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*El Duende*:
Folktale, oral history, and the
construction of gendered and racialized discourses in Quito

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of New Mexico, 2018

THESIS

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***El Duende:***

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## ABSTRACT

*El Duende* is a popular mythical character featured in written and oral traditions in Latin America and Spain, where it is often described as particularly dangerous for women. In this research project, I focus on this character to explore the cultural and social meanings of these narratives in the Ecuadorian context, specifically in the city of Quito. Applying oral history methodology, I collected nine participants' narratives about *El Duende* and conducted a discourse analysis of these stories. In this thesis, I discuss ways in which the stories about *El Duende* reproduce narratives of traditional gender role expectations and violence against women, and how the stories about the myth construct particular understandings of gender and racial relations that relate to colonial legacies that endure in current society. The main goal of this research is to understand the reproduction of discourses that shape everyday life and the power of folktales and language to construct gendered and racialized realities.

## Table of Contents

**Introduction**......1

The Myth in Historical Perspective ......2

Contextualizing *El Duende* in the Urban Spaces of Quito ......7

**Chapter 1: Literature review of key sources** ......10

Oral tradition and history ......10

Folktales, myths, and monsters ......13

Post-coloniality as a Lens......16

Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Conditions of Women in Ecuador......18

Centrality of Religion and Violence Against Women in Colonial Society......19

Contemporary Conditions for Women in Ecuador ......25

**Chapter 2: Methodology** ......28

Oral History: Research Design ......28

Data Collection: The Site, Participants, the Interview......30

Data Analysis: Discourse Analysis......36

**Chapter 3: The Oral Histories of *El Duende*** ......37

The oral histories of *El Duende* ......37

Discussion and Conclusions ......49

**Chapter 4: Discourses on Gender Violence and Gender Expectations and the Social Conditions of Women in Ecuador** ......55

Discourses on Gender Violence and Gender Expectations ......57

*El Duende* as a Cultural Symbol: The Application of Monster Theory ...... 64

Conclusion ......66

**Chapter 5: Discourses on Women and Social Conditions in Colonial and Contemporary Quito** ....68

Conclusion ....78

**Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations and Avenues for Further Research** .... 80

Conclusions ....80

Limitations and Avenues for Further Research ....86

**Bibliography** ....88

**Appendices** ....96

Appendix 1 ....96

Appendix 2 ....97

## Introduction

*Duendes* are mythical characters featured in written and oral traditions in Latin America, Spain, and Europe. In the South American country of Ecuador, there is a popular characterization of this myth that has come to be known as *El Duende*. This character is identified mainly as a male character that can be a beautiful singing creature, a lucky charm, or an elusive small man who causes mischief and even violence. For some, he wears a big hat; for others, his legs are turned around to confuse those who chase him, and thus avoid being captured. The meanings of the stories about this figure are described differently depending on the region and the person telling the story. However, a salient and recurring characterization of *El Duende* in Ecuador describes him as particularly dangerous for women. He is known to harass young women, and some have even blamed him for going after women and leaving them once they get pregnant. For this reason, a fatherless child may be attributed to an encounter with *El Duende*.

In this research project, I focus on this character to explore the cultural and social meanings of these narratives in the Ecuadorian context, specifically in the city of Quito. I apply oral history methodology to narratives I collected about *El Duende* as told by nine Ecuadorians in Quito and I conduct a discourse analysis of these stories to explore the underlying cultural meanings of the myth. In particular, I examine how the stories about *El Duende* reproduce narratives of gender roles and violence against women, and how the stories about the myth reproduce understandings of both contemporary society and the colonial past of Quito. My main contribution is to add another layer of understanding of these well-known stories. In addition, I intend to contribute to the scholarly literature on the topic of *El Duende* since literature on the topic is sparse.

**The Myth in Historical Perspective**

According to Julia Calzadilla Núñez, in European folklore *duendes* (elves or goblins) are creatures that have a close bond with the home setting and are situated in a plane between living beings and the spiritual world. Although their description and characteristics change from culture to culture, in general they are described as being of small stature (11). Calzadilla Nuñez cites Volume 18 of the *European-American Illustrated Encyclopedia*, which classifies them as beings of "the spirit world" in popular belief, such as: *sprit follet* in France, *diavoletto* in Italy, goblin in the United Kingdom, poltergeist in Germany, *trasgo* in Portugal and Spain, and leprechaun in Ireland, among others.

Historical sources archived by the Real Academia Española offer the opportunity to compare early European characterizations of *duendes*. In 1609, the Spanish, Italian, French dictionary by Italian Hispanist lexicographer Girolamo Vittori defines *duende* as a spirit who wanders around the house during the night (246). It was defined in the same way in earlier European texts, such as the 1607 dictionary by Cesar Oudin and in the 1604 dictionary by Juan Palet—who described a *duende* as a spirit of the night (123); in 1591, Richard Percival had described it as a Robin Goodfellow,[1] also known as a Puck (75). Even earlier, in the 1570 dictionary by Cristóbal de las Casas, the word *duende* is used as another name for a *trasgo* or mythical creature similar to a goblin (175).

In the 1611 Spanish dictionary by Sebastián de Covabarrubias, a *duende* is defined as the spirit of:

---

[1] A Robin Goodfellow is a domestic mischievous fairy (Brewer, 754).

> those that fell with Lucifer, of which some descended to the deep, and some stayed in the region of the air, on the surface of the earth, as it is commonly known. They are usually inside houses, and in mountains, and in the caves, they spook with some appearances, taking fantastic bodies, and for this reason they were called Trasgos (…) There is the opinion that *duende*s that inhabited subterraneous places, take care of hidden treasures. (658, my translation)

This connection to Lucifer makes evident that in Spain, ideas about *duendes* were deeply tied to Christianity. These same ideas were disseminated throughout the Americas during the colonial period. In addition, it is noteworthy that the descriptions of *duendes* vary depending on whether they were seen as mischievous or as evil.

In parts of the Ecuadorian Andes, a mythical character known as *El chuzalongo* that is associated with indigenous traditions is described in ways that also resonate with Spanish descriptions of *duendes* as well as with more contemporary Ecuadorian narratives about *El Duende*. In this section, I will provide background information about *El chuzalongo* for its interesting cultural meanings and intersections with *El Duende*, although El chuzalongo will not be the focus of this thesis. Some of the stories about *El chuzalongo* portray him as having feet that are turned backward and a penis that is elongated, and which he hangs over his shoulder. He looks for women, rapes them to satiate his sexual appetite, kills them, and can even feed on their blood (Calzadilla Núñez 145). According to Carlos Pérez Guartambel, *El chuzalongo* has white skin and light-colored eyes, and this fact could point to the legend as being an invention of the Spanish conquistadors that was assimilated by *criollos* (creoles or people of Spanish descent born on the American continent) to elude the responsibility of paternity of their descendants

(382). Calzadilla Núñez agrees with this description, stating that *El chuzalongo* may have "Caucasian features," just like European conquistadors. For this reason, the figure could be related to the mixing of races or even to rape and incest (Calzadilla Núñez 145).

In order to understand this characterization and meaning of *El chuzalongo*, it is important to discuss the system of *castas* that was introduced in Latin America during colonial times to allow Spanish and Portuguese elites to classify and strengthen their control of the society. These set of *castas* or categories divided people based on the color of their skin and their parent's origin, and classified people by attributing to them a set of physical and psychological characteristics (Martín & Bautista 248). Sociologist Anibal Quijano proposes that the idea of purity of blood created by the Spanish to justify the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula was used in the colonial territories in America to create the idea of a superior race. Purity of blood was a term to distinguish people who were "real" Christians, meaning that they had not converted from Judaism or Islam. The idea of race introduced by the Spanish colony "dictated who would have access to full citizenship in the nation-state. As the foundation of Eurocentrism, race defined what counted as history and knowledge" (Quijano qtd in Mendoza 113).

By Spanish standards, the mixing of the *castas* threatened to "undermine the purity of castes" (Levine 270). In the colonial hierarchy, for example, the Spaniards born in Spain constituted the dominant *casta* in society; not even Spaniards born in America, or *criollos*, were held as in a high regard as Castilians. Social mobility was based on a person's skin color, manner of speaking, clothing, and by the people they surrounded themselves with. Societal pressure pushed people to become as white as the colonial

society would allow them to be. Depending on factors including those listed above, some people had little to no access to resources such as money or social status (Gaughran 2012).

In other Ecuadorian stories, *El chuzalongo* is situated as part of the oral traditions of indigenous communities. The spelling of the word *chuzalongo* points to a *Kichwa* origin: *chuza,* which means small, and *longo*, which means young man. In addition, it is important to highlight that this character is described differently depending on the positionality of the person narrating the story. For example, in Otavalo, a city in the Andes, this character is said to live in the Peguche waterfall and provide strength to the dancers and musicians in the festivity of Inti Raymi.[2] In the book *Antropología del Ecuador: Memorias del Primer Simposio Europeo sobre Antropología del Ecuador*, the *chuzalongo* is an evil entity whose parents are *urcu-yaya* and *urcu-mama*. *Urcu* means mountain or hill in *Kichwa,* so *chuzalongos* are the children of the mountains. In addition, they mention that in the highland and in the coastal area, a *chuzalongo* is an evil spirit who is the offspring of an incestuous encounter (Moreno Yáñez and Thyssen 382)

Nowadays, oral recountings of the story of *El chuzalongo* seem to be interwoven and at times merge with the story of *El Duende* to the point where it is difficult if not impossible to tell them apart. In this respect, the existence of *El Duende* appears to combine elements of Spanish folktales and pre-Hispanic beliefs. One shaman from a parish in the city of Otavalo spoke of his belief that there are many spirits around, and

[2]Inti-Raymi is the celebration of the Inca God Sun during the summer solar solstice in June (Benavides 75).

that he can communicate with them. He told me that bad spirits stay in this world, roaming. He pointed out that there is no devil, only God and those spirits who chose not to follow God's path. Humans who misbehave or who are evil, end up becoming these roaming spirits.

For this shaman, *El Duende*'s intentions is to lead people astray into becoming a lost spirit. In this shaman's view, *El Duende* resonates with Inca cosmology. Inca cosmology did not refer to ideas of heaven and hell, but rather saw the cosmos as divided into three dimensions: the world above, this world, and the one below (Gordon Francis McEwan). When they died, nobles went to the world above regardless of their actions while alive. The rest of the population went to the world below when they died, unless their actions were so evil that they were condemned to "wander the earth as spirits." The world of the living and the dead was periodically connected, and it was possible to communicate between the both during this time (138). The Otavalo shaman's association of *El Duende* with the roaming spirits of people who were evil in their lifetimes resonates with this Incan cosmology.

In this thesis, I argue that both the narratives of *El chuzalongo* and *El Duende* are part of a meaning making process that points to a colonial past that still shapes Ecuadorian society. When approaching a character of oral traditions that arise in the contact zone between two or more different cultures, it is complicated to situate the tradition's exact place and time of origin. Such work is outside the scope of this thesis. However, scholarly research can allow for the study of how the various meanings attributed to the mythical character by different cultural groups relate to ideological understandings. In this thesis, I examine how the oral narratives about *El Duende*

reproduce narratives of gender roles and violence against women, and how the stories about the myth reproduce understandings of both current society and the colonial past of Quito.

**Contextualizing *El Duende* in the Urban Spaces of Quito**

Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is home to almost two million people. In the 2010 Census, the demography of the city is described as 82.8 percent *Mestiza*, 6.7 percent White, 4.7 percent Afroecuadorian, 4.1 percent Indigenous, 1.4 percent Montubio, and 0.4 percent as "others" (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos). The official language is Spanish, which is spoken by the majority in the city, but other native languages are spoken as well, such as Kichwa and Shuar. The prominent religion is Roman Catholic, and there is a growing number of protestants, non-Pentecostal, and Pentecostal evangelicals. There is also a Mormon congregation and a "small Jewish population" (*New World Encyclopedia*).

This large city of diverse ethnic and racial origins and identifications provides a rich site in which to study the contemporary cultural meanings of this myth. Although I do not seek to generalize my findings, I analyze the meanings and significance of the myth in the oral history narratives of nine participants with diverse cultural backgrounds. I approach their stories as narratives that evidence how colonial and patriarchal ideologies transmitted through the story of *El Duende* remain relevant in today's culture.

Growing up in Quito, I learned about this character in my early years and heard some people around me say that they believed *El Duende* was real. In my recollection, in the first stories I heard about *El Duende,* he was a paranormal being akin to a

mischievous ghost. Further on I started hearing or reading about *El Duende* as a small man who chased women.

El Duende has associations with oral traditions of indigenous roots, particularly with El chuzalongo. However, stories about El chuzalongo were not told to me during my childhood. Thus, from a personal perspective, I decided to focus this study on the stories about El Duende commonly shared by people living in the urban spaces of Quito.

Nevertheless, there is a key point of similarity between *El chuzalongo* and some of the narratives I heard about *El Duende* during my field research in Quito. Both stories focus on the chasing and harassment of young women. This made me question whether the narratives I heard in Quito are adaptations of the same folktale in an urban setting. And although I cannot answer that question in this project, the similarity across stories solidified my interest in understanding the problem of gender in this type of narratives. Furthermore, it led me to question of whether the myth of *El Duende* that I am familiar with echoes the situation of women during the conquest in Quito, and whether it had been adapted to the reality of its contemporary narrators.

## Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I present a literature review where I define the concepts of oral tradition and oral history, folktales, myths, and monsters. In this chapter, I also discuss postcolonial feminism as a theoretical lens to approach colonial legacies and contemporary conditions of women in Ecuador. In Chapter 2, I describe the methodology of oral history, the research design, and the data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapter 3, I present a summary of the archive, that is, the oral histories of my sources and salient patterns

identified in the narratives. In Chapter 4, I discuss dominant discourses on gender expectations and violence against women that emerged in the narratives analyzed. In Chapter 5 I go over the discourses on women and social conditions in colonial and contemporary Quito that emerged from the analyzed narratives. In Chapter 6 I close the thesis with my conclusions, limitations, and implications for future research.

# Chapter 1

## Literature Review

In this literature review, I develop a framework of key concepts, theoretical lenses, and relevant sources informing my discourse analysis of the folktale of *El Duende.* The review is divided into three sub-sections. In the first one, I establish my approach to the concepts of oral tradition, oral history, folktales, and myths. In the second section, I define and explain the theoretical lens through which I will conduct a critical analysis of the folktale: postcolonial feminism. In the third section, I provide relevant context for the discussion of historical patterns and sociological approaches to contemporary conditions affecting the status of women in Ecuador.

### Oral Tradition and Oral History

For this analysis, I approach *El Duende*'s character as part of both oral tradition and oral history (depending on the narrator). Oral tradition is a term which I define, according to historian and anthropologist Jan Vansina, as "unwritten sources couched in a form suitable for oral transmission" and whose "preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings" (Vansina 1). Hence, I do not expect to find a single version of a narrative nor do I seek to generalize. On the contrary, I expect to find diverse versions of *El Duende* that depend greatly on the interviewees' background and context.

