



**DECOLONISING  
ANDEAN  
IDENTITIES:  
ANDINXS,  
ACTIVISM  
AND SOCIAL  
CHANGE**

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**EDITED BY  
REBECCA IRONS  
AND PHOEBE MARTIN**

**UCLPRESS**

# Decolonising Andean Identities

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# Decolonising Andean Identities

*Andinxs, activism and social change*

Edited by

Rebecca Irons and Phoebe Martin

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# Foreword

Jelke Boesten

This book emerged from a workshop held at UCL in 2020. We gathered on what was, for London, a typical cold and dark February day, excited about the discussions and papers to come, excited to meet and greet, but anxious about the weeks to follow: there was talk about closing borders and imposing restrictions to social and professional life because of an approaching pandemic. Several workshop participants travelled from far away and were happy to have made it but were concerned about their return; others saw their fieldwork planning in the Andes disrupted. It was a strange and disconcerting time in which we nevertheless managed to celebrate the collective feminist exercise of thinking through the meaning of 'Andinxs'.

As the making of a book takes several years, we are past the Covid pandemic, and much has changed. The pandemic years revealed the weaknesses in our political systems and welfare provision, not least in the Andean region. Peru, the focus of five of seven chapters in this book, shows one of the highest Covid mortality rates worldwide, just below low-income and war-torn countries such as Syria, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan.<sup>1</sup> Ecuador did not fare much better, with devastating news stories about people dying on the streets, in front of hospitals and without being attended to in one of the hardest hit cities, Guayaquil.<sup>2</sup> Peru, at that moment governed by president Martín Vizcarra, locked down early, rapidly and rigidly. But this was followed by a severe economic crisis, particularly for the majority relying on precarious livelihoods, a rapid spread of the disease and high mortality despite the measures, and a spike in gender-based violence with lasting consequences for many (e.g. [Zielinska 2021](#)).

Unfortunately, while the pandemic put up a mirror in which the failings of the state and capitalist economic systems became glaringly

clear, this has not been reflected in post-pandemic changes. Conservative economics, high-level corruption and restrictions on women's rights have particularly intensified in Peru and Ecuador. But the Andes is not uniform: in 2022 Colombia elected Gustavo Petro, a left-wing former guerrilla, flanked by an Afro-Colombian woman as vice-president. Both Bolivia and Chile elected progressive governments in 2020 and 2022 respectively. Of course, left-wing governments do not make a feminist country, and the struggles for voice, rights and access to resources remain central to contemporary feminist activism in the region.

The chapters in this volume ask what these feminist struggles are, who leads them and how they might differ from feminist struggles in previous decades. The authors are concerned with various expressions of resistance and defiance to the gendered and post-colonial socio-political structures that constrain Andinx's lives in a world that is rapidly changing, with many bumps and pushbacks along the way.

In order to understand these changes, the term *Andinx* is very useful: on the one hand it deliberately overcomes the divisions based on class and race that have dominated discussions around marginality and activism in the Andean countries. We have studies of middle-class criollo feminism and studies of Indigenous 'grass roots'; rarely do they fit in the same feminist category. On the other hand, the term emphasises the 'Andeanity' of gendered politics in the discussed countries and movements. What might be specific about the gendered political dynamics in the Andes? How do the concerns and struggles of Indigenous women affect women's rights at a national scale? To what extent do movements and discourses meet and overlap, or clash and rift? *Andinx* provides a conceptual framework that allows for a foregrounding of voices pushing the boundaries of feminist activism moving into a space of defiance that is specific to places, people and problems, as well as generic – local as well as regional. Importantly, the term, and the way in which the authors deploy it, allows for alliances and bridges rather than division or hierarchy.

This volume of seven cases of *Andinx*'s defiance in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia demonstrates the power, or potency as Veronica Gago (2020) would say, of collective action in the region. The volume suggests that progressive change might indeed come from those long considered marginal to the national polity. But that only works if alliances are built and voices are heard; *Andinx* provides the inclusive term that can hold the intersecting struggles of feminists, Indigenous groups and LGBTQI+ people across classes, races and genders in the Andean region. This volume sets an important precedent to the study of such struggles.

## Notes

- 1 <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality> (accessed 4 January 2024).
- 2 Dan Collins, “‘Like the horror of war’: Mayor of virus-ravaged Ecuador city calls for drastic response”, *Guardian*, 22 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/ecuador-guayaquil-mayor-> (accessed 4 January 2024).

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# Introducing Andinxs

Rebecca Irons and Phoebe Martin

In this volume, we use the term ‘Andinxs’ to encourage a reconsideration of ‘Andeanism’ in a contemporary context. ‘Who are Andinxs (Andin-exs) today?’ – a seemingly simple question that carries far greater weight than first imagined. This proposed term asks us to reconsider the processes that have shaped the lives of the people living in and around the Andes today. Instead of a theoretical imposition, the work in this volume uses ‘Andinxs’ as a provocation. Migration, political upheaval, legal change, extractivism and gender violence have all had serious consequences. Political change sweeps the region once more, this time with a strong focus on addressing gender inequalities, the injustices of historical sterilisations and ongoing feminicides, and problematising contemporary feminisms.

Based on an international workshop that took place in February 2020, where we first debated the term ‘Andinxs’, the chapters within this volume seek to directly address, complicate and challenge existing notions of gender and Andeanness, bringing together cutting-edge work from diverse international authors to accelerate contemporary debates and formulate new and decolonial perspectives that will drive scholarship forward. Rather than a single perspective on who are ‘Andinxs’, the chapters provide diverse perspectives that encourage this debate. Together, the authors develop important insights into the transformative role of gender in Latin America, providing the first academic collection of scholarship to give critical context for the rise of anti-genderism in the Andes. While Peru is perhaps overrepresented geographically in this volume, we believe the diversity of approaches and disciplines justifies this. A specifically Andean focus is not often seen in Latin American studies despite its critical importance for decolonial scholarship, suggesting the timeliness of these vital contributions to the study of



Latin American feminisms at a critical moment in history as this diverse movement is on the rise. Using an interdisciplinary lens, the chapters seek to bring together several in-depth ethnographic accounts and a diverse range of methodologies to develop a response to who Andinxs are today. Considering the current climate of anti-genderism, the discussions developed within this collection are of paramount urgency.

When the Shining Path insurgency swept the Andes in the 1980s, many ethnographers failed to recognise the growing disquiet due to one important oversight: they did not adequately acknowledge who Andinxs actually *were*. In romanticising their interlocutors as outside of politics and time, this ‘Andeanism’ (Starn 1991) not only led to misrepresentation, but may also have held deadly consequences for those caught up in a violence that Andean scholars could have discerned before it ever began – had they asked the right questions. In this volume, we take the stance that we are not Andeanists, but scholars of the Andes, and encourage others to consider doing the same. Though on a superficial level the difference in approaches could be seen as generational, we argue that it is far more significant than this (even if it is indeed influenced by the times). Andeanists of the last century held and developed wildly different relationships to the people that they worked with, compared to the authors in this volume. Many Andeanists of the last century approached their research and relationships with the peoples with whom they worked through the gendered frame of objective distance and scientific control. A prominent example of this is the Cornell Peru project of the 1950s, whereby Andeanist anthropologists from North America became deeply entrenched in creating something akin to a ‘peasant laboratory’ where they could conveniently come to study Andean people whom they saw as unchanging and static remnants of a past lost to Western society (Lynch 1982). While we acknowledge this as an historical event, and the positionality of those involved as entwined within that history, we as a collective move away from such ways of relating with Andean people and their life worlds. Principally, we argue that a decolonial approach is critical to moving Andean studies forward. It is of crucial importance for us to work collaboratively and using participatory methods with our key interlocutors, whenever possible, and to endeavour to acknowledge and represent the social transformations taking place in the region.

As this volume argues, decolonial perspectives in/on/from Latin America must be deeply rooted in a reconsideration of gender, particularly the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2013), which resulted in the imposition of binary, fixed gendered identities and relationships upon the Indigenous populace living under Spanish and Portuguese colonialism across the

continent. However, as scholars have noted, it is not possible to fully do so while continuing to rely upon the gendered language constructs of the coloniser. In the case of Hispanic Latin America, this refers to the masculine and feminine gendered nouns of Iberian *Castellano* (ending -a/-o), which forcibly identify a person as binarily gendered. We also acknowledge that this volume is being written in English. This reflects the colonial structures of academia, whereby English is prioritised over other languages, limiting and excluding those outside the Anglosphere from debates and discussions. Moreover, English is a language with its own issues of gender and inclusion – for example, the debates over the use of the singular ‘they’ by non-binary people (Clarke 2019).

In Spanish-speaking societies, there have been attempts to work around the gendered limitations of the language. For example, previously the ‘@’ symbol was used as a way to combine the masculine -o and feminine -a. One strategy is to replace gendered endings with the non-gendered ‘-e’, taking advantage of pre-existing conventions in the language. This is used in contemporary contexts, but also dates back to the 1970s (García Meseguer 1976). Another way in which this has been addressed is through changing the gendered suffix to the more neutral ‘-x’, in expressions such as ‘Latinx’. Those seeking to reshape Spanish have ignited debates over *lenguaje inclusivo* (inclusive language) as a proxy for deeper societal disputes over gender inclusivity. The use of neologisms and the transformation of language is a common tactic among queer and feminist activists (Díaz Calderón 2021; Martin 2022). But this has revealed generational fault lines between activists and the Real Academia Española, official guardians of the language (Real Academia Española 2020, 73).

As Salinas and Lozano argue, ‘using the “X” carries sizeable assumptions of being inclusive in the term *Latinx*’ (2021, 250), though there is little consensus on the origins and development of this term, despite its widespread use. Some choose to use ‘-e’ instead of ‘-x’, for example in the phrase *todos, todas, y todes* (El Comercio 2018). Importantly, Salinas and Lozano (2021, 251) note that the ‘x’ itself has a long and pertinent colonial history in the Americas and has been used and adopted in both racial and gendered identity struggles. For example, as African slaves were not permitted to read or write, an ‘x’ was used as an identifier in place of a name, and can serve as a reminder of the violence of colonialism towards the non-white populace. Subsequently, Malcom X adopted the identifier in place of his slaver’s name and in reference to his unknown African name.

The term '*womxn*' was introduced in 1971 at the University of California Davis, 'to be inclusive of non-cisgender women and women of color' (Salinas and Lozano 2021, 251). The 'x' was first adopted in Latin American gendered identities in 2016, when Ana Castillo introduced the term *Xicanisma* to challenge the racist, classist, gendered systems of oppression experienced by Chicana women in the US–Mexico borderlands (Peláez Rodríguez 2021). However, the origins of 'Latinxs' specifically are less clear, though it has been argued that the term came either from a Puerto Rican 'psychological periodical to challenge the gender binaries encoded in the Spanish language', or as part of the Chicano civil rights movement for the empowerment of Mexican people in the United States (Salinas and Lozano 2021, 251). Within academia, the journal special issue 'Theorising LatinX' first attempted to explore the term from a scholarly perspective in 2017. Though the editor noted at the time that 'there is no consensus or general theory on this critical contemporary matter' (Milian 2017, 121), the special issue also did not provide such a framework going forward, reflecting how this is an ongoing debate (Salinas and Lozano 2021, 252). In a 2020 study with self-identified Latinxs living in the United States, Salinas's participants defined it as 'a term for people who do not identify along the European settler-colonial gender binary, and inclusive for all people of Latin American origin and descent' (2020, 159). However, there may be cause to question whether Latinx is indeed inclusive for *all* people of Latin American heritage. As Salinas notes, when not related to Chicana/Xicana identity, the 'x' is often tied to Indigenous languages originating from Mexico (Nahuatl, Zapotec), and as such, is a 'Mexicanized' term (2020, 152–3). Furthermore, the term is often related to an identity marker specifically for Latino/a individuals living in the United States (Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018, 385), of which over 60 per cent self-identify as of Mexican-origin (Krogstad, Passel and Noe-Bustamante 2022). Thus it is questionable whether the term is truly inclusive of all those living in Latin America, as it does not allow for the nuance of experience between Central American Latino/as and those living in the South American continent. Further, we argue that within South America itself, the diversity of societal influence on gender relations and identities is so pronounced that all those living on the continent's southern hemisphere cannot be categorised together under one term, either. As fairly new terminology 'Latinx' has been useful, but we argue that it is time to introduce a new word to the gender lexicon in order to better understand the nuances of regional history and experience within gender relationships. To encapsulate this, we offer the term 'Andinxs' as

a way of referring to all those living specifically within Andean nations of South America, who seek to challenge the gender binary imposed during and after colonialism.

Some limitations to this term must be recognised. For example, *Andinx*s runs into a similar linguistic issue as *Latinx*s when it comes to Andean indigeneity. As Salinas has observed, the Quechua language has no 'x' (2020, 152), and so both *Latinx* and *Andinx* may be difficult for native Quechua speakers to pronounce. That said, Aymara does include the 'x', so this is not wholly exclusionary to all Indigenous speakers in the Andes. Further, in contemporary Spanish-speaking countries, the 'e' is also often used as a gender-neutral suffix, one that is easier to pronounce orally than the 'x'. Where the 'x' implies a negation of gender, the 'e' suggests inclusion of gender diversity. Bearing the above in mind, we include the 'x' as a deliberate provocation, to create new spaces and understandings of gender and politics in the Andes: who is included or erased? How do we represent the Indigenous people of the region through imperfect languages? While this issue underscores the imperfect task of introducing new terminology, we believe that the use of '*Andinx*s' nevertheless marks a transitional phase towards greater nuance when considering the gendered dynamics of the Andean region, and the term will hopefully continue to be adapted, developed and refined by scholars as time goes on.

## Coloniality, indigeneity and the body

While for many years Indigenous peoples were viewed as passive victims of colonialism as well as a living past, the historical conceptualisation of gender in the Andean region has recently come under more careful scrutiny. For decades, 'Andeanist' (Starn 1991) scholars have written about pre- and post-conquest Indigenous peoples following an over-romanticisation of gender relationships, the likes of which are increasingly being challenged. Specifically, scholars of the Andes, particularly in the 1950s–70s, argued that there existed/continues to exist a relationship of 'gender complementarity' in the region, whereby (sexed) male and female community members and partners would participate in different, but complementary, gendered tasks. One oft-repeated example of this complementary gendered relationship is the work involved in tending the fields using the plough and bull. The male is thought to drive the bulls, with the woman turning the soil behind the plough (Serrano, Boillat and Rist 2005). In this way, each contributes to a part of the whole task, in line

with their specific gendered capabilities. This gender complementarity can also be seen as an expression of dualism. In discussing Andean masculinities, the prominent Andeanist Olivia Harris writes that ‘dualism, found in virtually all spheres of social organization and symbolic representations, is a central concern for Andean anthropology’ (2021, 40). These ideas are not solely based on contemporary observations of Andean gender relationships, but are inspired by readings of historical texts as well. For example, in her exploration of pre-conquest Peru, Silverblatt calls pre-colonial gender relationships an instance of ‘gender-parallelism’. She suggests that in ancient Peru the people worshipped masculine and feminine goddesses that complemented each other, supposedly reflected in the daily life of the people:

Women and men acted in, grasped, and interpreted the world around them as if it were divided into two interdependent spheres of gender. Armed with this understanding of the workings of the world, and of the role of humankind in it, Andean mortals structured their cosmos with goddesses and gods whose disposition reflected these conditions of life (Silverblatt 1987, 20).

These deities preceded the Incas, and were seen as the god of the heavens, Illapa (masculine), and of the earth, Pachamama (feminine). Silverblatt suggests that ‘the Pachamama, who embodied the generative forces of the earth, needed a male celestial *complement* to realize her procreative powers. So Andean thought paired her to the god of thunder [Illapa] as bestower of rain’ (1987, 21; emphasis added). Such scholarship gives the impression that pre-Columbian Andean society recognised and appreciated a gender dualism from the divine to the mundane.

Several scholars, including the anthropologist Florence Babb (author of this volume’s Afterword), have taken a decolonial feminist approach to re-examining the concept of gender complementarity. Babb’s 2018 volume *Women’s Place in the Andes* turned a critical eye to revisiting her work from the 1970s onward, including her reflections on gender complementarity, as a way of rejecting northern assumptions about Andean women’s subordinate status. Within that volume, Babb argues that ‘romanticized versions of gender complementarity (as opposed to historicized accounts of gender complementarity) are the product of essentializing colonialist thought, and that this must be reckoned with in our past and present representations of Andean women’ (2018, 46). Nevertheless, Babb argues that continuing debates around gender

complementarity among Andean as well as Western scholars may be productive insofar as the concept can be a viable alternative to the imposition of Western frames of knowing: ‘Gender complementarity . . . has offered an alternative to the dominant feminist framework of analysis originating in the North, *which assumes that different means unequal*’ (Babb 2018, 22; emphasis added). Similarly, Schiwy has noted that ‘gender complementarity has . . . *not necessarily meant equality or equal value*’ (2013, 139; emphasis added), further questioning those neatly packaged assumptions about pre-colonial gender relationships.

In contrast to the above-cited Global North scholars, the Peruvian academic Maruja Barrig (2001) argues that pre-colonial gender complementarity, and by extension its contemporary expression, was not quite the harmonious experience some scholars suggest. Instead, she says that these writers are guilty of an idealisation and romanticisation of the past that is not necessarily an accurate representation. As an example, the Aymara feminist scholar Julieta Paredes has argued that the existence of *los virgenes del sol* (sun virgins), female tributes to the Inca following the conquest of territory and expansion of the empire, underscore gender inequalities in the pre-colonial Andes. Young women were expected to serve men, and particularly the male sun god Inti, during religious ceremonies and thus could not be considered as equal, or necessarily complementary, to them (Paredes, quoted in Ströbele-Gregor 2013). The debate is therefore complex. Though there is evidence to suggest that gender in the Andes has long been unequal, it is still appropriate to question the influence that colonialism had on frameworks of thought, given that the arrival of the Spanish consisted of a complete disruption in the life worlds of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, we may recognise that some contemporary scholars do observe forms of gender complementarity within their field sites. This complicates the debate. Though some would argue that gender complementarity is based in a sex binary, and could therefore be seen as exclusionary to anyone not identifying as such, some scholars disagree with this and continue to support the inclusion of the theory in their research (see Stavig, this volume).

Within academia, the persistence of colonial thought and governance in post-colonial societies may be referred to as ‘coloniality’. As the Argentine scholar Maria Lugones notes, ‘coloniality’ is ‘an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations’ (2013, 372). Importantly for this volume, according to Lugones coloniality also

pertains to gender, that which she calls a 'coloniality of gender'. The central argument here is that the Spanish conquest imposed not only hierarchies based on race and class, but also those implicit within Iberian Catholicism regarding gender relationships and roles. Under the Church, those sexed male would be considered superior to those sexed female, and therefore be granted divine domination over them. These unequal gender relationships did not necessarily exist prior to colonisation, Lugones suggests. Though this line of thinking could potentially be criticised as another romanticisation, it is important to note that Lugones is not an Andeanist and so her work is not specifically referring to pre-colonial Incan gender understandings, which we have seen to be unequal even before the conquistadores arrived. Finally, Guerrero has called this 'patriarchal colonialism', and she argues that Indigenous women experience coloniality as a 'double burden because they must deal with both racist and sexist attitudes' (2003, 65). The notion of 'patriarchal colonialism' helps us to further understand the experiences of Indigenous women from an intersectional perspective. Though colonialism may have affected everyone living on colonised territory, women in particular have borne the brunt of societal inequalities.

An event that took place in recent decades underscoring these inequalities was the sterilisation of an estimated 300,000+ women in Peru, a large proportion of whom were thought to be Indigenous people living in the Andes (Boesten 2014; Ballón 2014). Scholars report that many of the women were sterilised without their consent, without full knowledge of what the procedure entailed, and sometimes using violence (Ewig 2010). Numerous scholars have sought to understand the sterilisations themselves (Chaparro-Buitrago 2022; Stavig 2022; Irons 2020) and the continuing treatment of Indigenous women's reproduction and healthcare (Irons 2021; 2022) using an intersectional, decolonial lens, and as the following section will elaborate upon, the event has inspired considerable action from feminist activist groups. A common theme that links such scholarship is the understanding that this kind of maltreatment could only take place due to a 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2013) that has long existed in the Andes. Aníbal Quijano suggests that colonial power relationships that saw Indigenous peoples as inferior continue to operate within contemporary post-colonial societies through an institutionalisation of racialised hierarchy. It is this coloniality of power that supported the perpetuation of harm towards thousands of women, and which still operates today in the Andean region. Indeed, it is the intensification of such a coloniality of power and gender that has formed the basis of contemporary feminist movements across the Andes today.

## Emergent Andean feminisms

Much has been written about the resurgence of feminist activism in Latin America in the last decade (Vacarezza 2021; Bohn and Levy 2022; Martin 2022). Transnational movements such as Ni Una Menos, the *marea verde* (green tide) of abortion rights activism, and the powerful performance protest of *Un violador en tu camino* (A rapist in your path) are some of the most notable events in this new ‘wave’ of action. Within this, however, less attention has been paid to the growing role played by feminism in the Andes. The majority of recent scholarship focuses on movements in the Southern Cone and Mexico, and with this volume we hope to correct this imbalance in the literature, and shine a light on the diverse feminist and women’s movements in the Andes.

In the Andes, as in the rest of Latin America, there has historically been a division between ‘feminist’ and ‘women’s’ movements. At the turn of the twentieth century, early feminists were upper-class educated women who made demands for access to education and the right to work (Vargas 1991; Lema 1981). However, in the 1970s and 1980s both feminist and women’s movements were founded across the Andes. Major shifts in society from the 1960s onwards paved the way for the rise of a new tide of activism: the availability of the contraceptive pill (Barrig 1979), rural-to-urban migration (Blondet and Montero 1994), increased access to education and women’s entrance into the workforce (Vargas 1991). Most importantly, many women gained important experience in political organising in left-wing and popular movements in the 1960s and 1970s. However, they found that when they voiced concerns as women, these were not taken seriously. This was particularly the case within left-wing movements, which ‘dismissed [feminists] as upper middle-class women who were concerned with issues that were irrelevant to the vast majority of women throughout the region’ (Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren and Alvarez 1992, 210). During the 1970s and 1980s, feminist organisations were founded, such as the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán in Peru, Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias del Ecuador (CEIME) in Ecuador and the Centro de Información y Desarrollo de la Mujer (CIDEM) in Bolivia. In the early days of the feminist movement some activists were still reluctant to use that label; for example, in Peru organisations did not initially label themselves as feminist due to the hostility towards explicitly feminist activism from the left, but also from the Catholic Church and liberal and nationalist politicians (Vargas 1985). Feminist movements, being predominantly made up of white or mestiza,



middle-class, educated urban women, were historically based in the cities and lowlands of the Andean region, rather than in the highlands.

As well as feminist movements, popular women's movements emerged at this time. According to Virginia Vargas, the women's movement is 'principally composed of women who try to find ways of satisfying the needs and demands springing from their traditional roles . . . as women' (1991, 29). However, it is simplistic to argue that these women's aims were simply 'feeding their family and community' or that they were more traditional than the feminists (Rousseau 2009, 98). Rather, their class, race and ethnic positions shaped the kind of activism in which they were engaged. Feminist and popular women's movements often worked together in 'a two-way learning process that had a permanent impact on the feminist agenda' (Vargas 2009, 200). Many women in the popular women's movement were also feminists and produced their own feminist proposals (Vargas 1991). Nevertheless, activists in the Andes have long found themselves navigating complex political, social and cultural landscapes, both inside and outside the women's movement. In Peru and Colombia, women's movements have had to contend with civil war and internal armed conflict, which provided opportunities for mobilisation but also significant risks and backlash (Zulver 2022; Crisóstomo Meza 2018).

In the contemporary Andean region, as this volume shows, the landscape of movements is much more diverse: there are Indigenous feminisms, queer movements and feminist movements all rooted in the realities of the Andes. Indigenous women have been protagonists in recent protests and uprisings in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. Feminist movements are growing across Latin America, including the Andes. These movements are marked by factors affecting the region (coloniality, inequality, conflict, political crises). Social media has been an important factor in the renewal of feminist movements, with hashtag and image campaigns taking over social networks (Meneses, this volume), but also providing spaces for discussion and debate.

These new feminisms are also growing in the context of a significant backlash against both feminism and other progressive movements. This is illustrated by the #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas ('Don't Mess with My Children') campaign against so-called 'gender ideology' being implemented into the school curriculum that started in Peru, but has a presence across the Andes. 'Anti-genderist' movements are global, and exist across the right-wing political spectrum, but what unites them is their opposition to feminism and gender equality (Graff, Kapur and Walters 2019). Corredor defines these movements as transnational

counter-movements that utilise the fear ‘of gender ideology as salient counterstrategies to feminist and LGBTQ+ social movements’ (Corredor 2019, 614). Anti-genderism is a backlash against the gains transnational feminist movements have made, particularly since the 1990s.

High-profile cases of sexual violence have contributed to ‘putting gender-based violence high on the agenda of movements’ (Harcourt 2013, 624). Ni Una Menos, the movement against gender-based violence and femicide that started in Argentina in 2015, was also echoed in the Andes. In 2016 Ni Una Menos marches took place in cities across Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia. This underlines how the movement is inserted in transnational and local realities. This is not the only platform for feminist activism. Other marches and protests have been organised all over the Andes: against gender violence, inequality and neoliberalism, and for reproductive rights. For feminists addressing issues relating to bodily and sexual rights, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of culture for ‘the right to have rights’ and there is now more of a focus on ‘intervening in cultural representations and broader public debate’ (Alvarez 2009, 180–1).

Abortion rights, and the lack thereof, have been one of the major focuses in recent Latin American feminisms (Sutton 2021; Blofield and Ewig 2017; Sutton and Vacarezza 2021; Calkin and Freeman 2019). There have been moves forward, such as the legalisation of abortion in Colombia in 2022, the partial legalisation in Chile in 2017 and the decriminalisation of abortion in cases of rape in Ecuador. However, in Bolivia, the proposed reform to legalise abortion up to eight weeks for under-seventeens was repealed in 2018, and in Peru the most recent attempts at reform failed in 2015. In the Andes, the *marea verde* is not just a tide moving across the continent, as it is often portrayed; rather, it is more like a wave ebbing and flowing in the face of opposition and political crisis. All the while, the lack of access to safe and legal abortion contributes to high rates of maternal mortality and other physical and mental health risks.

The movement is a diverse one, and so we should really speak about feminisms rather than feminism. Decolonial and Indigenous feminisms are growing in size and influence, and although these ideas are not always accepted by mainstream or institutional feminisms, they are increasingly prevalent on social media. Queer movements also overlap with feminist activism, which also includes the issues of LGBTQI+ inclusion and transfeminism in its understandings of bodily autonomy. There are also queer Andean groups who root their practices in the social and geographical landscapes of the Andes, such as Pachaqueer

in Ecuador, *Mujeres Creando* in Bolivia and *Chola Contravisual* in Peru, among others. As this book illustrates, the work of women and feminist activists in the Andes deserves serious analysis, in order to understand its contribution to Latin American and transnational feminisms. Through the diversity of contributions, this volume hopes to bring these perspectives to an English-speaking audience so that they might have a better understanding of the ways that gender and politics in the Andes have not just local but global significance.

## Structure of the book

The chapters in the first part of this volume address contemporary indigeneity in the Andes, framing this within a decolonial perspective of gender. This will develop a comprehensive body of knowledge reflecting upon the ways in which coloniality and gender intersect for various Indigenous peoples across the Andes. The first chapter by Andrea Espinoza Carvajal analyses legal pluralism in Ecuador to show how Indigenous women face multiple hurdles within the Indigenous justice and the state legal system to endure and survive violence. By analysing women's experiences, this chapter explores how lives are marked by the legacies of a colonial past, the challenges of representation in the nation state's democratic present, and tensions of everyday race and gender discrimination. The chapter examines the tensions of legal pluralism, which is often highlighted because of its transformative potential, not just because it recognises Indigenous autonomy but also because it promotes decolonial thinking. However, as presented in the chapter, legal pluralism – implemented without collaboration or ties of understanding or solidarity between peoples – complicates women's experiences as it imposes a binary between existing as a member of a nation state and as a member of a community. It also makes clear the gender subordination and discrimination experienced by Indigenous women in these two environments.

In the next chapter Lucia Stavig introduces the reader to the ways that Indigenous people have always fought for their communities. Through ethnographic fieldwork with Mosoq Pakari Sumaq Kawsay (A New Dawn for Good Living, MPSK), a healing centre in Anta, Cusco, Stavig recounts how sterilised women and allies are coming together at MPSK to treat culturally bound illnesses such as *mancharisqa* (*susto*, or soul loss) using ancestral medicine and spiritual ceremony. This healing work helps remember and re-member the shared body of the

Andean *ayllu*, revitalising traditional ethics, praxes and gynocritic (life-supporting) governance: Andinxs gender practices in action. A growing body of research focuses on the role of Indigenous women in cultural resurgence and community governance in the Andes and the Americas. Centring Indigenous women's voices and knowledge, this chapter shines a light on their contributions to the revitalisation of their communities, including gender complementarity as decolonial practice.

Following Stavig's focus on Andean women's cultural resurgence, Rebecca Irons explores Quechua sexuality through the concept of the pornographic gaze. Challenging prejudiced perceptions of Quechua sexuality in rural Peru, Irons argues that the view of Indigenous and non-white women as sexually deviant is a long-standing technology of discipline, dehumanisation and domination that has occurred since colonialism, and arguably continues today as a mechanism of the 'coloniality of power'. Through this perceived sexual deviance, often expressed towards Indigenous Latin Americans in terms of animality, Irons suggests that European 'colonial desires' have long tried to deny freedom of sexuality to post-colonial communities, instead viewing colonised women as commodified bodies for consumption and control. Addressing underlying legacies, Segato (2014) calls this a 'pornographic gaze' whereby colonialists interpreted Indigenous sexuality (so different from Catholic restraint in the Iberian peninsula) through their own subjective lens, in which the more extroverted Indigenous sexual behaviours were understood as emblematic of non-Christian, pornographic carnality and excessive, immoral appetites that needed to be disciplined. Drawing upon her long-term ethnographic fieldwork within state reproductive and sexual health services in Ayacucho, Irons finds that Quechua women are considered as void of sexuality – somehow unable to pursue sex for pleasure, while also over-indulging for reproductive motives alone. She argues that this does not merely deny Quechua women access to sexual pleasure; such post-colonial discourses contribute towards biopolitical justifications for contraceptive coercion and, in the historical case of Peru, enforced sterilisations. This chapter shows how only by addressing the oppression of Indigenous sexuality can historical and contemporary reproductive injustices be addressed and prevented.

Furthering the discussion of Quechua sexuality, Micaela Giesecke-Chero uses the Quechua-language film *Retablo* (2017) as a lens through which to explore decolonial and queer approaches towards Indigenous sexualities. They contend that the film, directed by Álvaro Delgado-Aparicio, provides valuable insights into the encounter between colonial legacies, such as religion, gender and the heterosexual matrix, and the

experiences of queer bodies in the rural Peruvian Andes. Giesecke-Chero asserts that queer Andean existences are inherently anti-colonial since challenging the gender binary and heterosexual matrix imposed on Andean people through a long history of colonisation of their territories and bodies highlights the remnants of queer identities that once existed in the Andes. The *quariwarmis*, two-gender shamans involved in same-sex practices, and the *chuqui chinchay*, a two-gender deity of the Andes, are examples of this. Analysing *Retablo*, they explore the complexities of being queer in the rural Peruvian setting, considering the symbolic trashing and other forms of violence that the protagonists Noé and Segundo face. These characters' suffering brings attention to the need for new perspectives that recognise queer Andean existences not as challenging of the colonial legacies but celebrated as an integral and historical component of social and cultural life in the region.

In [part II](#), on emergent Andean feminisms, the authors advance scholarship on evolving Latin American feminisms, thereby complicating the growing body of literature by examining Andean perspectives. Feminist resistance has been crucial to the struggle for justice for gender-based and sexual violence. In her chapter Phoebe Martin considers feminist activist responses to the fight for the victims of forced sterilisations. One group, *Somos 2074 y Muchas Más*, has led a feminist campaign on this issue since 2016 which uses performance protest to draw attention to the need for truth, justice and reparations. By analysing the use of two symbols – the *pollera* (a skirt traditionally worn by Indigenous women) and the uterus – Martin focuses on the visual and embodied politics of the movement, using digital and in-person ethnography as well as visual methods. This puts the campaign in conversation with other recent Latin American feminist scholarship that focuses on the uses of cultural politics ([Sutton and Vacarezza 2020](#); [Martin and Shaw 2021](#)). However, drawing on decolonial feminism, this chapter also highlights the tensions that have emerged around the uses of these symbols in the Peruvian context. As across the Andes, coloniality, white supremacy and patriarchy all intersect in Peru, and the sterilisations are a clear example of this. Taking this into account, Martin questions the symbolic impact of wearing the *pollera* by non-Indigenous women, underlining how it is critical that activists do not perpetuate these same structures through their actions.

Another novel strand of Andean feminism comes from Colombia, where the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have put forward their own conception of feminism, *feminismo insurgente* (insurgent feminism). As Jennifer Bates argues in her chapter, *feminismo insurgente* encompasses both activism and

theoretical proposals to counter gender subordination. Drawing on FARC documents, observations of female ex-combatants' participation in political events and interviews with Colombian feminist activists, this chapter situates *feminismo insurgente* in relation to the wider landscape of feminist theories and praxis in the Andes. It is argued that, while feminisms in the Andean region share the dilemma of whether and how to engage with the state, this issue is particularly complex and acute for *feminismo insurgente* due to Colombia's decades-long history of armed conflict and the hegemony of neoliberalism since the 1990s. Bates highlights complementarities between *feminismo insurgente* and Andean feminisms that draw on decolonial feminist theory to resist interwoven systems of oppression perpetuated and reinforced by coloniality. Parallels are also drawn between *feminismo insurgente* and feminisms in the Andes that navigate the tensions between socialism and feminism. The emphasis placed by *feminismo insurgente* on feminism as a collective project, including the reimagining of masculinities, offers potential for overcoming these tensions. Together with other feminisms in the Andean region, *feminismo insurgente* holds the possibility to radically contest and transform unequal gender relations, at their intersection with other axes of oppression including class, race, sexuality and location.

Moving from feminism 'on the ground' to feminism online, Daniela Meneses considers a viral social media campaign, #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial (I like social life), which developed after a lawyer used a rape victim's social life to justify the crime. In this chapter, Meneses approaches post-feminism from a position of discomfort and ambivalence to explore the wider political context of the Andes. Using Sara Ahmed's figure of the feminist killjoy, she presents a close reading of the online campaign to recognise the presence of post-feminist sensibilities and sit with the ambivalence they produce. Sitting with this ambivalence allows her then to show the ways in which post-feminist sensibilities travel outside the Global North context. In doing so, Meneses demonstrates how they are serving to obscure the particularities of violence in the Latin American context and moving in a different direction than the decolonial feminist movement. At the same time, she argues that the existence of the campaign also opens space for some degree of resistance.

In presenting these vital contributions that offer varied and detailed perspectives on the hitherto understudied area of gender and politics in the contemporary Andes, the authors offer a fresh provocation to international scholarship. Some of these ideas have been discussed previously. However, by bringing them together in this collection, we put

them in conversation with each other, thus creating a timely dialogue that advances discussions about decoloniality, feminism and indigeneity, and encouraging scholars to consider: who are Andinx today?

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Part I

## **Coloniality, indigeneity and the body**



# 1

## Entrapped in hollow choices: Indigenous women manoeuvring legal pluralism in Ecuador

Andrea Espinoza Carvajal

One evening in 2017, a man in his thirties, Antonio, was temporarily imprisoned in a local *casa comunal* (communal house) in the Ecuadorian highlands after being accused of beating his girlfriend, Edelmira, an unmarried woman in her twenties. Edelmira lived in Ñachag<sup>1</sup> – an Indigenous community in Colta, Ecuador – and had a relationship with Antonio for some time. The man, already married to a woman (Eugenia) in a different community, had a pending accusation of adultery and domestic abuse against Eugenia presented by his father-in-law César. César had asked for community intervention, requesting an *arreglo comunitario* almost 15 days earlier. An *arreglo comunitario* is a form of Indigenous justice that applies Indigenous community norms collectively and publicly. After attacking Edelmira, Antonio faced two accusations of physical abuse towards two women, plus one accusation of adultery. Twenty-four hours after Antonio's imprisonment, the community had already heard and resolved the accusations. They decided to protect the integrity of Antonio's family and remove from consideration the accusations of physical abuse.

In Ecuador, the recognition of Indigenous justice and state justice as coexisting legal systems made its way into the Ecuadorian constitution in 1998 and was further cemented by the 2008 constitution, making Ecuador a country with a plurilegal system. Legal pluralism refers to a social context where two or more legal systems coexist (Merry 1988). Article 171 of the 2008 constitution states, 'The authorities of the Indigenous communities, peoples and nations shall perform jurisdictional duties, on the basis of

their ancestral traditions and their own system of law, within their own territories, with a guarantee for the participation of, and decision-making by, women.<sup>72</sup> In that sense, legal pluralism aimed to guarantee Indigenous peoples' right to autonomy and self-determination – that is, the ability of Indigenous communities to govern themselves without discrimination or persecution. Thus, cases of violence against women like Edelmira's could be discussed and solved within the communities. However, as this chapter will discuss, it can be asked what happens when a victim – in this case, Edelmira – requests help from the national police first. How is legal pluralism navigated, and what are the tensions that appear when presented with the legal possibility of a choice?

