

# Research Project on Experiences, Documentation and Understandings of Hate Violence – Report for IRCA CASABIERTA

## *Introduction*

The report that will be presented and the data that shall be reflected upon in this analysis report, is from the internship I did over 3 months for an organization called IRCA CASABIERTA. This was a research internship, meaning that I worked on a research project as a scholar. Since I am considering continuing my career in academia, this was an opportunity to test my limitations and strengths in working independently with research. Since IRCA CASABIERTA resides in San José, Costa Rica, I spent a little less than 3,5 months in Costa Rica in order to be able to do this internship, which gifted me with teachings, in more ways than one. In this paper, I will explain what my internship consisted of, what my contributions to the organization consisted of, and what I can take away from the experience, now that the internship has come to an end.

IRCA CASABIERTA is an organization that works with LGBTQIA+ migrants in Costa Rica. The target group will further on be referred to as 'population' and/or 'persons of interest', or POI's, as this is how they are referred to in IRCA CASABIERTA (población de interés/personas de interés). As the population of interest arrive to Costa Rica with a minimum of two intersecting minority representations, they have a higher risk of experiencing social problems on account of discrimination from the Costa Rican population. Most of the persons of interest migrate due to severely challenging living circumstances in their countries of origin, which they are often faced with, because of a lacking acceptance of their LGBTQIA+ status. IRCA CASABIERTA provides humanitarian aid, social work, legal aid, psychological support, support in integrating oneself into the labour market, accompaniment for certain types of appointments (typically medical or legal), support groups and a safe space, to the population of interest.

A main interest for me, and thusly the main focus of my research project, is experiences of prejudice- and hate driven violence, which often is directed towards the population of interest. An important aspect of the project was to focus on experience of hate violence within Costa Rica, as that would be directly relevant for the other projects and work of the organization.

This paper is simply a report on my research, and has not been peer reviewed, before it was handed to the IRCA CASABIERTA, which is an important consideration to keep in mind, while reading it. Some sections of this paper have also been used in an assignment for my university, which however had a different purpose. The analysis of this paper is produced in a slightly different manner, than what is usually seen in research papers, as it does not directly refer to any particular body of social theory, but rather my understandings based on my academic background. Furthermore, certain other aspects of the format diverge from a classical academic form, in which

research papers are typically published. This is due to the nature of the internship, the requirements for the paper at hand, and the specific tasks and critiques I was asked to carry out as part of the project. A more theory bound perspective, can be found in the reflection chapter, where conceptualizations of hate violence are discussed.

## *Methodology*

### Collecting literature and familiarizing myself with the field

When I started my internship, I spent the first week settling in, learning about the organization, reading about the organization, and collecting literature. The following three weeks I spent reading and preparing for my own research project. Of course, the collection of secondary data is also part of the research, which was something I felt (and feel) strongly about, especially in this internship. I felt a necessity to build up a knowledge base from other more experienced and knowledgeable sources, especially upon entering a field outside of my cultural context. Thus, I studied reports about hate violence in Latin America, and in Costa Rica specifically, towards LGBTQIA+ persons, hate discourse on social media in Costa Rica, and Costa Rican critical feminist theory (Arroyo Navarette & Jones Pérez, 2020; *INFORME CeDoSTALC REGIONAL 2018 - Basta de Genocidio Trans by Red Latinoamericana y Del Caribe de Personas Trans - Issuu*, n.d.; *Violencia contra personas LGBTI*, n.d.; Malta et al., 2019; Sagot, n.d.; United Nations & COES, 2023). Besides that, I studied the legal landscape around hate crimes in Costa Rica, which is currently under transformation (Lectura, 2022; Pérez & Fonseca, n.d.). In addition, I looked into specific international judicial frameworks concerning topics that come in contact with the theme, such as the Camden Principles and the Rabat Outcome Report (Global Campaign for Free Expression, 2009; United Nations, 2013). Finally, I also sought out regional social theory on oppression and migratory grief (Achotegui, n.d.; 2009; Segato, 2022), in order to work towards obtaining a culturally relevant set of perspectives, in spite of my European background. In terms of social theory, I found that the professionals in IRCA CASABIERTA often refer to theory written by philosopher, Judith Butler, who I knew to have written a book on violent speech (*Excitable Speech*, 2013), which provides a thorough framework for understanding several aspects of hate violence. Therefore, I chose to incorporate Butler's theory into my work as well. This would inspire me later in the process, when I was producing my interview guide and coding strategy, and even more so later on in developing new conceptual perspectives for the organization.

Parallely with the process of collecting and reading literature, I also spent a good deal of time (see logbook) on studying the workings of the professionals in the organization itself. These were the persons I would later interview, so I needed to be familiar with their work and the systems at place. A part of the requests made to me by my supervisor, was to analyze, critique and bring forth suggestions for improvements on the way the staff at IRCA CASABIERTA systematize the information concerning hate violence, which they receive daily, from the persons that come through the

organization. Later I conducted 15 qualitative interviews, of which 11 were with staff members and 4 were with persons of interest.