In addition, in his book *Oral tradition as History*, Vansina argues that oral tradition is both a product and a process. The product is an oral message that has been passed on through at least one generation and that was based on previous oral messages (Vansina 3). The process is the transmission of the message over time, by word of mouth,

until its disappearance (Vansina 3).  In this research I am conducting interviews to collect the “products” of the oral tradition but also to analyze how the process of oral tradition has also passed down ideology from a colonial period.

The key difference that Vansina identifies between oral tradition and history is that the first one is no longer contemporary. Oral historians concern themselves with “recent or very recent events, often of a dramatic nature, when historical consciousness in the communities involved is still in flux. Some of the call this “immediate history”” (Vansina 13). However, scholar Valerie Yow “ventures” a “working definition” of oral history, asserting that it “is the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (3).

Thus, I argue that *El Duende* is part of Ecuadorian oral tradition and at the same time personal and family oral history.  My project does not seek to judge whether the character is real or not in the historical sense. Rather, I am interested in the content of the narratives, which will be analyzed as oral tradition with an oral history methodology for two main reasons. Firstly, because it is an oral tradition generally known in Ecuadorian culture that has been transmitted across generations, seemingly over a long succession of generations. It is not simply an expression of the present in which the story is being told but also an account that relates to the past. Secondly because I am recording personal testimonies delivered in oral form.  And thirdly because, following Vansina’s analysis of oral tradition as evidence, he does assert that oral tradition plays a part in “the reconstruction of the past” (199).

To this effect, I applied this theory based on the understanding that the story of *El Duende* is not a direct account of historical events, it still transmits ideological content of

the past that it is valid in the present. Its content is still valid in the present also because there are aspects of the present that resemble and resonate with those of the past. In addition, depending on the narrator, an encounter with *El Duende* was a real event that happened to the narrator themselves or to a member of their family.

Through this work, I am highlighting the importance of oral history in communities and its validity for cultural and historical research. According to Hammond and Sikka:

> oral histories have a potential to provide different perspectives of the same historical events and thereby to contribute to a better understanding of the role of human agency and struggles in the construction of accounting history[3]. They argued that the oral history method is particularly effective when shedding light on the life experiences of those whose are also affected by the institutionalized social practices but whose voices are seldom heard within society (Hammond and Sikka qtd in Kim).

It is important to point out that oral history is a relatively new field. It started in 1948 when "Alan Nevins, at Columbia University, began to tape-record the spoken memories of white male elites: this was the first organized oral history project" (Yow 3). However, through the decades, positivist social scientists reacted against this method for its reliance on memory rather than documentation and for the perceived bias of oral history researchers whether in quantitative or qualitative approaches (Yow; Thomson).

To this criticism, researchers who have applied oral history respond by arguing that what other researchers have called the unreliability of memory is in fact a strength

[3] I argue that cultural understandings as well

because it is giving us clues about the relationship between historical experience and personal identity, individual and collective memory, and memory and personal identity(Thomson 54). In a study made by Luisa Passerini on Italian memories of interwar fascism, she highlights “the role of subjectivity in history--the conscious and unconscious meanings of experience as lived and remembered-- and showed how the influences of public culture and ideology upon individual memory might be revealed in the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of personal testimony” (qtd. in Thomson 54).

In terms of the criticism of the researcher’s bias in oral history, researchers have pointed to the inevitable subjectivity of interviewing. Since the 1970s researchers have pointed out that a new oral history "paradigm... permits awareness and use of the interactive process of interviewer and narrator, of interviewer and content" (Yow qtd. in Thomson 62).

I followed this interpretive approach and conducted the research process mindful of my position as a mestiza Ecuadorian woman who is familiar with the oral tradition under study—not as an objective observer—and whose positionality and co-participation in the interview process enables a different kind of a dialogue about gender.

## Folktales, Myths, and Monsters

I will consider the stories in this oral tradition as belonging to the genre of folktale. According to Misch, in her book *Teaching Folktales,* a folktale is defined as:

> a general term for the various kinds of narrative prose literature found in the oral traditions of the world. It is used for various related types of stories, which can include legends, myths, fables, parables, allegories, fairy tales, ghost stories

> and many others. Folktales can contain religious, imaginary or mythical elements and deal with the sometimes-ordinary traditions of everyday life. The telling of stories appears to be culturally universal, because the different forms of folktales often resemble one another. (3)

Within the folktale genre, I consider the character of this narrative as a myth**.** A myth not in the sense that the story is not true but as Indian folklorist Pattanaik frames it: "unlike fantasy that is nobody's truth, and history that seeks to be everybody's truth, mythology is somebody's truth" ("Why I Insist on Calling Myself a Mythologist"). As I previously mentioned, I do not seek to establish if this story is real or not, but to analyze the ideological understandings that it has disseminated through time in the oral tradition.

Additionally, I approach a myth as Finnish folklorist Honko does: as a story that "expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, … provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, [and] testifies to the efficacy of ritual" (qtd in Dundes 49). Thus, myths and folktales are types of stories that connect the past and the present; that suggests norms and values that people use to make sense of the past as well as to find meaning for the present.

A theory that I found particularly useful to explain the relationship of the myth of *El Duende* with its cultural and ideological context was *monster theory*. English scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his book *Monster Theory*: *Reading Culture*, conceptualizes a monster as "that uncertain cultural body in which is condensed an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness:  like the ghost of Hamlet, it introjects the disturbing, repressed but formative traumas of "pre-" into the sensory moment of "post-," binding the one irrevocably to the other" (Cohen x). In this, sense, I read a monster as a cultural body that

holds ideas that are disturbing to society in discourses that link the past and the present. Particularly relevant for this research, are ideas about gender, race, and violence against women.

Cohen proposes seven theses to understand the figure of a monster in a culture. The first thesis urges us to understand that "the monster's body is a cultural body," meaning that a monster is a construction and a projection of a culture. In the case of *El Duende*, I would argue that the narrative that I am analyzing in which he chases women, could be a projection of Ecuadorian culture in the sense that the story combines different elements such as Catholic religion, different Andean and spiritual beliefs, and narratives that surround the Ecuadorian historic process (e.g. *mestizaje*, colonial and postcolonial social hierarchies, race ideologies). However, for me it is also a societal body, since in Ecuadorian society there is a certain perception of women and a conception of how they should behave. In his second thesis, Cohen notes that "The Monster Always Escapes," in other words, that the monster always disappears and consequently reappears in a different place and time. He asserts that "each reappearance and its analysis is still bound in a double act of construction and reconstitution" (5). This suggests that the monster is co-constructed between the time it was conceived and the time it reappears. Meaning, that there are elements of the story nowadays that have been kept or are still relevant to the time it was constructed. Otherwise, the story would no longer be told or be relevant to the narrators of the story. This is the way in which I will analyze the different appearances of *El Duende,* connecting it to a colonial past and to contemporary society.

The third thesis states that "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis," as it presents the difficulty in categorizing it due to its hybridity. *El Duende* as described by

narrators, is one of these hybrid beings that are sometimes part human, part animal, part demon, blended with the supernatural. Also, it is a being with traces of Spanish and indigenous traditions; it is also part evil, part mischievous, or benevolent for others. In addition, in this research this mythical being overlaps oral tradition and oral history, as I will discuss later in the analysis of the narratives of the interviewees.

The fourth thesis, "The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference," proposes that the monster embodies the "other" in terms of race, culture, and other normative concepts. As one of my narrators proposed, one of the colonial ideas passed on through the narrative is the idea that *El Duende* symbolizes an indigenous man, making him the outsider of society. Also, in a counter-narrative proposed by a narrator, *El Duende* embodies violent masculinity and is an example of wrong or undesirable behavior instead of a character that normalizes violence against women. The fifth thesis, that "The Monster Policies the Borders of the Possible," propounds that those who step outside of what is accepted become vulnerable to the monster. In the case of *El Duende*, the vulnerable would be women in society who do not conform to expected gender performances.

The sixth thesis, "Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire," holds that the monster tempts people into the forbidden with its liberty. And finally, "The Monster Stands at the Threshold…of Becoming," asks us to question why we have created the monster. Through my analysis of participants' narratives, I seek to unpack how does the folktale of *El Duende* still reproduce colonial ideas and ideas about gendered identities and violence in today's society.

**Post-coloniality as a Lens**

I approach the analysis of *El Duende* through a postcolonial feminist lens. Postcolonial theory is a critical approach that examines culture as a historical struggle that still manifests the legacy and presence of European coloniality in society nowadays. I examine postcolonial conditions taking into account coloniality, which is not the same as colonialism, for coloniality refers to the "patterns of power" that emerged from the colonial period, and the enduring cultural and historical struggles stemming from colonial relations that still manifest themselves in society and culture (Mendoza qtd in Disch and Hawkesworth 114).

One of the criticisms of postcolonial feminism, as explained by Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is the epistemic violence in Western academia. "By juxtaposing Western 'civilization' against the 'barbarism' of 'the East,' academics and activists colonized subaltern experience, while reinscribing the superiority of Western knowledge" (Spivak qtd in Mendoza 109). In this essay, I do not seek to denounce how U.S. and European academia have portrayed Ecuadorian culture but to analyze the ways in which certain oral histories, in this case that of *El Duende*, have passed down Western ideologies of gender and race that have been embedded in the structures of power since colonial times, and to show how gendered violence and identity construction still echo such patterns of power in complex ways in today's society. However, as I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, *El Duende* is a complex character, and there are different narratives and counter-narratives that reveal the complexities of identity construction.

According to Ofelia Schutte, "Postcolonial identities put into question the belief in the neutrality of the sign and the separation of the subject and object of knowledge, as accepted by the Enlightenment" (qtd in Narayan and Harding 60). This means that signs

in society are mediated by the interests of the “dominant culture hidden behind it,” according to Chilean feminist Nelly Richard (qtd in Narayan and Harding). In this sense, the sign of *El Duende* has meaning and significance beyond that of a mythical character. The narratives surrounding the myth are mediated by structures of power and forms of knowledge that relate to European cultural formations such as Catholic religion, sexism and patriarchy, and racial ideologies that create particular social hierarchies and relations of power.

In tracing a legacy of how colonizing ideologies after European conquest have affected women, I do not assume that there were no such comparable structures of gender domination before the arrival of the Spanish. My focus is, however, on denouncing conditions that affect and have affected Ecuadorian women for generations after the Spanish conquest. More specifically, I give attention to the intersections of the identity dimensions of gender, power, and race in the narratives of *El Duende*. The reason for the analysis of these intersections is that all these identity dimensions influence each other and, historically, there has been an intersection of these dimensions with religious/patriarchal/colonial systems that have been hegemonic since the colonial period (1534-1822) and throughout the period of Ecuadorian national independence that started in 1822. I am particularly interested in analyzing how the hegemonic point of view and belief system that perpetuate patriarchy have heavily influenced the conditions faced by white, indigenous, *mestiza*, and afro-descendent women.

**Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Conditions of Women in Ecuador**

Gender analysis of contemporary narratives of *El Duende* are lacking in scholarly literature. In *La mujer es puro cuento*, Nicaraguan anthropologist and linguist Milagros

Palma discusses *El Duende* as one of what she calls mestizo myths to elaborate on how violence is symbolically perpetuated. In a chapter titled "*El Duende* un macho diminuto," she claims that Colombia is the cradle of *El Duende* and argues that the *Duende* narrative underscores the construction of gender through myth. She posits that *El Duende* is like any good macho, a little man in love who chases pretty women without restraint. Palma asserts that *El Duende* as a myth of male lust for young women conveys the cultural value of controlling the sexuality of young women from the onset of their puberty (Palma 105). Palma argues that, in Colombia, the folktale is used with the purpose of "domesticating" women. My analysis, as presented in Chapter 4, reinforces Palma's argument about the symbolic reproduction of patriarchy.

Moreover, my research extends the analysis of gender to address its intersections with other legacies of the colonial period, such as race and religion. I look, for example, at the centrality of the Catholic religion in the social construction of ideals or models of femininity from colonial to contemporary times. Another notable legacy of colonial times is that sexual violence against women has affected women of different races differently. Thus, in the following section, I will discuss the centrality of religion and violence against women in colonial society and its prevalence in the present time.

**Centrality of Religion and Violence Against Women in Colonial Society**

The Spanish colonial era in what is now the national territory of Ecuador was set in motion with the foundation of the Royal Audience of Quito in 1563 and ended formally with the annexation of Ecuador to Gran Colombia after independence in 1822. The Royal Audience of Quito was a colonial political-judicial administrative unit that includes what is now Ecuadorian territory, part of southern Colombia, northern Peru, and

northern Brazil. The Catholic Church with its network of political and social influence found itself at the center of administrative power. In fact, the Catholic monarchs were seen as having the responsibility, imposed by the church, of evangelizing the continent (Herrera Garcés 56).

The presence of the church was such that the power of the Spanish crown was threatened, and this led to the expulsion of the Jesuits by order of the Bourbon reforms in the eighteenth century. My goal in highlighting this historical fact is to point out that much of the colonial social relations were mediated by a strong religious influence and that this influence, in turn, affected the agency and the lives of women not only in political-judicial terms but also in the educational, medical, and social options afforded to women. In fact, Quito's educational institutions, such as the Colegio de San Luis and the Universidad de San Gregorio, were administered by the Jesuit order at the request of the local creole elite (García 6).

In Spanish America, women could not attend these educational institutions. In Chile, for example, women who belonged to the elite class were educated in convents and, then, their education could continue at home with private tutors. This was because the prospects for elite women were either marriage or the cloister (Navarrete González). Women in general were expected to play a role of "vassalage" in terms of being confined to the spaces of home, marriage, and family. In this social structure, singleness was seen as a disgrace. Women were expected to marry at an early age—which could be from the age of twelve with the consent of the father. Among elite sectors, suitors were generally chosen in terms of their economic means since the marital union was seen as a business,

and the Spaniards saw the opportunity to perpetuate their last name on the continent (Vasquez).

Faced with the oppressive system of marriage, women, particularly upper-class women, sometimes preferred religious vows as a more attractive life option. A notable example is that of Úrsula Suárez (1666-1749), who joins the Clarisas monastery in Chile at the age of twelve to flee from the constant marriage plans that her mother had for her; Úrsula equated marriage with death (Navarrete González). It should be noted that most of the Church's cloistered nuns were neither Indian nor mixed blood, for religious authorities were closely linked to upper casts of white Spanish families (Lavrin 369). Therefore, the limited options and prospects of women were further limited by skin color.

However, this religious presence mediated not only the public life of women but also their personal choices. Another female figure that incarnated such ideal of femininity was, for instance, Mariana de Jesús (1618-1645), the "Azucena de Quito" (the White Lily of Quito). She was an Ecuadorian saint, canonized, and known for offering her life aloud during mass in the city of Quito when the Riobamba earthquake of 1645 and the epidemics of diphtheria and measles threatened the city. She allegedly became ill after offering her body in exchange for the salvation of Quito and died shortly after. The city took this fact as God's acceptance of her body, and her funeral was presided over by important public figures at the time. Her nickname comes from the fact that supposedly after drawing blood from her body in an attempt to cure her, blood was spilled on the ground and a lily grew on that very same spot.