This chapter will discuss how Indigenous women navigate legal pluralism, considering that the existence of plurality creates the option (or the illusion) of requesting help from one system or the other. The possibility of choosing becomes a matter of identity, citizenship and belonging. Moreover, it also becomes a question of practice: who has the jurisdiction, the willingness and the instruments to support women? As this chapter's title suggests, discourses of protection of self-determination and culture can also undermine the requests of victims of violence and deliver limited support.

This analysis puts Indigenous women's experience front and centre. It shows how women face multiple hurdles within their communities and the state legal system to endure and survive violence. Indigenous women are vulnerable for being women, and for being Indigenous, and for the unique situation caused for the overlapping of these two characteristics. Their path to confront abusers unveils the complexity of their experience. When aligning themselves with *justicia indígena*, the type of justice closer to their culture and identity, they might close the possibility of any contingency plan of accessing state law because of the principle of *non bis in idem* (double jeopardy). On the other hand, approaching state law first could mean feeling as though they are betraying their people's history of struggle, undermining their communities' right to self-determination and, not least, exposing themselves to racial and ethnic discrimination by state officials. None of the options are easy and women's survival strategies are tested at every turn.

The conceptual framework provided by an understanding of the gendered nature of 'Andinx's' helps to unveil what is included, erased and adapted in women's lives when their experiences are marked by navigating unsettled territories created by the legacies of a colonial past, the challenges of representation in the nation state's democratic present, and tensions of everyday race and gender discrimination. The

people whose experiences are mentioned in this chapter are Indigenous. They identify as such and are proud of their identity, but they are also Ecuadorian citizens; as such, they also have expectations about the access to services provided by the Ecuadorian state and are in constant negotiation of what works for them. They are active citizens of a state that, at some point, planned to erase them.<sup>3</sup> Such negotiations are lived tensions unique to Indigenous women living in contemporary Ecuador. Hence, there is the need for a new lens to understand how Indigenous people build their place within contemporary Latin American states.

This chapter is based on five months' fieldwork undertaken in 2017 in a rural area of Colta, Chimborazo, Ecuador. I will present stories shared by women during unstructured interviews and the information gathered by participant observation, such as witnessing Edelmira's *arreglo comunitario*. The process of collecting and analysing this information has been accomplished by using a feminist epistemology. First, by recognising the author's positionality as a mestizo Ecuadorian scholar conducting research in an UK institution. As explained by Donna Haraway, 'there is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines' (1988, 583). In that sense, both my background as a non-Indigenous woman and my focus on violence against women in practice contributed to the interpretations of the materials gathered in the research process.

In the following sections I will discuss three main points. The first section will take a closer look at Edelmira's story because it contributes to understanding how women experience the tensions between using Indigenous justice and following their communities' norms, and other forms of justice than the ones presented by the state legal system. I will discuss how using Indigenous justice is not only a matter of representation and convenience but also acts as a way of signalling belonging and validating the Indigenous community's autonomy, authority and value. The second section will present the role of Indigenous justice in supporting women victims of abuse. It will highlight the major changes in the way communities discuss violence and, at the same time, the difficulties that persist. Finally, I will discuss the problem of the discriminatory nation state and how in a contemporary context, the lack of cooperation between legal systems affects women's experiences. By way of a conclusion, I will show how a dual legal system with very limited support for women contributes to the reification of patriarchal structures and silencing women and therefore needs to be reconceptualised, positioning cooperation between systems as a key element to understanding and supporting Indigenous women's needs.

## *Justicia indígena as a right and a contra-hegemonic hope*

Analysing women's experience in Ecuador contributes to understanding legal pluralism in theory and practice. Academic literature places particular attention on the counterhegemonic nature of legal pluralism but can undermine the intricacies of its applications on the ground. Similarly, it focuses on the victories of the Indigenous communities against the discriminatory nation state but leaves space to ask what comes next. Considering the constant tensions between the state and communities, what do we know about the way they coexist?

Latin America's experience of legal plurality and the process of drawing and redrawing the terms of exclusion and inclusion has a long history, showing significant legal reform in the last 40 years. In the 1990s, strong mobilisations of Indigenous people demanded collective rights in Latin American countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru (Yashar 1998; 1999; Hooker 2005). As mentioned by Yashar (1999), different countries may have had different approaches, but all shared the characteristic of having organised social movements with a clear social and political agenda. Indigenous people demanded changes in the state law and the recognition of ethnic diversity and autonomy (Van Cott 2001; Yashar 1999). For example, in Mexico, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista Army of National Liberation) demanded the recognition of autonomy, in some cases taking up arms. In other countries, Indigenous movements such as the Ecuadorian Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and the Bolivian Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni (CPIB, Centre of Indigenous Peoples of Beni) and Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB, Confederation of Bolivian Rural Workers) opted for the organisation of massive demonstrations in major cities to push for changes in the law (Yashar 1999).

Parallel to these mobilisations, international pressure prompted massive constitutional changes in the region, advancing legal instruments delineating the fundamental rights of Indigenous people (Barrera Vivero 2016). The two most significant documents were the 1989 International Labour Organisation's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention 169) and the first draft of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (adopted by the General Assembly in 2007). The recognition of legal pluralism is often highlighted because of its transformative potential, not just because it recognises Indigenous autonomy but also because it promotes decolonial thinking. In that

sense, the recognition of Indigenous justice has been examined and explained using decolonial and contra-hegemonic perspectives. The practice of *justicia indígena* becomes an act of political contestation and a performance of differentiation in the context of the homogenising modern nation state. De Sousa Santos remarks that ‘Indigenous struggles have the potential to radicalise (in the sense of going directly to the roots) the processes of social transformation, especially when they assume a constitutional dimension’ (2012, 12) as in the case of legal pluralism. Nonetheless, in practice, a transformative process as *justicia indígena* has its complications as the tensions that emerge from existing patriarchal structures within Indigenous communities.

## Lived challenges of plurality

The agreement of legal pluralism as an Indigenous victory does not change the fact that the coexistence of two legal systems represents a challenge to those who see themselves as partially represented in both frameworks or to those that have aligned to one or the other to survive the discriminations of the state. For decades, in Ecuador the state implemented plans to promote a homogenising identity to erase the Indigenous identity, pressuring for the endorsement of ‘mestizo’ (Indigenous–European mix) as the preferred ethnic category, which became a marker of engagement with the urban, market-led and modernising national society (Radcliffe 1999; Weismantel and Eisenman 1998). Such a colonial goal is best summarised by the former Ecuadorian president in 1972–6, General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara,<sup>4</sup> who said, ‘There are no more problems in relation to the Indigenous people . . . all of us become white when we accept the goals of the national culture’ (cited in Selmeski 2007, 158). This *mestizaje* (becoming mestizo), according to Radcliffe (1999), referred to a ‘cultural’ rather than a ‘racial’ *mestizaje*. Its main goal regarding the Indigenous communities was to make them ‘move forward’ to become urban workers who could help transform the nation. The confrontation of the Indigenous and state agendas has had long-lasting effects on individuals and communities and how they interact with existing structures to satisfy their needs and demands.

For example, the night that Antonio hit Edelmira, Edelmira’s older sister Rosana witnessed everything. Rosana decided to call the police. Making a phone call in Ñachag is not an easy task; the community does not have landline phones, and there is poor mobile phone reception. To make a call in 2017, people had to go somewhere high up in the mountain



or walk downhill to the main road. The effort that Rosana invested in making the call suggests that the action was not intuitive or automatic but determined. Edelmira's sister managed to make the phone call and police officers from the local police station in the neighbouring village, Columbe, arrived in Ñachag that same night. Their intervention was short. They apprehended the man, but because the 'incident' happened within an Indigenous community the police officers decided to deliver him to the local Indigenous authorities instead of starting a legal process in the state justice system. This meant going to the house of the community's president, notifying him about the case and leaving the man in his custody. From that point onwards, it was the community's responsibility to decide what to do.

An *arreglo comunitario* started at 8 p.m. the next day and took seven hours. Community attendance was required, for all people born or living in Ñachag of any age, gender or marital status. The *arreglo* works as a collective discussion of a problem, therefore the floor is open for people who want to testify, comment, confront and give opinions or advice. The families of Edelmira, Antonio and Eugenia were called to attend and participate. However, Eugenia's family declined, and she expressed interest in divorcing Antonio.

Even though Antonio's wife and her family did not want to participate, the *arreglo* was centred on the case of adultery and not the episode of violence against Edelmira. At the end of the *arreglo*, Edelmira and Antonio were lashed three times each as punishment for their actions. The community decided both needed to be punished and the families of Edelmira and Antonio agreed. The parents delivered the punishment in front of the community. As explained by García Serrano, physical punishments such as lashing and the use of stinging nettles are part of a ritual of purification that aims to clean the bad energy generated by committing an infraction (2012, 541). In addition, the punishment as part of Indigenous justice promotes spiritual healing and allows the guilty party to reconcile with the community (García Serrano 2012, 543). García Serrano adds that sanctions are used as examples for the public that participate in the meetings in order for them to avoid the same infractions. From the moment the police decided to deliver Antonio to the Indigenous authorities, Edelmira had no control over the way the process unfolded. While Edelmira and her sister made a choice about asking for support from the state through the police, location and context defined the process and the result. The speed at which the events unravelled is particularly relevant because the initial attack, calling the police, and the intervention and resolution by the community all happened in less than

48 hours. While Rosana's intention in calling the police was to report violence against a woman, the final interest of the community was to judge adultery and restore family unity.

Edelmira's intention of using state law was disruptive for the community. The authorities were concerned that the police could follow up on the case, and this prompted them to act quickly. Another worry was that the offender could lose his job in a public institution if the process took too long or if he was imprisoned by the police. The community wanted to avoid tension with the police.

The *Código Orgánico de la Función Judicial*,<sup>5</sup> published in 2009, is the law that offers the basic regulatory framework about the coexistence of state and Indigenous justice, and has four articles related to legal pluralism and the practice of Indigenous justice (Articles 253, 343, 344, and 345). The most important features to be found in this legislation are firstly the principle of *non bis in idem* (double jeopardy) and secondly the explanation of how Indigenous justice should prevail over state law.<sup>6</sup> The *Código* explains that Indigenous justice should prevail in cases of doubt about jurisdictions.

Challenges over jurisdiction are not unheard of. For example, in Ecuador, Manuela Picq (2012) documented a case where a woman, Lucrecia Nono, had tried to use the state legal system to resolve a case of violence against women but was forced to comply with the community regulation and use Indigenous justice. Picq's research shows how Nono, living in the rural community of Chaupi Pomalo, Chimborazo, was pressured to use Indigenous justice, even though the community at first ignored her request for support. Picq writes about how Lourdes Tibán, an Indigenous lawyer, former congresswoman, former candidate for the Ecuadorian presidency and defender of Indigenous justice as strategic autonomy, publicly approved of 'the authority of communal justice over the case, calling on ordinary justice to stay out of culture' (Picq 2012, 7).

In such a context, one can ask whether state justice is meant for Indigenous women at all, and whether an Indigenous woman's desire for state justice may imply a rejection of her 'local' Indigenous justice system. While the question appears to reproduce an unwanted and problematic binary, the dichotomy exists and is created by law and practice. In Ecuador, Article 171 of the current constitution states that 'the law shall establish the mechanisms for coordination and cooperation between Indigenous jurisdiction and regular [state] jurisdiction' to provide Indigenous Ecuadorian citizens with unrestricted access to legal solutions to their problems. Nonetheless, at the time of writing, no legal

framework to support a system of cooperation between justice systems has been established.

For Indigenous women, the decision to access the state justice system is not easy. The dichotomy mentioned above is one of the reasons. Indigenous people are supposed to use Indigenous justice. This is a statement reproduced by Indigenous politicians, community leaders and Indigenous women. In one of my interviews, Delfín Tenesaca, an Indigenous politician living in Chimborazo, explained:

[Historically] the Ecuadorian state has not supported the needs of the people that wear the *poncho*, the *anaco*, the *bayeta*. In the 1990s, they [the Ecuadorian state] only wanted to punish by using state justice. Then we said, 'We will carry out our Indigenous justice, we will not go to state justice,' and we said, 'We are going to open a legal space [to practise Indigenous justice].'

For Tenesaca, Indigenous justice is both a right and a representation of Indigenous beliefs. 'Indigenous justice presents *Kawsay Pichurana*, which means *arreglarse en la vida* [to fix things in life]' (fieldwork interview, 2017). If a norm is not followed then 'we have to activate Indigenous justice and try to restore harmony', he explained. In Ñachag, community leaders agree that Indigenous justice is at once a part of their identity, a presentation of their culture and a connection with their ancestors, who also applied Indigenous justice and taught them about it. That considered, to use the state instead of the Indigenous justice system can be seen as disloyal and as a decision that underestimates the community's autonomy and its values.

Indigenous women also are discouraged from using the state justice system because of the importance of belonging to an ethnic community. Two women living in Ñachag, Dora and Martha, offer some examples that describe the connection between Indigenous justice and family and community.

Dora (67 years old) explained that 'we entrust ourselves into the hands of God, then we ask a wise community leader to solve the case in the most just way'. In our conversation Dora clarified that her Indigenous identity is represented by her language, her faith and the system she trusts as fair and just. Indigenous justice is more than a practical element to solve problems: it is a system that reflects her beliefs and her trust in her community. Martha (38 years old) adds that Indigenous justice is a way of teaching community values, and it helps to advise her children as

the process of an *arreglo* shows what is good and what is not good for the community. As women talk about Indigenous justice as a way to perform and maintain their culture, it is therefore a difficult decision to consider the use of the state justice system, even if its use could be an effective (though limited) way to advance their causes, such as the case of violence against women.

## Indigenous justice and reporting violence

The message that 'Indigenous justice is there to represent and support its members' is political, powerful and efficient. This has become even more so since an active effort to include women's participation in community activities and decision-making processes has been made. *Indigenous Women's Access to Justice in Latin America*, a report authored by Sieder and Sierra (2010), mentions several successful cases of women's participation in Ecuador, one in the city of Cotacachi (Imbabura province) and the other in the province of Sucumbíos. Indigenous communities in both areas wrote codes to deal with violence against women and domestic violence. In Cotacachi, the *Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia y el Buen Trato* (Statute on Good Living and Good Treatment) was established in 2008 by the Centro de Atención Integral de la Mujer (Integrated Centre for Women's Aid), an organisation supported by the assembly of Cotacachi, UNIFEM and the Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres de Ecuador (National Council of Women of Ecuador, CONAMU), and by the previous Indigenous mayor of Cotacachi, Auki Tituaña (Sieder and Sierra 2010). The document aimed to regulate family and community life and established a series of penalties which are increased whenever a person reoffends, thus recovering the custom of tougher and tougher sanctions for double offenders. In Sucumbíos, the 'Law of Good Treatment' was an initiative created by the Asociación de Mujeres de Nacionalidad Kichwa de Sucumbíos (Association of Women of Kichwa Nationality of Sucumbíos) to prevent violence. Its primary goal was to include men in the discussion of equality. This law incorporated penalties for cases of physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence, as well as for gossip. The document considered moral and economic sanctions and also asked for reparation where needed (Sieder and Sierra 2010).

In the twenty-first century, Indigenous women's experiences of representation in *justicia indígena* are significantly different when compared to the 1990s, as they have developed 'new languages to name violence and exclusions that were previously naturalized' (Hernández

Castillo 2016, 120). Changes have included the adaptation of feminist and human rights discourses to Indigenous women's needs. Contrary to previous cases of religion and power displays that enforced gendered structures, these changes aimed to negotiate women's roles in their communities. Research by Sieder (2017), Sieder and Sierra (2010), Sieder and Barrera (2017), Sierra (1995; 2013), Hernández Castillo (2001; 2002) and Barrera (2016) demonstrates women's increased participation and some victories in challenging and changing social practices, including norms and structures performed in Indigenous justice. These authors recognise that exchanges and interaction with national and international legislation as well as national and international organisations have provided elements to create new strategies for women to confront gender pressures and roles.

Sieder and Barrera remark that 'Indigenous systems – like all legal orders – are neither static nor impermeable. Law . . . is created, reproduced, interpreted, scrutinised and transformed in people's perceptions and through social practice' (2017, 643). In the case of Indigenous justice, it is this flexibility that contributes to its 'formative and transformative nature' (2017, 645). In their analysis, Sieder and Barrera consider that women have to face tremendous obstacles to make their voices heard, but still they manage to stand alongside their male peers to defend their rights as Indigenous people and denounce the unequal treatment they experience as women within their families, communities and organisations (2017, 647–9). Furthermore, they manage to do so on their own terms. They do not reject their cultural identities but, on the contrary, 'strive to strengthen them by confronting internal oppressions and insisting on more balanced relationships within the culturally specific spaces they strongly endorse' (2017, 649–50). Some women's strategies are consciousness-raising, leadership training, strengthening of women's networking, appropriation of external legal repertoires and seizing spaces for women's participation (Sieder and Barrera 2017).

However, change encounters constant opposition and there are also many cases where Indigenous justice does not support women's needs. Indigenous justice could prioritise community ties and the preservation of networks over the protection of the individual, as in the case of Edelmira or Lucrecia. There are features of Indigenous justice that negatively affect women's experience and can actively discourage them from disclosing and reporting their experience of violence. For instance, in cases of domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, Indigenous authorities, mostly men, tend to downplay or overlook women's reports. For example, in the case of Edelmira, Turi, a community elder (considered a wise man),

intervened in the *arreglo* and explained that he thought the adultery was Edelmira's fault because 'a man can only do what a woman allows him to do'. Others widely supported Turi's statement in their interventions. Antonio's sisters even threatened Edelmira with physical violence if she was seen with Antonio again. In that sense, Edelmira was responsible for Antonio's desire because, as a man, he could not help himself. Moreover, during the *arreglo*, Edelmira was attacked continuously because of her decision to be sexually active before marriage; people pointed out that in the future she would not be considered a suitable wife. Finally, Edelmira's sexual conduct also limited her claims for protection: her boyfriend physically abused her, but such abuse was not treated as a problem.

Furthermore, in cases of intrafamily violence or intimate partner violence, Indigenous leaders tend to question their competence and categorise these problems as 'family matters', trivialising women's complaints and only considering 'severe' cases of abuse as relevant (Barrera Vivero 2016, 11). Even if the Indigenous authorities consider the reports, family and other community members can exert pressure on women and encourage them to reconcile with their male partners and forgive them, thereby reinforcing gender inequalities and privileging the maintenance of family life over women's wishes, if the women in question no longer wants to live with a violent man (Sieder and Sierra 2010).

Even with the constant improvement of women's participation and political representation, Indigenous women still might consider state law as a possibility to protect themselves or negotiate improvements on their well-being. One benefit that support from the state legal system can provide to Indigenous women victims of intimate partner violence is the opportunity to pressure men to reconsider their abusive behaviour. The state justice system could be used as an ultimate resource bargaining tool. Going to the state justice system is a *de facto* way of saying, 'You need to stop this behaviour or else,' presenting the looming threat to file a report and involve external authority figures such as the police or judges. For Indigenous women, to ask for help in the state justice system is not a parallel option for choosing Indigenous justice. It is a steep path that means that women have passed through recurrent violent incidents and sought help within their family and community. For women, to seek help from the state can be a final and decisive move in their quest to stop violence. Similarly, it could be a *de facto* challenge to the poor results generated by Indigenous justice. The use of the state justice system could be a bargaining tool that provides a window of opportunity to negotiate power relations by seeking the intervention of the state law.

## Lack of coordination and the abandonment of the state

But what happens when state law is a system full of obstacles and, in practice, not meant for Indigenous women, not even as an instrument of negotiation? As mentioned previously, Indigenous and state laws were meant to interconnect, according to the constitution, but no legal framework has been passed to materialise that goal. Moreover, due to ongoing inaction the two legal systems have been moving apart, creating service gaps that negatively affect women. For example, the state legal system does not accommodate language requirements (Kichwa–Spanish translation) and is not culturally aware of the value of interpersonal connections in an Indigenous community; moreover, officials including judges and psychologists (part of the legal system) are not trained to overcome persistent racial discrimination in actions and speech.

For Indigenous people living in rural areas, language is a crucial obstacle for reporting any type of case to the state legal system, which becomes even more complicated when dealing with violence against women. Since 1995, when the *Ley contra la Violencia a la Mujer y la Familia* (Law against Violence towards Women and Family, Ley 103) was published, Ecuadorian law has stated that women's statements and demands could be oral and the state should be in charge of putting them onto paper. This move aimed to eliminate the requirement for a lawyer and to facilitate access to legal advice and procedures regardless of a person's literacy. However, it did not offer any guarantee of translation. Within the contemporary constitutional framework, this has changed. The 2008 constitution introduced the right to translation and the *Código Orgánico Integral Penal* (COIP) also guaranteed access to translation for victims and defendants. Nonetheless, the inclusive legal framework still does not guarantee access to justice for Indigenous women. If the institutions that are supposed to guarantee access to justice (the *Fiscalía* and the *Unidades Judiciales*)<sup>7</sup> do not have the resources, be they human or economic, to provide translation, an Indigenous woman will not get the support she needs.

For example, in 2017, if a woman from Ñachag wanted to access the state justice system she would have to go to Cajabamba, a nearby urban area in Colta. There, if the case was severe according to the parameters mentioned in the law, the woman would need to go to the local *Fiscalía*. However, when I visited this office it was clear that the *Fiscal* did not speak Kichwa although there was one secretary (a man) who could help with translation. Ana, the local *Fiscal*, admitted that language was a barrier and that a potential solution would be ensuring that at least one person in the

office is bilingual. In this context, the language barrier intersects with the fact that the person taking the woman's statement was a man with an urban background and not trained to understand the dynamics of the woman's community or her vulnerability as an Indigenous woman victim of abuse.

Even if the *Fiscalía* could ensure that one translator was always available, that would not facilitate the process for Indigenous women as the *Fiscalía* is an institution that can only assist people who want to report criminal offences. Where a case is less severe,<sup>8</sup> a woman might go the *Unidad Judicial Multicompetente de Colta*, also in Cajabamba. In 2017, this office had two judges, neither of them a Kichwa speaker. The institution had also a doctor, a psychologist and a public defender, though yet again, none of them spoke Kichwa. However, they had two employees who also provided translations if needed. Facilitating translations was not these men's primary job. The relevance of language accessibility in the area is undeniable, considering that in the province of Chimborazo, 38 per cent of the population self-identified as *indígena* (INEC 2010). In Colta, 94 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, mostly in Indigenous communities (INEC 2010).

Not speaking Kichwa or any other Indigenous language is the most basic restriction to understanding Indigenous women's needs. However, even when the barrier of language is overcome, there is still a lack of understanding of the victims' cultural, social and economic backgrounds. This is compounded by a lack of willingness to understand Indigenous women's experiences. The lack of information about Indigenous communities' structures and values, in addition to embedded racial discrimination, negatively affects the interaction between the legal staff and the victims. In one of my interviews, Joaquín – one of the judges in the *Unidad Judicial* – described the Indigenous women as *sumisas* (submissive) and *manipuladas* (easy to manipulate):

Women in the [Indigenous] communities are very submissive; the husband is the authority. There is the phrase: *aunque pegue, aunque mate, marido es* (although he hits and he kills, he is my husband). This situation is not far from reality yet. They [women] become more *manipulables* (manipulable). In one case, for example, a *señora* reported a physical assault by her husband and she also mentioned psychological abuse from her husband's sisters. The husband manipulated her by showing regret. He asked for forgiveness. When there is no family support, these people [women] are vulnerable to falling into this manipulation.



The implementation of a plurilegal framework has not changed the vacuum of information (and discrimination) or the power dynamics between state and Indigenous justice systems. For example, people working in the state legal system might have an idea of what an *arreglo comunitario* is and how it works. However, they do not grasp the social implications of a public punishment or the role of family and community in women's decisions. Instead, they keep reproducing prejudices and racially discriminatory statements.

The lack of resources to employ appropriate personnel and pay for training to build cultural awareness has been a consistent problem in the system since legal pluralism was constitutionally recognised. In general, resources are scarce and political willingness to improve cooperation between systems is low. Furthermore, the current implementation of legal pluralism relies on the false premise that Indigenous people want to solve their problems independently with their own rules. To analyse this position, it is necessary to discuss the practical implications of multiculturalism, a progressive development promise that has been strategically misused over time.

In theory, the term multiculturalism unsettled crude assimilationist strategies that refuse to accord any positive value to cultural difference (Molyneux and Razavi 2002, 14). Its disruptive power transformed multiculturalism into a key element in the process of recognising cultural rights as human rights. In the late 1990s, multiculturalism, ethno-development and Indigenous rights became popular terms in Latin America, fitting into the global movement in favour of minorities' rights. At that time, a number of international resolutions such as ILO Convention 169 strengthened Indigenous movements and triggered constitutional changes in Latin American countries. Joining the international trend of recognising multiculturalism, the 1998 Ecuadorian constitution defined Ecuador as pluricultural and multi-ethnic.

However, in the 1980s and 1990s, parallel to the growing international support for the recognition of multiculturalism, neoliberal economic policies started to appear. Together these two trends created a particularly favourable scenario for Indigenous claims of autonomy (Van Cott 2001). The same set of neoliberal policies of structural adjustment programmes that reduced the budgets assigned to agriculture, social services and economic programmes, including the protection of rural lands, also promoted decentralisation policies that favoured Indigenous demands for autonomy. National governments viewed decentralisation as 'a way to decrease their burdens in a context of austerity while at the same time increasing their legitimacy with their citizens and international

agencies' (Andolina, Laurie and Radcliffe 2009, 81). The move towards decentralisation meant more responsibility for local governments while relying more on civil society to implement development plans. In that sense, while multiculturalism offered enormous opportunities for Indigenous peoples because they challenge notions of national homogeneity, some interpretations of multiculturalism are inclined to defend boundaries between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous Ecuadorians, fostering further divisions. In Ecuador, this has contributed to double standards in people's access to services, and hence rights and duties, within the state. These double standards about what is accepted and expected from each group are created according to their ethnic background.

The path followed by the Ecuadorian state could be examined considering what Charles Hale (2002; 2005) defines as neoliberal multiculturalism and Robert Andolina, Nina Laurie and Sarah Radcliffe refer to as social neoliberalism (2009). Hale's (2002) work explores the relationships between neoliberal ideologies and multiculturalism, and explains that, while Indigenous struggles and neoliberalism seem oppositional, this perception is a misleading assumption. Hale calls neoliberal multiculturalism the neoliberal doctrine that proactively endorses 'a substantive, if limited, version of Indigenous cultural rights, as a means to resolve their own problems and advance their own political agendas' (2002, 487). Hence, the neoliberal model does not aim to destroy or erase Indigenous communities but rather uses them as agents in development programmes (Hale 2002, 487–8), allowing the state to disengage from the responsibility of implementation of development projects and use the free labour of volunteers to cut costs.

From that perspective, the Ecuadorian state's respect for Indigenous justice could be identified both as a practice of validation and recognition of Indigenous identity and as a strategy used to deny investment in coordination between Indigenous and state justice. Why would the state intervene in coordinating with Indigenous communities' access to legal support, if the Indigenous system of kinship and community could cover those demands? In the case of women, the disengagement presented by neoliberal multiculturalism is more problematic. As stated by Marisol de la Cadena (1992), '*las mujeres son más indias*' and, in the context of the multicultural neoliberal state, because they are more *indígenas*, they are 'lesser citizens' of the state. I call them lesser citizens because their rights are not guaranteed in the same way as women from different ethnic backgrounds. For the state, *all* women have access to legal support as there are laws and institutions in place to protect them from violence.<sup>9</sup> However, Indigenous women are not just any women. Because of their

ethnic background their needs are assumed to be supported by their ethnic community, and when they are not, Indigenous women fall into a void – a legal gap created by the inexistent framework of collaboration between legal systems. For Indigenous women, there is no contingency plan when they are not satisfied with the support provided by their community leaders.

If a woman presents a case of intimate partner violence and it is judged by her community using Indigenous justice, Ecuadorian law states that it should not be judged again by the state justice system. The only way for a person to appeal is to ask for the intervention of the Corte Constitucional (Constitutional Court), the supreme body responsible for controlling, constitutionally interpreting and administering justice, located in Quito, the capital of the country. This process is very expensive and can take years. The person challenging the system will need to ask for an *Acción Extraordinaria de Protección contra Decisiones de la Justicia Indígena* (Extraordinary Action for Protection against Indigenous Justice Decisions, AEPJI). Since 2009, when the process of appealing was established, the Corte Constitucional has received several cases. The first case to ask for an AEPJI was presented in July 2010 and the final resolution was published in July 2014. The last case recorded on the Corte Constitucional website started in June 2016 and the final documentation was sent to the parties involved in February 2022. The case is now closed.

## **Conclusion: limited support and hollow choices**

The lack of integration between the legal systems does not protect the autonomy of the Indigenous justice system but complicates and obstructs the access of Indigenous people to another set of legal options to which they are entitled. Women are affected by this legal void. The use of the state justice system becomes another challenging setting for women who have experienced intimate partner violence. They have to confront the complicated legal framework, the barriers of language and translation and the lack of cultural understanding. Nonetheless, even when faced with multiple obstacles, women find ways to use the state justice system as part of their strategies to manage violent partners. The division between the Indigenous and state justice system does not contribute to the accessibility of justice. Moreover, it complicates it, leaving women with limited and restrictive solutions to manoeuvre violence.

Indigenous women's choices and decisions are mediated and restricted by two main barriers: the effects of multicultural neoliberalism

and the gendered inequalities that persist within their communities. These two sets of restrictions present overlapping, intersectional challenges for Indigenous women. Under the scenario of being failed by two legal systems, Indigenous women have to adapt and survive violence with little support from either. Indigenous women confronted with the challenging setting of intimate partner violence use several strategies to protect themselves and their children. As explained by Benson (1990) and Showden (2011), women's extensive knowledge of their own social context shapes their strategies to manoeuvre violent scenarios. In this sense, the way Indigenous women cope with, endure and survive abuse reflects the possibilities and the limitations they can see as available to them. In Ñachag, the first is a path of prevention and limited confrontation that gives women the possibility of protecting themselves. The second path is more related to the normalisation of abuse as part of a strategy to survive. Language plays an integral part in the reproduction and interiorisation of subordinated roles in women's lives. There are also two less common strategies: permanent separation (divorce) and suicide.<sup>10</sup> Women's decisions demonstrate their ability to manoeuvre very restrictive settings even when options are limited and choices are hollow.

## Notes

- 1 Ñachag is a fictional name used to maintain the anonymity of the people mentioned in this story. To contribute to clarity in understanding the context, the chapter refers to a broad geographical area that includes several Indigenous communities with shared history and traditions. Personal names in this chapter have also been changed.
- 2 All translations by the author.
- 3 In the twentieth century, Ecuador, among other countries in the region, started to promote the endorsement of mestizo identity. This process of cultural *mestizaje* aimed to force Indigenous communities to 'move forward' and leave behind their Indigenous identity and history.
- 4 Rodríguez Lara was not a democratically elected president. He became president after a coup against President José María Velasco Ibarra.
- 5 A *código orgánico* or *leyes orgánicas* are the most relevant laws in the country after the Ecuadorian constitution and international treaties.
- 6 Article 344. '*Non bis in idem*. The actions of the authorities of the Indigenous justice shall not be judged or reviewed by the judges of the Judicial Branch or by any administrative authority, in any state of the causes brought to their attention, without prejudice of constitutional control . . . Pro-Indigenous jurisdiction. In case of doubt between the nation-state jurisdiction and the Indigenous jurisdiction, the latter will be preferred, in such a way as to ensure its greater autonomy and the least possible intervention.'
- 7 The *Fiscalía* is the public prosecutor's office and the *Fiscal* is its main authority. The *Unidades Judiciales* are the national courts.
- 8 If the case is not a criminal offence, it will be a misdemeanour. According to the Penal Code, misdemeanours are incidents that leave the victim injured and incapacitated, but for no longer than three days. This categorisation is determined in the evaluations by the doctors in the *Unidades Judiciales*. If, during these evaluations, the legal team determines that the damages will incapacitate the person for four days or more, the case needs to be sent to the *Fiscalía* to start an investigation that might end in a criminal trial.

- 9 Even though they are not efficient, access is restricted and gender discrimination is a problem. Forty-three per cent of women in Ecuador have experienced intimate partner violence (INEC 2019). Nonetheless, more than 80 per cent of intimate partner violence victims did not report the abuse in the state legal system (INEC 2019). Overall, the state legal system is disconnected from Ecuadorian women's needs, but in the case of Ecuadorian Indigenous women it is not just disconnected but also disinclined to provide a service to support their needs, even when Indigenous women have to some extent demanded its support.
- 10 During fieldwork, I heard about two cases. Both involved victims of intimate partner violence. The first case was a woman married for a long time who had never complained about her husband. The family only discussed the case after the woman, in her fifties, drank insecticide after a fight with her husband. The second was an old case, which took place in 2008. The case was registered in the community's *Libro de Actas*. The *Libro de Actas* is a notebook where community leaders write summaries of their internal procedures, such as the *arreglos comunitarios* or, in this case, the record of a suicide. The *Libro de Actas* mentioned that the woman was about three months pregnant when she hanged herself.

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## 2

# 'A new dawn for good living': women healing body and community in the Andes

Lucía Isabel Stavig

During the National Programme for Reproductive Health and Family Planning (1996–2000), approximately 290,000 Peruvian women were sterilised, with estimates that almost 70 per cent of them were not offered full and informed consent (Rendon 2019). Researchers estimate that 92.5 per cent of women sterilised were Indigenous or Indigenous descendants (Jiménez and Rendon 2020; Chirif 2021). The programme's focus on women was not accidental: women are the heart of Indigenous communities, and sexual and reproductive violence have long been used as a weapon by the state to gain access to Indigenous lands and resources (Hernández Castillo 2016; Smith 2005; Theidon 2014).

Affected women in Anta Province, Cusco have been organising for legal justice since the late 1990s, but many still find themselves ill. Even where allopathic medicine is accessible, some women's illnesses are not legible within biomedicine: their aetiologies are tied to Runa (Quechua) theories of body and wellness. One of the illnesses experienced by affected women is *mancharisqa* (*susto*, or soul loss), a sickness understood as 'illness of the land' within Runa medical practice. This class of malady comes from the breakdown of relation among beings in *ayllu*: the more-than-human Runa community comprising people, plants, animals, ancestors and earth beings (such as land, mountains and lakes), and held together by *ayni*, or reciprocal care.<sup>1</sup> Together, beings-in-ayllu form a 'shared body', whose health and well-being is based on the continual circulation of care, respect and mutual nurturance or *uyway*.



The physical cut to affected women's bodies severed them from the reproductive life of *ayllu*. Not only could they not reproduce biologically, but their illnesses also kept them from reproducing the social and spiritual life of *ayllu* through everyday labour and the rituals and ceremonies that renew relations between Runa and their other-than-human kin. Forced sterilisation, then, dismembered the shared body of the *ayllu*, leading to illness in people and in community. To address these illnesses, Runa *lideresa* (leader) Hilaria Supa Huamán established Mosoq Pakari Sumaq Kawsay (A New Dawn for Good Living, MPSK) in 2003. MPSK is a healing house that offers affected women a place to heal within the continued neoliberal plunder of their lands, bodies and lifeways.

Runa healing frameworks are based on re-establishing balance and connection within the body and between an individual and their larger *ayllu*. The centre uses a combination of ancestral Andean, allopathic and other medical traditions to help re-establish connection and balance within women's bodies. And in healing women, the centre helps heal the entire more-than-human community. By using traditional healing processes that centre Runa ethics, knowledge and practice, the healing centre has become a space of 'survival' (Vizenor 1999), a place in which Runa life is cultivated in the everyday. In this process the centre has also become an engine of 'radical resurgence' (Simpson 2017): a place where Runa futures are built, in the present, based in traditional ethics of relationality that have powered Runa survival through time.

Over the past decade, resurgence has emerged as a theoretical framework for Indigenous practices of decolonisation that 'combat the violence of colonial social relations through the revitalization of Indigenous epistemologies, political structures, and place-based economic practices' (Coulthard 2014, 1). Unlike 'neoliberal capitalist management systems' that are based in individualistic, consumer-oriented, extractive logics, radical resurgence is an Indigenous-centred, place-based project of community and cultural revitalisation centring Indigenous ethics and ways of being and knowing (Million 2020, 393; Simpson 2017). While some place-based knowledges have been lost to colonisation, many others have been dispersed throughout communities. The goal of MPSK is to bring people and traditional knowledges together on the land to revitalise relations in-*ayllu*. These knowledges include herbal medicine, sacred geographies, ceremonial protocols, land stewardship and, of significance to this chapter, ethics of gender complementarity. I argue that gender complementarity continues to be relevant not only as discourse, but also as a tool of decolonial struggle for Indigenous women in the Andes. The discourse of gender complementarity has been used by some (male)

Indigenous leaders to occlude or excuse sexism in political struggle in the region (Pape 2008). But gender complementarity can be a tool of social transformation when wielded by women seeking more equitable gender relations. Thus, when implemented within the larger context of dispossession, these healing modalities contribute to a radical resurgence of Runa lifeways: as women heal, they remember and re-member the shared body of the *ayllu* – including women’s historical role in the reproduction of the biological, socio-spiritual and political futures of their communities.

There is a long history of Indigenous resistance and survivance in the Andes (Allen 2002; Silverblatt 1987; Stavig 1999). A small but growing body of research focuses on the role of Indigenous women in cultural resurgence and community governance in the Andes and the Americas more broadly (see for instance Simpson 2017; Gunn Allen 1992; Méndez 2018; Mollett 2015; Picq 2018; Schmidt 2016; Olivar et al. 2021; Mora 2021; Oliart 2008). This chapter adds to this focus and answers calls to bring Indigenous women’s ‘alternative knowledges, “felt theory”, to the fore, [which contest] dominant discourses and [lay] bare often-invisible structures of power’, including those that silence Indigenous women’s contributions to the revitalisation of their communities (Speed 2021, 34).

