of life. This macro-politics of social control of feminized bodies through violence is also reflected at the micro-interactional level in the practices of the subjects. Thus, for Cavanagh et al. (2001), gender-based violence is not distortion, they are intentional strategies, actions often calculated based on various aspects that include, not infrequently, the man's knowledge of the relationship and his partner. Therefore, men use violence in intimate relationships as a means to discipline, and exercise power and control over women, as Segato (2016) also helps us to understand when she speaks of *expressive violence*⁵ in the case of femicides.

Thus, cognitive-behavioral approaches cannot successfully address a problem that is not of an individual, behavioral, or representational nature but is mostly structural, as gender studies maintain. The situation is even more complex when feminist masculinity studies speak of the diverse positions of women, feminized corporealities, and men. Not all people are equal according to class position, race, age, religion, and geographical origin or ability. Men from popular sectors, racialized men, and, in a very high percentage, unemployed men, who are the majority population of the CIV (Bard Wigdor, 2023), may exercise violence as an expression of the need to elaborate an unrecognized conflict. Thus, Wieviorka (2001) states that defining which factors are associated with violence is not a simple task, and this is a topic that is not found to be problematic in the documented antecedents of the approached device, nor the dialogue with the workers interviewed.

⁵ With this notion, Rita Segato proposes to understand that the exercise of violence has an expressive purpose rather than an “instrumental” one. That is, to express that one has the will of the other in one's hands.

The Centro Integral de Varones en situación de violencia in the province of Córdoba

The CIV works with two main instances of intervention on its population: first interview and psycho-socio-educational groups. The *first interview* is aimed at men who were denounced for gender violence and who are referred by court order (99%), or men who come voluntarily, which represents a minimum percentage (1%). The interviews are conducted by a professional team using a questionnaire or form (which includes different instruments such as the SARA, HCR-20, and Cognitive Distortions, among others) with items that are considered suitable for an individual psychosocial assessment of the reasons for which the male presents himself at the institution. At this stage, information is collected regarding the victim's complaint, history of previous violence, comprehensive health and educational background, family and friendship networks, etc. From the quantification of the data that are added, an overall result is obtained on the potential risk of the subject in question to the person who denounced him and his environment, as well as an assessment of the general socio-psychological situation, especially if he shows motivation to change.

As a result of this first and only interview upon admission to the institution, the professional team assesses whether the male should be referred to individual or external psychiatric therapy, particularly through social security, private providers, or health centers. Sometimes, the professional dupla also requests a referral of men to care facilities for problematic use of psychoactive substances and alcohol or mental health care in hospitals (Bard Wigdor and Aquino, 2024). In fact, from participant and non-participant observations and the dialogue with professionals of the device, the decision to refer to group or individual therapy is defined by whether the subject can be “grouped” (psychological evaluation) and whether or not he has social security; that is, whether or not he has his economic resources to pay for the necessary psychological or psychiatric services (field notebook, 2023). At the same time, there is an institutional decision not to work with cases related to violence and sexual abuse. If appropriate, men must join the second stage of intervention, which is the *psycho-socio-educational* groups offered by the institution for three months and lasting an hour and a half. The main axes of this instance are analyzed below: the epistemic-theoretical and methodological approaches to working with men and the significant components for the intervention: demand, the time allocated to the groups, the time allocated to the groups, the time spent in the groups, the time spent in the groups and the time spent in the groups.

Regarding the epistemic-theoretical and methodological approach of the work of the CIV, it adheres and is institutionally framed in the ecological model of Bronfrenbrenner according to UNFPA (2024), from which it identifies aspects that will give greater probability of the presence of violent behaviors in males: (a) factors associated with the sociocultural framework, the economic and social environment, (b) factors referring to the community, institutions and formal and informal social structures; (c) factors linked to the family framework, relationships or immediate context where the abuse takes place and (d) factors acting at the individual level and individual characteristics of the perpetrator. These factors have an impact on three constitutive dimensions of the subject: 1) In their cognitive dimension such as thinking schemes, cognitive distortions, sociocultural patterns with which they explain and signify their world and that of others; 2) The behavioral dimension around their behaviors and the concrete exercise of different forms of violence; and 3) The emotional dimension that promotes the recognition of their emotions and significant experiences in their life histories crossed by conflict and violence.