The known facts of her life are that she took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience at the age of ten, that she lived secluded in her house, in constant fasting, and

that she practiced the mortification of her body. In one of the main museums of Quito, her spiked clothing is exhibited, as for example, blouses or belts with nails. Mortification in the colonial period was considered a “virtue that teaches one to curb appetites and passions, through punishment and harshness with which the body is treated externally, or with which the will is repressed internally” (Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana, 612, my translation).

Thus, Mariana de Jesús was an example of female virtue. In addition, the symbolism of the lily, meaning purity and innocence, added meaning to her identity. One could say, then, that repression of passion by means of punishment and mortification purified her and made her a role model. We can see the continuation of this ideal in Quito in the 19th century with the Ecuadorian saint Narcisa de Jesús (1832-1869). She was known for her catechism and philanthropy. Following the example of Mariana de Jesús, she had a life of secrecy, asceticism, and mortification of the body.

In this sense, in terms of women’s health and body, it was considered admirable in women to obey what were considered the duties of the woman toward society and religion above her own well-being. Those seen as admirable women were those selfless beings who not only dedicated their lives to others but, in terms of their private life, exerted “pressure” on their senses and their own will. Both women, Mariana and Narcisa, in different centuries, died young from different ailments and mortified their body privately. More importantly, these two female saints were not nuns but considered secular before their death. Therefore, the idea that monastic life was not necessary to observe exemplary female conduct further solidified the power of religious ideology to control women’s lives.

As I have pointed out, the confinement—forced or voluntary—of women to religious life (whether secular women or nuns accepting vows to chastity, poverty, and obedience) was more prevalent among the dominant classes. Among the popular classes, economic needs and social expectations afforded women more access to and visibility in the economic life of colonial Quito, especially in the so-called *pulperías.*[4] While these women were subordinated and under the control of a male dominated society—e.g. expected to obey their husbands—there were those who managed businesses or came into the sphere of commerce primarily through the sale of food with their husbands. Participation in the economic realm was also facilitated to women who had the purchasing power or could access a loan (Borchart de Moreno 172).

I would argue, however, that the elevation of religiosity as a female virtue—including the idea of matrimony as a sacrament—in elite circles created a dominant ideal of femininity that shaped, to varying degrees, gender expectations and models of behavior for women across "castas." Thus, I will argue that the myth of *El Duende* reproduces some hegemonic ideas that, even though rooted in the practices of the elite, have influenced the historic experience of women across social and racial sectors.

Another enduring legacy of colonial society is the generalized patterns of sexual violence against women and the impunity of such criminal behavior. When the Spanish first arrived on the American continent, their ships carried mostly men, although some white women did accompany their husbands in the early voyages (1493-1496) (Antolini 6). In the violence generated by the conquest, indigenous women suffered rape and

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[4] Convenience stores that were also spaces where people could socialize. Also, the dispensation of alcohol was allowed, and rooster fights could take place in these establishments

sexual violence, as they were taken as booty by the Spanish. Some became concubines of the conquistadors as a way of appeasing the enemy, forming alliances, and/or increase the power of colonized families. Some were violated and abandoned the relationship, and others stayed with the conquistadors (Socolow 36).

When referring to these "relationships," one must consider how the unequal power dynamic between conquistadors and indigenous women, the violent restructuring of society, and the murder and massive death of indigenous people were constitutive of such relations. As Andrea Smith states in her book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide,* sexual violence has been described by scholars such as Kimberly Crenshaw as not only an instrument of patriarchy but also a tool of colonialism. In the chapter "Sexual violence as a tool of genocide," Smith argues that "while both native men and women have been subjected to a reign of sexualized terror, sexual violence does not affect Indian men and women in the same way. When a Native woman suffers abuse, this abuse is an attack on her identity as a woman and an attack on her identity as Native" (Smith 12).

In 1510, the first African slaves forced into the "new world" under licenses granted by the Spanish Crown further complicated the power dynamics in the colonies. In 1542, a prohibition was established against the enslavement of indigenous people. This factor and the massive death of indigenous people increased the arrival of African male and female slaves through the seventeenth century. For female slaves, as for indigenous women, sexual terror and exploitation marked their historical experience (Juang & Morrissette 1067).

The colonization of the New World was thus predicated on violence against women, and the appropriation and exploitation of indigenous, black, white, creole and mestiza female bodies with different goals: from the reproduction of slavery and servitude from indigenous and black women, to marriage and reproduction of family lineage with white women.

## Contemporary Conditions for Women in Ecuador

Throughout the country's history, women's ability to perform civil and political functions has been even more limited than their ability to play an economic role. This point is reflected in the political life of Quito, where political functions were reserved for men, and it would not be until the twentieth century when there would be a difficult and slow inclusion of women in the educational and political plane. The case of Matilde Hidalgo (1889-1974) is emblematic. In 1913, she was the first woman to graduate from high school in the Ecuadorian province of Loja. Her family had to ask for her to be admitted to primary school, given that there was no rule explicitly excluding women from education. Even though she was accepted, she experienced difficulties that affected her family. Her classmates from primary school were not allowed to talk to her, she was insulted on her way to school, and her mother was "threatened with excommunication from the Catholic Church" (Clark 4). After finishing high school, she applied to the medical program at the Universidad Central at the capital, Quito, but her application was rejected. She was told to enroll in the only fields then open for women at the University, midwifery or the pharmacy program.

However, she was finally able to enroll at a medical program in the province of Azuay, still facing several obstacles imposed by her classmates and professors. In 1923

she married a lawyer, who reviewed the constitution and pointed out that there was no explicit provision preventing women from voting. Thus, in 1924 the minister of the interior granted her the permission to vote, becoming the first Ecuadorian and Latin American women to vote in a national election (Clark 5). Nonetheless, it would not be until the year of 1929 when women would be considered citizens with the amendment to Article 13 of the Constitution: “Every citizen of Ecuador is a man or woman, over twenty-one, who can read and write” (La Asamblea del Ecuador "Constitución de 1929").

Even after the incorporation of women as citizens of the nation, the enduring inequality, victimization, and marginalization of women has been overlooked by government institutions and policies. Evidence of this neglect is, for example, the fact that nowadays government agencies fail to record statistical data documenting gender violence and the socioeconomic status of women in Ecuadorian society. According to the United Nations, one of Ecuador’s challenges is the “Limited knowledge and data gathering on violence against women within the justice system, which results in suppression and disregard when presented with these cases and therefore, in impunity.” In addition,

> Limited political will to curve violence against women prevents it from being prioritized as a public health problem, resulting in policies and programs with meager results, without continuity, low coverage and quality and fragile inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination. Stereotypes and cultural practices that influence the preservation of power relationships that perpetuate subordination of women before men. (UN Women)

According to a report titled *Intimate Partner Violence and Femicide in Ecuador,* this situation results in "the permanence of a naturalized, chauvinistic culture, the lack of an effective network of resources to support victims, and a rigid administrative structure. Consequently, victims have little confidence in public institutions, rates of reporting and prosecuting cases of violence are very low, and there is a perception that the aggressors can act with impunity, increasing the risk of severe violence and femicide" (30).

Ecuador's 2019 national survey on family relations and gender violence against women presented statistics on the types of violence that are framed in national and international regulations. The types of violence included are psychological, physical, sexual, economic and property, and gynecological-obstetric violence. The survey showed that 64.9 have suffered at least one type of violence at some point in their lives (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos).

In closing, this literature and documentation of social conditions of violence against women in Ecuador provide historical context and a base of sociological knowledge to inform the analysis I seek to advance in the following chapters. In them, I explore how narratives of *El Duende* as told by residents of Quito resonate with and activate discourses about gender expectations and violence that have circulated throughout the history of Ecuador.

# **Chapter 2**

## Methodology

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. What oral histories of *El Duende* emerge in participants' narratives?
2. What discourses about gender violence and role expectations are constructed in the participants' accounts of the folktale of *El Duende*?
3. How do the narratives about *El Duende* relate to social conditions in colonial and contemporary Quito?

For the purpose of this research, I define narrative as an "account of actual or imagined events told by a narrator. A narrative is made up of events, or the story, and the arrangement of those events into the plot. The term narrative applies to nonfiction as well as fiction" (Quinn 210). I define discourse following Foucault's concept of discourse as a socially constructed process of production of knowledge and meaning (truths) through the use of language and other signs. This production of knowledge is historically contingent and repeated through time; it is consolidated and disseminated by social structures and power relations, and it produces subjects (Adams).

## Oral History: Research Design

This research is based on oral history methodology, which Mediavilla defines as "the systematic collection of firsthand accounts of people's experiences." The data collected—also called an oral history—is an audio or video recording of the accounts that are transcribed into written documents. According to the Oral History Association, oral history is not only a method of recording testimony but also the product of the process of recording and preserving it. In the case of my project, it is the recording and analysis of

testimonies that relate to personal experiences and understandings. It is important to add that oral history is:

> distinguished from other forms of interviews by its content and extent. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the fullness they desire. The content of oral history interviews is grounded in reflections on the past as opposed to commentary on purely contemporary events. (Sommer and Quinlan 133)

According to Larson, in oral history methodology researchers should follow three main procedures: (1) select a genre, (2) select a theoretical lens, and (3) plan the interview. The genre of my project is a *subject-oriented* oral history, in other words, "from the beginning [the research] is more focused, with a more clearly conceived agenda and perhaps a stated hypothesis" (96). In this project, I established research questions with some initial assumptions about expected findings. Not only that, but I approached the project with the understanding of the need "for the subject [of the research] to be addressed, or if it has already been addressed, a need for it to be approached differently" (Larson 97).

In terms of the theoretical lens informing the interview process, the lens applied is postcolonial feminism. This lens is appropriate because I want to study how the discourses of gender reproduced by the folktales relate to Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge disseminated in Ecuadorian culture through colonial and postcolonial history, with attention to the intersection of gender, class, race, patriarchy, and religion in participants' stories. While *El Duende* is a topic well known in oral

history, I did not locate many sources of scholarly literature on the topic, and specially lacking was research with a feminist and decolonial lens. Therefore, a main contribution will be to add another layer of understanding of these well-known stories. In addition, I intend to widen the literature on this topic not only in U.S. academia, where there is little knowledge of this mythical character, but also in Ecuador, where the oral tradition of *El Duende* is strong.

In order to plan an interview, I observed the following procedures: (1) identified type of participants to be recruited based on the theory informing my project and on practical issues, (2) set the scope of the study based on availability of the interviewers and resources, (3) elaborated an interview guide, (4) conducted background preparations, such as research about the topic of study, (5) obtained the necessary clearance, and (6) made sure that the interview questions related to the main goal of the study, and (7) took into consideration the implications of the study (Larson 110-120).

In terms of clearance, before starting data collection in Quito, I followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process with the guidance of Dr. Jaelyn DeMaria, associate professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism, who has previous experience with oral history. The IRB was approved on June 28, 2019, and in the summer of 2019, I travelled to Quito, Ecuador, and interviewed nine people who had previous knowledge of the oral tradition of *El Duende*.

In the next section, I describe the data collection procedures I followed informed by these guidelines for oral history research.

**Data Collection: The Site, Participants, the Interview**

In this project, I conducted individual interviews with nine Ecuadorians living in the city of Quito. These interviews were considered as oral history to record the oral tradition of *El Duende* (see interview guide in Appendix 1).

Quito was chosen as the site for this study because it has been historically, socially, and economically a diverse city. Is it a city where one is more likely to find cultural interactions across ethnic, racial, gender, religious, and social classes; it is a cultural landscape that offers a richer site to explore the diverse meanings of the folktale for different social groups.

Quito is divided into north, center, and south. The center is the historic district where the city was founded in 1534 by the Spanish conquistador Sebastián de Benalcázar. Due to the city's location (a valley in the Andes), the city expanded to the South and to the North. The North is considered by some as the "developed area," where middle- to high-income sectors of the population are located, and the South is considered by some as more "less developed" for its large lower-income population. This divide is also evident in the popular perception of the three sectors. This perception is captured in the Ecuadorian movie *Behind your Back*, where the director frames the statue of the Virgin Mary placed in the middle of the city to echo the popular saying "the south is so ugly that even the Virgin turns her back to it."

Socioeconomic segregation is linked to racial segregation. According to Quito's metropolitan plan for development from 2012 to 2022, the members of indigenous peoples and nationalities originating in the district are concentrated in the rural sector, while the indigenous populations that have migrated from the central and northern

highland mainly, are located in the neighborhoods near the markets, in the historic center and in the south of the city (Consejo Metropolitano de Quito 44).

To avoid centering my study in only one geographic area and to increase diversity of participants, I conducted two interviews from narrators in the north, two from the center, three from the south, one in a rural metropolitan parish of Quito called Guayllabamba, and one in the rural parish of Tumbaco.

In choosing to interview in Quito and not in other cities or rural places, I also considered my own intersectionality, and time and resource limitations for this project. In terms of my intersectionality, I identify as a mestiza from Quito, Ecuador. I define mestiza as a person of mixed ethnic origin, which could be indigenous, Spanish, Afro, and other different ethnic identities in a person's background. This is an identity that I am currently re-signifying and trying to better understand.

However, it is important to emphasize that in my experience, most of the time, a mestizo person is defined as someone whose ancestors are a mixture of indigenous and Spanish; and although it is not known exactly when, the racial mix is assumed to have happened at some point in the near or distant past. I believe that mestizo is a term that merits further discussion, questioning, and self-analysis in Ecuadorian society. There are people who might choose to identify as a mestizo to fit into the national discourse of who is a citizen and who is visible.

This idea of mestizaje as a mechanism used to erase legacies is addressed in Careaga-Coleman's doctoral thesis on race and the mechanisms of invisibilization of the Afrodescendants in Mexican history, popular culture, and literature. Careaga-Coleman states that "the ideology of mestizaje," through the construction of "a homogeneous

identity," has ended up marginalizing "to the point of erasing, the presence of Mexican Afro-descendants" (18). It is important to look at mestizaje with a critical eye, understanding there are many experiences and negotiations of identities under this term. For its complexity, it's a construct that should continue in further research and discussion outside the academic area, as well.

Because of my background, I am most familiar with a racially "mixed" setting, and that is my place of experience. I am aware that the light color of my skin has given me privilege in my country. Regarding my role as a researcher, I am aware that different participants might have viewed me differently considering the social background and uneven power distribution that subjects people to racism, class, and gender discrimination, and even limited social mobility linked to colorism and elitism in the city of Quito.

**Participants.** To recruit participants, I established initial contact with friends and family during the first months of 2019. I used a snowball technique to identify potential interviewees. I started with an alumnus from an institution that I attended during school and high school. I asked each potential participant, and some of my relatives, friends, and acquaintances, to give me names of people who knew about *El Duende* and lived in a certain area of the city (north, south, center). I then visited different places in the city to reach interviewees, making sure that they came from backgrounds that could be as different as possible. I searched for differences in gender, age, ethnic and racial identification, religious beliefs, economic status, and place of residence. This was expected to add richness and diversity to the material collected in interviews.