This chapter is based on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Peru between 2019 and 2020 and a six-year research collaboration with Indigenous *lideresa*, healer, founder of MPSK and ex-Congresswoman Hilaria Supa Huamán. She was one of the first Indigenous women to be elected to the Peruvian congress, and the first Indigenous person to give their oath in a language other than Spanish. Born in 1957 on an *hacienda* (a plantation-like agricultural unit that held Indigenous peoples in perpetual peonage until 1969), Hilaria was legally prohibited from attending school; she taught herself to read and write upon being elected to congress. Hilaria Supa drew from the spiritual and relational teachings of her grandparents to become a fierce advocate of her people. Her dedication to fighting for Runa futures has culminated in bringing forcibly sterilised women together [to heal on the land]. This chapter is primarily based on conversations with Hilaria Supa as an elder, knowledge keeper and Quechua *lideresa*; participant observation of the rehabilitation of the healing centre and community life; and everyday conversations with affected women. It is also heavily indebted to scholars of Native American and Indigenous studies of Turtle Island (North America) and their theorisations of the gendered ethics of relationality that shape Indigenous governance, resistance and survivance.

I open this chapter with a discussion of the border-crossing decolonial project of Indigenous scholarship and organisation, paying particular attention to Indigenous theorisations of nation as practice (Simpson 2017). Reading across colonial borders, I propose that *ayllu* is akin to nation as practice and discuss Runa women's role in its defence. Women have often been at the forefront of defences of *ayllu*, though their *political* labour has often been overlooked as masculinist views of resistance elevate protest and formal politics at the expense of more 'feminine' forms of politicking, such as the reproduction of community (Picq 2018). While women partake in both protest and formal politics, their roles as mothers, culture-keepers and reproducers of socio-spiritual life often go unappreciated. To valorise this important work, I read women's contributions to Indigenous Andean politics through the lens of gender complementarity. Having laid this groundwork, I turn to a discussion of efforts towards community healing, focusing on the work of women at MPSK. I conclude that by connecting Runa women's struggles to those of other Indigenous women across the Americas allows for a decolonial scholarship that appreciates how the ethics of relationality are the seeds of *ayllu*, or nation as practice.

## Of borders, nations and radical resurgence

Decolonial, feminist and other scholars have critiqued unreflexive applications of theory from the Global North onto the Global South (Hall, Alcalde and Babb 2021). However, in the case of the Americas, eliding similarities can prove equally problematic as overemphasising them. For thousands of years prior to European colonisation, vast trade networks, gatherings places, markets and kinship ties united the peoples of the Western hemisphere (Noble 1991). These deep histories of exchange developed into cultural commonalities found among many peoples of the Americas, including 'a worldview that includes principles of environmental stewardship, concepts of balance within an interdependent universe, kinship and clans as the basis of governance, and with European invasion and settlement, resistance to colonization' (EagleWoman 2008, 556–7).

This exchange also resulted in political alliances. Over the past 500 years, the alliance among Indigenous peoples and nations of the Western hemisphere (also known as the Condor and Eagle alliance) has had to 'go underground' to remain out of sight of colonial governments (EagleWoman 2008). Nevertheless, this alliance has persisted, and

its importance to the theorisation of decolonial futures should not be underestimated. Current Indigenous political organisation and theorising span artificial colonial divides, stretching the ‘social skin’ of Indigenous communities and nations (Valdivia et al. 2021). Through the internet, major Indigenous conferences, project partnerships and transnational protest, Indigenous nations around the world have learned about each other’s struggles and modes of resistance. They have been able to see and experience the commonalities and differences between these struggles and to analyse what they are all up against: a renewed colonial impulse around land dispossession for resource extraction and development (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Simpson 2017).

Reading social realities across colonially imposed borders can shed light on shared histories of cultural exchange and political alliances, which illuminates current conversations and cultural similarities among Indigenous nation of the Americas (Speed 2017). While the cultures of peoples and nations of the Western hemisphere are not the same, ignoring histories of shared cultural practices and alliances occludes important sources of political resistance and resurgence – namely shared values and ethics around Indigenous relation, governance and stewardship that power current-day Indigenous politics.

## Process and practice: thinking across nation and *ayllu*

The practice of nation is one of the most essential political practices among Indigenous peoples in the Western hemisphere (Simpson 2017). Here, nation is not the legal and bureaucratic notion of the *nation state*, which defines membership as citizenship (a set of exclusionary rights and inclusive responsibilities between citizens and the state). Rather, the concept of Indigenous nation is an ethicopolitical one (Coulthard 2019), a mode of governance based on the embodied ethics of inter-being among human and non-human kin in the past, present and future. The ethical responsibility to support life separates Indigenous nationhood from the biopolitics of the liberal nation state in which the life of some is deaths of others (Simpson 2017, 8; Million 2020).

Under the regime of liberal democracy, the land is far from kin. As such, it has no rights and is considered *geos*, un-alive, an object to be made resource (Povinelli 2016). On the other hand, nation in Indigenous practice is ‘an ecology of intimacy’:

a web of connections to each other, to the plant nations, the animal nations, the rivers and lakes, the cosmos, and our neighboring Indigenous nations . . . It is relationships based on deep reciprocity, respect, non-interference, self-determination, and freedom . . . It is nationhood based on a series of radiating responsibilities (Simpson 2017, 8–9).

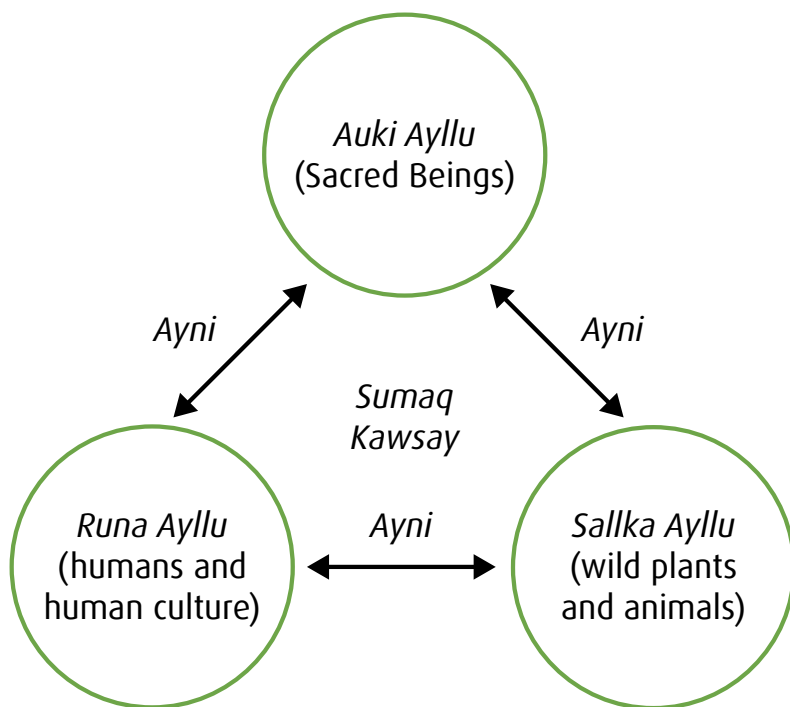
Driven by a grounded normativity of ethical conduct arising from Place-Thought (Watts 2013; Coulthard 2014), Indigenous nation calls into question systems of settler colonialism that threaten relation through dispossession, extractive industry and death.

Indigenous North American theorisations of nation are strikingly akin to Runa theories of *ayllu*, though this connection has not been explored. In anthropological texts, *ayllu* is often translated as ‘community’ or ‘family’, but these translations do not fully encompass what *ayllu* is for Runa (Quechua) peoples. Scholars have noted how Runa experience *ayllu* as a bio-socio-spiritual community, a shared body of humans, non-human animals, plants, earth beings and ancestors with whom Runa inter-are (Salas Carreño 2016; Allen 2002; Bastien 1985; de la Cadena 2015). I add a focus on *ayni* as an ethics of relationality weaving these beings together and shaping praxes of shared governance among beings – human and not – in-*ayllu*.

The connection between *ayllu* and Native American conceptions of nation became apparent to me when Walter, an Indigenous educator at the Potato Park in Písaq, described *ayllu* in similar terms to Simpson’s description of nation. He described *ayllu* as a series of *ayllus* that inter-are, that work together to produce life and well-being. These *ayllus* are the *runa ayllu*: the *ayllu* of human culture (including cultivated fields); the *sallka ayllu*: the *ayllu* of wild plants and animals; and the *awki ayllu*: the *ayllu* of sacred beings, like *apus*. These *ayllus* are held together by *ayni*, or reciprocal care (Figure 2.1).

In this Indigenous practice, *ayllu* is not only an economic unit of exchange or a descent line as previously theorised by Andeanists; it is also a dynamic constellation of beings powered and governed by the ethics of reciprocal care (or *ayni*) in the everyday. *Ayni* has historically been defined by anthropologists of the Andes as a formal institution of reciprocal labour and services. But as my research shows, *ayni* is also *reciprocal care* and the ontological principle of relatedness among Runa, as argued by Van Vleet (2008).

*Ayni* lives in *Runasimi* (the Quechua language); in the ceremony and ritualised offerings or *despachos* to the *apus*; in the everyday offering



**Figure 2.1** Author’s elaboration of a diagram based on a presentation by educators at the Potato Park in Písaq, Cusco.

of *chicha* (corn beer) and *trago* (alcohol) to Pachamama (Earth mother) and *apus* (mountain beings). It also lives in people coming together to raise money for the sick; in how they observe that plants are sad (*llaki* in Quechua) when uncared for by their human helpers; in how the community raises *cinco por cohetes* or five soles per family to buy fireworks to ward off crop-destroying hail; in how people call each other *ñaña/panay* (sister) or *turi/wawki* (brother) even if not immediately related, and in how folk ask after ‘our’ mother or father when talking to a friend. These acts are *ayni* as they tacitly acknowledge that life, identity, health, well-being and strength come from relation with other beings-in-ayllu (Supa Huamán 2008; de la Cadena 2015). *Ayni* is the grounded normativity, the ethics of relationality that has powered the regeneration of Runa worlds through time. Thus, I propose that *ayllu* be rethought in terms akin to nation: as a *practice of governance* that supports life and well-being.

Some scholars have worried about the ability of *ayllu* to flourish into the future due to continued migration (Allen 2002), desires of Runa to advance economically and socially (Leinaweaver 2008b), and the effects of extractive industry and other colonial ecoterritorial conflicts (Silva Santisteban 2017). These are not baseless worries; dynamics both internal and external to *ayllu* do tear at its fabric. However, both scholarly and everyday theorising indicate that *ayllu* remains an important source of personhood, ethics and governance in Runa worlds.

During a Google Meets class in 2020, my Quechua teacher and young Runa activist, Qorich'aska (Golden Star), recounted how different Runa nations outside Cusco coordinated their annual pilgrimage to the sacred mountain, apu Q'ullur Riti, so as to care for the mountain's melting glacier and protect each other. Caring for the *apus* and other earth beings became of utmost importance to Runa during COVID-19 as the illness was theorised as the Pachamama's way of expressing her dismay at humans' disregard for their reciprocal obligations of care towards other-than-human beings.

'Nations?' I asked. I was perplexed as I had never heard the term nation used to describe *ayllu* before.

'Yes! Canas, Canchis, Quispicanchis, Acomayo . . . these are nations,' Qorich'aska replied.

Canas, Canchis, Quispicanchis, and Acomayo are all legal provinces within the state of Peru, but Qorich'aska's intervention helped me understand that modern legal and political delimitations have been superimposed atop much older modes of Indigenous governance (Stavig 1999), indicating Runa's long and active resistance to imposed forms of territorial delimitation and governing structures. Historically, a great deal of care has gone into defending *ayllu* in the Andes, a fact well documented by anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s (Bastien 1978; Isbell 1985; Allen 2002; Gose 1994). The above discussion adds to this conversation by arguing that although survival is not a given, *ayni* guides modes of governance and is foundational to what *ayllu* is: a present practice of respectful inter-being with past, present and future relations.

Indigenous peoples of the Andes have consistently resisted the dispossession of their lands, bodies and nations through outright rebellion, adaptation of colonial technologies to Indigenous systems of being and knowing, and the sustenance of spaces of survivance. Because of their centrality to the reproduction of Indigenous life, Indigenous women have been targets of colonial violence (Smith 2005). Despite these attacks, women remain the heart of processes of resurgence and survivance, which I explore in the following section.

## Complementarity and intersectionality: strength in 'unlikely' places

The status of women in the Andes has been a point of discussion in academic circles for the past half century. A main source of tension has been the issue of gender complementarity, as discussed in the introduction to this volume. The 1970s Andeanist literature on women either tended to emphasise the continued existence of gender complementarity and read contemporary sexism as an outcome of the imposition of colonial gender regimes, or else argued that patriarchal relations were rooted in 'traditional' gender roles and would only be rooted out with modernisation (Babb 2018).

The complementarians generally won this debate – though some Indigenous scholars and allies have lately challenged what they see as idealisations of gender duality, parity and complementarity by feminist scholars of the North (Escribens et al. 2008; Paredes and Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad 2010). While these critiques are apt in many ways, I contend that they miss a crucial point: complementarity is not synonymous with gender parity or equality as conceptualised in the binary, oppositional logics of liberal democratic systems. Complementarity is based in non-dualism, in the balanced *interdependence* of sexed opposites (male/female, sun/moon, *Hanaq pacha* [male sky world]/*Ukhu pacha* [female underground world]) for the reproduction of life (Yáñez de Pozo 2005). When paired with the Andean principle of reciprocity, complementarity suggests that sexed complements are necessary for creation; the feminine, the masculine, men, women and their work are essential to the reproduction of biological, social and spiritual life. No sex or gender expression is more important than the other, and imbalance between creative forces results in violence and an inability to reproduce life. Acknowledging and maintaining the creative tension between feminine and masculine is, then, vital to health and well-being. As Supa Huamán has suggested:

Respecting our ancestral wisdom, neither machismo nor feminism can exist, because neither men nor women are worth more or less than the other. Just like overexposure to 'hot' influences (the sun, alcohol, and other foods) makes our bodies sick, the imbalance between men and women makes our society sick (2008, 89, my translation).



Though eroded, the praxis of gender complementarity remains present in the two-headed household of the Andes, a family structure also found in other Indigenous cultures throughout Abya Yala (Hamilton 1998; Lugones 2008; Schmidt 2016). In this system, power and responsibility are shared among husband and wife, and where one does not uphold their obligations in the *warmiqhari* (womanman/wifehusband) unit, conflict ensues. For instance, in Anta, women continue to administer family finances and hold the keys to the larder: the contemporary means of reproducing everyday life. Daily gossip among the women with whom I spent my days shelling fava beans and cooking included whispers about husbands who failed to hand their wages over to their wives, or who otherwise did not contribute their gendered labour to the well-being of the family.

Again, my argument for the continued importance of gender complementarity in Runa society does not rest on the current presence of egalitarian gender relations. As Dian Million notes, 'There is fierce resistance to our [Indigenous women's] efforts to collapse hierarchies embedded in our community relations' (2020, 395). Sexism, and particularly heterosexism, are violently enforced in many Indigenous communities in the Andes (Cuentas Ramírez 2016). The origins of this sexism are debated. It is likely that existing hierarchies in Indigenous Andean societies were recoded and strengthened by colonial patriarchal gender systems, in what Paredes (2017) calls the *entronque patriarcal*, or patriarchal conjunction. Nevertheless, based on ethnographic research, it seems likely that gender complementarity (as the principle of interdependence between sexed opposites) was remoulded, not replaced, by male dominance.

Rural, agrarian life in the Andes requires the labour of both men and women for the reproduction of household and community (Babb 1989; 2018). In my field site, this gendered division of labour was evident in the everyday. Where men guided the ploughs through the earth, women guided the *yunta* (bull team); where men opened the earth, women planted the seed; where women cooked and served food, men understood that being served rested on their respect for their wives' labour. Nevertheless, it is still the case that the status of Indigenous women is much lower than that of Indigenous men in the eyes of the state, wider mestizo society and, because of this, within Indigenous communities (Boesten 2014).

I was witness to several cases of domestic violence in Hilaria's community, an unfortunately common occurrence in the Andes (Boesten 2012). Conversations among women in the aftermath of such abuse

did not centre women's rights discourses presented to local women by NGOs, but rather circled around how this abuse was not in keeping with Runa values. This discussion of values is reminiscent of a dynamic de la Cadena (1991) noted 30 years ago: Runa men who work in cities often come home to their wives and communities defeated, or else as arrogant strangers disdainful of their Indigenous wives.

Despite their current lower gendered position vis-à-vis Runa men and the wider mestizo and *misti* (white) worlds, Runa women (like other Indigenous women globally) continue to be the beating heart of their communities. By engaging in acts of reciprocal care within neoliberal, individualist and extractivist logics, Runa women recreate relational governance in the face of a 'coloniality of power [that] denies the validity and coevalness of worlds through a gender system that disintegrates communal relations, ritual thinking, collective authority mechanism' (Méndez 2018, 20; see also Lowe 2015). Gunn Allen (1992) has called Indigenous systems of governance 'gynocratic' in that they are based in the reproduction life among all relations, human and non-human.

Practices of reproduction (both biological and socio-spiritual) are a potent source of relational governance, particularly in contexts of colonial reproductive violence. Within these contexts, Indigenous women

play a crucial role in envisioning models of autonomy that do not merely replicate patriarchal, hierarchal structures that often reproduce the marginalization and subjugation of sections of society . . . [They] play a crucial role in maintaining and cultivating practices, systems and bodies of knowledge, values, languages, [and] modes of learning (Kuokkanen 2007, 2).

One mode women embody this role is through what Patricia Hill Collins calls 'motherwork' (1994). Applying this concept to Indigenous women, Udel (2001, 42), argues that 'motherwork involves working for the physical survival of children and community'. Where motherwork de-emphasises individual autonomy in favour of collective survival, it has troubled some feminists. However, in the face of the destruction of Indigenous women's communities, families, and source of personhood, nourishing spaces of survivance that reproduce their worlds biologically, socially and spiritually is highly political work. These spaces, while shaped by settler colonialism and structures of oppression, 'displace the epistemic frame of settlers' (Vizenor 1999, ii) and centre Indigenous logics and ethics of mutual care.

The Andes has a long history of Indigenous women resisting colonisation through protest and rebellion, as well through reproduction of spaces of survivance (Schmidt 2016; Silverblatt 1987; Stavig 1999; Roca Puchana 1990). Resistance has often only been legible to the academy as public acts of protest (Scott 1985). However, in the context of colonisation, resistance can also be the *everyday* reproduction of Indigenous life in the face of continued assault (Alfred and Cornassel 2005; Vizenor 1999). Manuela Picq (2018) picks up these 'feminine' styles of social governance in the Andes, arguing that women's contributions to Indigenous politicking have often been overlooked because particularly Western understandings of the private/public split have been superimposed upon analyses of Indigenous protest and governance.

While there is a private and public sphere in Runa society, the sphere of governance *includes* the private sphere; as the health and well-being of community is built on the health and well-being of each family, the private sphere is one of the main spaces in which *ayllu* is reproduced through the complementary labour of men and women. Thus, despite changing dynamics around gender, I argue that gender complementarity continues to be an organising principle of everyday life, and as I will show in the next sections, it proves useful in efforts to rebalance relations among Runa men and women.

Healing on their lands at the centre, Runa women work to remember and re-member the shared body of the *ayllu* by reconnecting to the energy of the land and regaining a sense of their own reproductive force, even after sterilisation. While the connections between women's bodies, fertility and motherhood are not uncomplicated in the Andes, scholars cannot afford to shy away from exploring mothering and other 'feminine' reproductive activities as political actions stemming from Indigenous women's attempts to cultivate the lives of their *ayllus*. Before I attend to women's motherwork, I discuss how the physical space of the healing centre is itself healing.

## Women reweaving *ayllu*: Mosoq Pakari Sumac Kawsay

The healing centre, Mosoq Pakari Sumac Kawsay (MPSK), is a space of gendered resistance, of motherwork. It celebrates and reproduces Runa life through women's active engagement with the land, ancestors and the cosmos through its architecture, placement in a sacred geography and healing projects. The centre was built on reclaimed *hacienda* lands in 2003. During a ceremony to determine where to build, the ancestors came to the *paqo* (spiritual healer) engaged by Hilaria Supa. They told him that the

centre should be built atop their resting place at the base of a nearby hill. That the ancestors wanted to be a part of the healing at MPSK came as no surprise to Hilaria – in her view, they need as much care and healing as the living. Telling me about *paqo*'s vision she said, 'Sometimes the illnesses that plague us here in the present come from something that happened to our ancestors. To heal them, we have to heal ourselves now. Healing ourselves heals them.' This type of healing elides linear settler time, while also being emplaced. Further, the centre was built in a series of three terraces to represent the three worlds of the Runa cosmivision: *Hanaq pacha* (the sky world), *Kay pacha* (this world) and *Ukhu pacha* (the under or interior world). When relations between all three worlds are in balance, one of the outcomes is good physical, social and spiritual health known as *sumaq kawsay*, or 'good living' (Mujica Bermúdez 2020; Portocarrero and Langdon 2020). The longue durée of colonialism has led to a deterioration in Runa's relationship with their cosmos, leading to a sense of disconnection from land, community and self, which contributes to ill health (Yáñez de Pozo 2005). The illnesses stemming from this disconnection are part of the 'soul wound' of colonialism (Duran et al. 1998; Brave Heart et al. 2011); thus reconnecting to the *ayllu* and Runa cosmos is central to healing.

One morning, as I was attempting to think through the significance of the centre's architecture and placement, Hilaria and I had a conversation.

LS: Is remembering these three worlds important for healing?

HSH: Of course, of course! Because, well, you live with these worlds.

LS: So, this way of healing reincorporates affected women with their ancestral knowledge, or something like that?

HSH: Yes, yes. One should always live with their ancestral world because there is a lot of knowledge that we are forgetting that we are leaving behind. And, well, we are moving away from our medicines, from all of it. So, if you separate yourself – because, in old times, our Elders, they went without shoes. They would go *q'ala patita* (barefoot). *Pum pum pum pum* they would walk like this. They were stronger than we are because they were still connected to the earth, the dirt, to Kay Pacha. But now we go with shoes, right? So we are more disconnected from the earth and weaker for it. They say that it's good – they say that walking on the ground barefoot is always good, always grounding.

LS: So one's strength comes from that connection?

HSH: Of course! From that connection!

Good living in Runa worlds means maintaining connection with the *ayllu* nations that span the three worlds of the Runa cosmos. The knowledge and practices necessary to maintain these relations still exist, but as Hilaria points out, people *are* forgetting. Remembering the cosmos through sacred architecture is one way to remind people. Hilaria's point is not for everyone to literally go barefoot (though that is a good practice from time to time); the point is to find ways to remember (*yuyay*) and re-member (make whole) the shared body of the *ayllu*. The centre's architecture and engagement with the ancestors makes it a space of survivance and radical resurgence precisely by serving to remember and re-member the shared body. When affected women tend to their symbolic and physical wounds at MPSK, they heal themselves and the entire shared body, including the ancestors and future generations.

Healing work that remembers and re-members the shared body lays the foundation for Runa futures by reproducing Runa life and governance through everyday practice. As Corntassel contends,

The complex spiritual, political, and social relationships that hold peoplehood [i.e. nation or *ayllu*] together are continuously renewed . . . whether through prayer, speaking your own language, honouring your ancestors, etc . . . [These] are the foundations of resurgence (2012, 89).

As I will show, the motherwork of commensality, childrearing, medicine making and tending to both language and the land are essential to Runa's continued existence, and their existence *as Runa* with particular praxes of governance. Reading Runa women's motherwork within Andinxs contexts of gynocritic governance, survivance and radical resurgence honours their labour and avoids essentialising their gendered contributions to Runa society as simply a 'natural' extension of their role as women. Rather, the power of their politics comes from their role as creatrixes in ancestral gender systems, and from their experiences as Indigenous women under colonial occupation (Mollett 2015). While they are victims of violence due to their gender, Runa women are also the backbone of communities, orchestrating healing and radical resurgence as they construct spaces of survivance that help reconnect women to themselves, each other and the shared body of *ayllu*.

## The medicine of being together

Over the first years of MPSK's operation, dozens of women came to the centre for healing. Though each woman was individually poor, each brought with her a little food, which was cooked and shared communally. Food and feeding are materially and symbolically important: commensality is one of the main forms of (re-)creating relation among beings in-ayllu (Leinaweaver 2008a; Salas Carreño 2016; Weismantel 1995; Weismantel and Wilhoit 2019). While they cooked and ate, they brought the Pachamama (mother earth) and the *apus* (mountain beings) into relation with them by offering these beings food and libations. As they cooked, the women also talked – sometimes for the first time – about their sterilisations.

HSH: Every woman who came to the centre brought a little food with them. We were all poor. Women are the last to eat in their families. When there isn't much, they eat less so that their children and husbands can. But still they brought what they could. Some brought potatoes, others corn, carrots or cheese. Others brought wood for our fire. Together, we made food, *alimento*, for our bodies. But cooking together also gave women *fuerza*, strength, and space to talk about what happened. Cooking gave us *ánimo*, vital energy.

LS: Do you think being together helped them *desahogarse*, unburden themselves?

HSH: Oh yes. For some it was the first time they shared out loud what had happened to them. In their families, many of them had been shamed for what had happened. '*Acaso no tenías boca? Por qué de dejaste?* Did you not have a mouth to speak? Why did you let this happen?' One woman said her youngest child, now a teenager was saying these things to her. Many of these women find themselves alone, *waqcha*, without family to help them. So being together, cooking, talking, is medicine.

In cooking and talking, affected women made memory and rejected epithets coming from the state, communities and families that insinuated their sterilisation was either 'for their own good' or their fault. By sharing food and stories in *Runasimi* (Quechua), women began to reweave relation, creating a space to begin healing the colonisation of their and their ayllu's body, mind and spirit.

Further, though affected women cannot regain their biological reproductive capacities, they work to heal their 'cut' from the land by engaging earth-based healing modalities. The association of women's body with the land and the natural has been a point of contention in feminist scholarship, and, where used to oppress and devalue women, an association with the natural can be detrimental to women's well-being (Lugones 2008; Morgensen 2012). However, as Mollett (2015) contends, what can be seen as a source of oppression can also be a source of politics. In keeping with Runa praxes of feminine, life-giving governance, women's healing motherwork is not a politics of liberation, but of *relation* (Anderson 2021). Women reconnecting with the land and their social reproductive roles helps power a decolonial politics of communal healing, animating Runa futures.

Creating the centre's medicinal garden also helped women remember their biological and social reproductive capacities. When Hilaria approached affected women to help with the garden, they were excited to collect medicines from the wild, or *sallka ayllu*. In reference to a particular medicine, Vicentina, one of Hilaria's neighbours, told us, 'I know where it is, but we have to wait for it to finish having its babies [flowering and seeding] before we can harvest.' Vicentina's statement suggests that when she thought about care and healing, she did not only think of the well-being of humans, but also of the larger shared body of the *ayllu*: to damage the *sallka ayllu* (the *ayllu* of wild plants and animals) would be to harm herself and her kin.

In the creation of the medicinal garden, I came to realise the importance of the (re)production of collective knowledge to processes of resurgence. Though many women had a wide knowledge of medicinal plants, the persecution of midwives (who were also trusted herbalists) by the Fujimori government in the mid-1990s curtailed Runa's knowledge of how to mix and prepare medicines.<sup>2</sup> With the aid of an herbalist, women coming to the centre were able to relearn and share knowledges important to their *ayllus'* futures with their children and grandchildren.

The transfer of traditional knowledge is an everyday act of resurgence in contexts in which 'family and community kinship networks that provided emotional, spiritual and physical support have been brutally and systematically dismantled' by colonial incursions (Morgensen 2012). Through the creation of a medicinal garden, the centre facilitated the intergenerational (re)production of knowledges about medicinal plants, their uses and how to plant and harvest them. One day, after a lesson in herbal medicine, my god-daughter's siblings (who were then 12, 10 and 6 years old) and I were sent out to harvest *muña* (a close relative of mint)

for tea. As we walked, the children pointed out at least a dozen different medicines, and without much prompting, told me how to prepare and use at least six of these. When we found series of *muña* plants, the two boys began to pick quickly. Watching their enthusiasm, their sister reminded them to not *abusar de la planta*, not to abuse the plant, to take only a bit from each, so as not to harm the plants' growth or their own future access to medicine. Though this was something she had learned through observation and direct teachings from her parents, this was a knowledge now being reinforced and validated by the space of survivance created at the centre.

Responding to and adopting new technologies has long been a part of Indigenous survivance in the Andes, and when it comes to incorporating new practices, 'tools do not necessarily define process' (Simpson 2017, 196). What makes a healing modality (including acupuncture, massage and other somatic healing techniques used at the centre) 'traditional' in Runa medicine is its ability to work in *ayni* with the body – that is, to support the body's natural ability to heal itself. For instance, Hilaria Supa is currently adding a sauna to the healing centre, an idea that came from working with other Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas:

The *temazcal* (sweat lodge) is traditionally practised from Mexico northward. But here in the South, it can benefit us, cure us, help us live our culture . . . It's a ceremonial offering to the Pachamama and a ceremony of physical, emotional and spiritual purification. It's a form of *ayni* because you give your suffering, you endure the heat so that you can ask for something (Supa Huamán 2008, 96–7, my translation).

In its Runa rendering, the *temescal* becomes a means of reconnecting ailing Runa with their culture and tradition, aiding the larger process of remembering and re-membering the *ayllu* through praxes of *ayni*.

Hilaria is also piloting a couple's counselling programme that uses both modern psychological techniques and principles of gender complementarity to address gender inequity and gendered violence in the families of sterilised women. In this counselling, women are reminded of their importance in the reproduction of not only of family, but of community life and governance more broadly. In a history that includes powerful political and military leaders (Mama Oca, Micaela Bastidas, Bartolina Sisa), the contemporary power of Runa women has been more restricted. The weight of sexism is felt in the bodies of sterilised women



in the form of illness, domestic violence and general malaise. 'Failure' to reproduce biologically often became the centre of conflict in affected women's marriages, as contemporarily, the number of children a man produced has become a colonised measurement of masculinity rather than a measure of a family's economic, social and spiritual wealth. Counselling at MPSK seeks to reframe couples' relationships within the more equitable vision of gender complementarity that values both men's and women's work as vital contributions not only to the biological, social and spiritual life of the family, but to that of the overall community as well.

Cooking and eating together, sharing pain, building knowledge, making herbal medicine, undergoing acupuncture and the *ayni* of the sweat lodge are only a handful of the healing and re-membling activities undertaken at MPSK. In the future, Hilaria seeks to reinforce spiritual ceremony to help women heal from the *mancharisqa* or soul loss they experienced from forced sterilisation, and to bring midwives to share and shore up knowledge about traditional midwifery and women's health more broadly.

## Conclusions: creating Runa futures

The healing modalities used at MPSK illustrate how spaces of Indigenous survivance can power radical resurgence through their engagement with traditional knowledge. The work of repair remembers and re-memblers more-than-human communities and seeds Indigenous futures. At MPSK, women affected by forced sterilisation have begun to heal their own bodies, minds and spirits by re-engaging in *ayllu* as a practice of relationality guided by *ayni*. From building the healing house on recuperated *hacienda* lands and the resting place of ancestors, to the shoring up and intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and the adaptation of medicines to help heal physical, emotional and spiritual wounds, affected women at MPSK are doing what Indigenous women 'have always done' (Simpson 2017): create and cultivate Indigenous life in the everyday through the politics of motherwork. As women do this work, they revalidate women's historical role in upholding Runa praxes of governance that value the reproduction of the biological, socio-spiritual and political futures of their communities.

The creation of MPSK as a space of survivance is part of a much longer genealogy (from colonial times to the present) of Runa women stepping up to defend the future of their people through motherwork.

This political labour has often been overlooked; but whether engaged in legal battles over their sterilisation or in the revitalisation of traditional knowledges and cosmovisions, Runa women are the beating heart of a Runa politics of futurity.

Connecting Runa women's struggles to those of other Indigenous nations in the Americas allows for a decolonial scholarship that appreciates how the ethics of relationality are the seeds of *ayllu*, or nation as practice. Relational practices are the lifeblood of survivance and radical resurgence. For thousands of years, Indigenous nations across the hemisphere have exchanged goods and cultural practices, even where these have remained (purposefully) invisible to the colonial state. Denying the continued conversations, alliances and shared practices of relational ethics among peoples serves to occlude Indigenous women's contributions to governance, survivance and radical resurgence through motherwork: the reproduction of everyday Indigenous life in the face of continued dispossession.

When I think of the importance of women to the practice of resurgence, I am left with this image: half a dozen Runa women, some in *polleras* (layered skirts) and top hats, braids down their backs; others in T-shirts and stretch leggings, hair in a ponytails, but all talking, laughing and drinking *chicha* as they sit on brightly coloured *llicllas* (woven clothes), sorting seed for next season's crops: Indigenous women seeding Indigenous futures.

## Notes

- 1 Historically, anthropologists have defined *ayni* as reciprocal labour. A more feminist analysis of the concept (cf. [Van Vleet 2008](#)) has resulted in an expanded understanding of *ayni* as the circulation of life-supporting care among humans and their other-than-human kin in *ayllu*.
- 2 The persecution of midwives, herbalists, *curanderos*, *paqos*, *yachaqs* and other healers has been a strategy to disintegrate Indigenous worlds since the colonial period ([Silverblatt 1987](#)).

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### 3

## Prudish in the *puna*: Quechua sexuality and the post-colonial pornographic gaze

Rebecca Irons

*Quechua women rut like guinea pigs and therefore require state-enforced contraceptive interventions*, or so prejudiced perceptions of them go in rural Andean Peru. Viewing Indigenous and non-white women as sexually deviant is a long-standing technology of discipline, dehumanisation and domination that has occurred since colonialism, and arguably continues today as a mechanism of the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000). Through this perceived sexual deviance, often expressed towards Indigenous Latin Americans in terms of animality, European ‘colonial desires’ have long tried to deny freedom of sexuality to post-colonial communities, instead viewing colonised women as commodified bodies for consumption and control. Addressing underlying legacies, Segato (2014) calls this a ‘pornographic gaze’, whereby colonialists interpreted Indigenous sexuality (so different from Catholic restraint in the Iberian peninsula) through their own subjective lens, in which the more extroverted Indigenous sexual behaviours were understood as emblematic of non-Christian, pornographic carnality and excessive, immoral appetites that needed to be disciplined.

The ‘coloniality of power’ suggests an endurance of colonial thought in contemporary society, and so the ‘pornographic gaze’ still has very real consequences for previously colonised people today. Long-term ethnographic fieldwork within state reproductive and sexual health services in Ayacucho found that Quechua women are considered as void of sexuality – somehow unable to pursue sex for pleasure, while also over-indulging for reproductive motives alone. Yet it will be argued that this

does not merely deny Quechua women access to sexual pleasure; such post-colonial discourses also contribute towards biopolitical justifications for contraceptive coercion and, in the historical case of Peru, enforced sterilisations. Only through addressing the oppression of Indigenous sexuality can historical and contemporary reproductive injustices be addressed and prevented.

Sitting with a group of new acquaintances in Lima in 2016, I explained how my impending doctoral research would be on family planning and contraception among the Indigenous Quechua of Andean Ayacucho. ‘Yes, anthropologists do study *myths*,’ the group laughed. Conversation quickly turned to uncomfortable speculations over the lack of running water in the Andes, general hygiene and the unlikelihood of oral sex (as a ‘contraceptive method’) under highland conditions. Discriminatory ‘joking’ comments were made about ‘repulsive’ smells, tastes and logistical challenges considering the layers of floaty *pollera* skirts that Indigenous women wear. Thus, before I even arrived at my field site in Ayacucho, it struck me that some Peruvians may hold the view that the Quechua might have different sexual appetites and desires than those in the metropolises, and that they might not be engaging in the same sexual behaviours as those in Lima.

As this chapter will discuss, these views are frequently expressed, by both Limeños and other Peruvians working in rural health centres, as perceptions of Quechua animality regarding reproduction: ‘the Indigenous’ are perceived as rutting like guinea pigs, without any consideration to the role that pleasure or the erotic play in their sex lives, or that they may also have sexual curiosity and experimentation. In this instance, the colonial ethnic hierarchies that saw urban, white and mestizo Peruvians as embodying a racially superior ‘modernity’ (Mignolo 2011), and the perception of Indigenous peoples as inferior and ‘traditional’, continue to be in operation through institutional structures such as the health system, my field of study.

Speaking particularly of sex and the erotic, I will draw principally upon the work of two feminist scholars’ theories: Argentine-Brazilian scholar Rita Segato’s (2014) pornographic gaze (*la mirada pornografica*), which understands Indigenous sex and sexuality as entwined within the wider coloniality of power in Latin America, and African American feminist Audre Lorde’s understandings of the ‘erotic as power’ (1984), the suppression of which is also an intentional suppression of power. Through ethnographic exploration of an Ayacucho community, it will be possible to observe the ways in which the state-run health discourse and beyond frames Indigenous sex in dehumanising terms, and how joyful Indigenous

sex is celebrated only under conditions of taboo inversion during the Lent carnival. It will be argued that such discourses do not merely deny Indigenous women access to sexual pleasure and the erotic, an enforced denial of an important part of the human experience (Lorde 1984, 91), but also contribute towards biopolitical justifications for contraceptive coercion and enforced sterilisations, as occurred in the Andes. Only through addressing the oppression of Indigenous sexuality can historical and contemporary reproductive injustices be addressed and prevented.