According to the field work developed in this research, it is evident that the ecological model affirmed by the institution is intercepted by other views that are characteristic of the psychopathological-clinical and cognitive-behavioral approaches. The psychopathological perspective of the institution determines a diagnosis of violence in medical-clinical terms, evident in the ways in which the process carried out by the men is named and signified, and which can be exemplified when the Provincial Law on Family Violence speaks of “establishing special rehabilitation and reintegration treatments for both the aggressor and the victim” (Law 9283, Chap. V), when they mention in their institutional report (1st Report) (Ministry of Women, 2020) that “there will be individuals who are discharged before others” (p. 28) and refer to the objective of the program as how to “stop violence and recidivism” (p. 23). These phrases are frequently repeated in the reports and also in the “risk measurement” instruments they apply to users for professional assessment in the first intake interview conducted with males (Bard Wigdor and Aquino, 2024).

In addition, the institution approaches its users with a cognitive-behavioral approach which, as Garay and Keegan (2016) argue, is based on a psychopathological model that does not involve a set of techniques to resolve isolated symptoms, but implies a psychotherapy system based on a particular conception of psychological disorders. From this perspective it is affirmed that there is

a psychopathology of cognitive origin, whereby mental processes acquire a significant place in the onset and sustaining of what they call disorders or distortions and the assumption that people experience discomfort because of the way they perceive reality and not because of reality itself. In the case of the CIV, there is talk of “cognitive distortions” in users who exercise gender-based violence, in fact there is a whole section of the first interview where these distortions are mapped, which are nothing more than macho beliefs about relationships with their partners, gender roles and masculinity itself that sustains the heteropatriarchal order in which they live.

Likewise, these cognitive-behavioral approaches make little reference to the structural gender relations beyond the link, as a relevant variable that induces the practices of violence exercised by men on feminized bodies. Lemos Hoyos et al. (2007) explain that they focus on couple relationships and especially on emotional episodes and on how to control the anger or low self-esteem of users, giving equal weight to cognitive distortions about the role of women as to naturalized sexist ideas in general. In addition, among the contents that organize the workshops given in the device, formally mapped: 1- concept of violence, the cycle of violence and recognition of emotions at each stage; 2- identification and expression of emotions, distorted thoughts about gender roles; 3- control of abusive and angry behaviors, relaxation; 4- gender violence, violence in their life trajectories, parenting styles; 5- communication skills from empathy, negotiation and conflict resolution.

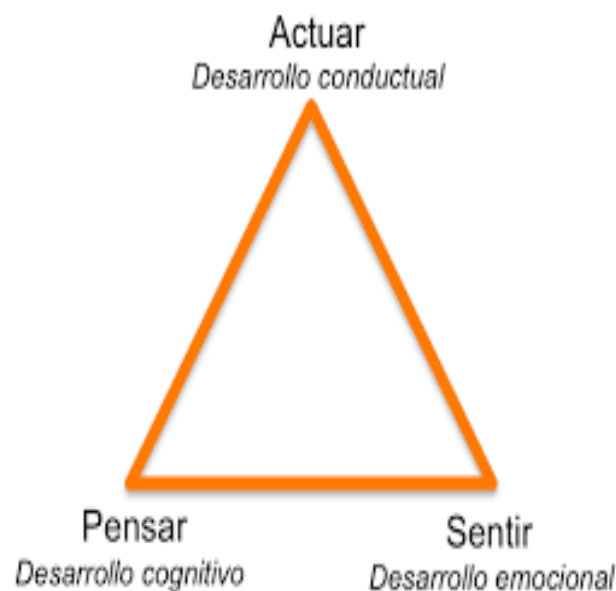
However, in the group observations, it has been noticed that time is given to axis 1- regarding the understanding of the cycle of violence without focusing on the identification of their own singular experiences, and on the 3- of the theoretical contents on the control of anger, anxiety and the recognition of emotions in the body when they feel angry; while the reasons for these macho and violent practices, the emotions associated with the bond and gender inequalities, are abandoned as a transversal theme to the meetings:

“They don't know how to control their emotions, they get stressed by economic situations, so what happens,” says the group coordinator to the 24 men present, ‘their emotions become dysregulated and they get angry... of course,’ says one man, ‘we come here to learn how to manage anger and insecurity, which is really our problem’ (author's field note, Wednesday, October 11, 2023:14h).