Among the nine participants recruited, four were female and five were male. The range of ages reported was wide: one participant was between the ages of 70 and 80, one was between the ages of 50 and 60, two were between 40 and 50, two were between 30 and 40, and 3 were between the ages of 20 and 30.

In terms of race and ethnicity, among the nine narrators six identified as mestizos, one as indigenous (*kitu*), one as black (*negro*), and one as both *montubio* and *mestizo* (montubios are farmers of the rural coastal area whose racial identity is typically mestizo). In the case of this participant, although he self-identified as montubio and mestizo, he referred to the racial identity of his family as white. His position is illustrative of the complexity of racial and ethnic negotiations of identity in the Ecuadorian context.

Six participants were Catholic, one did not report religious affiliation, one reported Andean cosmovision, and one spiritual believes not associated with any religious organization.

When asked about their economic status, eight replied middle class, regardless of their place of residence (a four-storied house, or a one floor dwelling), and one informant chose not to answer. In 2017, at the International Seminar on Urban Inequalities in Latin America and the Andean Region, Ecuadorian scholar Fernando Carrión stated that 33 percent of the population of the two biggest cities, Quito and Guayaquil, had 50 percent of the country's wealth to their disposition. Ecuador's society is highly classist and elitist, which could be directly related to the participants' answers. Perhaps identifying as middle class is a way of adhering to a status quo and expressing that they do not consider themselves part of the elite or as part of the "others" in society.

In terms of geographical place of residence, two were from the north (who identified as mestizos), two were from the center (who identified as mestizos), three from the south (two identified as mestizos and one as *kitu)*, and two from outside the "metropolitan area" (these identified as *montubio* and black).

**The interview**. The in-depth interview was the method of generating data because I wanted to make sure I had structured questions that I could use to meet my research goals, but at the same time allow the subject freedom to discuss other topics if they arose. The interview questions were a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions (see interview guide in Appendix 1) crafted on the basis of my personal experience growing up in Ecuador, information from scholarly sources regarding the legend of *El Duende*, and primary and secondary sources regarding the situation of women in Ecuador.

Before I conducted interviews in Ecuador, I piloted my interview guide and revised it. Once in Quito, I conducted one interview of about one hour with each participant. The interviews took place in Spanish, for I am fluent in this language, which is my native tongue. I provided an "Informed Consent for Interviews" (see Appendix 2) in Spanish and explained to each one of the participants the conditions for their voluntary participation. Participants were not provided monetary compensation for their participation. I recorded the conversation with a digital audio recorder and a video camera with the permission of the participant. The interviews were conducted at the time and location of the participants' choosing. Some were in my family house, others took place at their own place of residence, and one took place at the Guayllabamba

Metropolitan Zoo. Regarding the data safety, recorded conversations and field notes are being kept in a locked safe place. Only I have access to the notes and audio recordings.

In addition to conducting the interviews, throughout my stay in Quito I visited bookstores such as Mr Books, Abya Ayala, Librería Studium, and universities such as Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Universidad Central, and Universidad Salesiana to find literature on *El Duende*, feminism, folklore, and oral tradition. I also had several informal conversations in the streets, markets, and stores around the city regarding *El Duende* as a form of informal triangulation of data.

## Data Analysis: Discourse Analysis

Once I interviewed and collected the recorded materials, I transcribed them and coded the transcripts paying attention to stories, narratives, linguistic choices, and omissions that reference beliefs and actions linked to expectations of gender roles and gender violence. I used a deductive and inductive approach to coding, mindful of the research questions and theoretical lens stated but also allowing room for other stories and narratives that would emerge in people's accounts of the folktale. In particular, during the deductive coding process I focused on gender, race, and ethnicity as categories of analysis. There is a clear theme of gender in the discourses that circulate in the culture, which is the reason that I chose to explore it, But I also coded for race and ethnicity as relevant categories. After analyzing recurrent narratives, the next interpretive text was to relate them to larger social discourses on gender operating through the history of Ecuador and to contemporary conditions for women.

# <u>Chapter 3</u>

## The Oral Histories of *El Duende*

In this section, I present the oral histories of the narrators to highlight the answer to the first research question: What oral histories of *El Duende* emerged in participants' narratives? Depending on everyone's beliefs and cosmology, *El Duende* means something different.  However, it is interesting to note that several participants stated that for them *El Duende* is a real being. Furthermore, although some narrators stated that they believe this character is part of a folktale, all narrators reported that either they, or a close relative, had actually seen *El Duende*. However, the purpose of my analysis is not to determine the real existence of the character. My analysis aims to explore how the characterization of *El Duende,* and the stories told by the narrators enact particular understandings of gendered behaviors in Ecuadorian society. In this section, I present the oral histories of the narrators in summary form.

These narrators conveyed the stories about *El Duende* told to them by relatives during their childhood. Across gender, race, class, and religious affiliations of the narrators, the stories recalled were quite similar in the characterization of *El Duende*, his motives, and the meaning of this oral tradition. The following are the profiles of narrators and their stories about *El Duende*, as reported at the time of interviews in summer of 2019.

### Cristina Gordón

Cristina Gordón is a 23-year-old mestizo woman who said she is Catholic by tradition but does not follow any specific creed or religion. She works at the city's Guayllabamba Zoo, in the public communication department.  Gordón studied social communication and has a bachelor's degree in journalism, with experience in the

production of content for digital and traditional media and the management of social networks. In her interview, she told me about the stories her grandmother used to tell her about her own life, ghosts, fantasy, and animal mythology. For example, the grandmother would say that one should not look at an owl's eyes because they would steal your soul. Her grandmother would tell her other scary stories such as the tale of *La Llorona.*[5]

She asserts that there are many stories about *El Duende*, but the most known is that of a tiny green man with a big hat who dwells in a tree (the type of tree varies according to the region). Although she personally thinks the character is a myth and does not exist, she reported that the first time she heard about *El Duende* was at school, when someone said that they had seen *El Duende*. When she went home and asked her mother about it, her mother told her that it is a legend, the legend of an animal who lives underneath the stones, has a big hat, and is always looking for girls with light hair and light eyes. She warned her that if the girl sees him, then he takes the girl away, and they never come back. The narrator also conveyed the version of the folktale in which *El Duende* goes after white women, with light, long hair and light-colored eyes. She was told that if a girl is younger than 15 years old and a virgin, *El Duende* was going to show up before her.

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[5] *La Llorona* is the story about a mother who drowned her own children out of revenge, because she felt unloved by her husband. She then killed herself and wanders eternally at night, looking for her children. However, like El Duende's, this is another story with different versions and counternarratives.

Another story told to Gordón when by her uncle, when she was a child, was that *El Duende* dwelled in a tall avocado tree next to her grandmother's house. There is a story that during nights when the moon is visible, if you look at the top of the trees and you see *El Duende*, he will then materialize on your shoulder. Her grandmother used to pass a candle around her as a mean of protection, a symbolic action that is tied to Catholic belief. For her, believing in *El Duende* has to do with age. The story was ingrained in children to tell them what they should or shouldn't do. In this case, it meant that little girls were not supposed to go out alone or at nighttime. She thinks it also has to do with culture, since in Ecuador the legend is very old and is present in the collective unconscious of the people.

**Carlos Lastra**

Lastra is a 32-year-old, black male who identifies as Catholic. He works at a clinical laboratory in Quito. He is from the town of Cotacachi in the Imbabura province. Lastra comes from a "humble" family. He grew up in the Intag valley in Imbabura, where there is a lot of vegetation, and he was involved in agriculture. When he was a child, *El Duende* was real for him and for his grandparents. In the community where he lived during childhood, *El Duende* was a part of the everyday life. He said that he heard it would appear to people in the valley, and they would say that there was a reason why *El Duende* appeared or showed up to that particular person. Lastra does not think this is only a children's story since his grandfather would tell him how *El Duende* appeared to other elderly people, as well. He thinks in the city it has become more of a tale to tell children how to behave.

Lastra said that people in the rural areas would arrange their machetes in the form of a cross to scare away *El Duende*. They would also tell him that *El Duende* was afraid of oxen because of their horns. This is the reason why, at night, they would walk with an ox in front of them. *El Duende* was described to Lastra as a small being with a big hat and dressed in black; other people would describe him as dressing in striking colors such as red, with big teeth and big ears, and hairy. Lastra thinks that *El Duende* transformed himself depending on the moment and which person he wanted to engage with. Lastra's friend told him that he fought *El Duende* in his sleep, and when he woke up, he saw that he had scratches on his skin.

Lastra also knows the story of *El Duende* in which he tries to take women and chases beautiful women and girls. These women were described as women with long hair and green eyes. So, women would avoid going out at night and would cut their hair short. He also heard of a female *Duende* who followed drunk men, or men who spend too much time at their work and neglect their families or are womanizers (*que se dan mucho al trabajo, que son mujeriegos*). He was told that the female *duende* was also small. On whether *El Duende* is female or male, Lastra thinks it is the same *Duende* transforming itself depending on the objective to achieve.

**Fernanda Figueroa**

Figueroa is a 33-year-old *mestiza* who identifies as Catholic. She is the vice principal of a Salesian primary school named after the Italian saint Don Bosco. She believed in *El Duende* when she was a child and now believes it is a story told to children to stop them from causing mischief. For her, it was part of a larger repertoire of stories told to children to teach about norms, such as the one told to her, that if she pointed her

finger at a rainbow, her finger would rot. The purpose was to teach her not to point at things or people, because it is considered rude. Figueroa had heard the idea that *El Duende* had a big hidden treasure, which, I suggest, could point to a similarity with leprechauns.

Figueroa said her mother told her the story of *El Duende*, and about how she personally saw him. She described him as ugly, old, green, not friendly, wrinkled, with long dirty nails, nice shoes, and a big hat. Her mother said that when she told her story to other people, other people confirmed that it was indeed *El Duende*. Figueroa´s grandparents had a hacienda and for the holidays her mother would go visit them. She would always see *El Duende* when she went there, always beckoning her with a finger. He would only follow her when she went to the hacienda. She was told that *El Duende* goes after girls who are alone. People also told her that he presented himself to her because she had long hair and long eyelashes. Thus, people would advise her to modify her appearance. Since she would see *El Duende* every time she went to see her grandparents, they cut her hair.

**Johnny Zambrano**

Zambrano is a 48-year-old, montubio man who identified his religion as Catholic. He works in Quito´s Guayllabamba Zoo. He is an environmental educator, in charge of guiding nightly "zafaris" in which he tells children about *El Duende*, and how they should protect the forest because he is an inhabitant of it. He told me that his cousin was haunted by *El Duende* as a girl, and that she would even wake up with bruises. He said that *El Duende* is always looking for a female companion and had fallen in love with his cousin. It was only when she got married that *El Duende* stopped chasing her. He has

never seen him, but he believes that he is real. He still tells the story of *El Duende* to his own child but changes details to include angels and fantastic elements, so that the story is not scary for his child.

Zambrano´s father, who lived in the coastal area's countryside (Chone), would tell him the story of *El Duende* and described him as small, with a big nose, big ears, and wrinkles, and wearing a big hat (*pava).* He had big shoes, few teeth, and he limped because he wore boots. He went after children who misbehaved.

However, he has also heard the story of *El Duende* as a single man who looks for women because there is no *La Duenda*. *El Duende* appeared to his cousin, who was white with light-colored eyes. Zambrano said: "people in the coastal countryside were very pretty, white, my father´s race was white." *El Duende* goes after pretty, single, young white virginal with long hair. Therefore, *El Duende* followed his cousin because he fell in love. The family would put garlic in the house to stop *El Duende* from coming in, but he would come in through the window and lie in bed with her. The family's solution for her (she was 18 at the time) was that she had to get married.

Zambrano also told me that women in the countryside would wear their hair long because parents didn't allow girls to cut their hair. He said that parents who did not have enough to pay their debts would promise their daughters to *El Duende* in exchange of money. If they were not able to pay of their debts, *El Duende* would come around. But since he does not like strong smells, or "weird things," if parents want to get rid of him, mothers would make a mix of different herbs and substances until they become a cream and put it all around their child. They would create a sort of cream and put it on the girl´s head along with the feathers of various chickens. Then, the mothers would tell *El*

*Duende*: "If you want to take my child, you must guess what animal this is." He would then give up and go away.

**Betty Loaiza**

Loaiza is a 41-year-old *mestiza* who identifies as Catholic. She is a language teacher in the Jesuit school San Gabriel in Quito. Her father is from a province called El Oro, from the Zaruma *canton,*[6] and her mother is from the province called Loja, from the Catacocha *cantón*. For her, *El Duende* is a folk story that has been passed through generations to tell children what they should or should not do. The main story she knows is that *El Duende* wanted to take pretty women away, as was told by her grandmother. However, she told me that the children she works with no longer know about these stories.

Loaiza´s grandmother told her the story of when she saw *El Duende*, when she lived in the coastal area's countryside (Machala), where people say they have seen it. People would say that he appears usually to pretty women who have long hair. He would sometimes leave golden coins behind for those women. Her grandmother had long hair, and she had seen *El Duende*. He was a really small man, old, with a big hat. He limped because he wore boots. She said he is a green little monster who is either the devil or the son of the devil. In order to get rid of him, it is necessary to pray and to use holy water; to throw the water at him, sprinkling it in the form of a cross. However, Loaiza asserted that there are other legends in the highland of *duendes* that scare men, and that the way to keep them away is to show them a crucifix or a rosary.

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[6] In Ecuador, these are administrative second level sub-divisions, smaller than a province but bigger than a parish.

## Irma Gómez Walfanderg

Gómez Walfanderg is 53-year-old who identifies his ethnicity as Kitus.[7] She explained to me that she is Catholic because of her parent's beliefs and also follows Andean spiritual practices rooted in indigenous cosmovisions by choice and conviction. She is the principal of a school in Quito called Tránsito Amaguaña, which is located inside a market in the south of Quito. This school caters to children of migrant families from the rural areas who speak Kichwa. Tránsito Amaguaña was an indigenous leader who fought for the rights of her community and of indigenous women. When she was growing up, Gómez Walfanderg identified as a *mestiza*, but she now believes that the mestizo identity is a way of whitewashing Ecuador´s indigenous roots. She married an indigenous man and now identifies as indigenous. When she was a child, her grandmother would tell her that *El Duende* takes misbehaving (malcriados) children away ("se los lleva"). She thinks *El Duende* is a good spirit that appears to people to remind them that they should not do harm to anyone, but people say he is bad, so they behave well. Gómez Walfanderg believes *El Duende* is real since her son has seen him since he was a little child, and because it is part of the indigenous cosmovision.