### Collecting primary data & Specifying the aim of the project

IRCA CASABIERTA, recently opened a department for research. This department is currently in the starting phases of a large transnational research project, in collaboration with an organization called ILDA (Iniciativa Latinoamericana por los Datos Abiertos/Latin American Initiative for Open Data). The aim of this project is to establish an open database for hate crimes in Central America – something that does not yet exist. This is due to omissive regulations, anti-LGBTQIA+ legislations, and absence of registration of such crimes on an institutional level (Alvarado, 2021: Ibid.). Thus, organizing activism towards social justice for LGBTQIA+ persons, becomes rather difficult, without references to quantifiable information. Since IRCA CASABIERTA collects data from the people that come through the organization, they possess a lot of knowledge, which is quite valuable for projects like ILDA. Therefore, one of the main interest points of my investigation has also been to orient the research and work towards aiding the department of research in their collaboration with ILDA. As I was not only working from a place of motivation from personal passions, but also for the organization, it was important for me to unite my interest in the field with a realistically achievable body of work which would both serve IRCA CASABIERTA in their work and be feasibly accomplished within the span of three months.

Together with my supervisor, we created a set of main objectives, which were formulated as follows:

#### Main Objective

- To create social advocacy strategies against hate violence towards LGBTQIA+ migrants in Costa Rica, based on the analysis of data collected from and/or by IRCA CASABIERTA, for IRCA CASABIERTA.

#### Secondary Objectives

- To analyze IRCA's approach to data collection, and thereon produce recommendations for improvement.
- To collect and systematize primary data on perceptions of violence towards the population of interest.
- To establish guidelines for advocacy work and conceptualization of violence in IRCA.
  - Political work
  - Violence awareness (vocabulary on levels of violence)

Based on these objectives, in combination with the literature I had collected, and the information I had gathered about the structures in IRCA, I formulated my interview guide. Next, came the phase of conducting the interviews. These were qualitative, carried out with a semi-structured interview guide, and they were all recorded using

the Zoom application. I interviewed eleven professionals in IRCA CASABIERTA, hereof two were legal professionals, two were social workers, two were social oversight workers, two were psychologists, one was a socio-educative professional, one was a teaching and up-qualification professional, and finally one was the founder of the organization. Thereafter I interviewed 4 persons of interest. These interviews were shorter and less complex in structure, as it was necessary to approach these interviews in a more sensitive and less academic/professional fashion. All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

In order to have a fruitful and versatile usage of the recordings, I transcribed them. I used software to aid me in this otherwise very lengthy process, whereafter I revised the interviews. Thereafter, I imported the files into NVivo, which is a software tool for coding and analysing in social sciences. I constructed my coding strategy in three steps, first by brainstorming and testing different ideas for coding hierarchies, followed by choosing the structure that worked best, whereafter I created the codes and the initial code-book in NVivo. And as I was working with the data, I found a few codes that needed to be split into several more specific ones, I discovered a few missing coding themes, which were then added, in order to arrive at the final code-book. At the end I had 7 top codes and 106 child-codes/sub-codes, which were organized in coding hierarchies. Although the interviews were carried out in Spanish, the codes were written in English, as that is the language I would use for my individual work, and the language in which I would later write my report.

## *Working with the data and analysis*

### Analysis of documentation and systematization of information

The first analysis I conducted consisted of revising the systematization processes in IRCA CASABIERTA. During this process I studied the ways the professionals at IRCA CASABIERTA document the information received from the POI's, but also how said information is collected. Many employees use "informes" which is a template for the interviews, they carry out during meetings with a POI. My initial impression, was that the different departments have a very inclusive language and collect a lot of information in many different ways, which is then stored in different ways as well. This indicates a large amount of work and investment in data collection. Nonetheless, I also discovered some areas, that could call for improvements, especially with the pending ILDA project in mind.

In the department of social work, they conduct a fairly lengthy interview, in fact the most extensive systematized interview in IRCA CASABIERTA, to get to know the situation of the POI. However, when touching upon the topic of experienced violence in Costa Rica, there are but three questions, which are answerable with yes/no responses. These questions are rarely elaborated upon, and often omitted all together. I found several pitfalls in this approach, as it limits the potential knowledge collection about hate violence in Costa Rica. I also found that the questions may be phrased in

an obstructive way. Since POIs were asked directly if they have experienced either physical violence, sexual violence or other forms of discrimination in Costa Rica. I learned from talking to staff members at IRCA CASABIERTA that POIs often arrive from positions of low education and social circumstances, where violence, hate violence and especially non-physical forms of violence are only verbalized with scarcity. As a result, questions asking directly about a topic that may be difficult to verbalize and/or un-normalize, should be phrased in a way, which allows for an accessible and non-invasive form of discussing the theme, for the persons of interest.