This chapter is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the Ayacucho village Vilcashuaman, from 2017 to 2019, the aim of which was to understand contemporary Quechua interactions with state-provided family planning and reproductive and sexual health services through ethnography in a local health network and community. It can be difficult to research and discuss a topic that is still perceived as taboo in the conservative Andes. Whilst it should be acknowledged that the subject is complex, all ethnographic examples were either given under interview conditions, in the knowledge that they were speaking to a researcher, and/or were publicly available. Indeed, people do talk about sex, without necessarily going into details of the acts. Living in small, tight-knit communities in the Andean village of Vilcashuaman, where many families share the same room to sleep, certainly does place constraints in terms of privacy. Yet people quietly admitted sneaking off to day-rent hotels in the departmental capital of Ayacucho, taking separate *combi* buses to avoid suspicion from their gossiping neighbours. One junior doctor once recounted to me that she had asked some of her patients how they had managed to get pregnant if they did not live with their partner (and presumably couldn't afford the luxury of a hotel); they'd gone off into the *puna*<sup>1</sup> and found themselves a tree to hide behind.

Despite the perhaps obvious revelation that Indigenous people also live erotic lives, many Andean ethnographies that do offer discussion of sexual relationships in the highlands tend to err on the side of explaining sex as a form of economic-exchange relationship and/or suggest exclusive male dominance over, and desire for, sex. For example, Weismantel's study of Cholas and Pishtacos in Ecuador recounts Quechua dating and flirting incidences but leads discussion towards exchange in material and economic terms. For example, she states that '*sex is a form of exchange*, and the kind of sex people have depended upon their material relations to each other' (Weismantel 2001, 136, emphasis added). Sex may also be seen as a man's domain. For example, Alcalde's investigation in Peru frames sex in terms of violence and force on the part of men (2010, 113–14), and Van Vleet suggests that her Bolivian informants viewed unpredictable



'sexual energy and excess' as a male domain (2008, 105). That said, there are works such as those by Isbell and Roncalla Fernandez (1977) and Riverti (2018) that highlight the sexual nature of joking within Quechua society. As this chapter will discuss, sexual joking can also be found in Quechua song. However, this does not necessarily mean that sexuality is openly acknowledged or studied, as will be seen. Indeed, such studies that address sex, without addressing women's sexuality or the possibility that Indigenous women might have sex for pleasure, underscore Ströbele-Gregor's (2013, 80) lament that although Indigenous women are increasingly visible in politics and activism, their bodies and sexuality continue to be erased from reflexive discussion (2013, 80). There is a reason for this, as the Aymara feminists Julieta Paredes and María Galino (2012) argue: Indigenous women are denied the opportunity to seek and express sexual pleasure by patriarchal societies and post-colonial government(s) that instead insist upon their submissiveness, obedience and oppression. Such perspectives on sex as outside of female agency render Indigenous women as body-objects under a pornographic gaze (Segato 2014), which will be discussed in more depth below.

As the literature cited above shows, Indigenous women's sexual lives are often presented as cases of unequal relationships motivated beyond the experience of the act itself – an approach that, at best, overlooks emotional and physical motivations for behaviours and, at worst, dehumanises Indigenous women. There is no denying that gendered relationships are unequal in the Andean context in several ways; nor can it be outright denied that women may have economic motives to engage in sexual relationships. However, Quechua women (and men) also have sex with each other for pleasure, a fact that has seemed to be consistently rejected both within the literature and among those working in the health centre in Vilcashuaman during my fieldwork, as will be elaborated upon.

Following the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), the Indigenous people of Peru find that power is exerted upon them in various ways that have persisted since the conquest. Though Quijano focuses predominantly on ethnicity and the colonial invention of race and racial hierarchies, Lugones develops this further to reference gender hierarchies as well. Her coloniality of gender theory (2007) sees the imposition of patriarchal gender hierarchies, following the Catholic tradition on the Iberian peninsula, upon otherwise more horizontal social structures in terms of gender. Though this has been contested (see this volume's introduction), the note of import here is the way in which Lugones suggests that this has affected Indigenous sex. Feminine sexual purity

and virginity were key in the Catholic tradition, which was not and is not necessarily the case among Indigenous communities who see sex from a very different perspective (Segato 2014). According to Lugones, this disjuncture led to the view that Indigenous sex was exaggerated and un-Christian. She states that ‘Idealized Christian sex is without passion . . . The consequences for the coloniality of gender are evident, as the bestial, colonized males and females are understood as excessively sexual’ (2007, 756). Taking a biopolitical perspective, unbridled behaviours of those considered inferior under coloniality must be reined in, Indigenous sex being no exception.

Abuse of post-colonial power to deny people the erotic can have a serious influence on many aspects of their lives. As Lorde writes:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise . . . In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives (Lorde 1984, 87–8).

She observes that those women ‘who continue to operate under an exclusively European-American male tradition’ (1984, 91) are unable to share in the ‘erotic charge’ of those outside this paradigm. Lorde was an African American woman in the United States writing from within a specific perspective, but the overall notion that it is the patriarchal, white framework of the Global North that seeks to suppress the erotic has consistency with the coloniality of power in Latin America as well. Ultimately, Lorde suggests that the erotic is a resource that provides power (1984, 89); this is corroborated by Lebron who, in his reflections on Lorde, argues that atonement with the erotic provides one with another tool at their disposal ‘with which to observe and criticize our social circumstances’ (2017, 92). In light of this, it can be argued that both reducing Indigenous sex to economic exchange and animalising Indigenous sex strips Indigenous peoples of sex as tool not only for joy but also for power. Through utilising the ‘Andinx’s’ lens, it will be possible to suggest that scholars understand Indigenous sexuality as complex and very much alive, moving on from static and simplistic notions of sexuality being taboo, strategic or barely existent for Quechua communities.

## The pornographic gaze and perceptions of Indigenous sex

As has been noted, while the wide-ranging influences of coloniality in Indigenous lives have been noted by various scholars (e.g. Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2011; Lugones 2007), the question of sexual intercourse itself has not featured so heavily within the discussion. And yet sex and desire (both coercive and otherwise) were dominant within colonial projects' expressions of racialised hierarchy. The lasting effect that such attitudes have had on post-colonial societies has been noted. For example, Young (1995) explores how the Victorians' inability to publicly discuss sex contributed to the 'obsession' with talking about (and in the process, creating and cementing hierarchies of) race in the Caribbean colonies, which Young terms 'colonial desire'. He argues that the colonial obsession with talking about race was not just about racialising others; it also revealed a heavy preoccupation with sex. Through the discourse of race and racial hybridity, people could talk about sex openly without fear of taboo. Young says, 'Nineteenth-century theories of race did not just consist of essentializing differentiations between self and other: they were also about a fascination with people having sex – interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit, *inter-racial sex*' (1995, 181; emphasis added). These Victorian (male) colonial desires lead to 'the controlling power relation between slave and slave owner' becoming 'eroticized' (Young 1995, 152); however, the interracial mixing and quantity of offspring produced began to threaten the imagined superiority of the white coloniser and his white bride (often back home in England and absent from the colony itself). This led to colonial government efforts to prevent mixing between the British (men) and the colonised (women), while maintaining the white male's control over colonised bodies. A significant way that this was achieved was through a systematic destruction of Black Caribbean women's subjectivities, rendering them as sexual objects for the benefit of white men, while also solidifying hierarchies of race through insisting that the non-white body was inferior (sexually and otherwise). Young notes that 'despite the way in which black women were constituted as sexual objects and experienced the evidence of their own desirability . . . they were also taught to see themselves as sexually unattractive' (1995, 152). Thus the colonial hierarchy became internalised and writ upon women's bodies.

Young's exploration of colonial desire within the Caribbean suggests that the coloniser saw colonised women as sexual objects: paradoxically both highly desirable, and also racially inferior. This objectification of the female body in colonial sex is theorised further by Segato, who sees

this as an expansion of the colonial-Christian-modernity mindset (2014, 597). She introduces the term 'pornographic gaze' to refer to the way in which sex is seen and interpreted through the perspective of coloniality, whereby colonialists interpreted Indigenous sexuality through their own subjective lens: the supposedly more extroverted Indigenous sexual behaviours (such as premarital intercourse) were understood as emblematic of non-Christian, pornographic carnality and excessive, immoral appetites that needed to be disciplined. In the colonial Iberian understanding, women are seen as body-objects in an inferior position of power *vis-à-vis* men. The gaze upon this body-object is not observational, but about ownership of the person (much as Young's reflection of the coloniser's relationship to slaves). Not all sex need be seen this way, and one can distinguish between pornography (object-bodies; exploitation of the body; fantasy; West/coloniality perspective) and conjugal pleasure (shared pleasure; Indigenous perspective), Segato argues (2014, 608). Lorde also observes a similar gendered disjuncture between approaches to sex, arguing that men have used the erotic against women by turning it into a psychotic and plasticised sensation. She argues that 'pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasises sensation without feeling' (1984, 88). Lorde goes on to state that in pornography the use of others as 'objects of satisfaction' rather than indulging a shared 'joy in the satisfying' avoids connection and reconciliation of similarities and differences (1984, 91). Referring specifically to Indigenous sex, Segato's main point is that when sexual intercourse is viewed through the pornographic gaze, it mutates the Indigenous understanding of relationality within the act and introduces the religiously infused concepts of morality and sin, even where the Indigenous group would not have interpreted the sexual act through this subjective lens (Segato 2014, 607). Her theorisation is significant because it asks that we understand Indigenous sex on its own terms, without analysing relations through legal or moral frameworks that have been introduced by coloniality and internalised to great extents in the Global North as well as South.

Discussions of power in sexual intercourse are divisive but necessary. From an academic perspective the pornographic gaze contributes a new dimension to discussions of coloniality and the influence that this continues to have on Indigenous society, how sex and sexuality are experienced and how they are portrayed. To flesh out Segato's original theory, I argue for the further consideration of women as body-objects. Implicit within this interpretation is the notion that the objectified body is not only restrained from active participation in sexual intercourse,

but also that sex is not enjoyed or enjoyable for the objectified person. However, I believe that it is important to acknowledge not only that Indigenous views on sex may be different in terms of power dynamics and morality, but also that sexual enjoyment may be a possibility in situations where the colonial-modern gaze may not perceive this to be so.

The pornographic gaze can be applied to the Peruvian context, in which Indigenous sex is portrayed and spoken about in specific ways that, as will be argued, dehumanise and limit female sexuality by seeing women as body-objects lacking agency. This will later be discussed regarding animalisation of sex, drunken ('immoral') sex, rape inferences and promiscuity during carnival, but at present it is worth exploring representations of Quechua sex within popular media and how they may fit into the pornographic gaze framework of understanding.

Portrayals of Indigenous Quechua sex are somewhat few and far between. However, there is one well-known cinematic example that deserves mention here for its unique portrayal of indigeneity as well as the considerations invited when one analyses the content through the pornographic gaze: Claudia Llosa's 2005 Peruvian film *Madeinusa*.

The story is set in a fictional Quechua village during the three-day 'holy time' (*Tiempo Santo*) from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. It is not quite as 'holy' as expected, as when the Christian God is absent, so too is the colonial-modernity paradigm that might impose Christian sexual morality. The viewer learns this when we see the main character, the Indigenous youth Madeinusa, being caressed by her inebriated father who is attempting to have sexual intercourse with her. She tells him they must wait until the holy time when God/Jesus Christ is 'dead' and will not be able to see them; she does not balk nor reject his advances based on the act itself, it seems. Alongside this we see the arrival of a white Limeño, Salvador ('saviour'), with whom Madeinusa plans to run away to Lima. Ultimately, Madeinusa poisons her father, puts the blame on Salvador – who we presume is lynched by the villagers – and runs away to Lima by herself, inviting various commentaries on the post-colonial and feminist nature of the film (Palaversich 2013).

The purpose here is not to critique the wider content of the film, however, but to mention the incestuous storyline specifically within the pornographic gaze framework. In presenting Quechua sex and relationships this way, Llosa was accused by some of perpetuating 'racist colonial stereotypes of primitive and irrational natives' (Palaversich 2013, 490), and the reaction of Indigenous critics was also unfavourable to the 'false' representation of Andean life (Palaversich 2013, 494).

Yet *Madeinusa* is not an ethnographic film but a fictional story; if *Madeinusa* is read as a post-colonial, feminist film it could also be an interpretation of the pornographic gaze in action – when the God of the colonists is dead (as in the story of Christ, who spends Easter in a tomb), the morality value placed upon biblically sanctioned sexual relations is removed, suggesting that sex-as-sin is only pertinent when the colonising, pornographic gaze (of Jesus Christ, as *Madeinusa* implies in her comments about being ‘seen’) is upon the Indigenous. This is not to say that the film should be taken literally or that incest occurs and/or is socially acceptable in Quechua communities, but rather to suggest that (one of the only) cinematographic representations of Indigenous sex offers commentary and consideration to the pornographic gaze in a Peruvian context. There are also other ways in which the pornographic gaze interpretation of women as body-objects can be seen regarding Indigenous sex: this time in local community and health-centre discourse surrounding reproduction, sexual enjoyment and women’s roles and motives.

## Pleasure and carnival shenanigans

In a context where discussions of sex and sexuality remain somewhat taboo, Indigenous people’s sex lives are seldom celebrated in public by the popular media. While elite discourses on Indigenous peoples may suggest they have unbridled sexual appetites, this sex is seemingly never about pleasure seeking. Beyond being discriminatory, the absence of discussions of pleasure influences the way Indigenous women are treated in the health context. In Vilcashuaman I observed hundreds of family planning consultations, with the full range of contraceptive choices on offer (condoms, pills, three-month and one-year injections, IUDs, sterilisations). However, not once was comfort, pleasure or romance mentioned; these consultations were exclusively about avoiding pregnancy, regardless of a woman’s present situation, or her stated motives for attending a consultation. The absence of discussion of pleasure is somewhat striking when considered alongside contraception’s framing elsewhere in non-post-colonial societies: it is used to avoid children, certainly, but with the caveat that one can enjoy sexual pleasure without the worry – a discourse that was missing in the Ayacuchan world.

Importantly, the introduction of the contraceptive pill to the Western world in 1961 was considered a key moment in the history of human sexuality. People could now put fears of unwanted pregnancy aside and enjoy sexual intercourse as a pleasurable pastime (Eig 2014). Although

the medical world may have once ‘treated intercourse as a sanitized, emotionally neutral act’ (Higgins and Hirsch 2007, 240), there has been an increasing process of change towards this in the Global North. For example, the changing of the phrase ‘reproductive health’ to ‘sexual and reproductive health’ suggests increased medical consideration of sexuality, Higgins and Hirsch argue (2007, 240). The lack of attention to sexual pleasure in family planning has been called ‘the pleasure deficit’, leading to a publication in renowned medical journal *The Lancet*, arguing for greater inclusion of pleasure promotion in sexual and reproductive health, the inverse of which may actually undermine effective use of contraceptives (Philpott, Knerr and Maher 2006). Increasingly, this pleasure deficit is being addressed in family planning contexts of the Global North (Higgins and Hirsch 2007) and was especially promoted during the Fifth International Conference of Family Planning in Kigali in 2018. At this forum, it was argued that pleasure is fundamental to family planning, as it is the core reason why people choose to have sex. As one speaker concluded, ‘family planning is inherently about sex, but we’re not talking about it’.

Why not pleasure in the Andes? It may be that female sexuality and pleasure are taboo subjects, as Paredes and Galino argue (2012). That does not mean that it is invisible, however, only that it is a silenced subject within communities and family planning agencies. However, it may also be argued that this is because Indigenous sex is viewed through the pornographic gaze: Indigenous women are often seen as body-objects that receive a male penis during sex as the inferior party in an act of colonial, patriarchal dominance, and do not experience pleasure as a result of that act, thereby removing their erotic power (Lorde 1984). As I have argued above, the removal of the possibility of Indigenous women’s pleasure should also be considered a function of the pornographic gaze.

An interesting avenue through which to address Quechua approaches to sex and pleasure is therefore when it is most visible and open for discussion and exploration: carnival. For three days during either February or March each year, towns and villages all over Peru erupt into festive stupor in the period before Lent. In Ayacucho, carnival is a highly important event and has been declared as ‘Cultural Patrimony of the Nation’ by the Peruvian National Institute of Culture (Instituto Nacional de Cultura), with regional events taking place across the province throughout this period. Carnival is a time when many Quechua people return home from wherever they currently reside to their natal villages, where they can reunite with friends and relatives and party for a week or so. In other parts of the Andes, men return home during carnival specifically to look for a wife, engaging in the practice of *warmisuway* (woman stealing)

during the festivities, a playful ritual in which men will seek to literally carry away a woman for coitus and intimacy during the events (Van Vleet 2008, 101–8). Men in Vilcashuaman had similar ideas, although perhaps without matrimony in mind. When I asked one of the local shopkeepers why so many men had suddenly turned up in the villages for the festivities, his response was, ‘*Pa’ kachar pe’!*’ (‘Well, to fuck!’). Indeed, it was a running joke within the local health centres that November was always the busiest month for the obstetricians as the highest number of births in the region occurred nine months after carnival.

Liberal sexual intercourse is not just the subject of snide and elbow-nudging joking among health workers, but takes centre stage in carnival festivities. To illustrate this, I present and discuss one of the songs popular in the Vilcashuaman carnival. Sung in Quechua and Spanish as a call and response, while participants drink themselves into a frenzy and dance in the street, such lyrics are intentionally suggestive and lewd, and represent a come-on through teasing and tempting the other:

*WARMI:*

*Chatam chatam nispa niwachkanki*

*Flakam flakam nispa niwachkanki*

*A ver niñuchay malliykullaway*

*Hina chatacham miskirachisqayki*

*A ver niñuchay milliykullaway*

*Hina flakacham miskirachisqayki*

*QARI:*

*Chatum chatum nispa niwachkanki*

*Flakum flakum nispa niwachkanki*

*A ver niñachay malliykullaway*

*Hina chatucham miskirachisqayki*

*A ver niñachay malliykullaway*

*Hina flakucham miskirachisqayki*

*WARMI:*

*Lisa lisachas kani*

*Supa supaychas kani*

*Iskina pasaqtapas*

*Aysaykuqmi kani*



*Lisu maqtatapas  
Wachchiriqmi kani*

*QARI:*

*Lisu lisuchas kani  
Qari qarichias kani  
Miskilla puñuqmanpas  
Yaykuykuqmi kani  
Lisa pasñatapas  
Wachchiqmi kani*

*WARMÍ:*

*A mí qué me importa  
Que tu no me quieras  
A mí qué me importa  
Que tú no me ames  
Chatita como soy, todos me quieren  
Chatita como soy, amores me sobran*

*QARI:*

*A mí qué me importa  
Que tú no me quieras  
A mí qué me importa  
Que tú no me ames  
Chatito como soy, todos me quieren  
Chatito como soy, todos me buscan*

**WOMAN:**

*Short, short, that's what you're calling me  
Skinny, skinny, that's what you're calling me  
Let's see little boy, come and try me  
Short as I am, you're going to enjoy it  
Let's see little boy, come and try me  
Skinny as I am, you're going to be delighted*

**MAN:**

*Short, short, that's what you're calling me*

Skinny, skinny, that's what you're calling me  
Let's see little girl, come and try me  
Short as it is, you're going to enjoy it  
Let's see little girl, come and try me  
Skinny as it is, you're going to be delighted

WOMAN:

Daring, daring, they say that I am  
Demon, demon, they say that I am  
Able to draw inside  
Any man that passes by the house  
Able to make cry  
Even a daring boy

MAN:

Daring, daring, they say that I am  
Really brave, brave, they say that I am  
Even I can get inside  
When she is in a deep sleep  
I'm able to put a child inside  
Even a daring girl

WOMAN:

What do I care  
That you don't like me  
What do I care  
That you don't love me  
Even though I'm short, other men are after me  
Even though I'm short, I have enough other lovers

MAN:

What do I care  
That you don't like me  
What do I care  
That you don't love me  
Even though I'm short, everyone likes me  
Even though I'm short, everyone is after me

This song is worth analysing in more depth for its lyrical content. Beyond simply acknowledging and sexually lauding the Indigenous stature that may be mocked by European-descendant white Peruvians, who may be stereotypically perceived as taller and larger in height and other ways ('Skinny as I am, you're going to be delighted' W/ 'Short as it is, you're going to enjoy it' M), it also alludes to questions of sexual morality without censure. For example, the woman refers to herself as a 'demon', who is able to draw men inside her house and make them cry (with pleasure? We might assume so). It goes without saying that this is an un-Christian way to refer to oneself and one's motives and would therefore challenge the dominant colonial paradigm. Then the response to these lines is express intent to rape and impregnate: 'Even I can get inside / When she is in a deep sleep / I'm able to put a child inside.' Both male and female then express that love is not important for them in this fictitious sexual exchange, and that they both have enough other lovers. In this song, morality is removed from the sexual exchange, and rape, premarital sex and promiscuity are glorified. Taking this song as an example, in this instance for Quechua peoples sex does not appear to be a moral endeavour as such. Compared to a predominant stereotype within the health centre of Indigenous people (women) as sexually repressed, during carnival time they flirt and fornicate, using such songs as fodder, along with large quantities of alcohol. What is interesting here is that carnival songs are sung mostly in Quechua; effectively they are songs for the community, as they are rendered inaccessible to modern, coastal Peruvians who would likely not understand them.

However, there is a crucial point to make about events that occur during carnival. In Latin America, carnival is a topsy-turvy time, and seen as a 'world-upside-down' event (Murray 2000, 104), a moment when the norm is inversed, of 'negative truth[s]' (Lévi-Strauss 1976, 172, quoted in Murray 2000, 103). In Peru, Galindo refers to carnival historically as a time when 'rank was inverted, the lower orders took over public plazas, and all hierarchies provoked laughter and ridicule. In other words, everything was permitted. Carnival, a central element to popular culture, avoided the risk of direct confrontations but kept alive, in its festivities and rituals, practical utopias' (Galindo 2015 [1986], 11). Importantly, carnival is a time when power relations come to the fore and can be negotiated and manipulated, although as Murray (2000, 104) argues, this does not signify that any ritual transgressions of the norm are necessarily resistant behaviours. Thus, for Quechua women to flaunt sexuality, pleasure and promiscuity, while being wildly drunk nonetheless, is not necessarily an oppositional stance to dominant

discourses within and outside their communities, although it is a way to address repression. What is important here is that if something is presented during a time of the inverse, this suggests that during a time of the 'norm' it may recede into the shadows; if joyful sex and women's blatant pursuit of pleasure are unavoidably presented during carnival, this may suggest that they are hidden and potentially intentionally overlooked the rest of the time.

This is concordant with other research on Ayacucho. For example, when Theidon discovered the uncontested, liberal sexual exploits of the *warmisapas* (war widows), so unusual was this situation that she ventured to class them as a 'third gender' (2004, 134). Yet in non-carnival times, and for those who do not belong to Theidon's third gender, women's sexuality seems to recede once more. Boesten, commenting on Butlerian theory in the Peruvian context, argues that 'those who subvert gender or sexuality outside of the binary confront multiple problems that commonly result in violence' (2017, 301). Herein lies one reason why this 'pleasure approach' may not have been employed within family planning discourse in Ayacucho: potential rejection by a post-colonial state that views Indigenous sex through a pornographic gaze but is also, perhaps, responding to what it sees as the everyday repression of women's sexuality. In this view, the sexual intercourse that Quechua peoples engage in at carnival time may be seen as morally inappropriate; it is highly visible through song and dance, it is between unmarried spouses, and people are drunk. Following Lorde's assertion that being in touch with one's erotic energies gives a woman power, it could be argued that Quechua women are empowered by this open enjoyment and display of eroticism. However, when carnival time reverts to 'normal', this agency and power once again recedes. This suggests that, as with other mechanisms of the coloniality of power, the discourse within the health centre and beyond that Indigenous people have sex merely for reproduction and not eroticism ultimately aims to remove power and maintain people within the long-established hierarchies of power. Such mechanisms of power become more potent when one compares the discourse about Quechua absence of sexual pleasure with the perceived rate of reproduction among Indigenous communities, and the associated animalisation of their sex by health workers and others, as the following section will explore.

## Cuyes and the animalisation of Indigenous reproduction

*'Aquí, nacen y nacen como cuyes'* ('Here, they are born and born like guinea pigs') sighed Yessica, a Quechua schoolgirl and the daughter of a friend with whom I often spent time during fieldwork. Enjoying a break from school on the weekend, Yessica and I were taking a long stroll through the *puna* to her grandmother's house. Yessica's comment came about because lately she had been receiving less attention from her teacher at school. This was due to the fact that more children had joined the class from other villages, most likely because their own small school lost its only teacher. While commenting on the reproductive activities of others may seem out of place for a 12-year-old, Yessica later mentioned that she had heard it from her teacher, a woman who came to the village every week from the regional capital, and who evidently had certain opinions about the families whose pupils' she taught. Wont as young people sometimes are to repeat what they hear from their elders, this comment about the reproductive nature of families in Yessica's community holds significance as this was not a one-time occurrence. Indeed, the notion that Quechua women rut like guinea pigs (and therefore require state-enforced contraceptive interventions) runs deeply through Peruvian health service discourse and beyond to the local communities. Beyond displaying strong prejudice, such comments about the sexual lives of others hint at deeply entrenched notions not only of racisms, but also of hierarchy beyond-the-human. That said, such animalisation of 'the other' is nothing new, whether relating to their sexual activities or otherwise, as Hurn suggests: 'Notions of animality have . . . been used . . . to categorize groups of humans . . . on the often-dubious grounds of "difference"' (2012, 12). As this volume has demonstrated in various ways, in the Andes such 'difference' has often been based on ethnicity, with animalisation of the other frequently directed towards the Indigenous. For example, scholars have reported overhearing white and mestizo Peruvians referring to Indigenous people as 'animals' (Huayhua 2014, 5), and 'dirty cows' (Ewig 2010, 34), to name just two instances. Reproduction in particular has invited derogatory animal metaphors against poorer and/or Indigenous women, with Indigenous birthing practices being called 'animal-like' (Bradby and Murphy-Lawless 2002, 54), and comments that Indigenous women mate 'like rabbits' (Quipu 2019).

Placing this within the wider framework of the present volume, it is important to underscore that animalisation of others is deeply related to ethnicity and post-colonial racial hierarchies and, as will be seen later, gender. On this, Goldberg argues that 'animalization and bestialization

have long been integral to the history of racist representation' (2015, 48) as they can be used to justify repressive racial hierarchies. In Peru, these racial hierarchies follow the logic of coloniality of power, with Barrig arguing that zoomorphism of the Indigenous began in the colonial period when the Indigenous would be likened to 'dirty animals' or be portrayed in literature and public commentary as more capable of loving another animal rather than their own children (Barrig 2001, 28). Indeed, such representations can be said to have sought, and contemporarily to seek, to reduce the humanity of the Indigenous, and to uphold colonial hierarchies.

The 'guineapigification' of the reproductive other, as touched upon in the opening vignette of this section, can be seen as a particularly Andean brand of discrimination, central as the little *cuy*<sup>2</sup> is to highland life. This animal has been raised and consumed in the Andes since before the conquest, with the practice beginning around 5,000 BC. Guinea pigs were reared by the Incas and their predecessors for ritual purposes (the likes of which can still be found in the Andes today), as well as a food source (Morales 1994, 1). *Cuyes* continue to be a feature of the contemporary Andean landscape and are often kept freely roaming inside dwellings. In Vilcashuaman, if you enter a rural homestead, you are likely to find *cuyes* either scurrying around under your feet in the kitchen/living area or living separated from the family spaces in a corral. The animal also continues to feature predominantly in the rituals of *curanderos*,<sup>3</sup> often as a conduit for negative energies and sickness. They are sacrificial conduits in a very literal sense (Cabrera 2017; Theidon 2004).

*Cuyes* have therefore long been associated with Andean culture, and particularly Indigenous groups where *curandero* medicine may still be practised alongside (or in preference to) biomedicine. Further, as it is women who raise these animals, the *cuy* is also deeply associated with gender (Garcia 2021). Unsurprisingly, then, a 'guineapigification' of the reproductive Indigenous woman has been found across the Andes. For example, working in Peru, Ewig reports the jibes of an obstetrician as she mocked recently sterilised Indigenous women in the 1990s: 'Como *cuyes* son [you're like guinea-pigs], now you won't have more children' (Ewig 2014, 50). Stavig found similar commentary working with Quechua women in Cuzco, when a young lady was discouraged from home birthing when a nurse reprimanded her: 'Do you want to breed like a *cuy* [guinea pig]?!' (Stavig 2022, 1). During my fieldwork in Vilcashuaman, I had also been told a number of times by health workers that people in the region were like *cuyes*, in the sense that they had an unbridled excess of children, just like the little animal.

More than mere throwaway comments, it is important to observe where and from who this animalisation of Indigenous women's reproduction is coming from. For example, in the opening vignette, Yessica was a Quechua girl – a person about whose mother (or her future self) discriminatory 'guineapigification' may occur. She had overheard those derogatory comments about her own community from a local schoolteacher, who in the case of Vilcashuaman would likely have come from the urban departmental capital of Huamanga, and potentially belong to a different ethnicity than their pupils. This is not specific to Ayacucho, and Garcia (2005) points out that in rural areas of Peru, schoolteachers often belong to a different social stratum than their students. Garcia suggests that this social differentiation may lead to discriminatory behaviours and attitudes, the likes of which Yessica observed. To give an example of the range of potential discriminatory behaviours found in her ethnography on education in Cuzco, Garcia noted how local teachers referred to their Quechua pupils' families as 'less civilized', 'dirty' and 'ignorant' (2005, 118). Negative comments towards the Indigenous from those in positions of authority, such as teachers and health workers, are not unique to Vilcashuaman and, as I argue, reflect ongoing ethnic hierarchies of coloniality whereby Indigenous peoples are dehumanised and/or represented as ethnically inferior. Returning to the *cuy* specifically, it is necessary not only to view this animalisation from the perspective of racial hierarchies, but also to consider the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender.

In Vilcashuaman the focus on the gendered, reproduction- (sex-) focused nature of guinea pigs is exemplified through language. Whereas the sow retains the name *cuy*, the male is named a *kututu*, an onomatopoeic word that refers to the vibrating coo emitted in his mating dance as he chases after the female in heat: '*Ku—tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu*'. The very identity of the Andean *cuy* therefore centres on biological hyper-reproduction and an oversexed nature. Thus, to 'guineapigify' a person, through making comments that liken them to the animal, is to make the implicit suggestion that they are hyper-reproductive.

Schiwy (2013, 139) has identified how, under colonialism, the Andean Indigenous woman became increasingly associated with reproduction as her principal subjective identity. She references Choque Quispe, who stated that after the conquest the value of the Indigenous woman 'hinged on her reproductive abilities as the primary source for a new identity' (Choque Quispe 1998, 12). This colonial identity of Indigenous women as 'reproducers' can still be found today, as this section has argued. That said, it is more complicated than simple

representation, and the relationship to the guinea pig in particular has taken on increasingly gendered dimensions in recent times.

As a food source that may be seen as ‘unusual’ outside the region, the guinea pig has played a central role in the Peruvian gastronomic boom of the last decade – a boom that is highly gendered and racialised in terms of who creates and controls its development (Garcia 2021). Perhaps unsurprisingly given the unequal gender relations in Peru, men are currently dominating the expanding gastronomic boom and shaping the image of the Peruvian *cuy* (and other dishes) to the world (Irons 2022). In Garcia’s (2021) exploration of the boom, she notes how *cuyes* are highly feminised, with the producers and farmers taking on a masculinised role that may have parallels with the perception of contemporary Andean gender relations of *machismo*.

Garcia deftly observes that such perceptions are expressed through women themselves identifying as *cuyes*. One female breeder mused:

If we were *cuyes*, my overweight daughter and I, we would have been chosen as breeders (*reproductoras*), because we don’t consume much. This means we are low cost, but we still gain weight so we can give birth to higher numbers of young, and then have more meat once we are spent and ready for slaughter (quoted in Garcia 2021, 177).

This comment prompted Garcia to conclude that ‘the way in which human bodies can stand in for *cuy* bodies might seem remarkable, but in fact practices and discourses of animal reproduction are always linked to gender ideologies and imaginaries about human bodies’ (2021, 177). It should be noted that even within the world of Peruvian gastronomy, the *cuy* is spoken about, and principally valued, for its reproductive behaviours.

However, there is more to the way that *cuyes* are referenced than metaphors and put-downs. As the historical sterilisations in Peru have shown, bodies considered to be hyper-reproductive may be framed as worthy of discipline. Indeed, the disciplining of the hyper-reproductive body is arguably an effect of long-standing animalisation of the other. Hage (2017) argues that the aim of animalisation is to *domesticate*. He states that ‘racialized animalistic categories can sometimes tell us more about racism as an everyday practical orientation toward the other than the more general intellectual definitions of racism. This is because the metaphors embody a practical orientation’ (Hage 2017, 10).



Animalisation of the other implies a racism beyond insult; the metaphor is not simply an “observational racist category” but a *declaration of intent*’ (Hage 2017, 11; emphasis added). Through animalisation (in this case ‘guineapigification’) one can infer ‘what is desirable, possible, and preferable to do with them’ – ‘them’ being Indigenous women (Hage 2017, 11).

Further, Goldberg notices a relationship between animalisation of the other and the type of animal that is used in this endeavour, suggesting that ‘disposability in the forms of abandonment, externalization, disappearance, invisibility, incarceration, or more extremely, extermination has been enabled in part by the rhetoric of low-graded animalisation: rats, termites, cockroaches, snakes, sheep, and so on’ (Goldberg 2015, 86–7). *Cuyes* could easily be classified as so-called ‘low-grade’ animals as they are rodents, when seen from a non-Quechua perspective. If Indigenous people, and reproduction, are likened to the *cuy*, there is the implicit suggestion that the speaker may therefore see their object of discrimination as ‘low-grade’ as well. Furthermore, guineapigification arguably reduces women to reproductive body-objects under the pornographic gaze (Segato 2014). Coastal elites see Indigenous women predominantly as wombs, with a strong morality attached to the perceived high rate at which those wombs are inhabited (and by extension, to the intercourse that is taking place in order to achieve this outcome).

Explaining the purpose behind this kind of animalisation, Goldberg suggests that it serves the purpose of putting people ‘to use’, rendering them ‘pliable’ and rounding up or herding them to ‘instrumental purpose’ (Goldberg 2015, 49) – to return to Hage, to *domesticate* them, or in Foucauldian terms, to create docile bodies. These docile bodies are produced through a persistent ‘guineapigification’ of Andean women’s reproduction, a process that is not only to insult or humiliate but has been shown also to have instrumental purpose: docile bodies can be disciplined; docile bodies will act in the ‘correct’ way according to the post-colonial, anti-natalist state, i.e., they will cease to bear children in high numbers, and/or can be sterilised, as occurred in the past. When women are perceived as reproducers, the Indigenous viewpoint on sex and sexuality is not considered at all, only the biological consequence of that intercourse.

Finally, it is worthwhile to return to the notion that one of the main purposes of the *cuy* within Andean ritual is as a conduit and recipient for the negative energies within others. I argue that this is perhaps a more fitting metaphor for Indigenous women in the Andes, who have historically borne the negativity of others. In Quechua the practice of

passing a guinea pig over the body of a sick or troubled person is called *uriway* and involves the transference of ‘the essence of one life form to another’ (Theidon 2004, 61). The *cuy* is then sacrificed and cut open so that a *curandero* can ‘read’ the sickness of the patient. Women in the Andes are frequently conduits for the prejudice and negativity of others, bearing the brunt of others’ insults and discriminations; they too have been sacrificed to pacify these prejudiced perceptions (the sterilisations being a case in point). In this sense, the *cuy* as conduit for the negativity of others is one unfortunate metaphor that may have resonance with Indigenous women.

## Conclusion

Sexual pleasure and the pursuit of the erotic is a tangled web in (post-) colonial imaginaries. Though the prudish Catholic sensibilities of the conquest may no longer be quite so strong as in the past, Lorde descried how women’s sexual pleasure is nevertheless overpowered by objectification in the ‘European-American male tradition’ (1984, 91) – that which scholars of coloniality would relate to the notion of Western modernity (Mignolo 2011) – always imposed upon Indigenous communities in a dominating hierarchical manner. As Segato’s scholarship showed, this has resulted in a pornographic gaze upon the sex lives of Indigenous people – a gaze that does not see relativistic truth but passes judgement. Such post-colonial discourses do more than misunderstand, however. Arguably, they contribute towards biopolitical justifications for contraceptive coercion and, in the historical case of Peru, enforced sterilisations, as another dimension of power, the erotic, is denied to Indigenous women. Only through addressing the oppression of Indigenous sexuality can historical and contemporary reproductive injustices be addressed and prevented, and the power of the erotic be realised by oppressed communities.

## Notes

- 1 High-elevation grassland of the South American Andes. The *puna* is at a higher elevation away from the inhabited village(s), where people may run off for private love-making; therefore, this chapter title uses the word *puna* to reference this local knowledge.
- 2 Although some believe the word *cuy* to be of Quechua origin, Morales confirms that it is a Spanish word (although in continental Spain guinea pigs may be referred to as *conejitos de India* – ‘little rabbits from the Indies’). According to Morales (1994, 2), the Quechua words for the guinea pig are *jaca*, *aca*, *sacca* (Junín), *quwi* or *qowa* (Cuzco). However, in Vilcashuaman the term used is the *cuy*, which shall therefore be used in the remainder of the discussion, alongside the English ‘guinea pig’.
- 3 Traditional healers.