"My first child has some kind of gift," Gómez told me. He was four years old when she realized that he was talking alone. Psychologists said that he had an imaginary friend and that it would eventually go away. Because the family did not finish building the first floor of the house where they lived right away for lack of money, she said her son would tell her that he could see *El Duende* around the house. At first, she thought

[7] Indigenous group who is also known for inhabiting what is now Quito before the Incas.

that he was “crazy.” She would ask him: What does *El Duende* tell you? Her son would tell her that he did not tell him anything but was calling him to play.

Two years later, when they had finished building the rooms for the house, her husband's nephew came to live with them. Her nephew arrived at the house at midnight. Early the next morning he began to dream and, subsequently, had to go outside the house to vomit. He almost died. He told them that he had seen *El Duende*. Gómez Walfanderg’s son then told the nephew that the episode he suffered was because he was sleeping where *El Duende* slept.

Gómez Walfanderg spoke with a Yachaj or Andean shaman who told her that her son had a talent. The Yachaj said that they should not tell his son that he is crazy because that would make him close his third eye.[8] However, after he turned twelve, she never heard him say again that he could see *El Duende*. When he grew up, she asked him if he had really seen *El Duende* as a child. Gómez Walfanderg’s son told her that he had seen him, and that he has a red tunic, is small, and is “like a child, but he is not a child.” He also told Gómez Walfanderg that she has a *duende* at her house who protects her.

**Guido Díaz**

Díaz is 73 years old, mestizo, with no religious affiliation. He is a retired professor from the School of Architecture of the Universidad Central. He is the ex-director of the Metropolitan Patrimony Institute, an architect, and a writer. Nowadays he is the director of the Muñoz Miño Museo y Galerías in the center of Quito. He believes *El*

[8] A Hindu/Buddhist concept that refers to the ability to see what is beyond the physical world.

*Duende* to be a myth, but he asserted that all myths are constructed out of real events. He believes that *El Duende* was a pre-Hispanic character to which the Catholic Church added elements because the way of escaping his power is to pray or by showing him a cross. Díaz asserted that one of the goals of the Church was to stimulate guilt and the presence of the devil. *El Duende* is a being that provokes sin, and at the same time, his presence is a warning to fight against what he is telling people to do. According to Díaz, in these stories, women are treated as extensions of the teachings in the Bible, and they play the role assigned to them by religious ideology. In this ideology, women provoke the diabolic being, but are also expected to live as spiritual beings in the Catholic sense. For instance, Díaz referred to the belief that women incarnate the image of the "mother" who is associated with the Virgin Mary while also being associated with sin, as they are seen as temptresses.

Díaz said that his great aunt would say that if *El Duende* appeared on top of the oven, then they couldn't use it, or that if something went on wrong around the house, she would blame the maids and *El Duende*. For example, if a meal did not taste good, she would say that they let themselves be fooled by a demon or by *El Duende.* Díaz also told me that the maids also believed that that was the case. Diaz was told that young women, especially, were supposed to avoid him. He thinks that this was perhaps a way of maintaining the purity of women, by not letting them go out. He mentioned as an opinion that several pregnant women accused *El Duende* of being the father of their child because that was easier than explaining who the father was.

Díaz wrote a piece about *El chuzalongo* after he interviewed an indigenous man who worked for his grandmother. In this story, the man, Don Francisco Topa Atauchi,

told him that *El chuzalongo* dwells in the bell tower of the church of San Diego. Topa also told him that *El chuzalongo* might appear there laughing out loud after impregnating a nun and then jump to the main square. Then, running with his long penis tied on the shoulder, he would get under the *paila* (sort of a large frying pan) where Doña Dioselina cooks the *fritada*[9] and *tamales*, because from there he goes straight to hell, where he lives.

**Diego Ríos**

Ríos is a 25-year-old Catholic mestizo. He is an MA student in Spain, where he studies literature and social sciences; he considers himself "a person who had the privilege of having a good education." He told me that growing up, his cultural background was "quite rich," at least on the maternal side of the family, because they are from the Amazon region of Ecuador. His grandparents are academics and encouraged him and his brother to be more critical and to face any situation. He believes that *El Duende* is only a story. His art teacher would tell him stories about *El Duende* when he was at school and his classmates believed that *El Duende* lived in the school.

Although stating that he would love to think that *El Duende* is real ("me encantaría pensar que es real"), he told me of the time when he was with his cousins in the Amazon region of Ecuador and, on the branches of a big tree next to his grandmother's house, they saw a shadow. The sun was on the other side of the tree, so that what they could see was only the shadows of the leaves, and in one of the branches they saw two little feet that were swinging. They looked like "perfect human feet." He and his cousins got scared and ran away. He told me that after considering the event

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[9] An Ecuadorian typical dish whose main ingredient is diced pork ribs.

using reason, he suspects the shadow was that of a monkey, but he is not entirely ready to say that it was just a monkey.

**Andrés Trujillo**

Trujillo is a 22-year-old mestizo who identifies as Catholic. He is an engineer auxiliary in a construction company. He says that although his aunt and his grandmother say they have seen *El Duende*, he would have to have a direct encounter with this character himself in order to consider it as real. He thinks that perhaps in previous generations, people used to believe in these types of stories more than nowadays, and perhaps that induced them to think that they saw *El Duende.* He has rarely heard his friends tell these stories but believes it is a story that is a part of our culture. He thinks that *El Duende* mainly follows girls, because he has not heard the story of *El Duende* harassing boys. His grandmother once told him that he chased pretty girls, but mainly those who had misbehaved.

His aunt told him the first story her heard about *El Duende.* She told him that one night she went to the bathroom, when the bathrooms used to be located outside the house, and saw a silhouette that turned out to be a small man with a big pointy hat, big ears in the form of horns, and red eyes. She felt the red eyes following her everywhere, and she ran away, but felt that she was being chased by him. She was twelve years. She told Trujillo that she thought *El Duende* wanted to take her away. Her mother, Trujillo's grandmother, told her that the encounter with *El Duende* was caused by the fact that she had fought with her mother earlier that day. Thus, *El Duende* wanted to take her away for the misbehavior of fighting with her mother.

Trujillo's grandmother lived in the countryside and once, when she was a child, she was sent to do run some errands, but took too long and night was already beginning to fall. Before leaving home, she was given garlic and a machete to carry with her. The garlic would keep *El Duende* away, and she had to bang the machete against the rocks to frighten *El Duende* along the way. Because *El Duende* takes children away and makes them get lost, Trujillo's grandmother saw him. He was less than a meter tall, had a big hat that was bent at the tip, big eyes, wrinkly skin, and he was hairy (he had hair even in his ears). He was dressed in clothes that were the same color (she didn't specify the color) and did not wear shoes: she could see his toes. She did not specify the color of his skin but said that he looked just like a small person. Hence Trujillo assumes he looked mestizo. His grandmother told his great grandmother, and she was told to pray. He also recalls being told that the girl was taken to church afterwards.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Several noteworthy patterns in the oral histories of *El Duende* shared by participants surfaced in this analysis. An analysis of such patterns and a discussion considering the concepts of oral history and oral tradition, myth, and monster theory allow for the interpretation of the meanings of the narratives given by participants in this study.

First, eight interviewees mentioned that someone in their family, or in one case the narrator himself, had seen or encountered *El Duende*. In only one case, the informant heard the story outside the family circle (in her school) and then asked her mother about the myth. I would argue that the telling of the recount of this encounters become communicative acts that enter family history as events and mark the experiences of

narrators and their relatives—regardless of whether the character is seen as real or not by the narrator. Second, this collection of oral histories and traditions also shows how the story of *El Duende* is associated with a social function: to tell children and women how to behave. This pragmatic function was mentioned by participants who referred to the story itself as a tool for disciplining children (and women, to a lesser degree; and, in one instance, a misbehaving man). In this way, the participants locate the folktale within contemporary everyday practices in Ecuadorian culture. Third, it is also noteworthy that participants knew one or more versions of the folktale, and all have heard about the versions where *El Duende* that chases women. The chase seeks to correct or punish misbehavior or to court or sexually harass women. Fourth, one of my informants asserted that *El Duende* could be a representation of an indigenous man. In this sense, *El Duende* would be an example of who men are not supposed to be. Thus, the association of *El Duende* with discourses on gender and race is apparent in the narratives.

Fifth, I argue that the oral tradition of this character is also oral history for most of my narrators. Most of my narrators asserted that, regardless of if they believe in *El Duende* or not, that the stories of encounters with *El Duende* had been reported as real by one or more family members. One informant mentioned how *El Duende* was part of the everyday life of his community, in a different area of the Andes. For example, it made women cut their hair or not go out of their house late at night so *El Duende* would not chase them.

In addition, the oral histories and traditions profiled here relate to Pattanaik's definition of myth. According to this author, a myth is real for some and that is a subjective truth of people. His definition is then that "mythology is the study of a

subjective truth of people that is communicated through stories, symbols and rituals. Unlike fantasy that is nobody's truth, and history that seeks to be everybody's truth, mythology is somebody's truth". So, in this sense, *El Duende* is real for some of the informants or the informant's relatives. As the narratives of participants suggest, this myth has been passing on through oral history through generations of Ecuadorians. This myth is not only an important part of Ecuadorian oral tradition, but of some individual families' oral histories.

In addition, Pattanaik acknowledges that there has been a colonial association with myth, and to reject this connotation, he urges us to not get rid of the word but to redefine it to accommodate non-religious, religious, and secular beliefs. The myth of *El Duende* is associated for some with religious teachings, meaning that he is associated with the devil: to get rid of him one must pray or show him religious imagery, primarily Catholic. In addition, the participants' narratives also show different meanings when seen in the light of an indigenous cosmovision. As we saw earlier, for the son of one of the informants, *El Duende* is a spirit who took care of his mother and the house. Or as my interview with a Shaman in Otavalo shows, he sees *El Duende* as a spirit that chases women but also as one that may chase men who misbehave. Likewise, one informant suggested that *El Duende* is a single entity that shifts gender (male or female) and character according to the situation and objective presence.

A close reading of the narratives of participants, in the light of monster theory, shows why "monsters," in this case mythical characters, are hard to classify. *El Duende* as described by narrators, is one of these hybrid beings that are sometimes part human, part animal, part demon, blended with the supernatural. As Jeremy Cohen puts it, a

monster is a mode of cultural discourse, and a culture's boundaries, such as time or geography, are "imbricated in the construction of this monster" (ix). Thus, a monster is a category of a culture that influences identity formation, since it is an extreme version of marginalization, a resistant Other, and an embodiment of difference understood through process and movement (Cohen x).

One of the most, if not the most, salient physical characteristic attributed to *El Duende* is his small size. The meaning of this characterization is worth analyzing. Anne Lake Prescott has written about giants and pygmies in Europe. Asserting that in Europe giants and pygmies appear together in stories (i.e. Gargantua and Tom Thumb), she raises a question about the relation of size to status. Taking the example of the Spanish Empire, in the play *The Queene of Arragon* (1640) by William Haginton, a servant named Bumsilldora meets a dwarf with Spanish ancestry. When "asked about his family, he replies, 'My Ancestors were Giants, Madam. Giants/Pure Spanish, who disdained to mingle with/ The blood of Goth or Moore'" (Prescott qtd. in Cohen 85). However, he claims that his size is small because of the decay of time and the effect of the "barren hills" of Biskay.  Thus, *El Duende* as seen with Caucasian features at the time of the conquest might had been a character used to hide a mixed descent in America (Arcos Guartambel). *El Duende*'s stature could have been a symbol of the "decay of time" and of the mixing of races.

One of my informants asserted, however, that *El Duende*'s stature could be perhaps linked to an indigenous man's stature, making *El Duende* a representation of an indigenous man. In this way *El Duende* would be a process of constant reconstruction

and change linking the time in which it was created, and the time in which it was told bringing the past and present together (Cohen ix).

Evidently, there are different strands of the narrative. One of them focuses on the story of *El Duende* that looks for children who misbehave or disobey the parents. In this way, *El Duende* is a figure used to tell children how they should be acting, according to their parents. Alternatively, in the north of Ecuador there is the belief that *El Duende* is a singing and dancing being. Hence, at the end, *El Duende* belongs to their narrators and their oral tradition and history. Place, historic process, and personal history play an important role in how the mystic being is perceived.

Further, it seems interesting that all narrators reported that they first heard about *El Duende* as children, and the stories were told primarily by adult female relatives (the mother, the aunt, or the grandmother). In one case, the narrator said a female teacher told the story to him when he was a child in school. In another case, it was an indigenous source that told the story to an adult narrator. These narratives suggest the role of female storytellers within the family to perpetuate the myth. In the case of the narrators that assert that their female relatives saw *El Duende*, it could be that adult women used the story to teach a lesson (and maybe they did not see or encountered the character as real). In any case, what matters is the function of the tale and the discourses it reinforces through time.

Lastly, the participants shared understandings of the functions of the folktale are significant. Four narrators referred to it as a story told to children to keep them away from danger or from misbehaving. Four narrators spoke of this as a story told to girls to keep them from moving freely or from danger of male sexual harassment and assault.

One of them mentioned it as a tale that portrays the reality of women, and as an example of what should not be done.  Along these lines, the oral histories suggest the overlapping discourses on gender, race, and sexuality that will be further discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

# Chapter 4

## Discourses on Gender Violence and Gender Expectations and the Social Conditions of Women in Ecuador

In this chapter, I focus on the analysis of the participants' narratives and understandings of *El Duende* to elucidate the meanings of this folktale and how they reproduce dominant gender discourses and how these discourses relate to the history and the social conditions of women in Ecuador. More specifically, this chapter will address the following research questions: First, what discourses about gender violence and gender role expectations are constructed in the participants' accounts of the folktale of *El Duende*? Second, how do the narratives about *El Duende* relate to social conditions in the colonial and contemporary history of Quito?

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the most salient dominant discourses about gender expectations and violence enacted in the narratives about *El Duende*: the discourse on women's physical appearance and the elevation of whiteness and chastity as ideals of beauty; the dichotomy between males as active, aggressive agents and women as passive, vulnerable objects; the reduction of women to objects of male competition, possession, and personal property; the normalization of male violence against women and the blaming of the victim of violence; and the use of male power to discipline women and regulate their everyday life. This discussion concludes with the application of monster theory to the narratives analyzed in order to highlight the social meanings of the overlapping discourses on gender expectations and violence.

The second section of this chapter examines how the narratives of participants about the folktale of *El Duende* relate to discourses and social conditions for women in

colonial and neocolonial settings. I will argue that, in four principal ways, the narratives echo discourses on gender expectations that stem from social structures and Catholic religious ideologies that have endured since colonial times.  First, whiteness is an ideal of female beauty that reproduces a racial and social hierarchy inherited from colonial society and, evidently, still reverberates in contemporary society. Second, this beauty standard is linked to sexual and racial expectations that involve a paradox: women are supposed to aspire to be as white as they can and as beautiful as they can but, at the same, time they are supposed to hide it in order protect their lives from sexual aggression.