Below, we share two graphs that accompanied the interventions of different psycho-socio-educational groups and that were made on the blackboard where they usually write down or draw different information from “the classes” (as some men call it) in order to exemplify what is being analyzed. The first graph is an explanatory pyramid of the way in which people act or behave in certain situations and which is related to the feelings and thoughts that emerge in the situations they experience and the people with whom they relate. Thoughts and emotions are the basis of the way in which we habitually act, and the body reacts to the emotions that these ideas and thoughts generate, which are then reflected in our actions. Recognizing these ideas and therefore regulating emotions would allow controlling violent behaviors or actions.

Figure 1

Emotion regulation with men's groups



Note. Made by the CIV coordinators on the blackboard, drawing from the author's field notebook (Wednesday, October 11, 2023).

Figure 2

Cycle of Violence



Note. Made by the CIV coordinators. The choice of the icons accompanying the phases is the authors.

The second graph represents the cycle of violence, which is composed of three phases that occur cyclically and systematically in situations of violence: 1-accumulation of tension, 2- violent explosion, 3- honeymoon. It is proposed to the men that they visualize and reflect, based on their experiences, what generated this accumulation of tension in their relationships, and that they recognize the emotions they felt in each stage, in order to create a “bridge” before the warning signs of each phase “what cut can we make to avoid reaching Phase 2?” (author's field note, Wednesday, September 27, 2023:11h).

As in the case of the first graph, it is expected that by recognizing the emotions produced by what is generating discomfort, they can modify the ways of dealing with the conflict and thus avoid reaching the second phase, for example, “lack of communication” is mentioned as one of the key points and “talking about what happens to me and not to the other person” (author's field note, Wednesday, September 27, 2023) is promoted as a way of building relationships “without

accumulation of tension”. At this point it is necessary to point out that not all the groups talk about this cycle based on personal experiences; in two of the groups observed by one of the authors, they only worked in a theoretical way. Likewise, although it is necessary to address masculinity by working with emotions, which are denied by and for men, the problem is that these thoughts and feelings are not placed in the context of their social production. Addressing it individually is limited to the management of conflicts in interpersonal relationships and not to the phenomenon of violence and gender inequalities. The researchers ask themselves, are we people perfect machines in constant control? Can we manage emotions and individual behaviors in a sense contrary to the patriarchal social discourse?

Thus, the focus of the workshops is primarily from psychology in general and cognitive-behavioral psychology in particular. In an interview with a former employee of the institution, she spoke of the evident individual approach to the problem of gender-based violence and the primacy of psychology professionals in the work team; hence the weakening or delegitimization of other disciplines such as Social Work, Sociology or Anthropology, as well as the absence of training spaces from feminist or gender perspectives:

“Why men do what they do”, always had an implication of the psychological and individual order. It was very difficult to look at the subject in his social context. It was very difficult to think about the cultural variables that cross all of us. So, the discussions became... complicated, let's say, because it was not only the individual who came and arrived in the space, and who necessarily required attention” (Author's personal communication, December 2021).

Thus, the perspective that orders the intervention of this state device is characterized by techniques and concerns focused on modifying “cognitive distortions, regulating emotions and thus behaviors” of the subjects who exercise violence. It does not promote a collective reflection on the fact that violence is not the result of inexplicable cases of deviant or pathological behaviors but historical emergence of structural inequalities that become flesh. Learned practices, conscious and oriented, product of a social organization structured on the basis of inequality. Violence is linked to unequal power relations and is exercised by those who feel entitled to intimidate and control others (Mora, 2024, p. 13).