When reading interviews conducted by the legal staff, I noticed that if the interviews touch upon topics of violence, it usually concerns violence that POIs have experienced in their countries of origin, which forced them to migrate. It is logical that reasons for migration, provide valuable information in an application for residency or asylum, which is the main focus of the legal team, after all. However, in 2022 Costa Rica ratified a law that acknowledges discrimination and hate crimes, as a separate category within the penal law. This would increase the judicial relevance for focusing on violence experienced in Costa Rica, for the legal employees.

When reading through the systematizations applied in excel sheets by the different departments, it became clear that most departments log the exact same information about POIs. These sheets all contain "indicadores", which are categories for different topics, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, emigrational status, types of services the person has attended or will attend in IRCA CASABIERTA, and so on. In the end, all this information is gathered in one collective excel sheet, to centralize the data. I found that this process may be unnecessarily long and could be improved upon. I also noted that the excel sheets were lacking indicators/categories for experiences of hate violence in Costa Rica. Information on violence is valuable, especially with the incorporation of the ILDA project, where such knowledge is intended to be quantified. Furthermore, IRCA CASABIERTA is a political organization, why registering information about hate violence from the Costa Rican public, would be relevant for a number of purposes.

### Analysis of interviews

I when creating my codes, I mainly worked based on the principles of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kuckartz, 2013), but as I added certain codes as I was working with, and discovering focal points in, the interviews - the data itself also guided my coding strategy, which points to an influence from a grounded theory approach (Rubin, 2021).

My aforementioned seven top codes became my main themes in the analysis process. These were: *Descriptions of violence*, *IRCA CASABIERTAs functionality*, *Perceptions of Costa Rica*, *Societal tendencies*, *Understanding hate violence*, *Understanding violence in and through the community* and *Verbal actions*. Although they were main themes, they did not dictate the outcome of the analysis. This means that my findings

and presentation thereof, will be structured independently from my coding themes. In this paper I shall unfold on the most salient themes in an eclectic manner, as I will structure my analysis and later my findings, in respect to the objectives of my research, and therefore not in direct correspondence with the structure of my coding hierarchies. Because this paper serves as a report to IRCA CASABIERTA, the structure in which my analysis shall be presented, will be divided into the themes in which my analysis becomes relevant to the organization.

### **Multifaceted understandings of violence**

Upon initiating my interviews with the employees of IRCA CASABIERTA, I asked each interviewee what hate crime and hate violence meant to them as a person and as a professional. This was usually a question that would kickstart the conversation, as the professionals in IRCA CASABIERTA face people who have suffered a great deal of hate violence in their lives, and in many different ways. Therefore, the professionals had a lot to say on this topic. All the professionals, without exceptions, responded with elaborate answers that reflected a multiplicity of levels in which hate violence interacts with the lives of the population of interest. Below I will give a few examples of how this was described.

*“Es un rechazo social. En la cual las personas son agredidas de una forma verbal, física, emocional, por algún tipo de alguna característica que presenta”*

*“Bueno, creo que la violencia existe en un gran paraguas de violencia, pero que se puede manifestar de diferente manera. La violencia física, la violencia verbal, de palabra, la violencia patrimonial. La violencia económica, entonces creo que esa violencia se manifiesta en muchas formas, incluso la violencia familiar.”*

*“Creemos que violencia es solo que nos golpeen o nos empujen o nos peguen o nos agarren y nos tiren en la calle. No. Violencia es cuando yo no te respeto.”*

*“¿Qué significa? Significa comentarios, significan gestos, significan falta de oportunidades para personas diversas. Que se manifiestan de manera verbal, de manera física y de manera política, institucional también. Y es una violencia que se va tejiendo a través de todos los poderes del Estado y de todas las instituciones, porque viene de un sistema patriarcal. De un sistema binario y de un sistema violento contra la diversidad en general.”*

These responses seem to indicate a very thorough and, albeit differently presented, similar understanding of hate violence. The interviewees have different academic and professional backgrounds, but all seem to agree that hate violence, which often results

in hate crimes, are present in different categories and types of violence. Responses include different social levels, spanning from personal and psychological, to societal and institutional areas. The violence is related to structural themes, such as patriarchal ideologies and xenophobic tendencies in the Costa Rican population, whilst also carrying references to larger structures in the geographical region, if not to global structures. The examples which refer to rejection, such as "*un rechazo social*" or absence of respect "*violencia es cuando yo no te respeto*", speak to universal human experiences. However, when these themes become specific to the population of interest, the conversation is linked to discrimination and discriminatory violence. There is also a tendency, of understanding that the hate violence is omnipresent, which can be seen in examples, that point to the continuous, and often unintended reproduction of stereotypes and violent discourse, for example in expressions such as "*se va tejiendo a través de todos los poderes del Estado y de todas las instituciones*". The last citation refers to institutional violence, but in its phrasing I also find a reference to a systemic form of violence, when the interviewee describes how it is entangled with hate violence on many levels.