Third, the narratives of *El Duende* relate to gender discourses that, shaped by Catholic ideologies, reduce the choices allowed to women to two: religious devotion or marriage. In indirect, subtle ways, the myth echoes these gendered ideologies when it privileges the notion that to avoid *El Duende*'s aggression, single women have to either pray or marry a man. Fourth, the folktale ultimately could suggest that religious rituals—rather than the modern legal system or organized social or collective action—are the options women choose or engage with in the prospect of violence rather than denouncing or confronting sexual violence and gender violence directly or through legal action.

In the third section of the chapter, I examine how the narratives also relate to current social conditions for women society in meaningful ways. First, contemporary high rates of sexual crimes and misogynist public discourse in Ecuador signal a social climate where women are constantly under threat of gender violence and where the folktale of *El Duende* retains symbolic power. Second, in regard to racial discourses reproduced by the folktale, I will discuss how narrators and their stories engage with racial prejudice—primarily against indigenous identity—in today's society. Lastly, I will

examine how narratives and counter-narratives of *El Duende* relate to contemporary society through construction of multiple discourses on culture, commodification and environmental justice.

**Discourses on Gender Violence and Gender Expectations**

In this section, I argue that participants' narratives relate to discourses on gender expectations and violence against women in ways that interrelate dominant ideas about beauty, femininity, sexuality, with gendered identities, male domination, normalization of violence against women, and the power of men and society to discipline and control women. On the basis of an analysis of stories, linguistic choices, and omissions in the participants' narratives about *El Duende*, I show how, in general, the re-telling of the folktale perpetuates five dominant discourses about gender expectations and gender violence. I also discuss some of the counter-narratives that, even if not as salient or frequent, emerged in some of the accounts.

Most of the narratives, in effect, reproduce dominant discourses about gender that perpetuate traditional gender expectations and seem to justify male domination, aggression, and sexual violence against women. I identify five discursive patterns as follows.

First, one way in which the folktales recalled by participants reproduce dominant ideas about gender expectations is through the discourse on women's physical appearance and the elevation of whiteness and chastity as ideals of beauty. In seven out of nine interviewees' narratives, the narrators recalled the version of the folktale in which *El Duende* chases and looks for ("persigue," "busca") young, single, long-haired women considered beautiful ("bonitas") by society's standards. From the descriptions provided

by participants of what constitutes a beautiful woman, one can establish the expectations of feminine beauty and behavior that emerges. The narratives reproduce the emphasis on women's physical appearance and suggest an ideal of what is considered beautiful in Ecuadorian society. This ideal places whiteness as a core value (e.g. women with long, straight hair and light-colored eyes preferred). The narratives also support a discourse that links female beauty with the idea of young age and sexual purity. *El Duende* does not appear to every single beautiful woman, but usually to a girl or young woman who has never been with a man sexually.

A second, interrelated discourse on gender expectations that is reproduced in participants' narratives is the one that establishes a dichotomy between males as active, aggressive agents and women as passive, vulnerable objects. On the one hand, *El Duende* is given agency and power to chase, harass, and sexually abuse women with impunity. On the other hand, the folktales portray women as victims and vulnerable. In most instances, women in the narratives are passive victims who would have to run or hide—but never overpower—from the actions of *El Duende*. For example, one participant commented that the folktale's message is that a beautiful woman, given society standards, cannot defend herself against a tiny being.

Third, the narratives activate the discourse that reduces women to objects of male competition, possession, and personal property. For example, a narrative recounted suggested that in order to avoid falling prey to *El Duende*, the women would be forced to look for a partner or marry. This echoed an enduring discourse on women as property of men in two main ways: by describing single, unmarried women are objects available for a man's taking and easy prey, vulnerable to abuse; and assigning males as owners and

guardians of women's bodies and lives. Along these lines, in another narrative the aggression of *El Duende* against a woman became worse when she found a boyfriend. Since this relationship with a boyfriend signified a period of time in which her "purity" was in danger, *El Duende*'s violence increased for she could become an outsider to society by breaking gender expectations of virginity and purity. A parallel notion of women as objects of possession in a patriarchal society resonated in a narrative of how indebted parents would sell their daughters to *El Duende* in exchange for money.

In the narratives, male possessive hold on women is a form of subjugation that seems to be justified by unstated but underlying assumptions about gender expectations of roles and identities: women are passive objects available for male competition and possession; women do not have agency to combat their aggressors on their own through individual or collective action; women should live in fear of their aggressors; and, therefore, only a male partner can keep them safe from the abuse of another man. These assumptions not only justify sexual violence and exploitation of women but also deny subjectivity, free choice, and sexual autonomy to women.

Fourth, a discourse on the normalization of male violence against women and the blaming the victim of violence is also operating in the narratives —based on the stereotypical gender expectations such as the ones mentioned above. This is best illustrated by choice of verbs and words used by narrators to describe *El Duende*'s behavior toward beautiful women. In seven out of nine interviewees' narratives, the narrators recalled the version of the folktale in which *El Duende* chases women considered beautiful by society's standards. The use of euphemistic descriptions of male sexual violence as well as the omission of denunciatory or condemning words about *El*

*Duende*'s behavior, I argue, normalize violence against women and have important connotations when it comes the association of gender expectations and violence. For example, when referring to *El Duende*'s actions, narrators used words like "looks for" women ("busca" or "persigue"), "he takes them" ("se las lleva"), and "they are not seen again" ("no se las vuelve a ver"). When asked to specify what does *El Duende* do to the women, most informants asserted that they did not know. Only one narrator said that it is not hard to imagine what *El Duende* does to these women, but there was no explicit or direct reference to the link between female beauty and sexuality, male aggression, and violence against women.

If it is virginity and beauty *El Duende* covets, it is easy to guess what happens to the women that have been taken away. However, that is the part of the story that has been omitted, maybe because this part was considered indecent or breaking a rule of modesty. Regardless of the reason, this omission or ellipsis could signal a culture of silence in terms of sexual violence; it also communicates the idea that there is a looming silence awaiting women who are victims of sexual violence.

In effect, omission or absence of words like "abduction" or "disappearance," "harassment" "abuse," "rape," or "murder" in the discourse is notable, even when the connotations are quite strong. This is most evident in the case when *El Duende*'s actions against a woman, without her consent and against her will, can be described as physical and sexual abuse. As stated in one narrative, *El Duende* fell in love with a woman and would climb through the window of her room, lie next to her, and wake up naked. The woman became thinner and *El Duende* would sometimes beat her up if there were other rivals interested in her romantically. The euphemisms that masked sexual harassment

and aggression, and the silences around the denunciation of violence against women show, I would argue, the normalization or naturalization of these crimes against women. Part of this discourse of normalization of male violence is the idea, also recurrent in the narratives, that harassment and violence towards women is provoked by women. For example, disobedient women or those who are not modest enough to hide their beauty are chased by *El Duende* because of their own actions.

Normalization of male aggressive behavior and violence toward women is also reproduced in a narrative that characterizes *El Duende* as a lonely bachelor in search of a partner. Since there is no female *duenda*, he looks for women. This narrative suggests a sort of pity for his loneliness, despite the sexual aggression he directs toward women. In this view, *El Duende* is someone who imposes rules but is not by default evil. And despite of his association with the devil, some narratives described him as a sort of rule keeper that subordinates women to his will. One of the narrators noted the idea that *El Duende* only marries once, meaning that he is not an insatiable being in terms of sexual partners, but he is insatiable in terms of the woman he chooses. These characterizations naturalize male identity as violent and in control of women, and normalize the acceptance of the abuses perpetrated on women.

Fifth, the telling of the folktales speaks of the use of male power to discipline women and regulate their everyday life. Most of the narratives refer to the notion that women, afraid to attract the attention of *El Duende*, would cut their hair or tie it in a ponytail or bun to minimize its display; they would not go out at night; or they would stop frequenting places where *El Duende* might show up. As one narrator asserted, where he lived, parents did not allow women to cut their hair short. However, they were

supposed to put it up to avoid *El Duende*, to keep their hair combed and tied back. The references to these forms of control signified that women should hide or disguise their beauty and show modesty—another coveted quality—while maintaining the emphasis on taking care of her appearance. If they were to cut their hair, they would not be considered as feminine as the women around them. This could make them less suitable for marriage and the fulfillment of the role expected of women. In these accounts, we find the perennial paradoxes faced by women in society: what is considered to make them beautiful is also dangerous for them. Not only that, but women are forced to follow the rules of a society that tries to regulate their bodies and what they are allowed and not allowed to do.

I will note that these five salient discursive patterns in the narratives about *El Duende* are, occasionally, disrupted and complemented by counter-narratives. For instance, one narrator asserted that since *El Duende* is seen as a terrible being, this tale does not show sexism but, instead, denounces it. The idea conveyed by the narrator is that because there is sexism and violence in society, *El Duende* portrays the reality of women as a way of denouncing it. This narrative, however, was not reproduced in any other of the interviews.

Other narrators evoked alternative gender stories of *El Duende.* In these stories, *El Duende* chases and disciplines men (not women) or protects men. For example, there is a narrative in which *El Duende* chases men who drink too much or are womanizers. Interestingly, Palma has found stories in Colombia in which the *duende* is friends with the drunk. He defends them from “the spirits and from lazy women who chase them at night” (104). Another version of the narrative describes *El Duende* as a regulating

presence that appears to both men and women when they have not been acting morally. Yet another variation of the myth is that which holds that *El Duende* is a being that can be female or male depending on the objectives pursued. There is also the story of a female *duende* who follows womanizers and drunken men who neglect family duties. Although less salient—and certainly not conforming a dominant discourse—these counter-narratives are important because they suggest the rich interpretive repertoire and changing cultural meanings associated with the folktale.

In particular, the story of a female *duende* that follows ill-behaving men can be read as part of a collection of myths that relate specifically to a feminine figure chasing a man. These myths, while alternative to traditional tales of male domination, do not disrupt the dominant discourse on gender expectations and roles. For example, there is *La dama tapada* or the "Hooded Lady." As the name suggests, this is a beautiful, hooded woman who lures drunken men during nighttime through dark streets. She has an enchanting perfume that impacts her male victim. As she leads men, her scent turns into a putrid smell and when men approach her to kiss her, and they discover that her face is decomposing. This narrative is comparable to the myth of sirens, who with their enchanting voices and beauty, lure men into their death. In *Women in the Ancient World,* Niels asserts that these female figures are meaningful in the culture because "it was thought masculine to resist and endure" (149). Thus, the story of *La Dama Tapada* and that of sirens reflect societies' anxiety over the achievement or failure of the goals set for masculinity. In the encounter with a supernatural feminine figure, men meet their doom for not being able to resist beauty. This failure reflects the social anxiety over male domination and their inability to leave a sexual encounter without repercussion. Although

seemingly empowering women over men, I would argue that this type of tale also reproduces dominant discourses about women. After all, it is a beautiful woman who lures men into a dark path with her enchanting scent. In a way, this reinforces the dominant discourse that tells society that a woman's beauty and sexuality are both desired and dangerous. In contrast, in the case of the narrative about the existence of a female *duende*, beauty was not attributed to the character. Furthermore, the power attributed to *la duenda* is limited to the traditional space and role assigned to women: the domestic sphere and the realm of disciplining men regarding their family duties.

**_El Duende_ as a Cultural Symbol: The Application of Monster Theory**

To conclude this chapter, I present an analysis in light of Cohen's monster theory to approach *El Duende* as a cultural symbol that speaks to fears and anxieties that underlie overlapping discourses on gender expectations and violence described above. As proposed by Cohen, monsters stand at the limits of society. In the case of *El Duende,* he stands at the limits of normative expectations of women's behavior by posing a threat to the purity of young women. The narratives seem to relate to the fear and possibility that *El Duende* could turn women into the "other" in society if they would lose the virginity before marriage. Hence the expectation for virgin women to get married young, so that they do not fall prey to a male who, as symbolized in several accounts, may represent or be linked to the devil. In this sense, virginity is dangerous state for young women because it is coveted and, therefore, puts in in danger of sexual abuse and violence. It is considered to be evil to predate on women's purity. In this way, *El Duende* is a cultural symbol that warns us against male violence and domination. However, if we take into account Cohen's proposition that "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire," then *El*

*Duende* would also allude to both men's and women's desire to live their sexuality. In this folktale, women's desires are to be either repressed—through religious dogma contained in the concept of asceticism and repression of one's own wants—or else punished (sexual assault, exploitation, marginalization). In contrast, men's desires go unpunished for, as Cohen states, "the Monster always escapes."

Furthermore, as proposed by the fifth thesis in monster theory, the monster "polices the borders of the possible." Thus, in the narratives of *El Duende*, a woman's exploration of sexuality is policed and punished. Sexual behavior can lead to the labeling of the woman as an outcast. Another punishable deed for women in society is to disobey their parents. Several of the narratives related that *El Duende* looks for young women or girls who have "misbehaved" ("*no se portan bien*") or disobeyed ("*no hicieron caso*"). In one case, *El Duende* had appeared to both mother and child in separate events, and it was passed on by mother to daughter that he had appeared because they had both disobeyed their parents. In another narrative, *El Duende* was blamed for things going wrong around the house, such as the taste of the food prepared, in a time where the kitchen used to be a strictly feminine space. Thus, this looming presence not only polices women's purity, but their ability to perform with ease or success the daily duties conventionally assigned to women.

Lastly, the narratives of participants also seem to support Cohen's proposition that a monster's body—whether *El Duende* or *La Dama Tapada*—is a cultural body: "A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant"

(4). Therefore, the mythological creature, the monster, the cultural construct, is depicting anxieties and projections of the culture itself.

Indeed, *El Duende* is a sign that expresses the anxiety of the society over purity and idealized femininity being tainted before being controlled and regulated within the institution and sacrament of marriage. The remedy for these anxieties is presented in the form of protecting female purity through religious practices of Catholicism or marriage. Religion—rather than the legal system or organized social action—is what allows a woman to escape sexual violence. At the same time, the folktale speaks to social anxiety over the ability of failure of men to meet expectations of masculine behavior as well as the "envy" of a monstrous masculine being who is able to possess the purity of young women with no legal, economic, or moral repercussions.

## Conclusion

In sum, discourses on gender expectations and gender violence underlie the narratives about *El Duende,* and these narratives reproduce dominant ideas about women's ideal of beauty and expectations of gendered behavior and violence. In particular, the virginity or unmarried status is one of the characteristics that make a woman both desirable and vulnerable to a character that is associated with the devil. The dichotomous, gendered traits attributed to women—as passive, vulnerable objects—and to men—as active, aggressive agents—relate to a discourse that normalizes physical violence and expose women to harassment, rape, and other forms of aggression and marginalization. This violence is represented as almost unstoppable, unless women conform to social control of their everyday life through societal expectations like marriage at a young age, religious devotion, and obedience to husband and parents. The

folktale also reinforces social tolerance and even justification of violence against women when, in more subtle ways, it points towards the blaming of the female victim of sexual crimes and to a culture of silence surrounding the denunciation of male aggression and female victimization, and the empowerment of women. *El Duende* is thus a cultural symbol of the social fear and anxiety over, on the one hand, the control of women's bodies, subjectivities, and agency; and, on the other, the ability of men to meet dominant expectations of masculinity.