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## 4

# Queer suffering in the Andes through the lens of the film *Retablo*

Micaela Giesecke-Chero

Almost halfway through the film *Retablo*, Noé asks, ‘What is wrong with Segundo?’, his son, at dinner. Segundo, a teenage boy from rural Ayacucho, caught Noé engaging in a sex act with a man earlier that day. The event has a profound impact on their lives and their relationships with their community in rural Ayacucho. In this chapter, I will explore the intricacies of queerness, culture and homophobia in the Peruvian Andes by analysing the film *Retablo*, directed by Álvaro Delgado-Aparicio (2017). The movie portrays the issue of queerness and social suffering in a rural Andean setting, allowing us to explore the representation of homosexual practices and non-hegemonic masculinity in Peruvian Andean culture. Moreover, I aim to examine the emotional implications of existing outside the hegemonic matrices and how it leads to experiences of social suffering encompassing moral, religious and political dimensions of life (Kleinman 1997). Analysing this film, I seek to understand the specificities of social suffering among queer subjects in the Peruvian Andes. I explore the extent to which the emotional pain and suffering experienced by Noé was the result of the nature of violence within the community shaped by specific social, gendered, racial and political structures in Ayacucho’s history (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

The film tells the story of a family from the city of Ayacucho in the rural Andean region of Peru. The family comprises Noé, the father; Anatolia, the mother; and Segundo, the son. Noé is a respected *retablista* in the community. People refer to him as *maestro* (master) out of respect for his work. Segundo works alongside him, supporting his father while learning the craft of *retablo* artisanry. *Retablos*, boxes that close with two doors painted with Andean plants and flowers, are considered a

traditional part of folk art from Ayacucho. They were used to portray religious figures, which is why their name used to be *Sanmarcos*. However, following a process of redefinition, they stopped featuring religious figures – except occasionally or as secondary elements – and began to depict current events such as those related to the internal armed conflict and, later, other events stemming from the perspectives of the *retablo* artists. They were known as *Sanmarcos* due to their resemblance to church altarpieces and came to be called *retablos* after Alicia Bustamante met Joaquín López Antay in 1941 and ‘discovered’ the *Sanmarcos/retablos* to take them to Lima. The depicted themes transitioned from purely religious to representing historical events, songs and tales (Ulfe 2011, 25). Following Ulfe (2011), this is how they represent popular, historical, emblematic, testimonial, individual and collective memories, encompassing daily life topics and broader social and political issues. It is through the agency of the *retablo* artists and their artworks that such a diversity of landscapes is portrayed, and these memories are constructed.

The figure of the *retablo* in the film allows us to approach what is being depicted and what is left outside (Ulfe 2019), as unexplored. The *retablos* portray social, family and religious events but *leave outside*<sup>1</sup> queer figures, representations of non-heteronormative affection and the violence and suffering experienced by these subjects. These absences reflect much of what is expected in Noé’s Andean community, where ‘the lives of the *retablo* artists and the way they seek to be identified as popular artists is also a way of being recognized as citizens in a country that often discriminates based on skin colour or place of origin’ (Ulfe 2011, 39), and, I would add, based on sexual orientation.

Ulfe (2019) argued that the artist’s perspective is revealed in the *retablos*, but Noé could never fully reveal his subjectivity, what he felt for another man and how this affected him and the social fabric he belonged to. He has to keep this a secret (Simmel 2020) for self-preservation, as Giesecke (2018) proposed happens in lesbian relationships due to the coercive nature of Peruvian social norms towards sexual diversities. The film thus shows landscapes that essentialise communal life in the Andes (Ulfe 2019), which diverge from the *retablo* artist’s memories regarding his affections, desires and suffering.

As stated in the documentary *La revolución y la tierra* (Benavente 2019), cinema has the power to create social imaginaries. Analysing the narratives of underrepresented groups in media, such as queer Andean Peruvians, allows us to glimpse the diversity of experiences embodied by individuals whose gender and sexual identities are dissident from the norm and whose experiences are also intersected by race and ethnicity. As

Lugones (2005) suggested occurs in the Andean region, this intersection is the result of Peruvians' history and experience of colonisation. Paying attention to the nuances of violence and suffering within the LGBTQI+ population is crucial to continue working towards a democratic and just Peruvian society for all its members. Through the 'tense relationship between shame, vulnerability, and historicity' (Cornejo 2013, 92), it is possible to resignify, repair and transgress the cis-heterosexual order.

## The situation of the LGBTQI+ population in Peru

I have previously mentioned Noé's need to keep his sexuality and suffering a secret due to contemporary Peru's resistance towards sexual diversity. Currently, the LGBTQI+ population face high levels of discrimination and violence in different areas of their lives such as lack of access to education, employment, physical and mental health care (Defensoría del Pueblo 2016; INEI 2017; Minjus and Ipsos 2019; No Tengo Miedo 2016). According to research by No Tengo Miedo (2016), LGBTQI+ persons suffer violence on a psycho-emotional, physical, structural, sexual and symbolic level by their family members, psychologists, partners and priests, among others. Nineteen per cent of the population, predominantly in rural areas and over 40 years old, consider homosexuality a disease. Moreover, 71 per cent of the Peruvian population considers that the homosexual, bisexual and trans populations are the most discriminated-against groups in Peruvian society (Minjus and Ipsos 2019).

The violence perpetrated against the LGBTQI+ population was also imposed during the internal armed conflict. In 1989, six members of the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) carried out a shooting in a gay bar in a human settlement<sup>2</sup> in the Amazon city of Tarapoto, killing eight men. According to the radical movement, they condemned every 'gay', 'drug addict', thief and prostitute, equating homosexuality with drug addiction, crime and prostitution. They argued that gay people should rectify their 'undesirable attitudes and practices', but since the victims disregarded this ultimatum, they sought to exterminate them (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2003). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR)<sup>3</sup> elaborated the report on the crimes committed during the political violence of 1980–2000, which originated in Ayacucho, where the film *Retablo* is located. Although the CVR rendered the violence perpetrated towards vulnerable and impoverished populations visible, it lacked a broader perspective investigating further hate crimes against the LGBTQI+ population.



Only three crimes against LGBTQI+ groups were registered in the last chapter of the report. The Homosexual Movement of Lima (MHOL) denounced another five collective hate crimes against members of the LGBT community during the political violence; additionally, they registered cases where the armed forces attempted to kill LGBT people, while the CVR did not register any hate crimes enforced by the armed forces (McCullough 2017).

The violence towards the LGBTQI+ population is endorsed by state representatives and organised groups of society, such as religious fundamentalists, which aim for a controlled exercise of sexuality, evidenced in the lack of policies that guarantee access rights to the LGBTQI+ community (Motta et al. 2018; Rousseau 2020). The Catholic Church has had a vast political, cultural and economic influence on the naturalisation of misogyny and homophobia. Currently, Catholics and other Christians operate in alliance with conservative political parties to reduce efforts to improve the social and political conditions of the LGBTQI+ population in Peru. They employ the term 'gender ideology' to refer to and delegitimise sexual and gender diversity (Rousseau 2020). The use of this term in the media and society aims 'to push back against LGBT rights and spaces, which include sites of academic knowledge production and activist circles' argued Cornejo, Martínez and Vidal-Ortiz (2020, 420) in a comparative study of the situation of LGBT studies in Colombia and Peru. In 2016, NGOs associated with conservative evangelical churches established the transnational religious right movement #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas (Do not mess with my children), 'delaying or impeding reforms aimed at developing state policies around sexual and reproductive rights' (Rousseau 2020, 26) such as promoting comprehensive sexual education with gender-equal and sexual diversity approaches (Hernández Muro 2021; Rousseau 2020; UNESCO 2020; Motta et al. 2018). In higher education, the LGBTQI+ population is also misrepresented despite the evidence of gender and sexual diversity in pre-colonial and republican times. The feminist activist Wendy Aucapure asserted that anthropology professors at the university in Cusco 'never talk about the chronicles of communities and towns at the edge of the forest where women had affective relationships among them' (Hernandez Muro 2020, 31). The modern Peruvian state, built over the legacies of the colonial matrix, excludes queerness by not guaranteeing the rights of those outside the heterosexual norm to exercise citizenship, health and safety (Romero Caballero 2017).

## 'Queerness' in Peru

Queer existences – and, consequently, their suffering – have been silenced by the post-colonial ruling class of Peru until today. Following that token, Peru's history of colonisation is central to understanding its structures of inequalities regarding gender (Motta et al. 2018) and the suffering queer subjects experience. In this chapter, I follow Judith Butler's definition of gender as something that is not fixed at birth. Instead, subjects perform it over time and space through a 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler 1999, 179). I comply with the idea that there is no universal definition of gender; it is far from static, varying cross-culturally and over time. In Peru, the *quariwarmis*, two-gender shamans involved in same-sex practices, and the *chuqui chinchay*, a two-gender deity of the Andes, are examples of gender expressions that transcend the gender binary dichotomy (Horswell 2006). Such a binary implies that there are two opposite categories, masculine and feminine, where the subject's identities should fit. Following that token, the dichotomy of homosexuality/heterosexuality assumes that people should be sexually attracted to the opposite sex. Both matrices are Western constructions inscribed in the hegemonic biological and binary discourse regarding gender and sexuality that emerged in the nineteenth century. Butler (2005) argued that gender and sexual identities are socially constituted and reproduce relations amid regulatory practices of gender, sexuality, sex and desire. Any gender or sexual identity that does not fit within the binary of gender and the heterosexual matrix would be subversive (Butler 1999, 24) and could be understood as 'queer'. In this chapter, I will focus on how the extreme disgust and violence towards queer subjects represented in the film *Retablo* and the social suffering that it produces comes from a long history of colonisation and the imposition of the gender and heterosexual matrix.

I should, however, offer a reflection on the use of the terms 'queer' and 'queerness' in the Andean context. Queerness refers to sexual or gender identities that diverge from cis-heteronormative norms. However, historical theorisations of queerness have primarily been developed by white, middle-class scholars from the Global North. As has been accurately stated by Levi Hord (2020), there exist several sexual orientations and gender identities that are not adequately represented within queer narratives. Nevertheless, 'queer' is a fluid and adaptable theoretical concept that can be applied to various historical contexts, policy interventions and identities; the term 'flies wherever the demands of political urgency might call it' (Amin 2016, 175). However, a comprehensive understanding of ethnicity and cross-cultural diversity (Garber 2001) is urgent when

studying the experiences of queer groups and individuals as the one that will be presented here, especially since there is no literal translation of 'queerness' or 'queer' in Spanish, besides *cuir*, as it spelt and used in some Spanish-speaking countries. Other words have been used among the LGBTQI+ population instead of using the acronym more casually. That is the case of *cabro* and *maricón*, which have been – and still are – used to insult queer individuals and groups. As happened with the term 'queer', *maricón* and *cabro* have been reappropriated by the LGBTQI+ population, implying resistance against the initial offensive connotation of the terms; the act of reappropriation of these words implies resistance and defiance against their initial derogatory meanings. It is important to note that the use of the terms is not as widespread across the population as the term 'queer' is in Anglophone countries.

To facilitate communication and translation, I shall employ the term in conjunction with the LGBTQI+ acronym.<sup>4</sup> I will still acknowledge the limitations caused by the hegemony of a dominant discourse around queerness. It is essential for me to refrain from homogenising their narratives with those of the Global North, given the distinctiveness of dissident sexualities and gender identities in the Andean region. I aim to explore the nuances and historical context in which social relations and cultural practices are intertwined. I draw on Donna Haraway's (2021) contributions regarding the importance of situating analysis and knowledge production. Specifically, I intend to analyse queerness and social suffering in the Peruvian Andes using the film *Retablo* while avoiding the pitfalls of totalisation, homogenisation or universalisation of their nature or characteristics. I strive to provide a thick description (Geertz 1973) of cultural meanings by examining the practices, attitudes or symbols underpinning the specificities of queerness in the Andes. Through this approach, I aim to highlight the complex cultural meanings surrounding the queer experience in the region. I aspire to provide valuable insights into the cultural landscape that characterises the lives of queer subjects in the Andes from a perspective that is sensitive to their suffering as a social phenomenon.

## ***Retablo*: transgressing the gender and heterosexual matrix in the Andes**

Peruvian cinema has portrayed LGBTQI+ characters and their experiences of violence and emotional distress. However, only a few have centred on the narrative of Andean subjects and the implications that being queer

within their social fabric has on their emotional world. *El pecado*, directed by Palito Ortega (2007), provides a compelling and explicit portrayal of violence against trans subjects in the Peruvian Andes. It focuses on the life of Mario Eduardo, a teenager who confronts the fact that his gender identity does not meet his community's expectations. As a trans person, Mario Eduardo suffers physical violence and discrimination from other community members, a way in which they signal their disagreement with his gender identity. Similarly, Wesley Verástegui's *Sin vagina me marginan* (2017) presents the story of Barbie, an Afro-Peruvian trans woman who lives in a marginalised area of urban Lima. Along with her best friend, Microbio, they confront the reality of their identities being unrecognised by the Peruvian government, they are neglected by their families and find it difficult to find jobs besides sex work.

*Contracorriente* (dir. Fuentes-León, 2009) is situated in a coastal town in Peru, where Miguel appears to be in conflict with his queer identity due to the homophobia that characterises the social interactions in his town. He is expecting a child with Mariela, who later finds out that Miguel had an affair with Santiago, a painter who moved to the fishermen's town to be near Miguel. Santiago felt upset over Miguel's refusal to stay with him and be open about his sexuality. He then sank into the ocean, which leaves the question open as to whether his death was accidental or the result of emotional distress and suffering. The movie *No se lo digas a nadie* (dir. Lombardi, 1998), on the other hand, portrays the life of Joaquin, an upper-class *Limeño* who internalises the shame associated with queerness due to societal norms and religious teachings; he prays: 'Please God, help me not be like this.' His father teaches him to fight his peers at school when they tease him; then he will act as a 'man, not a fag'. He also arranges for Joaquin to lose his virginity to a sex worker. Since he is not able to have sex with her, she advises him to try with men; otherwise, he will suffer in vain. He witnesses his friends brutally attacking a trans woman and claiming: 'We have to exterminate every fag.' The film also delves into class dynamics within the queer population, as the distinction between 'gays' and 'queer cholos' is remarked. As Bolaños appropriately argued, 'Sexual contact between men carries severe consequences in both the coastal and Andean regions, although they are not the same' (2002, 59), which implies that the characteristics of queer encounters, as well as the implications of them in the lives of the subjects and their communities, are not the same due to the characteristics of their cultural and societal norms.

In this chapter, I aim to highlight the specificities of social suffering amid the Andes. I focus on *Retablo* to analyse the overlaps between

queerness and social suffering experienced by individuals whose gender identities and sexual orientations transgress dominant norms in the Andes. The movie makes references to *retablos*, which I have previously stated are Andean cultural motifs that serve as a means to communicate the boundaries between what is allowed and forbidden regarding sexuality. In the film, Noé has an extramarital connection with a person of the same sex as him, which is why he faces rejection from his family and community and experiences social suffering. His community respected him as a *retablo* artist, a status that became jeopardised when they discovered he was maintaining a sexual relationship with a man.

The film portrays Noé and Segundo in the middle of the road, waiting until someone stops to give them a ride to the city. Noé sits in the front seat, next to the driver, and Segundo in the back. The car starts moving side to side. Segundo looks at the front seat and sees his father performing a sexual act on the driver. Segundo turns around and looks petrified. He does not say a thing. They arrive at the church in the city, where they are to deliver a *retablo*, and the priest, Father Samuel, an elderly Spanish-speaking<sup>5</sup> white man, welcomes them and mentions how fast Segundo is growing up. He asks Noé if he is helping him with work, recalling that it is brilliant that he is working to become as good a *retablista* as Noé one day. Father Samuel emphasises they have reserved the most important place for the *retablo*, where they 'keep the most important treasures'. As the service begins, Noé participates in the ritual and prays: 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you but say the word, and my servant will be healed' (Luke 7:6–7). Due to the stiffness of his body and the vacant look in his eyes, Segundo seems to be struggling to reconcile Noé's participation in the Catholic rite of service, which implies purity and loyalty, with the disturbing scene he has just witnessed on the way to the city that implies a rupture between Catholic values and the morals of the heterosexual monogamous family. Noé has transgressed the gender and sexuality mandates of their community. Following this event, his professional and personal life trajectories are drastically affected. He is violently excluded from his social life, isolated from his community and loved ones and physically attacked. He also begins to experience severe emotional distress, leading him to end his life.

Segundo does not tell anyone about his father's infidelity with a man; he does not even talk about it with Noé, but the event alters their lives. Their bond goes from being close and caring to distant, hostile and sometimes aggressive. Segundo becomes more introspective and begins to self-isolate. His mood becomes distressed; he loses his appetite and

begins to consume alcohol. One day, the family of the man with whom Noé is cheating on Anatolia finds them together. They are physically attacked by community members, as they understand physical punishment to be an adequate way to sanction those who embody undesirable values, in this case, queerness.<sup>6</sup> Noé is consequently excluded from the community; Anatolia separates from him and seeks to move away with Segundo. She is uneasy and highly distressed that Segundo remains close to Noé. Meanwhile, Segundo begins to be ridiculed by other children and adolescents in the community, as if he could have inherited his father's queerness, an undesirable attribute for a man. He is becoming a *retablista* like his father instead of engaging in jobs that involve traditionally masculine attributes, such as the use of strength in the field. Segundo embodies his father's masculinity, which, in the eyes of the youth in the community, is a failed masculinity associated with queerness. Moreover, he does not play football like his peers, does not sexualise women and has not had sex like other young men. In the next section, I will develop further how this relates to the idea of not complying with the mandate of *recio* (tough) masculinity.

## Colonial legacies: gender, sexuality and race in the Andes

Although I have no intention of suggesting colonialism as the sole cause for the violence suffered by Andean queer subjects, I propose that the coloniality of gender greatly influences the configuration of power relationships between Indigenous queer and heterosexual subjects, as depicted in the film *Retablo*. I assert that queer Andean existences are inherently anti-colonial. In Horswell's (2006) words, the androgyne was the universal signifier in the Andes prior to Spanish colonisation and the colonialists' intent of eradicating all forms of sexual 'deviance' from their norm. During and after colonisation, Indigenous people played crucial roles in transforming sexuality while seeing their own transformed by the violent imposition of the Spanish normative discourse on sexuality and gender (Horswell 2006, 17). The gendered division of the world (Segato 2014) is a product of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2007) within the current capitalist global power structure (Lugones 2010, 746). Maria Lugones' (2005) notion of the 'coloniality of gender' provides insight into the oppression faced by individuals whose lives are shaped by their gender and race, elements that constitute non-dominant differences that interact within modern/colonial nations built upon the foundation of the colonial matrix of power, such as those in the Andean region.

Two centuries after Peru gained its independence from Spain, the prevalence of the heterosexual and gender matrices within society remains. As Segato (2014) posits, patriarchal structures and the binary of gender in countries in the Andean region are colonial figurations that persist in modern nation states, constraining the possibilities for inclusive and diverse countries. Currently, gendered colonial figurations remain in the modern nation state as the LGBTQI+ population continues to endure discrimination, lacks access to rights and experiences barriers hindering the full exercise of their citizenship (Hernández Muro 2021).

Different elements interlock, resulting in violence towards queer subjects. These will not necessarily be as evident for those attempting to comprehend how they interact, as Marfil Francke (1990) recalled in her work about the 'braid of domination', where she analyses the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity in the domination of women in Peru. The author suggested that analysing oppression from an intersectional perspective might be similar to seeing a braid or DNA structure because, although one may observe only one or two strands, the structure of domination comprises three parts. In this case, the racial strand regarding the violence experienced by Noé from members of his community in Ayacucho might be imperceptible from afar. However, taking a closer look at the specificities of the racial system of oppression in Peru implies understanding that race is relational and constituted not only by physical but also by cultural and social traits (Sulmont and Callirgos 2014), such as one's sexuality and gender attributes. This allows us to understand how race and sexuality interlock, resulting in power relations and inequalities. Marisol de la Cadena had already argued that ethnicity and gender intersected to explain how 'women are more Indian' (de la Cadena, 1992) in Peru as both identities interact, translating into specific experiences of oppression and resistance. I argue that *los homosexuales son más indios* since they embody a double – or more – alterity in Peru. Race, therefore, significantly influences the experiences of violence and suffering, even when situated in an Andean rural setting and interacting with other individuals who might also experience racism and discrimination.

In *Retablo*, Noé and Segundo perform masculinities that diverged from the tough Cholo or *Cholo recio's* masculinity. A man would be considered *recio* if he was strong and rough and, therefore, complied with the mandate of being tough. The *Cholo recio* type of masculinity is a legacy of coloniality and the process of *mestizaje* – or the mixing of races and ethnicities that occurred in Andean countries – according to Quijano (1980, 71). Due to the coloniality of power and gender, the desire to embody a tough masculinity persists, and the racial mandate for

Andean men is still present in the form of the *Cholo recio*. The *Cholo recio* is a racist expression and a mandate of certain masculinity; it implies the subordination of those whose identities emerged from *mestizaje*, seen as savage (Fuller 2012, 295) by white people. Under this scope, men should fit into a series of attributes such as being physically strong, insolent and sexually aggressive. They are expected to embody and reproduce masculine roles, machismo and compulsory heterosexuality through their actions and attitudes. In the film, a teenage boy who is working teases Segundo, saying to him as he walks up a hill carrying heavy stuff, 'You look like a donkey carrying your stuff like that up here,' suggesting he find work with animals or harvesting cotton instead, where they could earn up to 50 soles a week, which represents a significant amount of money for them. Segundo indicates he would rather be doing that than cleaning animals' excrement as he is, and the teenage boy replies that he should be working on 'man's stuff' as he does. During that encounter, the teenage boy finds out that Segundo bought fruit from the market, which is located in the city centre, and presumes that he bought it from Felicitas, a young girl from the community who works in the market, implying he goes to the city often just to see her: 'to smell her pussy and grab her ass'. The teenage boy mimics having sex with one of the pigs as he expects Segundo would do with Felicitas. They both laugh, complying with the idea of having sex with her and commenting on how he would 'fuck her aggressively'.

Noé teaches Segundo about patience and tenderness through the creation of art: 'The figures will not be born if you are in a hurry.' Their house has an outdoor bathroom, and they use buckets and rags to shower. Wearing their underwear, they share the intimate moment of cleansing, where, again, Segundo seems to pay close attention to how his father accomplishes cleanness and imitates him. They exchange rags and clean their upper body parts. Segundo learns about self-care and preservation from his father. He also teaches Segundo about discipline and how to be a man who will one day become a master craftsman like him. They are connected through self-care and, far from complying with the *Cholo recio*'s mandates, appear to be sensitive and connected to their emotions.

This rejection of the *Cholo recio*'s masculinity mandate has also been documented in the work of the Peruvian writer Marco Avilés. He recounts the violence that one of his friends experienced in Lima because of the attributes of his masculinity, which did not comply with the *recio* masculinity, and his place of origin, as he was an immigrant from an Andean region of Peru: 'What? Are you crying like a faggot? So, you are a *Serrano*<sup>7</sup> and a *cabro*? Shit, if I were you, I would kill myself' (Avilés 2016, 14). This passage illustrates the disgust towards a non-white



person whose masculinity differs from the hegemonic one, even if he is not homosexual. This, again, illustrates the specificity of masculinity and sexuality in Peru; it is intertwined with race as the latter is relational and socially constructed upon a variety of aspects, including class and place of origin. Transgressing the gender and sexual mandates as a queer racialised subject constitutes a more significant form of transgression of the status quo as they embody a double otherness for being racialised and queer. They represent the abject and are subject to violence and discrimination; their bodies and subjectivities are considered unworthy of existing, and they are expected to seek to end their lives. A queer *Cholo* is expected to feel the impulse to self-harm and experience severe emotional pain for being non-white and outside the binary of gender and the heterosexual matrix. Non-dominant identities exist in a gender system that devalues racialised masculinities that exceed the norm, embody the abject and are therefore expected to experience emotional suffering.

Noé and Segundo do not embody the typical attributes of the *Cholo recio* and exist within cultural and moral mandates of Andean culture and the Catholic religion, both legacies of colonisation. Their masculinities coexist with a sexual division of labour where Anatolia and Noé have complementary gender roles within the family: while she stays at home, taking charge of household duties and care tasks, Noé works outside the domestic sphere, commercialises his art, earns money to provide for the household, socialises and drinks alcohol. These values overlap with those needed to constitute and maintain the nuclear family, reinforcing the gender binary matrix and expectations surrounding heteronormative sexuality (Curiel 2011).

## Violence and social suffering

I have argued that the violence towards queer subjects portrayed in the film comes from a long history of colonisation and the imposition of the gender and heterosexual matrices. Although the Peruvian LGBTQI+ population faces different types of violence and limited access to rights and possibilities to exercise their citizenship, those whose identities are also racialised are more vulnerable to experiencing it and its consequences. In the film, Noé is subject to a homophobic attack, and Anatolia's mother tells him: 'It could have been worse; he has been doing it with another man. Their family found them and battered them. They wanted to kill him! He was lucky. In times of terrorism [internal armed conflict], he would have been murdered.' The violence Noé and Segundo

experience can be understood as *violence of everyday life* (Das 2007) since it occurs in various areas of life and takes multiple forms. These forms of violence are exerted by actors who, in this case, constitute the Peruvian social fabric through the devaluation of 'the other'.

Anatolia cries with Noé in her arms. He is bleeding after being attacked by the community. She asks Segundo to seek help: 'Run, ask for help! Who did this to your father?' He runs and finds Mr Maldonio, who raises his voice to tell him: 'Tell your mother we cannot help her!' Segundo claims: 'But my father has been beaten.' To which Mr Maldonio replies: 'We know. It could have been worse . . . He had it coming! We do not help people who do those *cochinadas* [disgusting things].<sup>8</sup> Go to your house!' Denying help and complying with the physical punishment while arguing he deserved to be hurt like that expresses the everyday violence queer subjects experience. Furthermore, the disgust and odium towards queerness by naming homoerotic practices *cochinadas*<sup>9</sup> also represents a manifestation of everyday violence; it ascribes to queer practices and affects the meaning of being unclean, contaminated, inappropriate and undesirable in the context of their social and cultural setting.

Moreover, the violence exercised towards Noé can be interpreted through Rocío Silva Santisteban's (2004) concept of 'symbolic trashing'. The author draws an analogy between transforming an individual into a repository for waste and subjecting them to violence even if they could resist and refuse such treatment. I see the process of symbolic trashing as a form of everyday violence that occurs in a context where various forms of vulnerability, such as race, gender and sexuality, intersect. To illustrate this, I suggest paying attention to two film scenes. First, the one in which Noé asks Segundo to save a few harvested potatoes to eat later instead of making more figurines for the *retablos* with the potatoes, as no one would want to buy anything from them again.<sup>10</sup> He recognises that the disgust and hatred he faces will continue in the future as he represents the material incarnation of the *cochinadas* that no one should practise. After the homophobic attack, Noé argues: 'There is nothing left to do here, Segundo; you should go with your mom.' He has lost hope and appears defeated due to the violence and rejection he has experienced, adding to his already precarious economic situation. However, Segundo wants to stay with him and suggests they move to another town, open a new workshop and start over.

In another scene, Segundo packs a *retablo* and walks to deliver it, passing by the football field. He is teased by the boys who are playing football. They shout homophobic slurs: 'Talking about abnormalities! – there is the *mami*.' They hit him, screaming: '[There is] your Barbie

house!’, referring to the *retablo* while throwing it to the floor and ironically saying, ‘We will not do what they did to his father,’ meaning they will not beat him until bleeding. Segundo pushes a boy, defending himself, and they yell: ‘he wants dick’, ‘in your ass, all over your face’, calling him a fag and beating him. However, he defends himself and manages to leave. In the film, members of the same community attack other racialised (queer) subject(s) as they embody certain traits that put them in a lower position in the racial power relation. Those in a position of power reject the traits that make the other(s) more prone to be racialised, to the extent that they feel they should exercise violence on their bodies to correct them, as in Noé’s case. Queerness makes subjects less desirable, reinforcing their racial features and, therefore, making them the target of violence: *los homosexuales son más indios*, and they are more subject to violence and suffering. The symbolic trashing of Noé and Segundo represents the ultimate dehumanisation of racialised bodies within the colonial matrix of gender and race, resulting in profound suffering for those subjected to it. In the following section, I will analyse the emotional implications of the violence in their lives and how it leads to social suffering (Kleinman 1997).

## Queer suffering in *Retablo*

Fassin and Rechtman (2009) argued that violence leaves physical and emotional traces on the subjects’ bodies. In Peru, LGBTQI+ individuals experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation and other mental health conditions (Más Igualdad 2019; INEI 2017). Das (2015; 2007), Farmer (2004; 1997), Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) and Kleinman (1997) pointed out that the suffering experienced by subjects and groups is cultural and social since it results from interdependent relationships between subjects in a given context. Although the capacity to suffer is characteristic of all human beings, no suffering is equal, and some groups are more vulnerable to experiencing it due to external factors and vulnerabilities such as racism and homophobia. In the film, Segundo has a nightmare in which the *retablos* they keep in the workshop portray a group of men surrounding and pointing at naked men’s genitalia, punishing him for his behaviour. Despite the fact that Noé is the one who transgresses the heterosexual matrix, the violence he experiences affects his family as a whole and impacts Segundo’s emotional well-being. As illustrated in the film, social suffering connects the moral, political and religious with the emotional and physiological (Kleinman 1997). Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) claimed that individuals seek

ways to integrate into society and cross the boundaries between them and hegemonic white, heterosexual and cisgender subjects. This is illustrated, for instance, through Noé's participation in the Catholic rite of service and having a family. Having established this, I suggest that the best way to understand the intersection of violence against queer subjects and queer suffering in the Peruvian Andes is through the interdependence of non-dominant differences posited by Maria Lugones (2005). Viveros Vigoya (2016) subscribes to this line of thought, suggesting a reconsideration of the contributions and limitations of intersectionality for feminist analysis and drawing the attention to the relevance of Black feminism, feminism of colour and Latin American feminisms when assessing a critical, localised and contextualised analysis of gender violence. Hence I emphasise the need for a situated theorisation of the experiences of Andean queer subjects, as there is no place for a universalised and homogeneous explanation of violence against queer subjects and their suffering.

The film helps us understand how the coloniality of gender interacts with modern systems of oppression. Queer suffering in the Peruvian Andes can be understood by paying attention to how the colonial legacies, such as the gender and racial system, interlock, resulting in violence towards queer subjects. Queer racialised men transgress the heterosexual and cisgender matrix and represent the *other* in a society where colonial legacies remain. They experience everyday violence due to two main reasons: firstly, because they transgress heterosexual and gender mandates, and secondly, because of the racialisation of their bodies, which situates them in a vulnerable position in the system that organises modern Peruvian society. In other words, their subjectivities represent a rupture with the post-colonial order and the gender and racial matrix that the Peruvian society aspires to be, which is characterised as being heterosexual, cisgender and white.

Although in the film Noé does not explicitly self-identify as gay or queer, his practices and attitudes distance him from the heterosexual matrix and he is attacked by his community and his lover's family after they become aware of the homosexual affair. Judith Butler (1993) argued that the act of coming out of the closet, and forcing someone out of it, reinforces the gender binary, the heterosexual matrix and the power relations that support them. Taking someone out of the closet, and in such a violent manner as in *Retablo*, reinforces power relations among those in and outside the heterosexual matrix in the rural community. After the event of violence, almost at the end of the film, he addresses his son: 'There is nothing left to do here, Segundo, you should go with your mom,' implicitly recognising himself as queer and, therefore, rejected.

Furthermore, the emotional suffering is also experienced by Segundo, as illustrated in the scene where the family is reunited, eating corn for dinner. Segundo remains silent and does not touch the food. Anatolia tells him, 'Son, eat!' but he says he is not hungry. The morning after, he works on the farm, preparing wood for the animals. His mother notices something strange has happened to him and asks what is happening. Again, she presumes he might be sick and touches his forehead, only to realise he is not. He seems mad and confronts his mother, with anger in his voice and words. Noé asks, 'What is wrong with Segundo?' Anatolia replies, 'He might be upset about something.' For his parents, this atypical behaviour indicates his physical health is compromised. However, there is a notable absence of conversation regarding emotional distress even though Segundo manifests signs of it. Suffering is social and silenced, possibly due to socio-cultural factors such as the invisibility of queer sexuality and the implications of Noé's affects and desires for their family life.

Moving on to another aspect of Noé's affliction, I propose that the suffering he embodies results from social relationships within the community, cultural legacies of colonisation and being outside the heterosexual matrix. One day, after Noé's attack, Segundo wakes up concerned and runs around looking for his father, who is still severely injured but is not in his bed or anywhere near their house. An almost-finished bottle of alcohol is sitting on the workshop table. Segundo runs towards the water well and screams desperately: '*Papay, papay*, answer me!' He jumps into the well to save him, only to come back with his dead body. He mourns his loss and hugs his deceased father. As previously noted by Fassín and Rechtman (2009) and Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007), his social suffering can be related to the violence and social inequalities he has experienced.

In the last scene, Segundo works with dough made from the potatoes his father recently told him to preserve as they will not have anything to eat, given the community's rejection of him for embodying queerness. The young boy builds figurines of the two of them, representing a scene in which Noé patiently and warmly instructs him in making *retablos*. The result is a finely crafted *retablo* that Segundo intends to offer to his father as part of the ritual of farewell and burial: 'I made it for you [he says to his deceased father], you will always be in my heart.' Afterwards, Segundo packs his things and looks inside the workshop for the last time before closing the doors. In addition to representing love and gratitude towards his father, this is a way for him to remain connected while coping with the social suffering experienced by him and his family after being excluded from the community due to their conceptions of gender and sexuality.

## Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, I have aimed to analyse the specificities of the violence and suffering experienced by queer subjects in the Andes through the lens of *Retablo*. I echo Romero Caballero's (2017) argument that the abandonment of racialised queer subjects is a response to an ideological disgust that rejects the non-heterosexual other. Moreover, the narratives and practices about Noé's sexuality convey odium towards those who transgress the gender and sexuality matrix. They also entail a deep fear of contamination among those exercising everyday violence.

Queer suffering is social and responds to the specificities of the gender and heterosexual matrix in the setting of a rural community in Ayacucho, Peru, built upon colonial legacies such as gender, sexuality and race. These elements are interlocked and are crucial to understanding the social dynamics reproduced among community members. Analysing the film has allowed me to illustrate the extent to which those who transgress the heterosexual and cisgender matrix are subject to experience social abjection, violence and suffering. I have asserted through this chapter, drawing from De la Cadena's (1920) argument that *las mujeres son más indias*, that queer racialised men are more vulnerable to experiencing violence and embodying social suffering since *los homosexuales son más indios*.

As this chapter illustrates, by interpreting *Retablo*, we can see how being a man and embodying queerness results in social stigmatisation and homophobic violence. Colonial legacies still exist today and operate through the symbolic trashing of queer subjects; thereby queerness is devalued in the social fabric as it represents an abject otherness. This violence depicts the vulnerability of those who challenge and transgress the heterosexual mandate. Moreover, this issue is situated in the broader national context. The Peruvian state has historically excluded queer existences, failing to guarantee those outside the heterosexual or cisgender norm the exercise of citizenship, health and safety. This exclusion has resulted in limited access to rights and opportunities, perpetuating the reproduction of colonial legacies such as the gender and sexual matrices in Peru today.

In that regard, queerness and the racialisation of Andean subjects constitute non-dominant differences in the midst of the coloniality of gender and the modern state's establishment (Lugones 2007). These non-dominant differences play an essential role in the subject's architecture and their vulnerability to experiencing suffering among queer individuals. The alterity embodied by dissident sexualities from the heterosexual and

cisgender norm translates into a vulnerability to experiencing violence in their daily lives. In *Retablo*, the community violently sanctions Noé for crossing the borders of sexual desire and gender mandates (Anzaldúa 1987). The extent of his suffering is such that he takes his own life. I view this as the ultimate and most tragic expression of violence and the manifestation of queer suffering represented in the film.

## Postscript

As I conclude this chapter, I struggle against the emotional uneasiness of living in a country that denies the queer the right to live and to practise our citizenship. I find it painful, but remain relentless. We stand and dare to exist in the face of a nation that does not acknowledge our realities and expects us to remain invisible and silent. I write these words with a heavy heart and tense muscles, grappling with mood swings provoked by a personal – or rather social? – history of violence and suffering that I challenge collectively. I guess I am also another bad *muchacha/e* of the story.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Refers to the act of excluding; emphasis mine.
- 2 Commonly precarised and marginalised areas of the city where people establish communities.
- 3 Created by then-President Valentín Paniagua in 2001.
- 4 Peru's queer population is not homogeneous; it varies depending on social class, gender and disabilities, among other aspects. I do not refer to the 'LGBTQI+ community' but to the 'LGBTQI+ population'.
- 5 In the film, which is predominantly in Quechua, the characters switch to Spanish whenever they leave the community to travel to the city centre, which represents the modern world, characterised by commerce and communication between networks of people, and when they interact with white people, such as the father at church.
- 6 However, it must be noted that the community enforces punishments, such as public stripping and whipping, on individuals who engage in acts they deem amoral or deserving of correction.
- 7 Man from the Andean region, *la sierra* in Peru.
- 8 Regarding this matter, I recommend reading Rebecca Irons' chapter in this volume, where she takes an approach to the pornographic gaze and discusses the animalisation of heterosexual sex in the Andes through mechanisms of coloniality of power.
- 9 This refers to unpleasant and repulsive acts, practices or things. Within this context, it can be interpreted as 'filthy'.
- 10 In the film, they use potato dough to create the figurines, just as it was done before the modernisation of the materials used to build *retablos*' figurines; plaster, flour and glue replaced the use of potatoes, which reflects the precarious conditions in which they lived.
- 11 I have borrowed and adapted a line from María Emilia Cornejo's (1989) poem *La muchacha mala de la historia* in the English translation, exploring the multiple meanings of *historia* in Spanish, which can refer to both personal narratives and broader historical accounts. I have also used both the feminine and gender-neutral versions of *muchacha/e* to match my gender identity.