### **Repercussions of violence**

Another area, in which I found many points of interest were in the discussions and responses that I had about the effects of violence, during my interviews. I inquired about consequences within individuals and consequences, if observed, on a group level. In my work with the data, I divided these repercussions/effects/consequences into categories of psychological and social repercussions.

What I found, was myriad repercussions which re- and co-produce immense problems, grievances and limitations in the lives of the POIs. Among these observations, was also the notion that the repercussions of violence reproduce more violence, as there are many cyclical tendencies between personal discrimination and hate violence, financial violence, and institutional violence. One response, where I find these correlations exemplified is when an interviewee said:

*"Y han aprendido porque la sociedad [...] les ha enseñado que son personas que no son capaces, entonces lo han aprendido desde ahí que no quiere decir que lo sean en verdad, pero repercute. Repercute en que son personas que les cuesta mucho confiar, les cuesta mucho hacer redes, les cuesta mucho hacer proyectos, no tienen las herramientas. Hay mucha depresión, hay mucha ansiedad, hay muchas ideas suicidas, suicidas también. Y espiritualmente repercute mucho y a nivel colectivo repercute en el tema de que hay un gran consumo de sustancias, también verdad? Como una manera de poder evadir ese dolor."*

Another, more specifically on the cyclical relations of partner violence said:

*"Normalmente se expande exactamente. Yo repito un patrón con mi pareja, termino con esta pareja y lo que esta pareja me enseñó que yo*

*normalicé que era que me gritara, que digamos no me dejara salir, que me controlará la verdad que os haga yo vuelvo y con la siguiente pareja, pues lo repito porque es lo que yo normalice y entendí que era una relación, entonces a la siguiente pareja que yo tengo lo que yo no hacía antes porque yo no sabía que era normal."*

And a third example, which also shows how one type of repercussion of violence, leads to other kinds of hate violence going uncontested, points out:

*"Eso es un gran problema de violencia que se está dando y que se sigue aumentando más y más quitando posibilidades, metiendo más trabas como que necesitan seguro, que cómo van a pagar un seguro si no les están permitiendo trabajar. Entonces todo es una bola de nieve que en vez de ayudarles a mejorar sus condiciones de vida, las empeora. Entonces se tienen que enfocar en eso, en cómo resuelvo mis necesidades básicas. No puedo estar pensando de si en la calle me gritaron algo despectivo por mi identidad de género. No es una prioridad cuando no tengo que comer o no sé dónde voy a vivir hoy."*

There are many more of such examples, that depict the truly horrific consequences of hate violence and societal oppression of minority groups. For me, unfolding the topic of repercussions, was a powerful element in educating myself on the topic.

Another aspect of this became clear in an interview with an employee that works with communication and socio-education, for the population of interest, but also external groups such as interest organization and companies in Costa Rica. This interviewee described how certain types of information, regarding the gravity of absent inclusion towards trans women, not only impacts their quality of life, but life expectancy, often has great impact on external groups:

*"Y muestro como esos datos que la gente como que se impacta, y como que no conoce y por ejemplo, cuando menciono que a nivel de Costa Rica las mujeres trans tiene un promedio de 35 años, también se impacta y se quedan así, verdad? "¿Como, cómo es posible que eso pase?" [...] Como que, como que esa mujer trans se vuelve humana, se vuelve persona y la deja en verdad como decir esa persona allí, entonces. Como que si he sentido una apertura bastante importante"*

Here I learned, that the severity of the consequences of hate crime not only had a great impact on me personally, but seems to be influential on other, less involved groups as well.

What I later discovered, in my semi-ethnographic observations in conversations and interactions with Costa Rican people and friends, was that mentioning these repercussions, were far more effective in shifting perspectives, than other strategies, when discussing discrimination and hate-discourse. Many would initiate with a lighter or minimalizing approach to xenophobic, sexist or homophobic jokes and expressions. And when I would comment with saying things such as stating the homophobic, sexist



or xenophobic element of their words, many would respond that they simply see it differently. However, when made aware that it makes people feel unsafe, and can apprehend people from engaging further, or going to certain places, and ultimately can have much graver consequences than that, responses were often more engaging and transformative – at least in the conversations I participated in.

Focusing on the repercussions also made my research richer, as it expanded my understanding of violence. It also complicated my analysis, as it altered some of my understandings of the different 'types' of violence. I will elaborate on this in the reflection chapter further on in the paper.

### **Fragmentation of knowledge**

There is a given difference between how employees work, since they have distinct professional and academic qualifications. Also, when it comes to the first services that POIs meet in IRCA, most often the main focus is on covering basic need in terms of shelter, food, safety, livelihood and such.