Triangulation of constructed data

In addition to the perspectives and approaches analyzed in the previous section, another important aspect to be taken into account when looking at the state devices is linked to the component of institutional demand, the time allocated to psycho-socio-educational groups, training spaces and professional reflection.

In the first place, the demands that arrive at the CIV are referrals made by the Judicial Branch and, according to what was observed in the first interviews and in the dialogue with the workers, on several occasions they are linked to interpersonal conflicts between couples, which are not necessarily gender-based violence. This is evidence of the absence of an intersectional gender perspective in the structural framework of the agents that make up the state apparatus, which causes a saturation in the demand for attention that can reach 40 cases per day, with a team of 12 professionals to receive them (Personal communication with the director of the CIV, November 2023). In addition, each professional conducts more than three intake interviews per day and two socio-reflective group coordinations per day per professional dupla.

These levels of professional demand and concentration of demand are due to the fact that the CIV does not have offices in the interior of Córdoba. Thus, it is difficult for the team of CIV agents to have time for training and group reflection, so necessary for the problems with which they work and the effects produced by the intervention in gender-based violence. The complex challenges faced by professionals involved with aggressors and victims of gender-based violence, with their exposure to bloody and distressing stories, have the potential to significantly affect health. In turn, this may influence the quality of support they provide to their clients. Ferreira et al. (2023) map symptoms such as fatigue, emotional exhaustion, frustration and difficulties in emotional regulation in female workers who intervene in a similar device in Portugal. In the observations at the CIV, they found fatigue, boredom, chronic illnesses, conflicts among peers, listlessness and absenteeism due to mental health problems.

Secondly, the socio-reflective workshops offered by the institution have a duration of three months for its users, with a face-to-face meeting of 1.5 hours (approximately) and with an average attendance of 12 to 23 men per meeting, insufficient time to generate transference between men and their coordinators; intimacy, listening and group dialogue, even when in an interview a

member of the coordinators states that: “(...) now we are here making an assessment for another topic, for something else, working on the topic of motivations, working on the anxieties that they also bring. ...) now we are here making an assessment on another subject, on something else, working on the subject of motivations, working on the anxieties they also bring... some stories -as you were saying just now- are difficult to digest, and you say, my God! But when you start to work there, also more from the psychological point of view, or more from the... more looking at other things” (Author's personal communication, 2023). Although the interviewee shows interest in the men's anxieties and interests, during the observations it is noted that due to the large number of participants, the short meeting time and the work format, it is difficult to generate dialogue and therapeutic listening.

On the contrary, the type of work they carry out consists of a class format with participatory dynamics, where “reeducation” is the formal bet, with an intervention at a multimodal level: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. In addition, the intervention modality and the duration of the group process do not allow for what is called a multilevel approach, so much in demand in work groups with men, which consists of working at the individual, group, social network and work level. In the CIV, we only work on the institutional group level. So, is it possible to undo a configuration of patriarchal mandates and beliefs of a lifetime in that time/space dedicated to the group approach? Can it be said that it is possible to generate trust with each participant and a deep assessment of the situation in such large groups and with so few meetings, even more so when there is no follow-up after the end of the process?

In this regard, Medina et al. (2014) analyze that what is relevant is to know that violent practices are not caused in isolation, but are a combination of static and dynamic risk factors, therefore the times of group meetings should be adjusted to the requirements, needs and deficits of each of the users, taking into account their social network, socio-cultural context, labor needs, among others. However, it is common for men to participate angrily in the groups, since they are forced by the courts to attend, they lose jobs because they coincide with the institution's schedule, and not infrequently they have problematic substance or alcohol consumption: “the courts send me here and to San Roque for consumption” (author's field note, Wednesday, October 11, 2023). According to data presented in the 1st CIV Report, the relationship between violence and problematic substance use is around 50% of the users, an issue that is not very problematic in the institution.

Hence, 3 months of collective meetings lasting an hour and a half is not a propitious time to generate problematization of such delicate situations, much less to transform practices with which they have been working all their lives, in a socioeconomic context of extreme vulnerability and where the State does not offer accompaniment with concrete economic resources.