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Part II

## **Emergent Andean feminisms**



## 5

# 'Somos las indígenas que no pudiste esterilizar': visual and embodied activism in the contemporary Peruvian feminist movement

Phoebe Martin

On a cloudy day in August 2019 a group of activists and victims gathered in central Lima to create a giant Peruvian flag (Figure 5.1). This was part of an action entitled *Antimonumento de la memoria: Si no están todas, no hay justicia* (Memory antimonument: If they are not all here, there is no justice).<sup>1</sup> This action is one of many organised by the feminist collective *Somos 2074 y Muchas Más* (We are 2074 and many more; hereafter 'Somos 2074'), which campaigns for justice for the victims of forced sterilisations. It took place in a symbolically powerful location on the Paseo de los Héroes Navales: a public plaza on a traffic island that faces the Palacio de Justicia, the seat of the Supreme Court of Peru. Wearing *polleras* (a traditional skirt worn by Indigenous women in the Andes) and surrounded by cars and buses in the centre of the capital, the participants came together to write the names of victims of the forced sterilisations that took place in Peru in the 1990s. They wrote these names on pieces of red and white cloth, which other participants then stitched together to create one huge flag. The act of inscribing these names onto a giant Peruvian flag while sitting outside the Palacio de Justicia is a symbolically powerful action, given the ongoing lack of justice and even awareness of the thousands of victims of forced sterilisations that took place in Peru in the 1990s, as discussed in the introduction to this volume.

Following the eruption of the *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) protests in 2016, the feminist movement in Peru has experienced a rebirth. In the early 2000s and 2010s Peruvian feminism went through a period of



**Figure 5.1** Activists writing the names of victims of forced sterilisations on pieces of red and white fabric sewn together to create a giant Peruvian flag (author's own).

abeyance, outlined in more detail in the introduction to this volume. The role of social media was key to this revitalisation. Contemporary feminist movements in Latin America are characterised by the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networks. However, analyses of activism and social media have tended to focus on their ability to

generate mass mobilisations or the use of hashtags (Williams 2015; Dixon 2014). More recently research has started to take into account the role of the visual in the digital era (Mirzoeff 2016). Social media platforms are highly visual spaces, where images and videos receive greater engagement than text (McGarry et al. 2019). In this visual era, activist strategies use symbols to straddle the border between the online and the offline. However, contemporary activist uses of social media and digital spaces are not only visual, but also embodied (Parkins 2000; Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Sliwinska 2021). We must give greater consideration to the embodied experiences of protest in the digital age, and how this is affected by the experience of shifting from physical to digital spaces and vice versa (Martin 2022).

Further, as this chapter shows, the racial politics of visual and embodied protest determines who participates in protest movements, who is represented and who gets to decide the terms of that representation. Taking a decolonial approach to the visual and embodied in contemporary feminist politics in Peru is essential to analyse the politics of representing Indigenous women's experiences in a country where their voices continue to be silenced by the state and mainstream media. Following the provocation at the heart of this volume – 'who are Andinxs?' – this chapter argues that the Somos 2074 campaign reflects the challenges and possibilities facing feminist activism in Peru as a whole. Drawing on the work of Spivak (1988) and Guerrero (1997), we must ask *who* is being represented and who gets to decide *how* they are represented. Somos 2074 uses various symbols in its campaigning, including the national flag and Indigenous dress. This chapter explores the use of two such symbols: the *pollera* and the uterus. These function as key symbols in the work of Somos 2074. These symbols are both visual and embodied: the *pollera* evokes Indigenous and Andean femininity, and in this context the uterus represents the embodied site of the reproductive violence inflicted through forced sterilisation. Informed by the work of decolonial scholars such as Lugones (2010), we can see how the uses of these symbols have also been the source of tensions within the movement over how the sterilisations and the victims are represented.

Feminist activism is interdisciplinary in its nature, drawing not only on traditional activist practices like marching, but also on art, theatre, poetry, law and psychology. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of feminist activism is essential. This chapter draws on fieldwork conducted in Peru in 2019 as part of my doctoral research, for which I carried out in-person and digital ethnography, as well as using visual methods and interviews. Ethnography is defined as 'in-depth analyses of



social worlds from the members' perspectives' (Adler and Adler 2010). This has traditionally entailed spending time with participants in physical locations. During my time in the field I took part in different feminist actions: marches, performances, rehearsals and meetings. Participant observation also involves building rapport; by participating in these actions I built relationships with activists, and attempted to create a level of trust. I chose this method to explore the experience of taking part in performance protests and artistic actions as activists themselves understand them.

In order to analyse the visual politics of this movement, I also drew on digital and visual methods. Growing out of traditional ethnographic methods, digital ethnography problematises 'the status of the Internet as a way of communicating, as an object within people's lives and as a site for community-like formations' (Hine 2000, 64). As I found in the process of my research, the internet is not a tangible space with fixed boundaries, but rather it is part of people's lives and should not be analysed in isolation. As many scholars have noted, it is not useful to draw a hard distinction between online and offline (Hine 2017; Postill and Pink 2012). Further, the topic of this research is a social movement that exists simultaneously online and offline. Digital ethnography is a key method for studying contemporary social movements (Barassi 2017).

As well as ethnographic methods, I also incorporated visual methods. This involves a number of different techniques ranging from photography and video to drawing and map making. In analysing contemporary feminist movements, we need to consider the visual politics of these movements. I follow Rose's definition of visual methods: 'methods which use visual materials of some kind as part of the process of generating evidence in order to explore research questions' (Rose 2014, 25). Social media is a visual format; our feeds are filled with images and videos and these make up the landscape of digital activism. This also influences the strategies that activists use, as they consider how offline actions will translate to the online sphere.

Finally, it is important to note my positionality and the impact of my role as a white British woman taking part in an action marking the violence perpetrated against Indigenous women in Peru. This dynamic was at the forefront of my mind while participating in and analysing the work of Somos 2074. As an outsider – I am neither Peruvian nor Indigenous – by participating I was aware of the colonial and racial dynamics at play. At the same, my position as an outsider gave me the space to observe the tensions between urban, mestiza and white feminists and the rural, Indigenous women being represented.

## Theories of visual and embodied politics

Approaching the Somos 2074 campaign using the concepts of visual and embodied politics allows us to explore both the role of contemporary feminist activism and the politics of representation within this movement. Social media is an inherently visual phenomenon: as such, the role of images, screens and symbols is increasingly important in today's world. At the same time, feminist activism has not just moved online: protests, performances, sit-ins and other in-person, embodied actions continue to be central to social movements. Combining theories of visual and embodied politics brings new insights into how new feminist activisms negotiate the borders between the digital and the physical, but also how these forms of activism create new questions about the politics of representation.

These days we spend a significant amount of time *looking* at screens. Our lives and understandings of the world are mediated through the visual. This has a direct impact on activism. Social movement scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of the visual. Activists must negotiate this visually dominated landscape as they attempt to make not only their voices heard, but also their actions *seen*. Building in particular on the work of social movement scholars and visual theorists, visual politics is defined as a set of beliefs communicated through images, the use of images to challenge, or maintain, power and status (Petchesky 1987; Pollock 2013; Khatib 2013).

Feminist visual politics is not merely about adding women to visual politics. It demands taking an explicitly feminist stance at all levels of visual politics. This means, in the words of Griselda Pollock, '[demanding] recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction' (Pollock 1988, 9). We can apply this not only to the visual politics of feminist movements, but also to conservative movements and how their visual politics contributes to the construction of patriarchal gender norms. Further, I take an approach informed by decolonial feminism, and the ways that visual politics reinforces and challenges the colonial logics of race, gender and sexuality (Lugones 2010). Decolonial feminisms are increasingly important in Latin America, and the Andes in particular; these approaches include an analysis of the colonial reality of Latin America within feminism (Segato 2016). These are perspectives that challenge the dominance of feminist thought from the north, and but also pre-existing white feminisms in the region. This chapter reflects on the tensions and possibilities linked to

the emergence of a decolonial feminism in Peru led by younger activists, which makes explicit the links between coloniality, race and gender.

The role of the body in activism has been widely studied. Scholars have looked at the ways that the body has been used in activism: from physical presence (Gale 2015), to performance (Taylor 2020) to naked protest (Abonga et al. 2020). The role of the body has been particularly important to feminist activism, given its dual role as a site of oppression and violations of bodily autonomy, but also as a tool for activism (Martin 2022). Building on the above definition of visual politics, here I define embodied politics as a set of beliefs communicated by and through the body – individual and collective – and the use of these bodies to challenge systems of power that act upon the body, particularly patriarchy and colonialism. Through analysing Somos 2074's performances we can see how these forces shape the body as a tool and the activist bodies taking part.

The visual and embodied are not two separate ideas, but ways of thinking about activism that are deeply intertwined. Feminist scholars, such as Donna Haraway, have highlighted how the visual is embodied, rather than a neutral scientific gaze (Haraway 2002, 192). Taking a visual and embodied approach to feminist activism reveals how the body and vision overlap and impact each other: seeing is a process that involves 'the whole body, not just the eyes' (Mirzoeff 2016, 14). Further, affect is key to understanding the intersections of the visual and embodied in activism (Jasper 1998). Taking into account the affects of political aesthetics can allow us to see how 'visual, aural, and tactile encounters with objects, spaces or indeed other bodies can engage the senses in ways that produce (political) effects' (Ryan 2019, 106–7). As Husanović argues, the 'synergies between culture, art, and politics' that bring in 'the politics of affect' can create new political and activist possibilities (Husanović 2009, 107). For Serafini, performance in particular creates 'temporary situations of freedom, transgression, reflection and mutual empowerment' (Serafini 2014, 337).

Visual and embodied politics, therefore, offer new possibilities for activists, particularly when they face a growing backlash. This is especially relevant for feminist activists in Peru who must navigate a rising tide of conservative politics and limited legal opportunities for both change to abortion legislation and justice in the case of forced sterilisations. As of 2022 the case is still languishing in the courts, due to a technicality involving the original extradition paperwork against Peru's former president Alberto Fujimori sent to Chile in 2005 (Infobae 2022). In the case of sterilisations, increasing social conservatism in

Peru, particularly *fujimorismo*, is tied to denials that these even took place. This movement is tied to a backlash against reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, reminding us that justice for victims of sterilisations is essential for contemporary reproductive justice. An analysis of activism that takes into account the visual and the embodied as well as the role of affect deepens our understanding of the relationships between different forms of activism. Contemporary feminist activism does not take place entirely online or offline, but it is understood and performed *through the body*. As Murphy argues in the case of mass political violence, given that this ‘is inextricably tethered to the human body’ we must ‘attend to the ways memory is performed in visual and embodied ways’ (Murphy 2019, 25). In the case of feminist activism, which challenges patriarchal and colonial bodily oppression, such an approach is of fundamental importance. As the next section will demonstrate, in the actions carried out by Somos 2074, the symbols – *polleras* and uteruses – are not just visual elements but also embodied by the performers in ways that reflect the colonial and racialised realities of Peru.

### **‘We are the Indigenous women that you couldn’t sterilise’: representation and activism in Peru**

As highlighted in the introduction to this volume, during the 1990s thousands of people, almost all poor, Indigenous women living in the rural highlands of Peru, were sterilised without consent. Since the first reports of forced sterilisations in the 1990s emerged, activists have sought justice for victims of the practice, but with little success until very recently. At the time that sterilisations were happening, feminists did not offer a coherent response (Bueno-Hansen 2015). Since 2011, however, the sterilisation campaign has become a core issue for feminist militancy in Peru. During preparations for an action carried out by Somos 2074 I took a photograph of participants carrying the giant Peruvian flag constructed during the *Antimonumento* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Figure 5.2). The women pictured are a mixture of feminist activists and members of the victims’ association of Lima and Callao (AVELFC). We were getting ready to take part in a march that was part of the *¡Que se vayan todos!* (Throw them all out!) protests that took place across Peru in 2019 and 2020. The aim of Somos 2074’s presence in the march was both to support the general aim of the march – to dissolve the corrupt and deeply unpopular Congress – but also to keep the victims of the sterilisations in the national consciousness.



**Figure 5.2** On their way to a protest, activists and members of the Lima Sterilisation Victim's Association hold a giant rolled-up Peruvian flag on their shoulders.

The Somos 2074 campaign initially emerged from independent feminist actions, before becoming a formalised campaign in 2016. The '2074' in its name refers to the number of the victims in the initial case brought by the state prosecutor. The official registry of victims (REVIESFO) now lists a total of 5,987 victims as of 2021, hence the addition of 'and many more' (Veliz 2016; Salas 2020).<sup>2</sup> This campaign works alongside the other groups that form part of the Grupo de Seguimiento a las Reparaciones a Víctimas de Esterilizaciones Forzadas (Monitoring Group for Reparations for Victims of Forced Sterilizations) and is also supported by the work of feminist NGO Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (Study for the Defence of Women's Rights; DEMUS). Somos 2074's activism includes legal work, research and lobbying, but its most visible activity takes place through performances and interventions that aim to put the issue of the sterilisations on the public agenda and continue campaigning for justice. Somos 2074 has become a key part of the wider Peruvian feminist movement.

Somos 2074 initially gained recognition as a feminist force in 2016 during Keiko Fujimori's second presidential run. When the campaign started, it had the aim of raising awareness of the case of forced sterilisations and showing how it was intimately tied to the legacies of *fujimorismo*. In an interview, Emilia Salazar, who works at DEMUS, put it simply: 'The issue of the sterilisations always comes out at the same time as *fujimorismo*.' One of the first versions of the performance took

place during a protest organised to mark the anniversary of the *autogolpe* (self-coup) carried out by Fujimori on 5 April 1992.<sup>3</sup> This shift has been tied to three successive presidential campaigns by Keiko Fujimori and her insistence on her father's innocence. During her 2016 presidential run, Keiko claimed that the accusations of forced sterilisations were a myth created to undermine *fujimorismo*, and that they were 'just' a family planning programme (La República 2021). The issue of forced sterilisations is intimately tied to the legacy of and campaigns for justice linked to the Fujimori dictatorship. Since its beginnings Somos 2074 has also been present in a number of marches linked to the legacy of the dictatorship and ongoing political crises in Peru, but for activists these issues are intimately linked to the issue of sterilisations.

This section examines the use of two different symbols by the campaign. It starts by analysing the *pollera*, a traditional skirt worn by Indigenous women in the highlands, and worn by participants in Somos 2074's performances, as a way of representing Indigenous femininity. Second, I consider the uterus, which appears in the performances and visual identity of the campaign as a symbol of the physical, embodied location of the process of sterilisation which was usually carried out by tubal ligation. Together, these symbols reveal the tension between visual representation and embodiment in these performances, and the challenges these pose for contemporary feminist activists who are concentrated in Lima and other urban areas and tend to be young and white or mestiza.

### The *pollera*: representing and symbolising Indigenous women

The fact that most victims were poor, Indigenous women living in rural areas in the Amazon or the highlands has shaped the character of activism for justice for sterilisation victims. This movement mobilises the category of Indigenous women in different ways. Somos 2074 uses dress as a way of representing Indigenous women through the use of red *polleras* worn by participants in protests and performances. However, this raises questions about the politics of representation and indigeneity in relation to Somos 2074's actions.

In Peru, the question of who is – or is perceived as – Indigenous is a complicated and shifting one. Unlike in Bolivia and Ecuador, countries with similar geographic and ethnic make-up, until 2017 Peru did not include ethnicity in its census, instead recording maternal language. Similarly, the official registry of victims (REVIESFO) does not ask victims' ethnic identity, but instead notes their location and maternal language.

Although the registry does not have specific data, language and location are particularly important markers of ethnicity in Peru, meaning that we can infer from these data that the vast majority of victims are Indigenous women. This is highlighted by the fact that many victims of sterilisation were not given information about the procedure in their maternal languages, but only in Spanish, meaning they could not fully understand, and therefore could not consent to sterilisation (Rendon 2020).

Indigenous women occupy a dual position in the national imaginary. As Babb argues, they are ‘the quintessential subjects of both national pride and everyday scorn and neglect in Peru’ (Babb 2018, 21). They are used as a symbol of authenticity in Peru’s tourism industry, appearing in marketing materials calling tourists to discover the ‘real’ Peru. Nevertheless, even when used as a symbol of authentic Peruvian-ness, Indigenous women are denied the opportunity to speak for themselves. Under the 1990s Programa Nacional de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar (PNSRPF, National Reproductive Health and Family Planning Programme), they were deprived of their rights and autonomy by a programme that characterised them as incompetent. Even when trying to access reproductive healthcare, they had to submit to the programme’s ideas about their needs, rather than accessing it on their own terms. Indigenous women are therefore often categorised as voiceless in the political sphere, even when this is not true in practice.

Somos 2074’s campaigning is complicated by this dynamic, and the question of how – or whether – Indigenous women get to speak for themselves. They are not part the national victims’ rights group AMPAEF, but rather they belong to a group that campaigns for justice on behalf of and alongside victims. The concept of ventriloquism is useful here. In Andrés Guerrero’s work on nineteenth-century Ecuador, he argues that the liberal discourse of the state creates a type of ‘ventriloquism’ in which Indigenous people get to ‘speak’, but the discourses they use are handed down to them from liberal elites (Guerrero 1997). The Peruvian feminist Maruja Barrig builds on this to argue that in the case of the PNSRPF, the programme’s ‘liberal discourse’ while claiming to be giving autonomy to Indigenous women actually constructed them as objects of manipulation, without free will or capacity to express themselves (Barrig 2008, 234). This evokes Spivak’s (1988) question ‘can the subaltern speak?’: who is really speaking through these performances, and who gets to decide on the logic and discourse used? Considering this, to what extent do these performances embody a decolonial feminism?

While it is organised in collaboration with victims’ groups and includes actions beyond the performances seen in the media, the rhetoric



of the campaign is an explicitly feminist one. The campaign is financially supported by the feminist NGO DEMUS, and it has goals that go beyond justice for victims of sterilisations, including campaigning against the election of Keiko Fujimori, or at least an end to corruption. This is not to say that all victims disagree with the rhetoric of Somos 2074. They are not a monolithic group and many work closely with the campaign. The title of the campaign also provokes questions of representation: who are the ‘we’ in ‘we are 2074 and many more’?

When considering the issue of representation in the case of Somos 2074 it is important to examine the processes through which its performances were conceived. They have evolved and changed since the campaign started. In initial versions of the performances, which were more spontaneous and ‘DIY’, participants attached a paper cut-out with the printed image of a uterus to their bodies and wore their own clothes rather than the official T-shirts and *polleras* the campaign is now known for.<sup>4</sup> Initially participants wore knee-length skirts, but not *polleras*, as a way of representing the clothes most associated with Indigenous women in the popular imaginary. The first iterations of the performance were organised spontaneously and so participants simply wore what was available to them. When talking about the emergence of the symbolism of the campaign, Lici Ramírez, an activist who took part in these early performances, described it as a ‘collective imaginary’ that emerged through spontaneous collaboration between activists:

What happened to me is that I met the other *compañeras* naturally because we were all marching together [in the 2016 *No a Keiko* protests]. It was a collective imaginary, the symbol of the *pollera* and the bleeding uterus . . . From 2016 the potentialities of this action multiplied, in the marches that took place on 5 April 2016, we were 40 or 50 *empolleradas* [see below for the meaning of this term], it was enormous! We still didn’t have a uniformity in the clothes, in the *polleras*. But from then on, I started meeting up [with the organisers of Somos 2074].

However, the spontaneous nature of this ‘collective imaginary’ initially did not include victims or their representatives. After the organisers did speak to victims, the performance was changed. Emilia Salazar from DEMUS recalled how ‘many *compañeras* told us “they’re not just skirts, they are *polleras*”. So, we decided to incorporate the symbol of the *pollera*, because it is much more than just a skirt.’ Moving from skirts



to *polleras* was a way of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the performance, and a reflection of how a decolonial approach might be taken. However, the fact that it was done retrospectively and decided by the organisers in Lima reflects the unequal power dynamics at play and the expectations of the power of the interventions. Despite the use of *compañeras* to describe them – a common way that Latin American feminists refer to each other – they were not the ones to make the decision to change the performance. This echoes Guerrero's ventriloquism (1997): they informed the performance, but they were not collaborators in the co-creation of the narrative and did not get to 'speak'.

Since then, the *polleras* have become such an integral part of the performance that the group as a whole is sometimes referred to as *las empolleradas*. Some activists use the verb *empollerarte*<sup>5</sup> to refer to taking part in the action. This phrase evokes the verb *empoderarte* – to empower oneself – suggesting that there is meant to be an element of self-empowerment in the action. The first time a friend asked me if I was going to put it on a *pollera* – '¿Vas a empollerarte?' – I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable with this idea, as a white, non-Peruvian woman, that I would put on this symbol of Indigenous femininity. At this moment I was with a friend and fellow researcher from Chile, who was working on a project on theatre and memory, and as outsiders – of different kinds – we both felt the same tension. But with the encouragement of others, and in order to support and participate in the action, we decided to put them on. Later, we both discussed how strange it felt to wear them, and the symbolic implications of white outsiders putting on *polleras*. We could 'dress up' in this symbol of indigeneity, but at the end of the day we – and other non-Indigenous participants – could take them off, and live unaffected by the colonial and racist misogyny that the *pollera* represented here. Yet at the same time, as an outsider researcher, refusing to put it on and lecturing Peruvian women on the politics of the *pollera* would have perpetuated the same pattern of ventriloquism analysed here.

The question of representation and who is speaking for whom is key, but the answers reveal its complexity. Somos 2074 seeks to represent those affected through performance, provoking questions of who is speaking for whom, and whether this issue perpetuates dynamics of exclusion. As this section mentioned, location and language are key signifiers of indigeneity in Peru, yet the majority of performances by Somos 2074 take place in Lima and in Spanish, away from the rural areas where Quechua-speaking women were sterilised. It is important to note that this is also where the audience that the campaign is targeting is located; one of its key aims is to keep the case in the media, which is also Lima-based and

Spanish-speaking. Nevertheless, performances in Spanish in the capital are located geographically and symbolically far away from the victims they represent.

The issues of representation and decolonial feminisms are affected by histories of race and migration in Peru. It is not as straightforward as simply speaking over or on behalf of Indigenous women. Many mestiza activists I spoke to did mention their Indigenous roots as an important motivational factor for caring about this issue – and for being specifically decolonial feminists. Lima, through Peru's long and complicated history of internal migration, is a diverse city, and many of the young activists who live there have Indigenous parents and grandparents. During marches that Somos 2074 took part in, we would repeat the chant 'We are the daughters of the [Indigenous/*campesina*/Amazonian] women that you could not sterilise.'<sup>6</sup> This chant builds on a different feminist chant popular across Latin America: we are the daughters of the witches that you could not burn.<sup>7</sup> Each repetition of the chant would feature a different category of women affected: Indigenous, *campesina* (peasant), Amazonian. They cite their connections to their ancestry as part of their motivation for taking part. In shouting these chants, they are highlighting their own ancestry and the legacies of internal migration rather than a direct familial link. Although victims and their relatives do participate, most activists who have joined through feminist activism are not daughters of victims. Nevertheless, when they invoke their own heritage as a reason to participate, this chant reflects both that motivation for taking part and their decolonial feminisms.

### The uterus: gender, reproduction and bodily autonomy

The uterus is a central symbol in Somos 2074 but not only because the majority of victims of forced sterilisation were women.<sup>8</sup> The uterus evokes the site of reproduction, and how the victims' reproductive autonomy was taken away from them. For feminists, as a question of reproductive justice, the sterilisations are directly linked to other issues such as abortion and access to contraception. However, the uterus as symbol has been a contentious part of the performance, reflecting generational tensions between victims and younger activists, and the role of male victims.

The centrality of the uterus puts the focus on the women who make up the majority of sterilisation victims. There are a small minority of male victims, and their role in the campaign is complicated. Out of the 5,967 sterilisations registered in the REVIESFO, only 90 were vasectomies. There may be factors preventing men from coming forward to register

their case, such as shame and ideas about virility. Given that more than 100,000 people were sterilised without informed consent during the PNSRPF, there may be many more male victims who have remained silent. Nevertheless, they make up a small minority of the total of officially registered victims.

The participation of men in actions by Somos 2074 is a difficult one, considering it aims to represent all victims. I noticed during the process of writing out the names of victims in black marker on the pieces of fabric destined to make up the giant Peruvian flag that there were several men's names on the list. At the march that took place on 5 September 2019, only *mujeres y disidencias* (women and non-binary people) were invited to take part, so men were not allowed to hold the flag. During this march a male protestor, not a victim but someone who was taking part in the wider march, came up to the group and tried to join in with the holding of the flag, but was quickly told that he was not allowed to take part in the action. He had mistaken our flag for the giant flag of the human rights movement, and apparently simply wanted to help, but was not aware of the significance of the march. I asked Emilia, coordinator of Somos 2074, about this, and she said it was down to three factors: the safety of the women (many of whom are also victims of gender violence); the need to maintain space for women victims – 'sometimes what happens is that [men] take over the space and they talk and talk and talk'; and finally, the fact that male victims don't actually turn up to participate. Although the protest has faced some criticism for not including men, so far it seems none of the male victims on the register have wanted to take part.

Feminists have long noted how policies around reproduction have been about controlling women's bodies. Earlier in the twentieth century, many Latin American countries sought to increase their populations through pro-natalist policies banning abortion and contraception (Sutton 2010, 102). These policies were not applied universally; they sought to increase 'desirable' reproduction, that is to say in the whiter parts of the population. Indigenous populations were targeted with anti-natalist policies, and Indigenous women in particular were characterised as having too many children. Both pro- and anti-natalist policies were framed in economic terms, with Indigenous reproduction being a drain on resources, but whiter children a resource for economic growth.

In initial versions of the performance, participants attached a paper cut-out with the printed image of a uterus to their bodies. However, the spontaneous process of creation meant that victims' perspectives were not initially included. In these early performances participants held up their skirts to reveal red paint daubed down their thighs to represent

blood and the violence of the procedures that some women underwent. However, this evolved in response to criticisms and feedback from victims' groups. The use of the blood in particular was controversial, as victims felt it did not accurately represent their experiences, or it was too distressing to recall. Either way, it rendered them a spectacle. Women who were sterilised underwent tubal ligations, a surgical procedure in which the fallopian tubes are permanently blocked. The use of blood in early versions of the performance was used to suggest literal reproductive violence. However, subsequently the blood was removed from the performance. When I spoke to Diana, an activist from Cusco, she recalled how the victims there felt about the use of blood by activists in Lima:

In the case of Cusco, the *compañeras* who were victims of the violence of the forced sterilisations asked us not to put red on our legs because it was very, very painful for them to remember this experience. For them it was very intense, and they also asked us not to put on the uteruses, because before we would go out with the uteruses and with the stained legs and all that.

*(Author) I imagine that probably for some victims it would be intense and difficult to see it converted into a symbol?*

Yes, for them it was intense. Some of the victims said we won't march if the girls dress like that. So now when we march there are no longer the uteruses and the blood and all that.

She refers to victims as *compañeras* and activists as 'girls' (*chicas*), showing a generational divide between younger activists in their twenties and the victims, who are mostly in their sixties and seventies, who have different approaches to the fight for justice. The fact that blood was removed from the performance after victims' feedback reflects some of the tensions between performance and representation. The artistic impulse to create a spectacle that is visually impactful was at odds with how victims wanted to represent themselves. That victims' voices were listened to is significant, as they should be at the heart of this movement, but they were consulted after the performances had started, rather than being included in the process. This is in part because initial performances were spontaneous; in the current versions, participants take part in workshops and hear from victims or their representatives as part of the training. The actions have evolved to be more inclusive after processes of reflection. There still exists a tension between victims' self-perception and the artistic and activist

desire to shock that is not unique to Somos 2074, but a limitation on this form of protest more generally.

Although Diana mentioned removing the uterus from actions in Cusco, this has not been the case in Lima. In the last two years, Somos 2074 has added a *pañuelo* (scarf) printed with an image of a uterus and the name of the campaign. On a practical level, these are more durable than paper, but they also echo the *pañuelo verde* of the campaign for legal abortion, which also draws on the symbolism of the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020). This explicitly places Somos 2074's actions within a transnational feminist ecosystem around reproductive justice. For feminist activists, the connections between the sterilisations and lack of access to safe abortions is clear. Cristina, a young activist from Lima, reflected on how the sterilisations reflect the relationship between women's bodies and the state:

It is interesting how we can connect with each other in other ways. What we are trying to do is transmit what these women felt in that moment. The impotence and pain that comes from the state deciding about women's bodies in general. So, at times it is a bit draining. We have also had conversations with the survivors themselves from various places, sometimes they even come from rural areas, and they tell us about their experiences. It is like a violation of the body by the state.

Similarly to other activists, Cristina draws a line between the sterilisations and other violations. But in this case, Cristina is specifically talking about state control of women's bodies, and the lack of bodily autonomy. The issues she raises link directly to the campaign for legal abortion, and the right to decide over one's own reproduction. However, Catholic and conservative groups have used the sterilisations as an argument against wider access to reproductive healthcare. Because of this falsity, therefore, it is essential that feminists clarify any confusion over the link between sterilisations and reproductive rights, and make it more widely known. Many victims and the AMPAEF frame their demands for justice around family and motherhood, and how their ability to have children was taken away. This is not at odds with campaigns for legal abortion, which heavily feature the slogan *la maternidad será deseada o no será* (motherhood will be desired, or it will not be at all). But given the tensions between activists and victims over the use of the uterus as symbol, the connection between the sterilisations and abortions is not necessarily explicit to all.

The uterus is a contentious symbol that reveals the tension between victims' experiences of sterilisation, and how this fits into wider feminist understandings of reproductive injustice. As part of the feminist movement *Somos 2074* seeks to address the structures that led to the sterilisations, which includes a broader perspective on reproductive autonomy. However, for victims the experience of sterilisation is a deeply personal one, with immediate and painful repercussions that have still not been addressed.

## Conclusions

*Somos 2074* reflects the dynamics that affect the feminist movement more broadly in Peru. The challenge for feminists is how to fight for justice, for rural and for Indigenous women, without speaking *for* victims. The use of *polleras* makes Indigenous women a symbol, rather than the protagonists of a movement that is about them. When we speak of Andinx, people's lived experiences should not be reduced to political symbols. Yet *Somos 2074* is also about what the sterilisations represent, and how they are reflective of wider structures in Peruvian society. The campaign draws a direct link between the violence of the sterilisations and other systemic types of violence. This mirrors the idea of a continuum of gender-based violence that Boesten develops in relation to gender violence during Peru's internal armed conflict: 'The experience of gender-based violence, then, runs along a continuum from cat-calling to emotional, physical, and sexual violence in homes, communities and workplaces, and to rape and femicide in war and peace-time' (Boesten 2019, 163). *Somos 2074* makes clear the link between the racial and patriarchal structures that led to the sterilisations and the violence that women face in their daily lives.

At the same time, these campaign strategies raise issues of representation and framing. In 'speaking for' Indigenous women, *Somos 2074* risks perpetuating the same colonial structures that allowed the sterilisations to happen. However, we must also acknowledge that a decolonial approach to this campaign takes into account the history of migration in Peru and alienation from Indigenous roots: many of those taking part have Indigenous parents or grandparents, but grew up in urban areas. Taking part in this campaign is a way of connecting to and reclaiming this heritage, from a society that continues to be hostile to the Indigenous people who live in it: who counts as Indigenous? Who are 'Andinx'?

In the performances of Somos 2074 the *pollera* and uterus are symbols that are both visual and embodied: they are worn on the body, reminding the viewer of the literal site of violence that the sterilisations represent. As visual emblems, these symbols can then exist in different contexts and draw comparisons and links between sterilisations and other issues, especially abortion. One of the last actions I participated in during fieldwork was a march where Somos 2074 were present, and it was an emotionally charged moment for me to march alongside activists who had become friends over the time I spent in Peru. The actions are among the most high-profile interventions that Peruvian feminists carry out. The sterilisations are an issue specific to Peru, making this more proximate and urgent than other feminist issues which have a transnational focus, such as abortion. Activists also tie the issue of sterilisations to other feminist struggles, for example literally tying *pañuelos verdes* around their necks while taking part in Somos 2074 actions. Unlike the *marea verde* (green tide) of abortion rights activism in Latin America, activism in the case of forced sterilisations integrates an analysis of racialised reproductive violence. The sterilisations show that many of the deep structural inequalities that run through Peruvian society are feminist issues.

In an interview with Lici Ramírez, she described the beginnings of the campaign and how she got involved. In this quote she explains how the campaign has always involved a struggle against *fujimorismo* and corruption in Peru:

The idea has always been – in addition to the political struggle against what [the sterilisations] represented in the Fujimori era – to fight against the judiciary and the corruption inside it, especially because of *fujimorista* influences. You know? There was information that even Becerril<sup>9</sup> was using his influence in the judiciary to cover up the truth. So, we intervened. We had to be constantly supporting the fight against corruption, because this same corruption is what prevents justice from coming to be.

Visual and embodied strategies like those of Somos 2074 are critical in contexts like Peru, where activists face corruption, backlash and frequent political crises. These campaigns keep sterilisations or abortion rights in the public consciousness, and fight to change dominant understandings of these issues. The presence of Andinxs, through Indigenous bodies and voices, is key to incorporating a decolonial feminism into these campaigns, and Peruvian feminism more widely.

## Notes

- 1 [www.facebook.com/events/514107279130609](https://www.facebook.com/events/514107279130609) (accessed 14 November 2023).
- 2 As of 2023 the online database of the REVIESFO is no longer accessible.
- 3 [www.facebook.com/events/1602036723370256](https://www.facebook.com/events/1602036723370256) (accessed 14 November 2023).
- 4 [www.losmovimientoscontraatacan.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/lucha\\_contra\\_esterilizaciones\\_forzadas\\_fujimori](https://www.losmovimientoscontraatacan.wordpress.com/2013/03/11/lucha_contra_esterilizaciones_forzadas_fujimori) (accessed 14 November 2023).
- 5 It would roughly translate as to put on a *pollera*; it is a reflexive verb, meaning that it is an action done to oneself.
- 6 *Somos las hijas de las indígenas, campesinas, amazónicas que no pudiste esterilizar.*
- 7 *Somos las hijas de las brujas que no pudiste quemar.*
- 8 Here I am referring to cis women, and briefly in the next paragraph to cis men. The discussion of the use of the uterus as a symbol is in relation to its use in this specific campaign, rather than to suggest that the uterus is a universal symbol of womanhood.
- 9 Héctor Becerril, a *fujimorista* congressman.

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## 6

# Challenging multiple oppressions: situating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) insurgent feminism within Andean feminisms

Jennifer Bates

We have assumed the task of formulating, based on the observation of our practices and the study of feminist theories and history, our own organisational politics on gender . . . insurgent feminism is a collective construction from our daily practices, in interaction with theorists, militants and representatives from women's organisations (Sandino and Delegación de paz de las FARC-EP 2016).<sup>1</sup>

2016 was a landmark year in the history of the Colombian Marxist-Leninist armed group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In November of that year, the FARC and the Colombian government signed a peace deal to end their more than five-decades-long armed conflict, ushering in multiple, and momentous, transitions. For the FARC, these transitions included transformations in subjectivities from 'rebel' to 'civilian', and a shift in organisational structure from an armed group to a political party. Yet amid the national and international attention accorded to the peace deal and subsequent demobilisation of the FARC, one change that went largely unremarked was the announcement quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that the FARC were formulating their own conception of feminism, known as *feminismo insurgente* (insurgent feminism), mere months before the peace deal was signed. Such an announcement is remarkable, particularly when viewed in relation to the experiences of female ex-combatants from other insurgent armed groups. Feminist scholarship has documented how non-state armed groups have

provided female combatants with spaces for greater agency during conflict, sometimes also incorporating feminism into their ideology, but have subsequently relinquished these spaces of agency and distanced themselves from feminist discourse once the insurgency has ended: a pattern that has been evidenced in armed groups ranging from Shining Path in Peru (Boutron 2015) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador (Dietrich Ortega 2012), to the Maoists in Nepal (K. C. and Van der Haar 2019). The FARC's formulation of insurgent feminism thus signifies an important and unprecedented move by a rebel group to deepen its commitment to feminism and female ex-combatants<sup>2</sup> agency as they reincorporate<sup>3</sup> into civilian life.

This chapter sketches the contours of insurgent feminism and situates it in relation to the wider landscape of Andean feminisms, exploring both their resonances and divergences. Andean feminisms here are deliberately pluralised to account for the heterogeneity of feminist theorising and organising being undertaken by Andinxs.<sup>4</sup> Insurgent feminism bears similarities with Andean feminisms in relation to their complex relationships with the state and leftist movements, and also resonates with decolonial feminisms in the Andes that construct knowledge from lived experience and centre the subjectivities most marginalised by the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007), all the while displaying distinct contours shaped by the socio-political context in which former guerrillas are located. This chapter draws on six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Bogotá and Cali, Colombia, in 2022, consisting of document analysis and semi-structured interviews with female *firmantes* and feminist activists working on insurgent feminism. Furthermore, I conducted observation of female *firmantes'* participation in political events and participant observation of two reincorporation villages, known as Former Territorial Areas for Training and Reincorporation (AECTR), in the departments of Tolima and Caquetá. The use of multiple methods follows a tradition of feminist research which has deployed the mix of methods so as to provide the deepest and richest insights possible into women's perspectives and lived experiences.