As described previously, the professionals in IRCA CASABIERTA have elaborate understandings of hate violence and discriminatory violence. However, when it comes to handling conversations with POIs about heavy topics, some employees expressed certain reservations. This is only natural, as the topics at hand can be very sensitive. Nevertheless, facing these topics is an inherent part of working in IRCA CASABIERTA. I observed a tendency of explaining certain avoidant strategies, from employees, if POIs would come to them talking about certain topics. A major part of the tendency was the strategy of referring the POI to the psychologists. The following examples are from parts of the interviews, where interviewees were asked about how they discuss, if they discuss, and what challenges they experience when discussing various aspects of hate violence with the POIs.

*"[...] no abordo esos temas porque no soy psicóloga y hay que tener mucho cuidado con eso"*

*"Mira, puedes ir a esa institución o puedes hablar con la trabajadora social o puedes consultarle a tu psicólogo o psicóloga o te agenda una cita con psicología o algo así."*

*"[...] yo no soy psicóloga para trabajar en la psique de la persona, pero sí les digo que existen opciones"*

Based on the selected quotes above, it becomes apparent that several professionals perceive the psychologists as having a certain expertise in dealing with topics on violence, which is quite logical since that is part of their professional specialization. This was mainly presented as a consideration for the POIs, and a risk-oriented mindset. However, when asked about the difficulties they experience, many

interviewees also contested that certain topics were difficult for them to handle, personally, as presented below.

*"Es un tema difícil porque es un tema doloroso"*

*"Sí, hay temas que a mí se me pueden hacer... difíciles. Eh, por ejemplo, si hay una persona, a mí me dice que fue violada sexualmente, yo me voy a quedar un poco en shock"*

*"Considero que sí podría ser un tema difícil porque, por ejemplo, yo soy socióloga. A nosotros, en nuestra formación académica no nos dan las herramientas necesarias, verdad, para hacer ese tipo de abordajes"*

*"Pero, a desgasta a nivel personal, digamos en el sentido de que escuchar tantas vivencias donde tantas personas que sufrieron es difícil, porque la parte emocional de uno termina cediendo, entonces es un poco complicado."*

The sense of inadequacy or difficulty that occurs for some employees, when touching upon topics of violence, is further complicated when they do not have an organized space to discuss these topics in a more general way, in regard to sharing knowledge, nor in regard to ventilating personal burdens of the job. As many refer POIs to the psychologists, it is clear that they have great trust in the knowledge and practice of the two psychologists in IRCA CASABIERTA. The caveat presents itself, in the fact that the confidentiality of the psychologists is of utmost importance. Therefore, the other professionals cannot access the notes or files of the psychologists, to better inform themselves on their work and competences, as they can through SIRCA with the documentations of other staff members. This was also an element, which was aired during some of the interviews, as demonstrated below.

*"Especialmente las psicólogas, las psicólogas que tienen mucha, mucha, información que no pueden compartir."*

*"Notas del proceso esa ya es información muy confidencial, en ese caso de las psicólogas"*

When asked, whether they thought it important to talk about experiences of violence, they unanimously supported the notion of verbalising violence, and thought it to be highly important and beneficial. This was phrased in various ways, such as:

*"Lo que no se menciona, no existe"*

*"Creo que siempre va a ser importante, porque lo que no se habla se desconoce. Lo que se desconoce, se normaliza, lo que se normaliza se repite"*

*"Hablar es terapéutico, hablar es sanador"*

*"Sí, claro, lo que no se habla no existe, entonces si no hablamos de esto, lo estamos invisibilizando. Así como muchas personas hacen la misma"*

*pregunta con respecto a un tema tan controvertido como el suicidio, que si hay que hablarlo, no? Sí hay que hablarlo, siempre hay que hablar. Siempre hay que... porque es la única forma en que la gente se haga consciente de las situaciones por las que están viviendo y que también les sirva de educación o información, hablar de estos temas."*

With responses like those represented above, it is clear that the need for talking about violence, pain and discrimination is important and is perceived as such by the employees at IRCA CASABIERTA. And this permeates different spaces, since many of the interviewees are also emphasizing the importance of visibility. The issue thereby becomes problematic, when many employees feel they are not equipped to take on certain topics. It is logical that the actual therapy takes place with the psychologists. However, it is also important for the staff members to feel knowledgeable and prepared in situations, where POIs need a space to share, and a psychologist is not immediately available. Due to the trust that is an inherent part of referral to other professionals, it also seems highly important that the professionals feel they can learn from, and refer to, the information that lives and grows within the organization. And this is not very accessible at the moment, since specific experiences or knowledge about violence is not documented, unless it becomes a subject in interviews, where the focus is otherwise elsewhere. This started me thinking of creating a space, where employees can share experiences and observed tendencies of violence towards the POIs, in a way that is general, so that the psychologist can participate alongside their colleagues.

### **Challenges and Attitudes for changes**

On the topic of verbalizing violence, several interviewees also emphasized the political elements of the practice. The idea of verbalizing lived experiences, was related to the responsibility of IRCA CASABIERTA to provide advocacy, socio-education and political change. This can for instance be found in excerpts as the ones below.