Finally, the institution does not offer gender training opportunities for its professionals and throughout the insertion in the CIV, it was not possible to obtain reliable information, but rather opacities about the previous training trajectories of its agents. Some of the people interviewed claimed to have training in gender, while others defined it as a personal decision, the truth is that most of them arrived at the institution after being transferred from other sectors of the State where this training had not been a requirement or a demand to join the CIV team. When asked about gender training for one of its workers, she said: “I think so, I don't know what criteria the person conducting the interview has, but yes. I would think so, the truth is that I wouldn't know how to answer you” (Author's personal communication, 2023). In other interviews these doubts are reiterated, showing that training in gender perspective to work in the institution is a personal criterion rather than an institutional requirement: “(...) for me, accompanying women has always been focused on the gender perspective and working with men... also. You have to add the human rights perspective (...) Because when you accompany women, sometimes you empathize so much with the women in the situation that you don't look... you blame the man a bit, don't you? It's like you have prejudices” (Author's personal communication, 2023).

Although they have a weekly space on Fridays called “athenaeum” in which they theoretically discuss some situations or issues related to the intervention practice, it is known that they end up being spaces where interpersonal conflicts or problematic situations that occur during the week among peers are settled (field notebook). Disciplinary tools for the treatment of gender-based violence do not find space in such tight agendas, which on more than one occasion has been a demand of the agents towards the institution. An interviewee from the CIV said: “To make an agreement with the public sector also to accommodate all those who cannot... all the people who cannot access here. Or ... training in violence, I think it is essential, because there are few professionals who are really trained in this, because it can be even iatrogenic to work with violence and not know how to deal with it” (Author's personal communication, 2023).

Likewise, the scarce training in gender is noticed in the analyzed device, when it is prioritized not to confront the discourses of the men when they affirm that violence is crossed, that is, from both parts, affirming that violence is a shared fault in the couple (author's field notebook, 2023:15h). This appeared throughout the observations I made in the workshops, even when working on specific cases of violence, male comments circulated without professional intervention about co-responsibility in domestic violence. Precisely, the gender approach rejects the concept of cross-violence and shared blame, since it is understood that they lead to a lack of responsibility on the part of the male (Yela, 2009). This is why gender approaches focus on the power and control of the male partner over the feminized body, and even speak of defensive violence.

In addition, the lack of training in gender is noted in the accounts of their professionals when they assimilate gender and women, and the assimilation of the human rights perspective as what would allow them to work with men. In effect, there is a professional reading that excludes feminist contributions for working with men, in addition to a lack of knowledge about the historical crossover between the protection of human rights and feminist or gender studies: “That's what happened to me. I had to make that change, that journey, to be able to work with men... I had to take a little step, didn't I? This, well, from a human rights perspective, and not only from a gender perspective, seeing it only from the woman's side, but addressing the situation of the link, right?” (Author's personal communication, 2023). A dominant representation is reproduced which states that gender-based violence is caused by structural inequality between women and men, and that it must be combated by promoting gender equality (López and Peterson, 2011).

What is left out of the discussion and treatment is the intersection or co-constitution of gender with other intersections such as class, race, age, among others. These subordinations tend to be made invisible, to take place in “the margins”, in complex circumstances. This tendency is extensive to other state programs and public policies, which insist on associating the concept of gender with that of “woman or man”, which has implied that in reality we are talking about a specific group of women or men. As Alonso and Castellanos (2006) explain, the States have included the gender perspective to eliminate gender violence and discrimination, but from a praxis that considers only the difference between women and men, with binary and heteronormative readings. Specifically, in the treatment of violence, they have focused on the interpersonal victim-aggressor relationship, forgetting the social context, as well as racial, class and religious intersections, as is the case in the

analyzed device. Finally, the device does not contemplate a method for monitoring or evaluating the effectiveness of its interventions in reducing the practices of violence and sexist representations of its users. Therefore, there are no mechanisms for evaluating the impact of the device on the population with which they work.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the article we proposed to examine the approaches and modalities of the state approach to gender-based violence, triangulating a SR exercise with the approach of a particular case in Córdoba-Argentina. The analysis revealed the recurrence of the cognitive-behavioral approach in the state group approach to work with men, as well as an intervention methodology that is disarticulated from the feminist contributions that are usually cited as part of the theoretical foundations that give rise to these devices. This means that at the discursive level, gender-based violence is connected to unequal power structures and the historical-social configuration of the patriarchal system, but in practice the treatment is pathologizing and punitive.