# Chapter 5

## Discourses on Women and Social Conditions in Colonial and Contemporary Quito

In this section, I analyze more closely how the narratives about *El Duende* relate to social conditions in the colonial and contemporary history of Quito. For this analysis, I draw on postcolonial feminism as a lens that brings attention to the main ways in which gender identity has been influenced by enduring religious discourses linked to Catholicism, racial and class hierarchies, and social conditions of women in Ecuadorian colonial and postcolonial history.

**Colonial legacies.** First, I will discuss how the ideals of female beauty upheld by the folktale and most of its narrators in this study reproduced a racial and social hierarchy inherited from colonial society and, evidently, still operating in contemporary society. As demonstrated in the oral histories presented earlier, all narrators were familiar with the particular story of *El Duende* who chases and threatens young, single, beautiful women. More specifically, when describing the physical traits that made women beautiful, two participants mentioned white skin, one mentioned green eyes, and one "light-colored eyes." There were also references to virginity, big breasts, and blonde hair in participants' description of the physical features of beautiful women targeted by *El Duende*.

In terms of gender and racial hierarchies, the standard portrays what is considered as beautiful in society: a white woman. This discourse tells most Ecuadorian women—*mestizas*, indigenous, black—that whiteness is the goal they should aspire to reach, since this is what is admirable. Furthermore, this discourse promotes the enduring idea that beautiful women are the ones who are worthy of male attention.

If we consider the colonial past of Ecuador, as discussed in the literature review, the folktale of *El Duende* would then be still passing down ideas of beauty and race linked the racial ideology of "purity of blood." According to Gaughran, this concept started in fifteenth century Spain to refer to someone of Christian ancestry. It affected people's social mobility and access to positions of power. Social mobility in colonial times, for people who were not in the dominant *castas* (i.e. Spanish and creoles) was determined by a person's position in the continuum of social categories that included skin color, manner of speaking, clothing, and by the people they surrounded themselves with. Societal pressure pushed people to become as white as the colonial society would allow them to be.

Today in Ecuador there is still an identity negotiation taking place in a context of inequality in terms of power, since there is racism and designated opportunities based on a person's gestures when speaking, traits or language patterns, or the color of *mestizos* whose skin is whiter and whose Spanish is more "neutral" (distanced from indigenous influence) and have more privileges and social mobility.

One narrator who self-identified as *mestizo*, considered that the tale of *El Duende* was created to establish an "us" versus "them" division between indigenous and whites. Since the beauty standard was set to be whiteness, then by this logic indigenous young women would never be kidnapped by *El Duende* as they would not be considered beautiful, nor their race and body type worthy of attention.

Overall, in the tale of *El Duende*, women's whiteness, beauty, and virginity are listed together as traits that made them sexually and socially desirable. This poses the question: are non-virginal, non-white women impure or "not as worthy" of social value

and male attention? If so, this would determine a women's "success" in society, since one of the most conventional gender expectations is that a woman should form a family and bear children.

Secondly, the beauty standard is linked to sexual and racial expectations that involve a paradox: women are supposed to aspire to be as white as they can and as beautiful as they can but, at the same, time they are supposed to hide it in order protect their lives from aggression. The consequences of "immodesty" are that *El Duende* comes after them and makes them vulnerable to his will. This masculine figure, who is almost unstoppable, will harass them, unless they hide their beauty. Otherwise, the boundaries of acceptable behavior in society are transgressed and in that way these women become an "aberration" to the norm—which ends up justifying the monster's persecution.

A third relevant level of analysis is how the narratives of *El Duende* relate to discourses that, shaped by Catholic ideologies, reduce the choices allowed to women to two: religious life or marriage. In indirect, subtle ways, the myth echoes these gendered ideologies when it privileges the notion that to avoid *El Duende*'s aggression, single women have to either pray or marry a man. In both options, purity is incumbent on the repression of their own desires for the sake of fulfilling their social duty. To wit, in the stories of *El Duende*, a single, young woman can escape his harassment by praying and showing the sign of the cross or a rosary, or sprinkling holy water. These practices reproduce the idea that one of the duties of women is to devote themselves to and pass down Catholic beliefs. If praying keeps *El Duende* away, then women would be disseminating religious faith as a form of protection across generations, from grandmothers to mothers, to young daughters. In effect, one male interviewee interpreted

this element in the story in terms of how women have to defend themselves against *El Duende* with the use of religion because they are also expected to pass religious teachings down to their children. Thus, in the folktale, as in society, Catholicism is associated with policing and protecting female sexual purity.

As discussed earlier, the other option available to single women who want to stop *El Duende*'s aggression is to marry a man: only the authority of a man is respected by *El Duende,* and only the sacrament of matrimony and sex within the marriage ensure social respect for a woman. When interpreting the folktale, one narrator mentioned how the folktale speaks to the separation of women in society between those who are mothers and comparable to the Virgin Mary, and those who engage in sexual practices that are not confined to procreation or motherhood. For the latter, punishment and marginalization is the outcome.

The two acceptable choices for single women harassed by *El Duende*—prayer or marriage—are linked to notions of religious duty and self-sacrifice in order to obey parents, husband, and social mores. In the literature review, I noted that women in colonial society were considered admirable if they placed this duty above their own wellbeing. Nowadays, gender ideologies still place duty above wellbeing. After doing research for my literature review, analyzing the narratives generated by participants, and reflecting on my own life experience, I will argue that both colonial women and women in the present time are still expected to dedicate their lives to others and, in terms of their private life, to exert pressure on their senses and their own will. For those practicing Catholicism and other religions, the condemnation of having a sexual life outside of wedlock endures as a controlling ideology. In this sense, the folktale as told by narrators

certainly upholds these controlling ideologies and, ultimately, suggest that Catholic religious rituals—rather than the legal system or organized social action—are the options women have to avoid or escape sexual violence.

It is worth noting that one of the narrators offered an alternative story centered on religious plurality that, I will argue, connects with colonial legacies. As discussed in the Introduction, while the folktale is said to have origins in European lore and Spanish oral tradition, it is also associated with indigenous cosmologies. Yet, most narrators, in their narratives, showed the dominance of Catholic practices and symbols in the story of *El Duende*. One participant, identified as a mestizo woman, offered an alternative story in which a necklace made with *chímbalo* fruits and a red string was used as an artifact to keep *El Duende* away. The use of the necklace could point to a use of different elements from both Catholic and indigenous rituals. The *chímbalo* is a fruit used in the Andes for stomach complications and for people who have had *el espanto* or have being frightened for days. Today, this necklace can be provided by a traditional healer. In Quito, such healers can be found in the food markets.

It is important to highlight that in Latin America, non-European cultural practices and subjectivities carried a differential valuation as inferior, since the more they departed from Catholicism, the more they were seen by the dominant society as evil, superstitious, and backward. For example, in Ecuador, the spiritual practices of enslaved Africans included elements of Catholic practices, so that they could maintain that part of their identity. However, African deities known as orishas were "hidden in plain sight when syncretized with Roman Catholic saints" (Gonzalez).

**Contemporary social conditions**. Contemporary high rates of sexual crimes and misogynist public discourse in Ecuador signal a social climate where women are constantly under threat of gender violence and where the folktale of *El Duende* retains symbolic power.

The news website Pichincha Comunicaciones reported in an article that according to recent statistics released by the Ecuadorian's State Attorney General's Office, "there were 53,666 complaints of sexual crimes in the last 12 months [of 2019]. Of these, 9,090 for sexual abuse, 1,998 sexual harassment, 6,455 rapes, 4,811 physical violence, 250 sexual violence and 65 femicides;" however, women's organizations have stated that the numbers are in fact higher (Pichincha Comunicaciones). For instance, the feminist and human rights organization SURKUNA, denounced that the Secretariat of Human Rights in Ecuador eliminated the Special Protection Services (SEPE) for women survivors of gender-based violence, and announced the cut of "approximately 80% of the budget for the prevention and eradication of violence against women and girls" (Surkuna qtd. in Pichincha Comunicaciones).

Furthermore, in January 2020, Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno made international news when, during a recorded conference, stated that "men are permanently subject to the danger of being accused of harassment. Women often denounce harassment and it is good that they do so, but sometimes I see that they are merciless [*se ensañan*] with ugly people" (Lenín Moreno pide disculpas por decir que las mujeres denuncian acoso "cuando viene de una persona fea") (Pichincha Comunicaciones, 2020). This statement shows a misogynistic ideology still present in the country that undermines the seriousness of the problem and focuses on the claim that the denunciation of harassment

is unfair because women only accuse men when they are physically unattractive. This is a claim that implies that sexual violence by physically attractive men is tolerated, if not welcomed, by women. Arguably, one of the narratives of *El Duende* that describes him as an unattractive, pitiful lonely bachelor in search of a hard-to-find love in some ways parallels this misogynistic argument by shifting the focus from the sexual crime to the needs and predicament of the aggressor.

As discussed in Chapter 1, limited data gathering on violence against women within the justice system, low rates of reporting and prosecuting cases of violence, the perception that aggressors can act with impunity, and women's distrust of public institutions conform a panorama where the storyline of *El Duende* retains currency and symbolic power.

In regard to racial discourses reproduced by the folktale and discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, it is interesting to note that some narrators and their stories engage with racism—primarily against indigenous identity—in today's society. For instance, when referring to the character of *El Duende,* the description of the color of his skin was significant. His skin color is described as green. This color could refer to European influence, for is often the color attributed to creatures such as goblins. However, one narrator asserted that the green color is a sort of mutation from brown, meaning that *El Duende* in a way is an indigenous man. In that sense, *El Duende* would be an allegory of a feared, unwanted male of color who preys on virginal whiteness—which by the way has constituted a key source of tension and violence in colonial and postcolonial societies.

This view contrasts with Arcos Guartambel argues in his book: that *El Duende* is white. During the research process, I did not encounter a narrative in which *El Duende*

was described as having white skin. Although a more comprehensive research of the variations of the tale in different regions is necessary, this could point to a dominant racial discourse in which whiteness is not associated with violent masculinity but with men's prestige, normativity, and power.

Among some narrators, the re-telling of the stories of *El Duende* made them engage the topic of racism today. For example, some of the narrators themselves expressed how Ecuadorian society nowadays is still very racist. One of them, who identified as *mestiza,* spoke also about her identity as a *chola. Chola or cholo* is a word with different connotations and meanings that is generally associated with indigenous people and stresses their low social and educational status. It is often used pejoratively to refer to someone who is not indigenous but who is perceived to act or behave like (indigenous) people in the lower classes. It may also refer to individuals who try to be part of the higher classes but cannot hide their humble origins or behave in a way considered unacceptable or vulgar by someone in the upper classes. In this case, the narrator subverted the pejorative meaning to affirm her identity. She expressed that while she is *mestiza*, she identified more with her indigenous heritage as a form of positive affirmation of a racial identity that is discriminated against, so she refers to herself as a *chola*. She even mentioned how some of her physical traits—e.g. red cheeks—are associated with indigenous people in the highlands. Another narrator, who identified as black, mentioned how sometimes when people see him on the street, they lock their cars presuming he is a thief or a criminal.

Another narrator who identified herself as indigenous, however, mentioned the subtle forms of racial prejudice that operate today to point out that racism does not

express itself in the ways in which it used to in the past. Yet, this participant said racism is still very much present in “subtle” ways. As an example, she cited her own experience and said that when she dresses in traditional indigenous clothes and takes the bus, sometimes strangers call her “María.” This a racist, not so subtle, word that is used to refer to working class women who work as cleaning staff or maids.

Another potential racial connotation in some of the narrators’ accounts referred to the belief that *El Duende* appears only in the countryside, where the majority of the population is indigenous. In Ecuador, the majority of the indigenous population lives in rural areas; in fact, “78.5% of the indigenous population of Ecuador is concentrated in the rural areas of the Andean country” (Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural). Some narrators asserted that the tale is not as frequently told in the city as it is in the countryside. This poses a question about the association of violence against women with rural areas and indigenous men, or with the notion that indigenous communities are more likely to reproduce and tolerate harassment and violence toward women. In this sense, the tale of *El Duende* could be a story that evokes the otherness of indigeneity and places it at the fringes of society. This is an idea that can be illustrated by the fact that in Ecuadorian history, the indigenous population did not live within the limits of the cities but engaged in trade within the urban centers via the markets. However, confined to commercial exchange, they were seen as outsiders.

To this day, the social perceptions and socioeconomic status of the indigenous and black population continue to place them at the margins. The National Survey on Racism and Racial Discrimination conducted in Ecuador in 2004 by the Technical Secretariat of the Social Front and the National Institute of Statistics and Census

determined that 88 percent of the surveyed asserted that Afro Ecuadorians are the main victims of racism while 71 percent of the surveyed said indigenous people are the main victims of racism. "These groups are the poorest in Ecuador according to unsatisfied basic needs (70.1% and 90.1 %), have the highest illiteracy rate in the country (10.2% and 28.1%) and earn less income than whites and mestizos" (Plan Plurinacional 74).

Another way in which the narratives of *El Duende* relate to contemporary society is in the reproduction of new discourses of commodification and environmental justice. As discussed above, the mixing of the Catholic rosary and the indigenous necklace in one narrative highlights tales of coloniality. Nonetheless, this signification process is still underway to multiply the range of meanings of *El Duende* in contemporary Quito. For example, a new experience for me when I returned to my country was to see the ways in which *El Duende* has been marketed to men and women and how this commodification interacts with people's folk and spiritual beliefs. Some merchants sell it as a charm to attract good luck or love. However, in some people it inspires fear because *El Duende* being sold could only mean that it would bring uncertain and unpleasant experiences to those who bought it.

Yet another contemporary counter-narrative of *El Duende* shifts the focus from sexual violence to environmental conservation. One of the participants in this project, a man who is in charge of guiding nightly "safaris" at the metropolitan zoo, offers a counter-narrative of the folktale centered on environmental justice. In his work, he tells children about *El Duende* as an inhabitant of the forests that should be protected from deforestation. As I previously explained, several narrators mentioned in their stories that *El Duende* appears in places where there are trees. This links *El Duende* to new narratives

about nature being produced by younger generations. Along these lines, a different narrator said she appropriated the folktale of *El Duende* to teach children how to recycle.

These examples show new ways in which the tale of *El Duende* is being reinterpreted in order to instill other values or teachings in young children. At the end of the day, *El Duende* is an important character in Ecuadorian culture, associated with tradition and socialization of children and women. There was a common concern expressed by the narrators over the loss of this tradition. Some interviewees asserted that the story of *El Duende* has been lost to the new generations. One interviewee also said that the knowledge passed onto us by our grandparents is being replaced by New Age fashionable trends.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the stories about *El Duende* echo and activate discourses of gender—and its intersections with race, religion, class—that have been circulating in society since Spanish colonial domination in Ecuador (1544–1822).

The most salient discourses about gender expectations and gender violence operate through the activation of the ideas about: the value of women's physical appearance and the elevation of whiteness as ideal; female passivity and vulnerability, as women become objects of male competition, possession, and personal; the normalization of male violence against women and the power to discipline women and regulate their everyday life.