*"[...] no solamente, o sea, no se trata solo de un espacio de catarsis. Se trata de un espacio de construcción teórica importantísimo. Trabajar sobre la teoría de la violencia, es mucho más que una presunción académica, es generar historia."*

*"Sí, me parece que es muy importante porque es la manera en donde podemos reeducar a la sociedad. [...] Si las cosas no se palabran y no se visibilizan, se van naturalizando, se van quedando como en el currículum oculto, se va quedando en una cajita guardada y es importante visibilizarlo para que la sociedad entienda el gran daño que provoca los estereotipos"*

*"[...] toca a la responsabilidad de las personas profesionales que sigan aprendiendo, ahí donde IRCA tiene un gran potencial porque se puede posicionar como un espacio que pueda formar y reforzar estos"*

*conocimientos en diferentes organizaciones de la sociedad civil que trabajan con personas migrantes y con personas diversas también y no solo con personas migrantes, sino a nivel general."*

Clearly, the enthusiasm among the interviewees is powerful when it comes to political change. However, it seemed unclear to me, who the interviewees saw as responsible for the political changes and the repeated importance of incorporating a focus on violence. While some mentioned things such as socio-education, which is already being carried out, to a certain extent, many people mentioned political work and advocacy, in a general sense. For instance, when asked how they see the way in which IRCA CASABIERTA could actually work with the political changes and how to use their knowledge, one interviewee answered:

*"OK, con incidencia política con investigación. Con investigar. Y escribir esas historias de estas personas y visibilizarlas. Poner las en la agenda política del país."*

As seen in the example above, interviewees sometimes refer to the research department, and to political work in general, without any specific clarification on how they imagine the actual work being carried out. Simply stating that the way to do it is with research, vizibilization, followed by adding the research (presumably conducted by the research department) to the political agenda of the country – does not exactly provide any concrete plan nor distribution of responsibility. Moreover, when I asked how much they knew of the research, currently being conducted as a preparational 'check-in' for each interview, every single participant admitted to not knowing much, or nothing. This is not to assign blame to anyone, as everyone is working with their own set of tasks and is not necessarily expected to know what everyone else is doing. However, I do find it important to note that something which everyone considers a responsibility of the organization, remains unclear in terms of how it is carried out and by whom. Nonetheless, it goes without doubt, that everyone who works in IRCA CASABIERTA functions as actors and activists in the lives of the persons of interest. Thus, some elements of the political responsibility lie with everyone. This also means that they all have and constantly receive a lot of information, which is immensely valuable. Therefore, I find it problematic, that there is an expectation of this knowledge to be processed and applied in political work, even though the professionals themselves do not systematize it, and thusly do not contribute to the knowledge production concerning hate violence.

When I inquired about, or suggested implementations of, change in the organization, the staff members were generally positive towards the initiative. Especially when I suggested incorporating an added focus on hate violence, in their documentation and systematization practices. Examples of such responses are:

*"Siento que es un tema muy importante que se debe tratar y como te dije, para mí es un tema de que se debe siempre concientizar tanto a la población como a las mismas personas que trabajamos acá, porque es algo que muchas veces tal vez se olvida y que hasta cierto punto*

*podemos llegar a tener algún comportamiento de estos y que la idea es que no sea así, porque más bien lo que tratamos de erradicar con eso y no hacerlo. Entonces, creo que es algo que se debe de hacer y que espero les vaya super bien con la investigación, este verdad que están haciendo.”*

*“Como nuestro trabajo en general, es un trabajo individualizado, profesional y personalizado, distintamente a los distintos espacios profesionales, a los que se acerque la persona de interés, deberíamos tener acceso como a un espacio donde en consulta con la persona de interés podamos registrar esa historia, verdad? Me parece muy bien”*

Feedback as seen in the examples above signify a promising positivity in attitudes within the organization. This was to my great comfort, as a significant portion of my tasks was to produce recommendations of change for the staff members, if I encountered any problems with their documentation and usage of knowledge. I also learned that many employees don't feel they have, nor take, the time to talk about the topics of hate violence. Most interviewees showed gratitude for participating in the interviews, and explained how it provided them with a chance to reflect on the topics and organize their thoughts on it. This showed me that employees need a space for topical discussions on hate violence, but also a space for unfolding their personal experiences from the work.

### *Reflections on conceptualization of violence*

One of my main take-aways from the experience as an intern and researcher, in terms of literature and sociological and cultural criminological discoveries, are the lessons I take with me in regard to understanding violence from several theoretical and practical perspectives. In order to work with violence or advocate against it, many interest organizations, including IRCA CASABIERTA, work with pre-conceptualized classifications for types of violence. These are for example, verbal, financial, physical and domestic violence, with many more such categories. What I discovered when I started working with my interviews, among myriad other things, was that the practice of dividing violence into rigid categories, did not coalesce with how I was interpreting the data. Most of the examples I was given in my interviews, presented experiences of violence that had complicated interplays between various categories. I also discovered that almost all violence is somehow simultaneously psychological violence, even though it may manifest in different, more material ways. As it is with many other human behaviours, violence does not happen in a vacuum, and neither do the reactions to violence. And when speaking of hate violence, societal factors are inherently part of it. Therefore, the observation of all violence being entangled, becomes emphasized within the scope of hate and/or prejudice driven violence.