In this sense, the significant absence of a gender approach to work on masculinity and gender-based violence in socio-reflective groups may be due to at least two reasons: on the one hand, the cognitive-behavioral approach described above, which predominates in the institutions that carry out this type of approach. On the other hand, the treatment of gender-based violence, as observed, follows the same approach applied to any other type of violence, from a punitive and state-controlled perspective. As Núñez Rebolledo (2019) points out, this is the emergence of a neoliberal criminality to address the gender-based violence suffered by women. Regulations and criminal law have been used as part and practically the only measure of a political strategy in the search to eliminate sexual violence and femicides to which women are subjected (Núñez Rebolledo, 2019).

The accumulation of impunity that was experienced in the last decade in the face of the most radical gender violence engendered legitimate claims of feminisms against violence, but they were reused by the institutional language in its criminal aspect, which led to obscure the structural causes and the responsibility of the State in terms of its tolerance, impunity and promotion of violence against women, allowing it to present itself as a protector. Perhaps the most serious aspect was to leave aside the analysis of the social, economic and political context that sustains and even reproduces male violence (Nuñez Rebolledo, 2019, p. 6).

Consequently, there is a complex knotting between the punitivist policy promoted by neoliberalism for the control and disciplining of impoverished sectors and sectors of state feminism that have privileged the criminal cause as a political strategy, in a context where hate crimes are not diminishing and the corporealities that occupy the majority of prisons and state devices of

intervention against gender-based violence are poor and racialized males (Bard Wigdor, 2023). Therefore, what narratives are absent in this type of interventions when they represent a capture mainly of racialized and impoverished male bodies? What dimensions of the problem escape us when we use the same recipe for the multiple and different experiences that exist in the socio-sexual-affective relationships crossed by violence? Many authors have been insisting on the need to look at the alliance between certain feminisms and prison policies (Arduino, 2018; Pitch, 2014; Macaya-Andrés, 2022; Bard Wigdor, 2023).

At the same time, as pointed out by other authors explored, cognitive-behavioral treatment of violence tends to focus on individual changes in thinking and behavior, while gender-based violence is a structural and relational phenomenon that demands changes in power ties. Therefore, it is to be expected that these policies are not very effective in transforming the problem and that the users of these devices return to their violent practices once they leave the groups. This is a situation that feminist studies of masculinity also warn of when they speak of the different positions of men and women, as well as the patriarchal and macho genealogy of the State itself. Indeed, is the State prepared to intervene on the violence that it itself engenders without reviewing its own modalities of relationship with the populations it captures and punishes? Is it not striking that most of the users of the CIV are men from racialized popular sectors? What is required and omitted from the agents it employs for the implementation of policies related to the subject in question?

In turn, in cases where the gender perspective is used as an analytical framework for intervention, it is reduced to a binary and heteronormative matter of women and men only, making feminist contributions to the study of masculinities invisible and decontextualizing the conflict. This dominant reproduction of the gender perspective disables the possibility of incorporating a cross-cutting approach to the state approach, nullifying the proper “listening” and obstructing the intersectional view on each case that arrives at the device and that would explain part of the conflicts that are known there. Not everything is gender violence, sometimes it is poverty, substance abuse or disability.

Finally, it is urgent to advance in in-depth, long-term follow-up and analysis studies on the effectiveness of the state's approaches to men who graduate from the programs addressed, in order to qualitatively analyze the impact on male practice and subjectivity. In addition, this follow-up

should be accompanied by interviews and knowledge of the impact on the lives of the people who directly experienced the harm, not only their direct family, but also their community and support network, in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the intervention. For this, it is necessary to provide resources, training and articulations to these devices, since the process of social reintegration of the participants and their encounters with society is as important as the entry to the device itself.

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