As Ancil Avoine (2022, 14) highlights, the naming of women who were in the FARC remains a contested issue, and former combatants draw on different labels to refer to themselves. For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to women who were combatants in the FARC as *firmantes* (signatories), which has become the most common way that former combatants refer to themselves, and which denotes their ongoing commitment to peacebuilding as signatories of the 2016 peace deal. I avoid the term 'ex-combatant' to reflect its contestation by some

*firmantes*, who challenge the 'ex' prefix for failing to reflect that although they demobilised militarily, they have not demobilised politically.

The chapter is structured as follows: the first section examines the factors that shaped the emergence of insurgent feminism in 2016 before turning to its main theoretical and political orientations. The second section highlights the dilemma shared by insurgent feminism and Andean feminisms around whether to engage with the state – a dilemma that is shown to be particularly acute for insurgent feminism due to *firmantes'* reliance on the state for security and subsistence. The third section demonstrates parallels between insurgent feminism and decolonial feminisms in the Andes that stem from insurgent feminism's construction of feminist knowledge from lived experience of the peripheries and attentiveness to differential experiences of oppression shaped by coloniality. Whether insurgent feminism could be considered decolonial is questioned in light of *firmantes'* significant involvement with international organisations. In the final section, insurgent feminism is situated within the history of Andean feminisms' oft-fraught relationship between leftist politics and feminism: tensions female *firmantes* continue to navigate, but which they are working to assuage through their work on masculinities. Overall, it will be argued that while insurgent feminism has a specificity shaped by its foundation in the lived experiences of female *firmantes*, it shares with mainstream Andean feminisms the tenacity to persist in spite of significant structural obstacles. This chapter thus contributes to academic understandings of the trajectory and political contours of insurgent feminism as an area that remains understudied in feminist scholarship, as well as providing insights into the possibilities for feminist practices and modes of organising within difficult and constraining contexts.

## **Insurgent feminism: sketching a nascent feminist movement**

When considering the origins of insurgent feminism, the FARC's announcement that it was formulating its own conception of feminism marks a somewhat unexpected development when viewed in relation to its historical relationship with organised feminism. No mention was ever made of feminism in the FARC's documents, and only male combatants occupied the most senior leadership positions in the organisation's secretariat (Sandino 2016). That said, after women were allowed to enlist as combatants from the early 1980s, FARC statutes formally recognised

that female combatants possess the same rights and duties as male combatants (Herrera and Porch 2008, 613). In practice, this manifested in the rupturing of the gendered division of labour in daily life, with female and male combatants receiving the same education and combat training, fighting side by side in combat, and carrying out the same daily routines and duties, including traditionally feminised domestic tasks (Herrera and Porch 2008). Particularly given the 'patriarchal rural societies of origin' from which most female combatants came, in which they would have been expected to fulfil highly traditional gender roles, the emancipatory impact of the erosion in the gendered division of labour should not be underestimated (Herrera and Porch 2008, 612). As Inés,<sup>5</sup> a female *firmante*, articulated it: 'Being a woman in military life was a powerful experience of acknowledging the capacity for equality' (interview, 24 March 2022). Nevertheless, considering the lack of feminist discourse and female combatants at the highest levels of power, these advances in gender equality are better understood by drawing on Dietrich Ortega's (2012) argument that leftist armed groups make considerable efforts to reduce inequality and differences between male and female combatants in order to foster class unity and advance revolutionary aims, rather than in pursuit of feminist objectives.

Thus, rather than insurgent feminism constituting the inevitable outcome of more equitable gender relations in the FARC, their feminist politics may not have emerged had it not been for the feminist advances of the 2012–16 peace process. In response to the androcentric beginnings of the peace process, in which women were almost absent as negotiators and the peace talk agenda made no reference to gender, 40 Colombian women's organisations formed the *Mujeres por la Paz* (Women for Peace) coalition to orchestrate a groundswell of domestic pressure and activism, which led to both the government and FARC appointing more women to their delegations and the creation of the gender sub-commission in 2014 (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018). Mostly comprising women from the government and FARC, the gender sub-commission was tasked with advising on the inclusion of a gender perspective across the peace deal. The gender sub-commission played an important role in developing female combatants' feminist subjectivities as its meetings with 18 civil society representatives, including those from women's organisations, and provided propitious spaces for female combatants to 'begin to build bridges with the women's movement', as Victoria Sandino, the head of the FARC's side of the gender sub-commission, described it (as cited in *Semana* 2016). The sub-commission also met with a delegation of female ex-combatants from other countries, which alerted female combatants

to the gendered challenges of reintegration. In a media interview after the meeting, Sandino explained that ‘they expressed a lot of pain. They had been very stigmatised . . . that was a warning bell for us, as we were already working on the topic of reintegration’ (as cited in [Semana 2016](#)). The peace process was also important in fostering insurgent feminism by bringing together female combatants from different fronts for the first time, sparking internal debates on women’s role in the FARC and prompting a group of female combatants to undertake feminist study. As Alejandra, a *firmante* who worked on the peace process, explained, ‘We began to read, to study the classics, not only Marxism but radical feminism, equality feminism, black feminism, Indigenous feminism’ (interview, 6 June 2022).

The FARC’s first public announcement on insurgent feminism, with which this chapter opened, was followed by two key documents on insurgent feminism. The first, published in 2017 and titled the ‘Thesis on women and gender for the Constitutive Congress of the FARC-EP party’ (henceforth referred to as the 2017 thesis), establishes the tenets of insurgent feminism, and was presented to women’s organisations in different parts of the country ([Mujer Fariana 2017](#)). One year later, ‘Insurgent feminism: A *farian* proposal for peace’ (henceforth referred to as the 2018 proposal) was published ([Comisión Nacional de Mujer, Género y Diversidad 2018](#)). Both documents begin by emphasising that female combatants played an important role in FARC history, which is outlined in some detail in the 2018 proposal with the stated aim of visibilising female combatants’ historical roles and distinct forms of participation. In relation to its theoretical influences, socialist feminism is an important referent. For example, the 2017 thesis conceptualises patriarchy and capitalism as co-constitutive systems: ‘the patriarchal social order sustains the inequalities in the capitalism system, in which women are excluded, discriminated against, subordinated, abused’ ([Mujer Fariana 2017](#), 2). Further to its anti-capitalist stance, insurgent feminism is articulated as anti-colonial, with the 2018 proposal stating that ‘in our *farian* vision the class struggle, struggle for emancipation and struggle against colonialism are fundamental’. Finally, the documents demonstrate an intersectional focus, citing the importance of black feminism in highlighting women’s differential experiences of oppression, as well as emphasising insurgent feminism’s aim to ‘advance recognition of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations’ ([Mujer Fariana 2017](#), 4). Insurgent feminism thus constitutes a nascent movement within the vibrant landscape of Colombian feminism: a landscape in which, as Zulver (2022) shows in her in-depth analysis of three Colombian grassroots women’s organisations,

women have continued to mobilise for gender justice despite grave violence and insecurity. While insurgent feminism's formulation by an armed group distinguishes it from the organisations examined by Zulver, which are mostly composed of women victimised by armed groups and who assume an avowedly pacifist stance, female *firmantes* nevertheless share with these women the risk of harm associated with mobilisation in a 'high-risk' context, as discussed in the next section. Having outlined the conditions through which insurgent feminism emerged and its key theoretical referents, the following section explores its resonance with feminisms in the Andes that have long grappled with how to relate to the state.

## Friend and foe? Feminist politics and the state

An enduring debate for feminisms in the Andes, and one that is particularly acute for insurgent feminism, is the relationship between feminist politics and the state: the latter is understood here as a 'differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses, shaped by specific historical and political contexts' (Vargas 2002, 205) rather than a monolithic, static entity. Over the 1980s and 1990s, feminists in the Andes became increasingly institutionalised and professionalised, establishing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) whose agendas centred on legal and policy changes and thus worked closely with the state (Alvarez 2009). This increasing engagement with state institutions was concurrent with states beginning to implement neoliberal reforms, prompting many feminist groups to assume responsibility for social services no longer undertaken by rapidly hollowing out states. The upshots of feminist institutionalisation have been substantial advances in legislation on women's rights, public and political visibility for feminist demands and increased funding opportunities (Alvarez et al. 2003). To name just a few examples, feminist groups participated in the writing of new constitutions in Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia, women's ministries were set up in Peru and Venezuela, and gender quota laws were introduced in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. At the same time, however, institutionalisation has come at high costs for feminism. Assuming increasingly technical and bureaucratic roles, feminist movements working with or in lieu of the state diluted or abandoned more radical, transformative agendas that challenged the precarity engendered by neoliberal policies (Alvarez et al. 2003). As Vargas (2002) highlights, a contradictory scenario thus unfolded in which women's rights claims gained increasing force

at the same time that social inequalities widened. Within this context, in the 1990s a major and oftentimes bitter fault line emerged between *autonomas* (autonomous feminists) espousing an ‘identity-solidarity’ logic and institutional feminists pursuing a ‘policy-advocacy logic’ (Alvarez et al. 2003). And whereas these fault lines became less pronounced in the early 2000s amid increasing recognition that many feminist NGOs were playing an important role in ‘movement work’, particularly through feminist knowledge production and the coordination of feminist networks (Alvarez 2009), this was less the case for Colombian feminism. As Paarlberg-Kvam (2019) highlights, in Colombia, *autonoma* divisions have been sustained by both the polarised political environment bred by the armed conflict, as well as long-standing neoliberal entrenchment which meant that institutionalisation implied cooperation with neoliberalism – a dynamic that is explored next.

In addition to institutionalisation, an important determinant of the relationship between Andean feminisms and the state has been the election of governments with different ideological orientations, bringing with them shifting political opportunities for the pursuit of feminist goals. Although the relationship between the left and feminist politics has a complex and sometimes conflictual history,<sup>6</sup> left-wing governments challenging neoliberal hegemony have often ushered in opportunities for greater engagement with women’s rights and a politics of class-based redistribution (Lind 2013). In Ecuador, Lind (2013) charts how under the governments of Rafael Correa (2007–17), the rearticulation from neoliberal, market-led development to development premised on the Andean cosmology of *buen vivir* (living well) saw increased interaction between the state and feminist movements, including feminist involvement with the 2008 constitution, which legally redefined the family to include non-normative households, thus providing them with potential to make claims on state resources. In Bolivia, under Evo Morales’s presidency (2006–19) de-patriarchalisation was adopted as an official government strategy, shaping a sweeping legislative agenda to advance gender equality that includes a law to guarantee a life free from violence for women, and a law mandating gender parity in government posts and in political parties’ internal elections for leaders and candidates (Vattuone and Collazos 2019). By contrast, Colombia was historically immune to the ‘pink tide’ of leftist governments in the region amid the decades-long armed conflict, during which people on the left were discredited as ‘guerrilla sympathisers’, and often violently repressed, until the election of the leftist Gustavo Petro in June 2022.<sup>7</sup> Before this landmark political change, the parameters and terrain within which



feminists were working were long shaped – as well as limited by – political elites’ fervent adherence to neoliberal development. As a result, feminists in Colombia have long diverged over whether to remain *autonomas* or to work with the neoliberal state, and thus incur the risk of becoming complicit in its logics (Paarlberg-Kvam 2019).

The issue of engaging with the state is particularly complex for female *firmantes*. At the discursive level, insurgent feminism expresses opposition to the state evocative of the *autonoma* position. As explained by the female *firmante* Alejandra, the decision to call their feminism ‘insurgent’, despite FARC negotiating peace with the government, was because ‘we remain insurgents, understanding the term insurrection as not just armed but as social, against the state’ (interview, 6 June 2022). Furthermore, insurgent feminism’s opposition to capitalism, described by Sandino as ‘an absolutely unviable system’ (observation, 7 April 2022), resists the very economic model of governance upon which the Colombian state is predicated.

Yet in practice *firmantes* are deeply imbricated in the different registers of the state: a dynamic that became particularly evident during my observations of the AECTR, where the presence of state (and international) institutions was ubiquitous. The most prominent state presence came from the reintegration agency, the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN), which provided *firmantes* with monthly stipends, and delivered basic food items on a fortnightly basis. Moreover, in the wake of the FARC lifting its long-term prohibition on maternity and female *firmantes* subsequently giving birth to an estimated 3,500 children (Oquendo 2022), the state sent employees from the Institute of Family Welfare to work in the childcare centres established in the AECTR. As explained by Carmen, an activist working on insurgent feminism, these centres were created to challenge ‘maternity as a state that has led them to withdraw from politics’ (interview, 23 June 2022). As part of the 2016 peace deal, the state is also obligated to guarantee the security of *firmantes*, although this is a task in which it has resoundingly and tragically failed, with 352 *firmantes* assassinated between 2016 and May 2023. Although it had not deterred their political involvement, insecurity was a constitutive part of daily life for female *firmantes*; speaking at a public event on peacebuilding, Sandino described how ‘many are exercising leadership in the territories despite issues with care, poverty and violence’ (observation, 22 March 2022). In contrast with their previous goal of overthrowing the state, *firmantes* also now form part of the state itself through the 10 seats in Senate and Congress assigned by the peace deal to Comunes<sup>8</sup> until 2026. Due to their concomitant reliance

on and incorporation into the state, female *firmantes* thus find themselves 'subject to entanglement within the very processes they seek to contest' (Coleman 2013, 170). Given the significant insecurity and precarity<sup>9</sup> that *firmantes* face, becoming *autonoma* and disavowing the state is simply not a feasible option. When enacting insurgent feminism, *firmantes* therefore go beyond the binaries of 'identity-solidarity'/'policy-advocacy' and resistance/collaboration to demonstrate plural, concomitant forms of working *with*, *on* and *against* the state.

Turning first to working *with* the state, the gender, women and diversity committees established in every AECTR to work on feminist politics have developed a variety of linkages with state institutions. As Carmen, an activist working on insurgent feminism, explained, depending on the AECTR in question these linkages included 'women's secretariats, secretariats for gender equity, gender links with the attorney general, ombudsman, and Family Welfare' (interview, 23 June 2022). Of these linkages, the most prevalent foci of collaboration were the aforementioned childcare centres, as well as raising awareness of the institutional routes of attention for victims of gender violence amid concerns over female *firmantes* being increasingly impacted by gender violence (interview, 27 April 2022). With regards to working *on* the state, one of the principal spearheads of insurgent feminism, Victoria Sandino, initiated a series of feminist legislative proposals in her time as senator between 2018 and 2022, including the removal of barriers to contraception (Vivas 2021), provision of menstrual leave from work and educational institutions (Maritano 2022b), and affirmative measures to guarantee access to job opportunities for women aged between 18 and 28 years (Maritano 2022a). Finally, turning to insurgent feminist work *against* the state, this has manifested through female *firmantes'* consistent critiques of the state's inadequate implementation of the 2016 peace deal across multiple public fora, as well as through their participation in the 2021 national strike, which marked the largest anti-government mobilisations in the country since the 1970s. To conclude, insurgent feminism demonstrates that, in the face of significant material constraints and insecurity, some feminist movements simply cannot afford to pursue autonomy. However, moving beyond the resistance/cooperation binary demonstrates that working with the state does not foreclose the possibility of also challenging it. The next section considers the extent to which insurgent feminism can be considered a current of decolonial feminism within the proliferation of decolonial feminisms in the Andes.

## Insurgent feminism and decoloniality

Since the 1980s, the Andean region has seen the flourishing of decolonial feminisms in both theory and praxis (Muñoz and Martínez 2019). Challenging the notion of woman as a unitary category with a shared experience of oppression postulated by prior feminisms, decolonial feminists have centred the differential experiences of women's oppression shaped by the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007). In the context of significant Indigenous populations in Andean countries, particularly in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, these feminisms foreground the disproportionate effects of interlinking systems of coloniality/modernity, patriarchy and capitalism on Indigenous women, as well as the practices they have developed to resist, transform and dismantle these systems (Aguinaga et al. 2013). These liberatory practices are both organisational and epistemic, involving the recuperation of epistemologies and ontologies devalued or suppressed by the Western modern episteme, including Indigenous concepts such as *buen vivir* (living well) and *cuerpo-territorio* (body-territory) and the construction of knowledge 'from below' based on lived experience (Aguinaga et al. 2013; Muñoz and Martínez 2019; Zaragocin and Caretta 2021).

Although female *firmantes* were not explicitly engaging with the concepts of *cuerpo-territorio* and *buen vivir*, in parallel with Andean decolonial feminist movements, insurgent feminism constructs feminist knowledge-from-below, specifically from the lived, embodied experiences of female guerrillas. As the 2018 proposal states, insurgent feminism 'is a collective construction emerging from our experience as guerrilla women', and 'the interpretation of our experience, in light of different threads of feminist thought' (Comisión Nacional de Mujer, Género y Diversidad 2018). This construction of insurgent feminism from lived experience in dialogue with feminist theories resonates with *sentipensar* (feeling-thinking), a decolonial feminist term that captures the imbrication of experience, affect and knowledge production (Muñoz and Martínez 2019). Rupturing the binary between theory and practice, *sentipensar* challenges assumptions around academia as the principal arbiter and source of knowledge (Curiel, Borzone and Ponomareff 2016, 50). Insurgent feminism emphasises the emancipatory potential of FARC practices, whereby male and female combatants received the same training and education, carried out the same tasks and occupied the same spaces in camps, thereby rupturing the gendered division of labour and dichotomous logics of masculine/feminine, agential/passive and public/private that structure civilian society. Mariana, a feminist activist for Comunes, explained the importance of these practices as follows:

The reflection comes after the practical fact. So this dynamic is fundamental for insurgent feminism, because it is not a feminism that first theorises and is then applied, but it is a feminism which had an emancipatory practice. And from that emancipatory practice it reflects and identifies things that aren't good (interview, 3 May 2022).

This quotation demonstrates how insurgent feminism disrupts the binary delineation between theory and practice, predicated on theorising and subsequently applying this theory, instead demonstrating how lived experience itself constitutes a theoretical and epistemic resource.

In another parallel with Andinxs engaged in decolonial praxis, insurgent feminism centres the subjectivities most marginalised by the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007). Speaking at a public event on gender and resistance, a female *firmante* emphasised how multiple axes of identity shape differential experiences of oppression: 'The existence of patriarchy of course oppresses us in different ways, according to our geographical location, class, ethnicity and sexuality' (observation, 17 April 2020). Linked to this sensitivity to multiple oppressions and inequalities, insurgent feminism declares its aim to construct alliances with other organisations to 'eliminate all forms of exploitation' (Comisión Nacional de Mujer, Género y Diversidad 2018), thus heeding Lugones' (2014, 77) call for feminisms to forge coalitions that articulate 'resistance to multiple oppressions'. To this end, *firmantes* have collaborated with a number of social movements, from the trans collective the Red Comunitaria Trans (Trans Community Network) to Hombres en Marcha (Men on the March), who campaign to foster non-violent masculinities, to feminist organisations including La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Pacific Route for Women) and Alianza de Mujeres Tejedoras de Vida (Alliance of Women Weaving Life).

Although insurgent feminism demonstrates features of decolonial feminist politics insofar as it privileges knowledge production from below and discursively centres differential experiences of oppression, in practice its politics has been tempered by *firmantes*' reliance on international organisations. Amid serious deficiencies in the implementation of the 2016 peace deal by Iván Duque's 2018–22 government and the grave physical and economic insecurity facing *firmantes* discussed in the previous section, international organisations have played a pivotal role in funding and sustaining both reincorporation and insurgent feminism. In both the AECTR I visited, international organisations were omnipresent, from the water dispensers provided by the Red

Cross to the library bearing a placard declaring its construction due to European Union funding, through to the UN officials distinguishable by the blue vests which they were wearing. International actors were also at the forefront of gender-specific projects, from the 2018 proposal on insurgent feminism ‘elaborated with support from the United Nations Development Programme and the Norwegian Embassy’ ([Comisión Nacional de Mujer, Género y Diversidad 2018](#)), to the Swedish embassy sponsoring *firmantes* to complete diplomas in the prevention of gender-based violence ([Forero 2018](#)), through to a two-year-long project that examined care and gender in the reincorporation process, implemented by an array of organisations including UN Women, UNICEF and UNDP ([Martínez 2021](#)). Furthermore, funding and support from international organisations played a key role in the opening of care centres in the AECTR, which as discussed in the previous section had constituted a political priority for female *firmantes*. Decolonial theorists Curiel et al. (2016, 52) have voiced vociferous criticism of ‘the agendas of the United Nations and other forms of colonialistic international cooperation’, arguing that their ‘projects for development . . . are nothing more than expressions of neoliberalism’ that ‘perpetuate structural racism’, and calling on feminist movements to develop autonomy away from their agendas. Viewed through the lens of this politics, female *firmantes*’ close ties with international cooperation would render them complicit in the latter’s colonialistic and neoliberal logics. I found scant evidence of female *firmantes* critiquing international cooperation during fieldwork. To the contrary, Inés, a female *firmante*, told me that ‘we thank the international community, we thank Sweden which has been a feminist country and one that has really supported the participation of women in projects and on the topic of gender’ (interview, 24 March 2022), while Diana asserted that ‘I think that without [international] cooperation, the balance of reincorporation would be zero and totally negative’ (interview, 28 April 2022). Therefore, there was an overall view that, in the face of a government at best apathetic to peace, without international support the reincorporation process and peacebuilding would have been adrift. That said, I did encounter one instance of a female *firmante* advancing a critique of the international. Speaking at an online event, Andrea described how:

On many occasions we have been considered exclusively as beneficiaries of the projects: ‘This is a project that is going to be implemented, there are this many workshops.’ They come, give the

workshops and then leave, and we remain in the same situation. Sometimes our *compañeras* [female comrades] are even more disappointed because these workshops do not play an effective role in transforming the complex realities that we are living (observation, 6 December 2021).

Andrea's observation powerfully demonstrates the issues inherent to international gender projects that may depoliticise participants by figuring them as 'beneficiaries' and implementing workshops that are shorn of contextualised consideration of the wants and needs of those 'on the ground'. This also suggests that, although female *firmantes* were willing to attend such workshops, they also had critical awareness of their limitations. The following section situates insurgent feminism within the history of Andean feminists' dual and often conflicting commitments to feminism and the left.

## Complex compromises: navigating double militancy

The relationship between feminisms and the left in the Andes has been historically complex and sometimes fraught. Whereas some leftist movements and parties categorically repudiated feminism as a 'bourgeois import' intended to sow class division, others have championed women as central to the revolutionary struggle, but ultimately left many women disillusioned by the treatment of feminist issues as a 'theme' and subsuming of gender under class as the primary axis of oppression (Gago 2007; Lind 2013). For example, in Peru, women who worked with the left to oppose the authoritarian rule of Alberto Fujimori in the 1970s later opted to separate and form women's organisations after facing barriers to leadership positions and the marginalisation of women's issues (Grabe 2022, 2). In a bid to reconcile their dual loyalties to socialism and feminism, many feminists have pursued *doble militancia* (double militancy) rather than decisively breaking from leftist organisations. Their experiences demonstrate that double militancy presents a double-edged sword. While maintaining allegiance to leftist political parties has provided feminists with financial resources, logistical support and larger political platforms and the potential to influence policy, this has often come at the expense of political autonomy, including the ability to build alliances with independent feminist organisations pushing for more transformative gender policies (Dietrich Ortega 2015).

Female *firmantes*' concomitant commitment to insurgent feminism and socialism attests to both the promises and the pitfalls of double militancy. As I argued in the section tracing the emergence of insurgent feminism, its formulation was by no means an inevitable outcome, with the gender sensitivity of the peace process playing a pivotal role. Particularly in the early days of this formulation, the nascent feminist consciousnesses of female combatants working on the peace process was met with scepticism, hostility and resistance. For example, Devia López (2021) has charted how during the creation of the FARC Woman website, whose launch in 2013 marked an important move in the scripting of a distinct female combatant identity, one male combatant was caught eavesdropping on meetings, while another was appointed head of the page and sought to disrupt its work. Demonstrating the reductive and derogatory discourses on feminism that were circulating at that time, in the words of the *firmante* Alejandra: 'There was a lot of fear, this stigma about what feminism is, that feminism places men opposite to women, that feminism attacks men, that feminists are hysterical, hung-up old women' (interview, 6 June 2022).

Since the early days of its formulation during the peace process, the strength of resistance to insurgent feminism has abated: according to Alejandra, 'the disputes have not stopped, but they have dwindled' (interview, 6 June 2022), and the party architecture dedicated to insurgent feminism has developed. The FARC declared themselves anti-patriarchal during their Tenth National Conference in September 2016, which also marked the first time that the conference committee had gender parity (Sandino 2016). A multi-level institutional architecture dedicated to insurgent feminism was subsequently established, which Mariana, a Comunes feminist activist, delineates as follows:

At the national level there is the Gender Commission . . . then the idea is to create a structure that responds to gender in every party space. For example, I am in charge of gender at the local council level. And there are other people in charge of gender in the other municipalities in my department, and we all make up the Departmental Gender Commission, and we have a leader who is part of the National Commission . . . In the ECTR, gender committees were created in every ECTR, and they have diverse relationships to the party: there are gender committees that are much more integrated into the party structure, and others that see themselves as separate entities (interview, 3 May 2022).

The creation of these structures has played an important role in consolidating insurgent feminism, as they have now accrued several years of experience in carving out and realising feminist agendas, often working alongside local women's organisations.

Female *firmantes* have increasingly occupied leadership positions since 2016, providing them with political influence and visibility that would have been difficult to attain outside a party structure, particularly given the widespread marginalisation and precarity that *firmantes* face. Despite only two of the 10 legislative seats assigned to Comunes between 2018 and 2022 being occupied by women, Victoria Sandino and Sandra Ramírez, Sandino used her position to initiate a series of feminist legislative projects (as previously discussed), while Ramírez was made vice-president of the Senate and spearheaded the first ever visit by the LGBTQI+ collective León Zuleta to Congress to mark International LGBTQI+ Pride Day in June 2022. At the same time, and exemplifying the challenges in pursuing feminism from within a political party, men continue to occupy most leadership positions and feminism has not been accorded high priority in Comunes' political platform. Comunes established gender parity in their candidate lists for the March 2022 legislative elections, but they did not win additional seats due to their small vote share, and their 10 legislative seats continue to be occupied by only two women during the 2022–6 legislative period. Although they were not prominent, proposals on women's rights featured in Comunes' political platform during the March 2022 legislative elections, in the form of commitments to guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive rights, ending gender-based violence, ensuring access to land for female farmers and guaranteeing women's political participation.<sup>10</sup> However, these proposals were articulated around the language of rights rather than insurgent feminism, which was notably absent in campaign material. More broadly, Comunes has been beset by internal divisions over the continuation of a 'vertical and autocratic' leadership style in its transition from a rebel group to political party (Yordi 2022). One of the leading proponents of this critique has been Victoria Sandino, whose seat in Senate was not renewed for the 2022–6 legislative period, and who resigned alongside some 100 party members in July 2022, citing Comunes' failure to adequately represent them in decision making (*El Colombiano* 2022). Speaking at a political event, Sandino stated that 'I am not continuing in Congress not because I don't want to, or because I have exhausted my legislative role. I am not continuing in Congress due to political motives, as retaliation taken by Comunes' (observation, 9 February 2022). Sandino's resignation arguably constitutes a significant



loss in advancing insurgent feminism from within the party, as she was a leading protagonist in insurgent feminism and had spearheaded numerous legislative proposals focused on women's rights.

Despite the aforementioned considerable challenges, several of the female *firmantes* whom I spoke with insisted that insurgent feminism must continue through the political party, and highlighted its strategic potential to include men in feminist work. For example, Alejandra stated that 'we cannot separate the struggles of men and women . . . Instead of confronting men, we need to win them over to the feminist cause' (interview, 6 June 2022), which was echoed by Inés: 'Insurgent feminism runs parallel with men' (interview, 24 March 2022). The articulation of insurgent feminism from within a mixed-gender organisation thus provides a structure through which to engage with men and masculinities. To this end, one of insurgent feminism's lines of work is the construction of 'insurgent masculinities', which Inés defined as 'new, non-hegemonic masculinities which oppose the traditional stereotypes that have been imposed on us even before birth' (interview, 24 March 2022). The 2018 document on insurgent feminism emphasised that the aim of insurgent masculinities was to challenge cultural beliefs that 'men don't cry', 'only men do political work' or 'all men are naturally violent' ([Comisión Nacional de Mujer, Género y Diversidad 2018](#)), demonstrating a conceptualisation of gender as performative, and a commitment to rescripting masculinities by disrupting and denaturalising norms that construct certain activities, emotions and behaviours as inherently masculine ([Bates 2022](#), 160). However, Comunes activist Mariana explained that the topic of insurgent masculinities 'had not been emphasised as much as the feminists in Comunes would have liked . . . there is a group of guys who want to drive this forward, but they are kind of afraid of getting involved in a topic that they don't know much about' (interview, 3 May 2022). Moreover, from my enquiries on the topic in two AECTR it did not appear that large numbers of *firmantes* were actively involved in insurgent masculinities. Nevertheless, there has been some momentum: since 2017, workshops and meetings on insurgent masculinity have been held across AECTR, while the first national meeting on insurgent masculinities was held in December 2019 ([Partido FARC 2019](#)). Furthermore, in 2020 a group of female *firmantes* launched a communicative campaign in AECTR across the country; as explained by one of its creators, it was formulated after 'many male comrades began to adopt machista practices imposed by society', and encouraged men instead to 'continue with the practices from guerrilla life' ([Comuneras Diversidades 2020](#)). Although it may still be limited in scope, this work to cultivate non-violent masculinities

is particularly pressing given concerns over cases of domestic violence affecting some female *firmantes*, and in light of the lack of a dedicated strategy from the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN) to sever ‘the salient links between weapons, masculinities, and violence’ (Theidon 2009, 2).

## Conclusion

Female *firmantes* have faced multiple and significant challenges in the process of reincorporation, thus constraining the enactment of the radical feminist politics evoked by insurgent feminist discourse. Therefore, despite insurgent feminism’s anti-state stance, *firmantes*’ reliance on the state to provide them with physical and economic security means they have not followed in the tradition of *autonoma* feminists in Andean countries who have disavowed the state and the institutions that constitute it. Instead, *firmantes* have exhibited multiple forms of engagement with the state that encompass working with, on and against it. Similarly, despite discursively positioning themselves as anti-capitalist and anti-colonial, female *firmantes* have worked extensively with international organisations denounced by decolonial feminists such as Curiel et al. (2016) as promoters of neoliberalism and coloniality. That said, insurgent feminism demonstrates glimpses of a decolonial feminist politics in the forging of alliances with social movements that challenge multiple oppressions, and the construction of feminism from experiential knowledge. Finally, insurgent feminism follows from a long tradition of double militancy in the Andes, wherein feminists have sought to navigate complex commitments to both feminism and the left. Female *firmantes*’ navigation of these dual commitments has demonstrated the challenges inherent to double militancy, particularly in relation to the initial resistance to insurgent feminism and predominance of men in senior political positions. At the same time, the articulation of feminism from within a leftist political party has seen progress in its institutionalisation across different territories and in the cultivation of masculinities that delink masculinity from violence.

Akin to other feminist movements in the Andes, which have remained vibrant and tenacious in the face of significant structural obstacles including the intensification of inequality through neoliberal policies and the long-enduring coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007), insurgent feminism has demonstrated the capacity to endure and progress despite myriad challenges. The presidency of Gustavo Petro,

who assumed office in August 2022, holds the potential to create a more propitious environment for insurgent feminist politics. If realised, Petro's political platform of 'total peace' (Ortega 2022), socio-economic redistribution and the formation of a ministry of equality headed by Vice-President Francia Márquez, an environmental activist and the first Afro-Colombian to hold the position, could contribute to attenuating the insecurity and patriarchal norms that female *firmantes* face when pursuing feminist politics. Whether this more propitious environment emerges remains to be seen, but what is less uncertain is that insurgent feminism will continue to mobilise female *firmantes* and constitute one of the myriad feminist movements that are flourishing across the Andes.

## Timeline

**August 2016** – FARC announce they are formulating insurgent feminism

**November 2016** – FARC and Colombian government sign peace deal

**2017** – Publication of the 2017 thesis on insurgent feminism; FARC becomes the political party 'Common Alternative Revolutionary Force'

**2018** – Publication of 'Insurgent Feminism: A *farian* proposal for peace'

**2021** – 'Common Alternative Revolutionary Force' is renamed 'Comunes'

## Notes

- 1 All translations from Spanish to English are my own unless otherwise stated.
- 2 According to a 2017 census, 33 per cent of combatants were female (Sesquicentario and Universidad Nacional 2017).
- 3 Although the process of ex-combatants' transition to civilian life is referred to as reintegration in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) literature and practice, in the context of the demobilisation of FARC combatants as part of the 2016 peace deal it is termed reincorporation to emphasise its collective and co-constructed character.
- 4 As Irons and Martin highlight in the introduction to this volume, the term 'Andinx's' constitutes a provocation to forge new understandings of gender politics in the Andes as a region profoundly marked by the coloniality of gender, but which also stands out for a resurgence in feminist movements and the diversity of these movements.
- 5 All interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
- 6 This history is discussed in further detail in the fourth section of the chapter.
- 7 The implications of the Petro government for the politics of insurgent feminism are explored further in the conclusion.
- 8 Translating as 'Commons' in English, Comunes is the political party formed by the FARC.
- 9 According to Victoria Sandino, more than 40 per cent of *firmantes* live below the poverty line (Radio Nacional 2022).
- 10 <https://twitter.com/ComunesCoL/status/1494690335360012291> (accessed 15 November 2023).

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## **#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial: an analysis of a feminist and Peruvian social media ‘campaign’ against victim blaming**

Daniela Meneses Sala

To understand the origins and aims of #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial (#IEnjoySocialLife), we need to travel back to October 2020. That year, a 21-year-old woman living in Lima was raped. The five men she named as the perpetrators denied the crime, but after tests confirmed she had been sexually assaulted, they were sent to pre-trial detention. The case attracted considerable attention in itself, but the words of one of the defence lawyers, Paul Muñoz, particularly fuelled the wave of outrage. When approached by journalists on the street, he stated that *‘la señorita es . . . eventualmente, digamos, le gustaba la vida social’* (the young woman enjoyed social life), seemingly referencing the fact that the rape had allegedly taken place at a house party, where alcohol and marijuana were consumed (Pereyra 2020; Villegas 2020). In response, Instagram rapidly filled with users posting images declaring that *they* also enjoyed *social life*. Many of the images consisted of a black background and white letters that read *‘soy una chica a la que le gusta la vida social’*, which translates to ‘I am a girl who enjoys social life’. Some women accompanied the hashtag #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial with pictures of themselves, often with friends, having some drinks or at parties. Others presented illustrations with different motifs to support the campaign, such as raised fists or illustrations of young women.

I viewed the campaign with interest through my own Instagram, a feminist account with around 10,000 followers: while I supported the overall message of the campaign – a woman’s social life is no one’s



business but her own and it should not be used as grounds to dismiss rape allegations – I also felt discomfort in seeing some of the pictures posted. What does it mean when the feminist fight against gender violence is translated to a group photo of friends having a drink – when, instead of rage, we see so many smiling faces? What is happening when the words rape and violence are hidden from the campaign? When so many of the illustrations are in pastel pink? In this chapter and echoing the work of authors who have analysed the role of affect in social movements and art activism (Jasper 1998; Ryan 2015), I take this discomfort and ambivalence seriously and, rather than thinking of it as something that is ‘inside’ me, try to explore its wider political context (Ahmed 2004). To do this, I start by providing some background on Peruvian feminism, and bringing together the concepts of postfeminism with Sara Ahmed’s figure of the feminist killjoy I present a close reading of the visual components of the campaign in question. In using postfeminism (rather than post-feminism) I am following the convention of authors whom I cite throughout this text, such as Rosalind Gill and Sarah Banet-Weiser. I argue that taking our discomfort seriously can enable us, feminist killjoys, to recognise the presence of postfeminist sensibilities and sit with the ambivalence they produce in us.

## Peruvian feminism

Providing a general overview of contemporary feminist activism and ideas in Peru is challenging. They have not been the subject of extensive academic research (Martin 2022, 4–5), and they are also extremely fragmented. Phoebe Martin, who has recently explored contemporary feminist activism in the country (see Martin, this volume), argues that Peruvian feminism today seems to ‘have moved away from the NGO-led, institutional model that characterised the 1990s and 2000s’ and that, currently, activism ‘is made up of individuals and groups, participating in multiple collectives, NGOs, assemblies, and many other contexts’ (Martin 2022, 123 and 136).

Faced with these challenges, perhaps it is useful to start by engaging with what is meant by *contemporary* feminism (others have explored the previous history of the Peruvian feminist movement: see Boesten 2018). To do this we should start with the year 2016. That July, the media reported that, after beating his ex-girlfriend Arlette Contreras, Adriano Pozo had only received a year’s suspended sentence from a court in Ayacucho. The day immediately after that sentencing, a court in Lima

gave Rony García, who had beaten Lizeth Rosario Socia Guillén (known as Lady Guillén), a four-year suspended sentence. Until the moment of sentencing, both accused had been in prison, which means the respective sentences implied their immediate release (Caballero 2019, 108). In that context, Ni Una Menos, a movement against gender-based violence that followed the initial Ni Una Menos movement in Argentina, erupted, and an important national march took place on 13 August (Caballero 2019, 108; Fernández Revoredo 2021, 5). From then on, authors such as Martin have argued that Peruvian feminist activism is experiencing a renewal (Martin 2022, 83–4; see also Fernández Revoredo 2021).