The topic became especially interesting when I started analysing further, with what I had read from Judith Butler, who talks about corporality in all verbal violence, and how

conceptualization of the body is intertwined in every kind of hate or prejudice driven violence. Also, how violent speech in particular acts as a defining power, that limits the identity and social mobility of the victim/recipient of violence. However, the verblatity of violence will not necessarily need to be orally produced, in order for it to be a verbal action. As we are bound by language in everything that we are and do as human beings (Butler, 2013).

With these ideas in mind, I went to my supervisor and inquired about the literature used by IRCA CASABIERTA to see the framework they have in place for understanding hate violence. What I was presented with, were a plethora of sources, mainly from different interest organizations, that provide elaborate lists of types of violence, how they are defined, and sometimes even the possible repercussions of such types of violence (CLAM, 2007; IACHR, n.d.; *Violencia contra personas LGBTI*, n.d.; Población, n.d.).

Clearly, using categories carries many benefits, as it provides people with a vocabulary to point out forms of violence, which are not physical. They can also be fairly beneficial in conversations with persons who have experienced a great deal of violence, and do not know how to acknowledge their pain, if it is not physical. If a person of interest, in IRCA CASABIERTA, does not possess the instruments for talking about violence, for whatever reason, starting out with a philosophical approach that links all violence through a complex web, may not be the best idea. I see no reason to eradicate the use of categories, but I do however see many reasons to consider them nothing but tools to understand something much larger and complex. Moreover, the reflection made me think of how I could add to the violence-vocabulary, by introducing innovative perceptions of violence. This made me return to Judith Butler, where I selected a few terms and elaborated on their meanings, and finally expanded on how they may be interpreted through the lens of IRCA CASABIERTA, which in turn became a significant part of my final presentation. I also encouraged the professionals to use their creativity when discussing violence and experiences from their work, as a supplement to my other, more pragmatic recommendations, as shall be presented in the following chapter.

### *Conclusive recommendations for IRCA CASABIERTA*

In this chapter, I will present my recommendations for IRCA CASABIERTA, based on the findings from my research, introduced in correspondence with the structure of my main objectives. First and foremost, I wish to stress that although the following recommendations are encouragements for improvement, I am deeply impressed with the structure and functions found in IRCA CASABIERTA. It has been an absolute pleasure working with and getting to know the professionals in the organization, and I hold great respect for the work that each of the employees carries out. I also firmly believe that inviting outsiders to analyse and evaluate their practice, indicates organizational health and great professional integrity.

Due to the involvement with the ILDA project, there is a pending restructuring of the data collection. Since some of my recommendations hold changes to the digital and systematized documentation, currently being used by the employees in the

organization, I find it important to mention that these will most likely serve as preliminary changes.

#### Recommendations for documentation of violence:

- Introducing a set of violence indicators in the excel sheets.

These shall reflect different types of violence experienced by the POI in Costa Rica. Another suggestion for an indicator, is to show whether or not the POI is interested in participating in interviews, focus groups or other types of research related activities – whilst maintaining the confidentiality of all their personal information.

- Establishing a violence database

This can be in the form of folder or archive for sharing experiences and observed tendencies, which are continuously developing in more ways than one. It will not contain personal information of POIs, so that everyone, especially psychologists, can share and participate in the knowledge production. The focus shall be information and observation of violence, not the individual POIs. Staff members can write questions, as well as answers, share insights, challenges, problems and reactions – all with utmost respect for one another. This will be a space for the professionals at IRCA CASABIERTA to continuously open the conversation about violence, share, and learn. There is no such thing as invalid or bad contribution. The important thing is that it will be applied and brought up for dialogue and discussion. I recommend that employees insert various categories, but not necessarily only for types of violence, but the reactions shown or experienced, whether they are from particular situations or longitudinal perceptions.

There are several ways in which these changes can be made, but important for the process is that all employees take part and agree on how they will instrumentalize them. Particularly concerning the second recommendation, employees should agree on how often they will contribute to the database, with what kind of structure, and how often they will raise the issues and topics for open discussions. The intention of the database is also to open the themes of violence in meetings. This will depend on the desires of the team, and can be done every two weeks, every month, every two months or in a different format. Essential for the initiative, is that the employees feel that the database and usage thereof belong to each professional, in order to feel a responsibility and motivation to contribute and participate in the collaboration of maintaining it. Every employee possesses valuable information and experiences, which usually is of great benefit and resource to the other professionals in the organization.

#### Recommendations for political advocacy

- Incorporating a theme on the repercussions of various types of violence in social media campaigns.