The participants' narratives also relate to discourses and social conditions for women in colonial and neocolonial settings when they center whiteness, Catholicism, and racial hierarchies to reduce the choices allowed to women to two: religious devotion or

marriage. The folktale as told by narrators ultimately suggest that traditional religious rituals, rather than the modern legal system or organized social or collective action, are the options women have to avoid or escape, but not denounce or confront, sexual violence.

In the second section of this chapter, I examined how the narratives also relate to current social conditions for women in meaningful ways.  Given the current high rates of sexual crimes, low reporting and conviction of criminals, and the misogynist public discourse around gender violence in Ecuador, the folktale of *El Duende* retains symbolic power and meaning. In telling their narratives, participants also engage the connections between the stories and racism—primarily against indigenous identity—in today's society.

Lastly, despite the fact that the folktale reproduces discourses on gender and race that undermine cultural sensitivity and equity for women and people of color, there was a concern among the narrators over the loss of tradition as they have noticed that younger generations have not heard of *El Duende*. Yet, in this research I identified counter-narratives to the tale of *El Duende* that do not center on whiteness, Catholic practices, gender violence nor victimization. These counter-narratives re-appropriate the character of *El Duende* to teach children the importance of recycling and taking care of nature.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions, Limitations, and Avenues for Further Research

### Conclusions

In this analysis, I have approached participants' narratives about the folktale of *El Duende* in Quito, Ecuador, as both oral tradition and oral histories that activate and reproduce social discourses on gender expectations and gender violence.

To answer the first research question, What oral histories of *El Duende* emerge in participants' narratives?, I examined the oral histories emerging in the narrators' accounts of the folktale. Eight out of nine narrators interviewed for this research mentioned that someone in their family, or in one case the narrator himself, had seen or encountered *El Duende.* I argue that the telling of these encounters becomes a communicative act that marks the experience of seeing or encountering *El Duende* as an "event" recorded in family history—regardless of whether the character is seen as "real" by the narrator.

Vansina argues that oral tradition is both a product and a process. The product is an oral message that has been passed on through at least one generation and that was based on previous oral messages (Vansina 3). The process is the transmission of the message over time, by word of mouth, until its disappearance (Vansina 3). In this research, I conducted interviews to collect the "products" of the oral tradition but also to analyze how the process of oral tradition has also passed down ideology from a colonial period.

I argue that *El Duende* is part of Ecuadorian oral tradition and at the same time personal and family oral history. I analyzed the content of the narratives as oral tradition with an oral history methodology for two main reasons. Firstly, because it is indeed an

oral tradition generally known in Ecuadorian culture that has been transmitted across generations, seemingly over a long succession of generations. It is not simply an expression of the present in which the story is being told but also an account that relates to the past. Secondly because I am recording personal testimonies delivered in oral form. And thirdly because, following Vansina's analysis of oral tradition as evidence, he does assert that oral tradition plays a part in "the reconstruction of the past" (199)

The way I applied this theory is that while the story of *El Duende* is not a direct recounting of a particular historical event, it still transmits ideological content of the past that it is valid in and affects the present. In addition, depending on the narrator, an encounter with *El Duende* was described a real event that happened to the narrators themselves or to a member of their family. I posit that that *El Duende* is an oral tradition in all the narratives in this study; however, it is also oral history for eight of the study's participants. While the narratives do not refer to a collective historical event, *El Duende* is part of people's personal and family oral history and has had an impact on it that can tell us information about the community the narrators live in.

In five cases in which the story passed down for a generation or two, the narrators said that the stories of the encounters with *El Duende* were reported as real by one or more family members. In one case, a narrator mentioned how *El Duende* was part of the everyday life of his community because it made women cut their hair or not go out of their house late at night. The narrators' telling of the folktale also show, as Pattanaik observed, the mythical character of *El Duende* as being "real" for some and a subjective truth for others. In this sense, *El Duende* is "real" for some of the informants or for the informant´s relatives.  As the narrators suggest, this myth is passed on as oral history for

individual families. Nonetheless, it is also a part of the informant´s oral tradition, seeing that *El Duende* is part of the collective knowledge and memories that are passed down through generations of Ecuadorians.

The collection of these oral histories and traditions also shows how the folktale of *El Duende* is associated with a pedagogical social function. This pragmatic function of the folktale was mentioned by participants who referred to the story as a tool to discipline children or to teach boys and girls how to behave. In this way, the participants locate the folktale within the historical experience of family and school as well as in contemporary everyday practices in Ecuadorian culture.

It seems interesting that all narrators reported that they first heard about *El Duende* as children, and the stories were told primarily by adult female relatives (the mother, the aunt, or the grandmother). This suggests the role of female storytellers within the family in perpetuating the myth. Participants shared an understanding of the gendered functions of the folktale. Four narrators spoke of this as a story told to girls to keep them from moving freely or from danger of male sexual harassment and assault. One of them mentioned it as a tale that portrays the reality of women, and as an example of what should not be done. In this regard, I argue that the lessons taught to children and women on how to behave convey dominant ideas and discourses about traditional gender expectations that normalize and justify control and violence against women.

To answer the second research question, What discourses about gender violence and role expectations are constructed in the participants' accounts of the folktale of *El Duende*?, I identified five overlapping discourses about gender expectations and gender violence enacted through the stories shared by narrators: the discourse that emphasizes

women's physical appearance and the elevation of whiteness and chastity as ideals of beauty; the dichotomy between males as active, aggressive agents and women as passive, vulnerable objects; the reduction of women to objects of male competition, possession, and personal property; the normalization of male violence against women and the blaming of the victim of violence; and the use of male power to discipline women and regulate their everyday life.

The folktale, I argue, reinforces social tolerance and even justification of violence against women when it points toward the blaming of the female victim of sexual crimes and to a culture of silence surrounding the denunciation of male aggression and female victimization, and the empowering of women.

To answer the third research question, How do the narratives about *El Duende* relate to social conditions in colonial and contemporary Quito? I demonstrate that the narratives echo discourses on gender expectations that stem from racial structures and Catholic religious ideologies that endure since colonial times until today. More specifically, there is an implicit link between beauty, whiteness, and purity (sexual virginity) that is affirmed whenever the story is told. The tale also affirms the dominant notion of the duality of women's identities in that it proposes that there are two types of women in society: those who are virgins or dutiful mothers associated with the Virgin Mary, and those who transgress because they engage in sexual encounters outside of wedlock. The narratives of *El Duende* also echo gender discourses that, shaped by Catholic ideologies, reduce the morally acceptable choices allowed to single women to two: religious devotion or marriage. To avoid sexual harassment or assault, single women have to either pray or marry a man. The stories ultimately suggest that traditional religious

rituals—rather than the modern legal system or organized social or collective action—are the options women have to avoid or escape sexual violence. This also reinforces the idea that women's options do not include those of denouncing or confronting this violence.

When analyzing how the narratives also relate to current social conditions for women in society, I argue that the folktale of *El Duende* retains symbolic power in a social climate where women are constantly under threat of gender violence. To wit, current high rates of sexual crimes, low reporting and prosecution of criminals, and misogynist public discourse in Ecuador are an enduring challenge to gender justice. Some participants' narratives also engage the racial discourses reproduced by the folktale, primarily racism against indigenous identity in today's society.

There was a similar concern among the narrators over the loss of tradition as they have noticed that younger generations have not heard of *El Duende*. Some narrators explained that if they would tell the story to the younger generations, they would tell it differently. In this research I identified some counter-narratives to the tale of *El Duende* that do not center on gender violence and victimization but are being used to teach children the importance of recycling and taking care of nature. These counter-narratives of *El Duende* disrupt the dominant discourses in contemporary society through discourses on commodification and environmental justice that are re-signifying and expanding the repertoire of meanings of the folktale for the future.

A close reading of the narratives of *El Duende* in the light of Cohen's monster theory shows how a monster is a mode of cultural discourse that sets a culture's boundaries and sets identity formation (x). In the case of *El Duende,* he stands at the limits of normative expectations of women's behavior and polices the boundaries of the

possible by posing a threat to the purity of young women. The narratives relate the possibility that *El Duende* could turn women into the "other" in society if they would lose the virginity before marriage.  Hence the expectation for virgin women to get married young, so that they do not fall into the hands of another male who, as symbolized in several accounts, may represent or be linked to the devil. In this sense, virginity is dangerous for young women because it is coveted, and they can therefore expect sexual violence and marginalization in society.

The narratives of participants also elicit Cohen's proposition that a monster's body—is a cultural body or cultural construct that projects the anxieties and projections of the culture itself. Indeed, *El Duende* is a sign that expresses the anxiety of the society over purity and idealized femininity being tainted before being controlled and regulated within the institution and sacrament of marriage. The remedy for these anxieties is presented in the form of protecting female purity through religious practices of Catholicism or marriage. At the same time, the folktale speaks to social anxiety over the ability of failure of men to meet expectations of masculine behavior as well as the "envy" of a monstrous masculine being who is able to possess the purity of young women with no legal, economic, or moral repercussions. *El Duende* is thus a cultural symbol of the social fear and anxiety over, on the one hand, the control of women's bodies, subjectivities, and agency; and, on the other, the ability of men to meet dominant expectations of masculinity.

In terms of postcolonial theory, we can argue that the idea of purity of blood that originated in the Spanish empire as a mechanism to expel Jews and Muslims, introduced hierarchies and power dynamics in the Americans in which the white European was the

"dominant race" and the ruling race. This dynamic is still present in society in our time, particularly in the upholding of overlapping ideas of whiteness and religious understandings of virginity as the ideal of beauty. As discussed here, the folktale of *El Duende* is one among many current cultural manifestations of this ideology. Further, following the idea of the narrator that asserted that *El Duende* embodies indigeneity, then an indigenous man is a threat to Catholic colonial ideals of virginity and purity of women. In this sense, *El Duende* story reproduces coloniality as discussed in the literature review.

As I previously mentioned, to ground this analysis of gender discourses in the contemporary narratives of *El Duende*, I examined the work of Palma, who argues that *El Duende* is a story that reinforces the view that young women need to be protected from the moment they start puberty. For her, the folktale is used with the purpose of "domesticating" women (105). My work reinforces Palma's argument in the context of Quito, Ecuador. However, I add that considering that a white woman is what is usually targeted as pretty in the story of *El Duende,* the myth warrants a closer look, since it conveys ideas of not only gender but also racial power dynamics, Catholic ideologies regarding women, and patriarchal structures.

**Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

These results were not meant to be generalizable, as a larger selection of narratives would be necessary to accomplish such a goal. However, time and budget constraints limited the number of participants. The limited number of narrators reduced the diversity of participants in terms of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In this respect, a larger selection of narratives would allow for a deeper analysis of the differences of the

myth across demographic and cultural variables. In addition, the research would benefit from interviewing younger generations of narrators in order to analyze changing meanings, emergent discourses, and counter-narratives of the myth.

Further analysis of a larger collection of narratives from different regions of the country should also be done to explore whether different religious beliefs might influence the stories about *El Duende* told in different ethnic communities in Ecuador. A broader comparative analysis of tales of in which the mythical female character chases men may prove illuminating of contested gender ideologies.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. ¿Cómo te describirías a ti misma?
2. ¿Cuál es tu definición de cultura? ¿Cuál fue tu ambiente cultural cuando crecías?
3. ¿Qué rol jugó la religión cuando creciste?
4. ¿Cómo se definieron los roles de género en tu familia?
5. ¿Cuéntame sobre cuando eras niña, que tipo de historias escuchabas?
6. ¿Qué experiencias o personas han formado tu vida y tus opiniones de manera significativa?
7. ¿Qué historias escuchaste cuando estabas en la escuela? ¿Cuáles sobresalieron?
8. ¿Qué juegos jugabas? ¿Salías de casa por la noche?
9. Que tan importantes eran tus abuelos en tu familia o en tu comunidad/barrio?
10. ¿Quién era la persona que contaba historias en tu familia?
11. ¿Has escuchado la historia de *El Duende*?
12. ¿Cuál fue la primera que oíste una historia de *El Duende*, de donde te llego la historia quien te conto?
13. ¿Tuvo algún tipo de influencia en tu vida? ¿Había algún ritual para alejarlo o alguna manera de mantenerlo lejos?
14. ¿Cuál es tu opinión de *El Duende*? ¿Es un personaje real o folclórico?
15. ¿Qué historias de *El Duende* te son conocidas
16. ¿me podrías contar historias de *El Duende* que te son conocidas o con las que tu conectes? ¿Una característica interesante de la leyenda de *El Duende* es que hay bastantes variaciones dependiendo de las regiones donde se cuenta la historia? ¿Has escuchado tu alguna de estas variaciones?
17. Esta historia la hemos escuchado a través del país en distintas regiones ¿Crees que la historia tiene una enseñanza o un mensaje, que está intentando transmitir
18. ¿Por qué crees que existen estas variaciones?
19. Un grupo en particular de historias o de leyendas parece centrarse en la relación ¿que tiene *El Duende* con la figura de la mujer?
20. ¿Qué crees que dice esta historia sobre los hombres y las mujeres?
21. ¿Sirve para justificar ciertos comportamientos asociados con los hombres en la sociedad?
22. ¿Piensas que esta historia reproduce una opinión machista y una visión de la mujer como víctima, oprimida?
23. ¿Crees que hay alguna relación con la leyenda y la realidad?
24. Lead out: ¿Le has contado esta historia a alguien más? ¿A quién y cómo?

**Appendix 2: Informed Consent for interviews**

***El Duende*: Oral history**

**Informed Consent for Interviews**

March 17, 2019

Carolina Bucheli, from the Latin American and Iberian Institute of the University of New Mexico is conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to observe and analyze *El Duende* narratives and through a critical analysis and an oral history method, understand (a) the underlying cultural meanings of *El Duende* by exploring how the myth reproduces particular understandings of Ecuadorian culture and society, and (b) explore how the stories about *El Duende* reproduce particular narratives about gender expectations and violence against women, and how do these narratives about gender relate to the social context of Quito. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a citizen of Quito, and you are familiar with the different stories of *El Duende*.

Your participation will involve answering questions in an open-ended interview. This interview will be recorded (audio and video), but you may choose not to videotape the interview. The interview should take about an hour to complete. The interview includes questions such as (What is your definition of culture? What was your cultural environment when you were growing up? What was the first time you heard a story about *El Duende*, where did the story come from who told you?) Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There could be a risk that the interview could lead to uncomfortable topics, but the interviewee has the right to stop the interview at any time. Participants will be identified by name in field notes, the interviewer's thesis project and in this consent form. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet at the interviewer's, Carolina Bucheli's, house. If published, results will be presented in summary form and using quotes with names, only with your prior consent.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Carolina Bucheli at 505 5891462, or cbucheli@unm.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644 or irb.unm.edu.

By returning this signed consent you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research study.

__________________________

Name of Adult Participant

______________________________ ________
Signature of Adult Participant Date

________________________
Name of Research Team Member

______________________________ ________
Signature of Research Team Member Date