In the interviews, a large body of evidence was produced, regarding various forms of psychological, physical, financial and social repercussions on the population and on individuals. These consequences contain a heavy influence on people's lives, but can simultaneously go unnoticed by the public. A big topic in the interviews was invisibility and normalization of violence, why an increased focus on repercussions of the violence, instead of the present violence alone would be beneficial. A result of this, can be that people, who do not consider themselves homo-lesbo-bi-trans-phobic, but have unintentional violent behaviours, will think more about their actions moving forward. Hopefully, it will encourage more people to step in, in situations where they would otherwise remain silent.

Another aspect of this element is how the aforementioned consequences of hate violence also affect the general population in societal areas regarding health, economy, safety, education and more, since there are direct links to public institutions and their efficiency. This could be of importance to the Costa Rican segment, which do not take issue with civil- and human rights violations of LGBTQIA+ migrants.

### Recommendations for conceptualization of hate violence

- Incorporate various ways of thinking about hate violence.

Categories are useful for many things, but they cannot describe everything there is to understand about violence. As presented in the reflection chapter, the research uncovered how other types of thinking would aid in expanding the vocabulary which can be used about hate violence and will allow for a more fluid understanding.

I recommend opening conversations to creative ways of thinking, and to different approaches and theories about violence. This is not an encouragement to eliminate the categories that are currently being applied, which are useful in the direct work with POIs, but to increase learning and understanding of staff members. As a supplement hereof, I recommend that the professionals at IRCA CASABIERTA start with familiarizing themselves with the theory of Judith Butler, from their book *Excitable Speech*. This is mainly for internal use, at least to begin with. It should also not be considered as limited to the work of Butler, but as a starting point for a creative and innovative approach when discussing and learning about violence. The reason I chose to incorporate the following additions to the theoretical and conceptual workings around violence, is that these are directly relevant to understand what the population of interest experience on a regular basis. During the interviews, naturalization was a big topic. When understanding concepts such as "context loss" (see below), the perceived gravity of naturalizing street harassment changes and extends. Below I will provide a selection of terms and understandings, that I find salient in relation to the work of the organization and the population of interest.



## **Linguistic vulnerability**

We are vulnerable to language because we are linguistic beings, who need language to exist and contextualize ourselves - we exist through language. Because of this, the conditions of language bind us to our social and conceptual existence. Consequentially, words and verbal actions hold great capacity to harm us.

## **Interpellation**

Verbal actions that describe, name or call someone or something, that identify it - assigning an identity. It is an act of power, which depends on circumstances and power dynamics. Being a minority increases the power of the words of the majority. This comes along with any slur, used about LGBTQIA+ persons, migrants, persons of colour, women etc..

## **Conceptualization of the body**

We cannot imagine a body without conceptualizing it, because of this we assign terms, words, definitions (possible interpellations) to describe a body. This limits the freedom and creativity with which we perceive, enjoy our bodies and exist in our bodies.

The omnipresent bodily conceptuality combined with linguistic vulnerability, makes every kind of hate violence directed towards the body, even if this is not directly uttered.

My interpretation and further personal theorization of this, incorporates a corporal element to various if not all levels of violence. Examples of this would be relevant to migration topics, poverty topics and LGBTQIA+ representation, among others.

- How we use it -> sexuality, work etc.
- How it looks -> if it meets expectations
- Where it is located
- Your social and geographic mobility
- Its capacity, hygiene
- Also how the body talks, thinks, moves

## **Loss of context(s)**

When the interpellation happens in a violent, demeaning and/or unexpected way, it can alter the sense of autonomy, self-determination and even self-esteem.

This means that the context in which a person perceives him/herself can suddenly be destroyed by hurtful words. This loss of power can lead to a loss of self-contextualization. Unfortunately, this is of great relevance to the population of interest, as the street harassment and verbal attacks are common to them.

## **Linguistic survival**

Finding power in the temporal space between the action and its repercussion. This is where countermeasures can be found to apprehend longitudinal repercussions.

How I would identify countermeasures: advocacy, joining groups, finding safe places, educating oneself about the law and policies. In such, IRCA CASABIERTA itself is a countermeasure.

### **The chiasmic nature of threats**

A verbal act that demonstrates a verbal action, followed by a material action. In addition, a threat is a complete action in itself, as long as it is exercised to threaten.

Speaking is a physical, bodily action.

Threats have a more violent nature, due to the chiasmatic nature of the crossings of violent thoughts, words and/or actions.

The utterance of a threat:

- It is an act that impacts momentarily, although it is rarely isolated in time, nor space, so the enunciation can continue to have a continuous impact, through emotional pain.
- It is a consequential act, which carries a promise of a material action later on, apart from the verbal action of the moment.

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I had a lot of self-doubt throughout the process, but my project turned out successfully. During the times of personal challenges and insecurities, I was supported by my supervisor, which brings me to my final point.

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