Currently the key issues for feminists in the country are at least threefold: fighting against gender violence, achieving the legalisation of abortion and demanding justice for women affected by forced sterilisation (Martin 2022, 317). These are, however, not the only topics Martin mentions, and she also found among her feminist activist interviewees the mention of ‘teen pregnancy, human trafficking, legalisation of cannabis, LGBTQ+ equality . . . corruption and justice’ (2022, 149). To this list, I would add that there are also several trans and intersectional feminist groups that give voice to demands that more explicitly include gender identity, race, class and disability (see for example No Tengo Miedo 2016).

Precisely in terms of intersectionality, there are still clear tensions that affect Peruvian feminism, and talking about Peruvian feminism requires underscoring the historical tensions ‘between “elite” feminists (white, middle-class, educated) and a more diverse movement’ (Martin 2022, 132), and the tensions between feminist activism and the *activismo del sector popular* (popular activism; see Boesten 2018). According to Martin:

The majority of established feminist NGOs are based in the capital, some with satellite offices in other cities. There are a growing number of feminist collectives being set up outside of Lima, particularly in cities like Huancayo, Cusco and Arequipa. Nevertheless, most feminists are based in the capital, and therefore tend to be whiter and more middle-class – although not exclusively so (Martin 2022, 252).

Discussing the changes in the feminist movement in Peru, Angélica Motta has argued that currently there is an increased articulation. An example of this is how the preparatory discussions for the 8 March

(International Women's Day) mobilisation in 2020 included a diverse group, made up among others from straight and lesbian women, cis and trans people, workers from different sectors (including informal workers, union workers and domestic workers), activists and NGOs (Motta 2020, 14).

While some have argued that another characteristic of feminism today is that it has entered a 'fourth wave' (Munro 2013), I prefer to distance myself from this discourse, among other things because of its traditionally Global-North approach (Marino 2019). However, I do agree that currently feminist movements in general, and Peru is not an exception, are experiencing a moment where online spaces have become key (Mahoney 2020, 1). In this context, I believe it is very important to turn to social media to do research, and also to help preserve what is happening there from disappearing online, either because the sites where this happens are taken down or access is restricted, or because they get 'buried' under a huge amount of data. I bring these ideas forward also because, as in the case of feminism more broadly, we can see that Peruvian feminism in the context of social media remains under-researched. One exception is provided by Caballero, who has explored the role Facebook had in the organisation and emergence of the 2016 Ni Una Menos march in Peru. He has argued that services such as fan pages, groups and Messenger made possible 'a series of necessary processes for collective action: emergence of indignation, emotional activation, deliberation, coordination, organisation and dissemination of information' (Caballero 2019, 106). Martin (2022), in turn, has also engaged in digital ethnography as part of her work on feminist activism in the country, and I draw from her work in this chapter.

While there might not be much research on social media and gender in Peru, in the wider Latin American context work by Sued et al. (2022), Rivera Amarillo (2020), Barrios et al. (2020) and Errázuriz (2019) stands out. A brief overview of social media in Peru reveals that feminism does play an important role in the platforms. Taking Instagram as an example, we can see that there are many popular Peruvian accounts that identify as feminist or engage with feminist content. As of March 2023, accounts such as @mujerdispara (33k followers), @empoderadamente\_pe (52k), @emmayyoperu (63k), @diversidadestm (4k), @movimiento\_manuelaramos (16k) represent a sample of online Peruvian feminism. These examples also represent the variety in accounts, including collectives, NGOs, more personal pages and also pages that relate to trans issues and to children's education. As these examples already point out, Instagram is used for different purposes that range from education

and information to campaigning, organising and crowdfunding. Through Instagram, Peruvians also have access to transnational feminist content; it is worth noting that there are more than four million posts with the hashtag *#feminismo* (feminism in Spanish).

It is in this landscape that the *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* campaign emerged. While it also took shape on other social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, I am only focusing on Instagram, which is the site most focused on visuals (on the role of Instagram in social media cultures, see [Leaver, Highfield and Abidin 2020](#)). A focus on images resonates with a recent call from scholars to give 'greater attention to images in social movements. Indeed, images convey and construct powerful political meanings' ([Sutton and Vacarezza 2020](#), 733). I follow more specifically Sutton and Vacarezza, who in their analysis of campaigns in favour of legalising abortion have focused on things such as 'slogans and symbols', 'emotions evoked' and 'the mode in which women are presented' (2020, 737–8). In addition, in her analysis of social media in Peru, Martin (2022, 154) has found that, at least until 2019, Instagram was the platform that feminist activists used the most, and in second place came Facebook. While we can speculate that TikTok has since become one of the most used platforms, Instagram, the platform studied in this chapter, has not lost its importance since 2019. As of March 2023, there were more than 1,000 public posts with the hashtag *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*. There were other related hashtags that also have more than 1,000 public posts, such as *#MeGustaLaVidaSocial* (another way of saying *#IEnjoySocialLife*); *#PeruPaisdeVioladores* (*#PeruCountryOfRapists*); *#CulturaDeViolacion* (*#RapeCulture*) and many others that were also used to condemn the words of the lawyer in question.

When talking about my research site, it is also important to note that while analysing social media activism often requires researchers to move between the online and the offline, this does not appear to be the case here. Indeed, I am not aware of the online campaign having a big offline counterpart, and I have not encountered any trace of marches or actions that gathered many people. Moreover, many of the accounts that participated in this campaign did not regularly engage with feminist discourse. This again resonates with one of Martin's (2022, 19) findings: online feminism does not necessarily have a clear 'offline' correspondence, and vice versa.

## **#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial: a discourse against victim blaming**

Accompanied by different images, the hashtag #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial was shared by diverse users, including feminist accounts with thousands of followers, relatively small personal accounts and even influencers who usually post content unrelated to feminism. This bundle of posts (which I will call a ‘campaign’ for the lack of a better term to refer to a brief, shared but not centrally organised online discourse) can be understood as an iteration of Sarah Banet-Weiser’s three senses of the popular in popular feminism: they circulated in popular media, enjoyed popularity and clearly strived to garner visibility for their cause (Banet-Weiser 2018, 1). Perhaps one central motif shared on Instagram was that of a black square that displayed, in a simple white font, the phrase ‘*Soy una chica a la que le gusta la vida social*’ (I am a girl who enjoys social life). The black and white aesthetic departs from the more classical ‘Instagram feminist aesthetic’ that, both in the Western and in the Peruvian contexts, is often composed of ‘pastels, glitter and “girly” images (Crepax 2020, 76). The black and white communicates solemnity, even mourning, and alludes to other issues that have been raised online with a similar format. Transnationally, it is in dialogue with the use of black squares for #BlackLivesMatter, an action in which Peruvian Instagram accounts also participated. Nationally, black images with white text have been used on other occasions, for example during political crises. The aesthetic chosen for #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial also already points to the logic of replicability. Like the black images we have seen before, this one has been created to be easily replicated and shared. A simple sentence on a simple background, it cannot (and is not supposed to) be claimed by any particular user.

Focusing now on the main message of the image, we can see that, as a denunciation of victim blaming, the main message of the image belongs to a popular feminist topic: a critique of rape. There is important work that touches on the culture of victim blaming in cases of rape (see, for example, Sanyal 2019; Banet-Weiser 2018, 54–5) and, in the case of Peru, there is a particular study that is worth mentioning. In 2019, Janos Uribe and Espinoza analysed Facebook comments to a newspaper that shared an article about a sexual assault that took place in Lima in 2017. The case involved security camera footage of a woman who was unconscious at a club, where she was assaulted by a man. The analysis in question put its focus on the multiple comments that blamed the woman for what happened, arguing that in general victim blaming, a pervasive

problem in sexual violence cases, can have direct consequences not only for the victim but also more structurally, since they ‘end up acting as an obstacle for criminal complaints and justice’ (Janos Uribe and Espinoza 2019, 148). This latter point has also been made in the Peruvian context by Josefina Miró Quesada and Hugo Ñopo, who have argued that rape myths that seek to ‘excuse aggressors’ make their way to court, where ‘justice operators condition the state protection of the victim to the “unimpeachable” behaviour she needs to have before the crime is committed’ (2022, 27, 79–80). Some of the tropes that Janos Uribe and Espinoza found are used to try to put blame on the victim are: ‘excessive’ alcohol consumption, going alone to a club, dancing ‘seductively’, having a ‘wrong’ personality and not having the ‘right’ moral values (Janos Uribe and Espinoza 2019, 155–9). Again, all these tropes and stereotypes resonate with the work of Miró Quesada and Ñopo, who argue that police officers, district attorneys and judges incorrectly take into account issues that should be irrelevant, such as alcohol consumption, whether the victim went voluntarily into a room with her aggressor, or whether she was a sex worker (Miró Quesada and Ñopo 2022, 79–80). It is in this context that we have to read the campaign, one that was indeed targeting an important problem in Peruvian society.

## Staying with discomfort: analysing the postfeminist sensibilities of #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial

While it is without a doubt positive to see a Peruvian campaign that refuses to stand quiet in the face of victim blaming, I have to admit that I also felt some discomfort when I first encountered these images. I decided to turn to an author who has made a point about the productive power of sitting with discomfort: Sara Ahmed. In her most recent book, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*, Ahmed argues in favour of paying attention to those moments when we are being ‘affect aliens’, when we are not feeling what we are ‘supposed’ to feel (Ahmed 2023, 21, 84). As she has also argued in previous work, it is in those instances that we act as feminist killjoys, refusing to be affected in the ‘right way’ when we know that something is not right, and thus acting as a ‘blockage point’ for the ‘smooth transmission’ of affects (Ahmed 2017, 53, 57, 257; Ahmed 2004). Instead of wanting to join the campaign immediately, I could not help but focus, for example, on *who* was speaking in the campaign. Interestingly enough, while the phrase ‘*a mí me gusta la vida social*’ itself is replicable, it is not attached to a common *we*: there is a clear *I* that speaks: ‘*a mí me*

*gusta* (I like). While a critique of rape-victim blaming is at the centre of the message, the post itself does not mention the words 'rape', 'sexual violence' or even 'violence'.

The fact that this campaign has gained such a shape without a doubt helps its popularity: while the underpinning message seems to be a general critique of victim blaming, it has been issued in such a way that it is virtually impossible to disagree with. First, there is the vague character of the term 'social life', which can take such loose shapes as having lunch with girlfriends at a restaurant. How many people would really condemn 'social life'? Second, and as mentioned, the message has been constructed from an individual point of view ('I am a girl . . .'). And who can question that the 'girl' writing the post enjoys social life, if she says so? It is worth highlighting that the phrase itself is so bland that the lawyer, after saying it, clarified that 'it was a euphemism' (Trome 2020). It seems he actually wanted to say something more graphic but thought perhaps that such a thing would not be necessary; everyone would understand him anyway. And, indeed, we all understood what he meant. And thus, it is over a euphemism – something mild by definition – that this campaign took shape.

The question that follows, I believe, is what understanding of feminism is behind the reading of this campaign as 'feminist'? I argue that what we are seeing is actually a campaign that, while carrying feminist fights such as the critique of victim blaming, is actually also shaped by *postfeminist* sensibilities. But let me take a step back and spend some time with this term. As tends to be the case with feminist theory, postfeminism has different conceptualisations. Some authors use it, for example, to refer to a reaction against feminism, while, to give another example, others consider it the period after the second wave (Gill 2016, 612–13; Butler 2013, 43). I find Rosalind Gill's conceptualisation particularly rich, and thus with her I understand postfeminism as a 'distinctive sensibility' (2011, 64) and an 'object of analysis' (2016, 621). Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad have argued that:

A postfeminist sensibility is one in which feminist ideas are said to have been 'taken into account' already, obviating the need for radical social transformation along gender lines. In recent years this has mutated from outright repudiation of feminism into something more subtle: a sense of the 'obviousness' of the importance of feminism, alongside its reconstruction in purely individual terms that stress choice, empowerment, and competition (Orgad and Gill 2022, 7–8).

This later point is important, since it starts to signal the different ways in which postfeminism is entangled with feminism: it can come like a ‘celebration’, ‘incorporation’ or, to name another example, ‘commodification’ (Gill 2017, 611–12; Gill 2016, 621). And so in this case there is indeed a message against victim blaming, but one also shaped by postfeminist sensibilities that opt not for a collective *we* that fights together, but an individual *I*, and one that gets rid of ‘vocabularies for talking about . . . structural inequalities’ (Gill 2016, 613). The phrase is so generic that, read without context, it could even be thought to belong to a party slogan. In relation to this later point, it is interesting to note that some iterations of the image changed the black background for a more colourful, some would even say ‘prettier’, one.

Moreover, we can also find postfeminist sensibilities in another common shape that the campaign took, which consisted of women posting pictures of themselves in so-called ‘social’ situations. Often appearing as a non-disruption of the respective account’s aesthetic, these pictures could only be read as part of the campaign if one looked to the text under the image, where one could find the *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* hashtag. The majority of these types of pictures have in common the fact that they show women in public settings (parties, bars, friendly gatherings, occasionally at the beach). Sometimes the women are alone. Other times they are with friends. Sometimes they only show one picture. Other times they use Instagram’s carousel function to be able to share several of them. Often there is alcohol involved, and we can see the women drinking. And while in seeing them I felt that they did something important by saying that things like going out and having drinks should not be used to victim blame a woman, I again felt discomfort. While many of these women seem to share some things in common (they are often young, appear to be in urban settings, appear to be middle or upper class), in true postfeminist fashion, the focus is now on a particular, no longer faceless, individual. It also should not go unnoticed that, in not disrupting the feed, the campaign is in a sense not leaving any trace behind it: someone browsing to the profile would most likely have no idea that the picture in question was part of a discourse against victim blaming. In these pictures, the turn to the *I*, already seen in *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*’s black and white images, is made more potent: we are not only talking about a faceless *I*, but about a very concrete individual. And so we can appreciate even more the tension authors such as Judith Butler have underscored when comparing feminist movements like *Ni Una Menos* to others like *#MeToo*. Indeed, according to Butler, while *#MeToo* (which



was born in the United States and later came to Peru) starts from the individual *I*, *Ni Una Menos* is enunciated from a collective of voices saying that they all are in solidarity, and that they are not willing to lose any more of them. As Butler argues, in comparison, ‘the “me” in #metoo is not the same as the collective we, and a collective is not just a sequence of the stories of individuals’ (Butler 2019). Analysed with this lens, #*AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* seems to be more about sequenced stories than community building.

But what perhaps produced in me the biggest discomfort is the happiness and fun many of the women seem to be having in the photos. While we can think that all the locations of the pictures were potentially a setting where women could be the subject of violence, the fear they might be feeling is hidden from the pictures. There is no mention of any latent danger: looking at them, it appears as if safety was already achieved. Thus, in seeing these images I cannot but think about the work of Simidele Dosekun. She found that her ‘class-privileged and educated young’ interviewees in Nigeria displayed postfeminist sensibilities in understanding themselves as ‘already empowered’ and placing feminism as something still needed by ‘other local women’ (Dosekun 2015, 970–1). In the case of Peru, there appears to be a similar binary of ‘already-safe’–‘in-need-of-safety’ going on. While I believe this is a path to explore in further work, I think the case of Peru adds to Dosekun’s argument about postfeminism being a ‘transnationally circulating culture’.

Before I continue to the next section, I want to end by mentioning that in what we could call alternatively peak white feminism or peak postfeminism, there were accounts selling clothes, eyelash procedures, cake, *empanadas*, even *pollo a la brasa* (a typical Peruvian chicken dish) that decided to support the campaign. It is impossible to say what the intentions behind these posts were: they could have come from honest anger and a wish to add to the campaign, or they could have been a cynical attempt to gain more business traction. Rather than analysing the individual dynamics behind the posts, it is worth underscoring here the fact that, at their most extreme postfeminist iteration, this feminist campaign has become an ad. Thus, its appeal to brands is proof that as Orgad and Gill (2022) have said, feminism has moved away from ‘outright repudiation’. It also puts Peru clearly in conversation with many other countries in the world, where today (a certain kind of) ‘feminism’ sells.

## Making space for resistance

After having spent time analysing some of the more frequent shapes that #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial took, I want to turn to those images that stood out because of how they differed from the patterns discussed above. In doing this, I am also following Banet-Weiser, who has argued that the popularisation of feminism brings a visibility that can, potentially at least, create an ‘opening of space . . . to think about broader opposition to structural sexism and racism’ (2018, 38). My aim here is not to suggest that the posts I am bringing forward are necessarily representative of the campaign. Moreover, in some cases I reference things that I have seen only one or two times. What I am arguing, instead, is that the fact that they took place at all is important in itself.

Indeed, I believe many of the posts in the campaign do present some more structural components. Some posts, for example, incorporate elements that relate to previous feminist marches in Peru, in particular Ni Una Menos. I am referring to the type of image that showed a picture of women looking straight at the camera and carrying signs with feminist messages, signs that appeal to the imaginary of street protests. One sign that appeared multiple times showed, in addition to the words ‘*A mí me gusta la vida social*’, something along the lines of ‘*eso no justifica que me violen*’ (that does not justify me being raped) or ‘*eso no te da derecho a violarme*’ (that does not give you the right to rape me). This wording centres the concept of rape, which as we remember was erased in the black and white illustrations and photos of women enjoying dinners out. While many of these types of images appeared to be taken at home, a few of the women decided to take the signs to the streets, to literally occupy public space.

In addition to the imagery of the signs that remind us of offline protests, there were also references to feminist chants in marches. For example, there were various usages of ‘*No es No*’ (No means No). This alludes to the feminist chant ‘*No es no. Te he dicho que no. ¿Qué parte no entendiste la N o la O?*’ (No is no. I have told you no. What part have you not understood, the N or the O?). Another phrase also referencing a chant that appeared was some variant of ‘*Tocan a una, tocan a todas*’ (You touch one, you touch us all). There was also a mention of the idea of ‘*Yo sí te creo*’ (I do believe you), also an important motto for feminism. Some references to Ni Una Menos were also present. In this way, the posts are placed in a wider feminist conversation, one that transcends Peruvian borders and places them in broader Latin American struggles.

In a similar vein, there was another feminist event that was referenced: the performance by LasTesis of the song '*Un violador en tu camino*' ('A rapist in your path'; see [Colectivo Registro Callejero 2019](#)). One account, for example, posted a video of a performance of the chant. Another image said '*El patriarcado es un juez y Paul Muñoz es su abogado*' (The patriarchy is a judge and Paul Muñoz is its lawyer). The appeal to LasTesis is also important to underscore in that it represents an engagement with what is a feminist critique of structural violence. As the mentions in this campaign show, there is a denouncement of patriarchy and the structures that support rape going unpunished. LasTesis' work, inspired by Rita Segato, 'highlights a systemic form of patriarchal, state-sanctioned rape culture that it effectively challenges through breaking with regimes that consign certain bodies to specific spaces and positions, and inventing new subjects and new forms of collective, disobedient, performative enunciation' ([Martin and Shaw 2021](#), 714).

In relation to the structural critique, there were also several references to the idea of *Perú, país de violadores* (Peru, country of rapist) and to the existence of a 'rape culture' in the country that needs to be eradicated. By referencing these ideas we can also see a departure from the (postfeminist) individualism of *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*, and an enunciation that seems to allude to the collective 'we'. In a similar vein, it is worth mentioning that some users opted to write *#AMiTambiénMeGustaLaVidaSocial* (I also enjoy social life). In adding one word, *also*, these users expressed a more direct link between them and the woman who was raped and opted for the construction of a collective 'we'. However, as mentioned, these posts were the exception, not the general rule.

Another interesting way in which a few of the images in the campaign made their point of belonging to a wider feminist collective was with the introduction of the *pañuelo verde*. Originating in Argentina, the green handkerchief has become a transnational symbol for the fight for legal, safe and free abortions and also 'a defining symbol of contemporary Latin American feminism' ([Martin 2022](#), 195; see also [Sutton and Vacarezza 2020](#)).

Another transnational feminist component that was present in some of the images of the campaign was rage and anger. Sometimes drawings of women showed them giving the middle finger or with the fist up. In one case, a woman spoke directly to Paul Muñoz, the lawyer in question, stating *#EducatePaulMuñoz* (get an education, Paul Muñoz). At other times, rage or anger could be seen in the faces of the women in the pictures. Here, some of Martin and Shaw's words on disobedience

as ‘central to the new aesthetics of feminist rebellion’ (2021, 716) also resonate. While they are discussing Chile, and in particular the context of LasTesis, their words about the use of disobedience as a way of breaking ‘unwritten’ rules about how women should behave (2021, 716–17) capture the impulse of these Peruvian users that refuse to act as a *señorita*, as a ‘girl’ who complies with stereotypical and restrictive ideas of how women should act. Women can look angry, they can decide not to smile, they can drink, they can give the finger, they can swear.

Some users also placed this campaign in terms of rights. There was some discussion on the rights to the city and to safety. There was a user who, for example, included a drawing stating ‘*quiero caminar tranquila en la calle*’ (I want to be relaxed when walking down the road). That same user also referred to the right to justice: ‘*quiero hacer una denuncia que se resuelva justamente*’ (I want to see justice done when presenting a police report). Other users turned to the discussion of consent in sexual relationships, an issue that sometimes took the form of pedagogies of consent. Ultimately, what these discourses pointed to was the *right* to decide over one’s body, and to be able to do so without fear.

I have mentioned that my analysis is mainly focused on images. However, it is worth mentioning here that a closer look at some captions makes the reading of the campaign even more complex. Indeed, even posts that seem full of postfeminist sensibilities when only looking at the images can become structural when focusing on the text they share. There, for example, we see some users contextualising their posts by sharing the details of the rape in question. We also see some users turn to discussing issues in terms of a more inclusive ‘we’ (we women or we parents, for example), and bringing to the forefront more structural issues, such as machismo. Some also turn to the comments to express anger. Others opt to again call Peru a ‘*país de violadores*’ (country of rapists). It is through these comments that we see a lot of the main structural components that I have mentioned in this section: references to being together as women in this, references to believing women and to speaking up together, anger, gender equality, references to patriarchy, machismo, rape culture . . .

## What women?

While there were many different voices in this campaign, and many voices that did indeed point to the structural inequalities related to violence against women, it is true that the complexity of the issue was not fully addressed. This places it in contraposition to what Verónica Gago, in her

study of transnational feminism, has argued feminist activists are doing: arguing forcefully for a much more expansive and intricate understanding of gender violence.

Sexist violence connects imploded homes with lands razed by agribusinesses, with the wage gap and invisibilised domestic work; it links the violence of austerity and the crisis with the ways in which those are confronted by women's protagonism in popular economies, and it relates all of this with financial exploitation through public and private debt. It ties together ways of disciplining disobedience through outright state repression and the persecution of migrant movements, with the imprisonment of poor women for having abortions and the criminalisation of subsistence economies. Moreover, it highlights the racist imprint on each one of these forms of violence (Gago 2020, 30–1).

In particular, the multiple ways intersectionality shapes the problem of violence against women are not addressed in general in posts related to *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*.

As Jelke Boesten has argued, and just to name one argument in favour of this intersectional approach, in Peru 'authorities that have as their task to protect [women victims of violence] condition their rights in relation to factors such as class and ethnicity, judging their value according to their racist and sexist prejudices' (Boesten 2018, 204). Data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Peru's National Institute of Statistic) also clearly points to this need. The Encuesta Demográfica y de Salud Familiar (Demographic and Family Health Survey, Endes) shows, for example, the difference in the percentage of women aged between 15 and 49 who have ever suffered violence from a partner or husband, depending on where they are located. For the year 2021, the region with the highest percentage of women responding affirmatively was Madre de Dios (70.6 per cent), and the region with the lowest percentage was Loreto (40 per cent). Lima Metropolitana lay somewhere in the middle, with 56 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The results of the Endes also allow us to disaggregate the question according to levels of education: 60.4 per cent of women without education have been a victim of violence, but the number falls to 48.7 per cent when women with *educación superior* (higher education) are asked. Fifty-five per cent of women from the lowest income band (*quintil más bajo*) have been victims of violence, while the number falls almost 10 percentage points to 45.7 per cent for women in the highest

income band (*quintil más alto*). Those women who have a native language as their first language also responded affirmatively in a higher percentage than women who have Spanish as their first language (59.9 vs 53.9 per cent). *Endes* is also useful in that it asks about *autonomía económica* (economic autonomy), which we know is crucial for being able to leave an abusive relationship. In Peru, 32.5 per cent of women do not have their own income source, but the figure is very different when we see it disaggregated to represent women living in rural areas (43.1 per cent) and women living in urban areas (30.3 per cent; see [INEI 2022](#) for more data).

In general not portraying factors such as class, race and ethnicity, *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* resonates a bit with other events of recent years in Peru. Martin, for example, has analysed one instance where a swimwear brand organised a ‘rally’ in an affluent neighbourhood in Lima as part of International Women’s Day 2020, consisting of the participants (thin white women) wearing bikinis and holding signs against issues such as street harassment. Using the concept of ‘white feminism’, Martin analysed the case and explored how this action was heavily criticised ([Martin 2022](#), 165). In bringing this occurrence to this chapter, I want to underscore how *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* relates to a wider conversation in Peru around ‘white feminism’. The concept of ‘white feminism’ has been recently conceptualised by Koa Beck ([2021](#)) as an ideology that:

has completely different priorities, goals, and strategies for achieving gender equality: personalised autonomy, individual wealth, perpetual self-optimization, and supremacy . . . It’s a specific way of viewing gender equality that is anchored in the accumulation of individual power rather than the redistribution of it. It can be practiced by anyone, of any race, background, allegiance, identity, or affiliation. White feminism is a state of mind.

(For more on white feminism in Peru, see [Martin 2022](#), 164; [Mosquera 2021](#).) While I think the term white feminism is productive, I have opted to use the analytical framework of postfeminism because I believe the ways in which it has been operationalised by authors such as Gill are useful when conducting a close reading. I also think that the concept of white feminism can risk slipping into a category of identity politics. Ultimately, however, I believe that the concepts of white feminism and postfeminism are not mutually exclusive: we can say that in this case,

*#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* is a campaign that was shaped by postfeminist sensibilities in such a way that it resulted, at least to some degree, in a manifestation of white feminism.

## Ambivalent killjoys

Throughout this chapter, I have mentioned how *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial* produced discomfort in me. But perhaps a better word to capture my feelings would be ambivalence, something that Ahmed also finds in feminist killjoys. Indeed, according to Ahmed feminist killjoys can feel ambivalence, can have ‘feelings that seem to take you in different directions, feeling appealed by how you are feeling moved, coexist in the same person’ (2023, 89; for an interesting discussion on ambivalence in feminism, see Hemmings 2018). To start with, I am ambivalent about my discomfort: while I think the campaign has taken generic and hyper-individualised shapes, I am also glad that there was a push against victim blaming and a manifestation of support in favour of the woman that was raped. Moreover, I acknowledge that it might well be that it was precisely the presence of postfeminist sensibilities that facilitated the popularisation of the images in the first place (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg 2020, 4), and agree that, at least in some respects, visibility can be something to celebrate (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg 2020, 15–16). I am also ambivalent towards the campaign because I see how some people have used it to be in conversation with structural feminist struggles present in Peru and in Latin America. Moreover, the more I worked on this chapter and engaged with the posts in the campaign, the more my initial discomfort tended to soften, in that I found so many different and important voices being able to share their thoughts and relations to feminism in the campaign. And so I do not want this chapter to be read as an argument against *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*. I also do not want it to be read as a discussion regarding whether the title ‘feminist’ campaign is even fitting for *#AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial*. I want this to be read as an argument in favour of being attuned to our discomfort and ambivalence, and seeing what sitting with those feelings can illuminate. I also believe further work is needed: comparing the visual component with the written component of social media campaigns might reveal that intersectional framings are there, but that there is perhaps something that is making it hard to translate to visual media.

And so, in that killjoy spirit, I want to end by remembering what I have not found. Indeed, the pictures that were part of the campaign all

seemed to be of cis or cis-passing women, and there was no appeal to trans women that I found except for one trans flag, despite the fact that trans women are a particularly vulnerable group. I also did not see much LGBTQI+ representation, which in turn obscures the fact that women can also be subject to violence because of their orientation. Crucially, and in general, the representation in the images also did not make a point of race, class or disability. We need to be killjoys not because we know best, but because we need to do better. Indeed, I hope to have shown how, following Sara Ahmed, sitting with this discomfort can be productive. In this, I have brought forward the figure of the feminist killjoy, and I have shown how thinking and feeling with her can be a way of making us pay attention to postfeminist sensibilities that do not sit right with us.

## Note

- 1 While some of the posts related to #AMiMeGustaLaVidaSocial do use the location feature to identify where users are posting from, which allows us to see the hashtag's use in different places in the country, the use of this feature does not translate to intersectional discourse on violence against women and location.

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# Afterword: Andinxs as provocation for a new generation of Andean researchers

Florence E. Babb

This compelling collection of scholarship based on research carried out in Andean nations, largely in the rural highlands, challenges us to think differently about familiar ground for anthropologists: social inequalities, political injustices and cultural diversity. Here, a vibrant group of early-career scholars brings a feminist and decolonising sensibility to the task of critically examining not only key racial and gender inequalities, but also those centred around sexuality, reproductive rights and new technologies of political organising, areas that have generally received scant attention in Andean studies.

Following the book's introduction, which charts the innovative work ahead, the volume has its strongest concentration on Peru, with five of seven chapters devoted to that nation. Two of these chapters are focused on the coercive sterilisation of Indigenous women during the 1990s and the ongoing demands for national reckoning and redress for the harms done to affected rural women and their communities. Three more focus on a rethinking of Indigenous women's sexuality, the gendered politics of rape and the sexual politics of 'queer' identity in the Andean region. Beyond that cluster, another chapter takes up the emergence of legal pluralism in Ecuador, with the nation's late twentieth-century official recognition of both a Western-style system of justice and an Indigenous one. A final chapter considers the insurgent feminism growing out of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), where women have practiced a *doble militancia* as revolutionaries and feminists, comparing their political activism with that of popular feminism in the nation and

of feminisms more broadly in the Andean region. As I will suggest, notwithstanding the somewhat concentrated scope of the book that I have just outlined, the contributors present a wide range of approaches to their ethnographic research and offer rich and varying conclusions. Together, they give us an exciting array of forward-thinking, agenda-resetting scholarship.

Before considering this most welcome and refreshing set of contributions, it seems important to address the provocation in the edited collection's title: *Andinx*s. The co-editors, Rebecca Irons and Phoebe Martin, are quick to point out some of the problematics of embracing this lexical innovation in discussing the peoples of the Andean region. They have modelled their terminology on the turn by some of the next generation of Latin American immigrants and their descendants in the United States who have adopted the term *Latinx* in order to move beyond both the gender specificity and the implicit gender binary of using *Latino* and *Latina* – when the population referenced is far more diverse, including the LGBTQI+ spectrum. But what does it mean for this volume's scholars – who are an international group, with several hailing from the region under discussion – to introduce *Andinx* and *Andinx*s as a decolonising move towards thinking beyond gender-specific and binary frameworks? Does it matter that the term does not have an equivalent in the region, nor is it used by those Andeans discussed in this volume? For it to parallel usage of *Latinx* in the United States, would *Andinx* only be used by those who have left their family's place of origin? Would that include next-generation highland migrants to Lima, as well as international migrants to the United States? And could this linguistic intervention be viewed fundamentally as another North–South imposition?

While all of these questions do concern me, as they do the co-editors, I believe that the contributors use 'Andinx' as an analytic to spark further debate, to unsettle and reframe the sedimented ways in which we often have come to understand gender relations in the Andean region. The term actually comes up infrequently in the substantive chapters, yet its use signals the intention of contributors to challenge received wisdom and to set out a crucial new research agenda. Moreover, the term suggests the engaged practice of the book's authors in carrying out research and writing in the interest of and in collaboration with those they 'study'. Finally, *Andinx* and *Andinx*s recognises the already-advancing (and gendered) social transformation underway in Andean Latin America.

Let me turn now to take stock of some instances where I see the contributors' commitments to novel approaches as opening new pathways

forward in interdisciplinary Andean studies. I begin with the chapters on Ecuador and Colombia, then address the wide-ranging cluster of chapters on Peru.

Andrea Espinoza Carvajal discusses the way in which, despite its good intentions, Ecuador's initiative to recognise Indigenous forms of conflict resolution and legal remedy may not always serve rural women's best interests. Establishing legal pluralism would appear to be a positive step forward in representing an intercultural nation, with both Indigenous and state legal systems acknowledged. However, she shows that women may not be in a position to turn from one system to the other as the need arises; they may feel morally obligated to turn to the Indigenous legal process in their communities. In such a case, a woman might be advised to remain with a partner charged with domestic violence, 'for the good of' the household and community. Where patriarchal forms constrain women from obtaining a fair hearing, they may find that less has truly been gained from this 'progressive' turn. Espinoza Carvajal's decolonial feminist approach presents a robust challenge to both the state and Indigenous systems of seeking justice for their failure to address women's concerns sufficiently.

In her chapter examining the development in Colombia of a strand of feminism emerging from the FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Jennifer Bates suggests that despite some tensions, an insurgent feminism of ex-combatants shares with popular feminism in the nation a concern for a radical transformation of unequal gender relations. Notably, despite their decolonial political commitment to generating knowledge from below in opposition to the state, both brands of feminism show a willingness to work with the state when that appears to be strategic. Moreover, keeping their political resolve is at times challenging for these feminists, as when international donor organisations seek to influence their priorities. What becomes clear, however, from this comparative case study of feminisms in Colombia, is that insurgent feminists have been especially empowered by their positive experiences within the FARC, where they experienced a greater degree of gender equality than in the wider civil society.

In Lucía Stavig's work in southern Peru with Indigenous women who were subjected to forced sterilisations during the 1990s, she underscores that harms to these women are also experienced by them as harms to the community that require collective responses. While individual women continue to live with health problems stemming from their often crudely performed sterilisations at rural clinics, they have taken action together to heal themselves by establishing a healing centre; there, women can

go to have the support of other women, who address their afflictions by means of ancestral health and healing practices, and by an ethic of *ayni*, or reciprocal care. Stavig's close collaboration with a community leader and founder of the centre persuaded her that this collective healing process should be viewed as a form of 'radical resurgence', stemming from the deep connections of women to their *ayllu* (community) and to the more-than-human Andean world. Her analysis, like that of the women themselves, moves beyond pain and suffering to identify women's acts of 'survival' that enable them to carry on and still demand state-level accountability. She credits these Quechua women with taking a decolonial gender-based form of activism, which she contends is critical to Indigenous theorising. Of particular significance to this volume and wider discussion in Andean studies, Stavig recognises these women's enduring commitment to gender complementarity, manifesting as 'relations-in-*ayllu*'; viewed through a decolonial feminist lens, this should not obscure abuses of gender and power, but rather it provides a way to understand Andean ontology and gender differences *differently*.

While rural affected women address the pain and injustice they still experience decades after their sterilisation, the Latin American #MeToo movement was launched in 2016 as 'Ni Una Menos' (Not One Less) and younger mestiza feminists in Lima have taken up the banner of support for sterilised women. In the 1990s, Peruvian feminists were slow to protest the violence done to rural women's rights, but now there is more attention to the body and to reproductive justice, and this *cause célèbre* has taken centre stage. Indeed, when Lima played host to the 2014 Encuentro Feminista de América Latina y el Caribe (Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Gathering), the close relationship of the body and territory (*cuero y territorio*) was frequently invoked as a critique of the extractivist politics and coloniality of race and gender relations in Latin America (Babb 2018).

Phoebe Martin highlights Lima feminists' growing use of visual and social media in mass organising and how embodiment figures in the digital age, pointing to the performance collective known as Somos 2074 y Muchas Más campaigning on behalf of sterilised women as a leading example. She shows that these feminists have found it politically effective to create a spectacle of urban women marching in red *polleras* (Andean skirts) with pictures of uteruses pinned on and with their red-painted legs giving the appearance of recent bloody procedures, as they carry a huge flag bearing the names of victims of forced sterilisation. Yet when these feminists consulted rural affected women themselves (rather belatedly), the women expressed their discomfort with memories evoked by such

visceral and painful displays; the performances were henceforth modified. Martin offers a generative, decolonial perspective on the negotiated process of Lima feminists' activism and of the complex relationship that some of these activists have to Andean women's experiences – indeed, many of them are the daughters or granddaughters of women who migrated from the highlands. Ultimately, the issue surrounding their protests is one of representation and how the story of rural Indigenous women and their reproductive rights struggle ought to be told.

On a related topic, Daniela Meneses discusses the use of social media in urban feminists' campaigns in Peru to push back against the 2020 claim of a defence attorney in a Lima rape case, that the woman who was raped 'enjoyed social life'. Paralleling the transnational #MeToo movement, Peruvian feminists used social media to support the woman by asserting that they too enjoyed social life – often with photos of themselves out having fun in public venues. While this action was clearly intended to refuse the patriarchal blame-the-victim mentality of the legal system, the author acknowledges her discomfort with what appeared to be a rather light-hearted response to the serious matter of sexual assault. She offers an important critique of a 'postfeminism' that may not be sufficiently attuned to intersectional issues of class and race as well as gender identity. Like Martin, Meneses provides us with a useful stock-taking of where Peruvian feminism is today, particularly since the recent emergence of the *Ni Una Menos* movement addressing violence against women. A new generation of urban women has gained visibility as political activists, but their predominantly white middle-class and individualist orientation appears worlds apart from the daily lived experience of Andean women, who may contend with racialised sexual danger within and outside their communities.

Two more chapters take up sexuality and sexual marginalisation in the Peruvian Andes, though in quite different ways, as they consider how colonialism introduced a more narrowly constrained sex–gender system that remains dominant in the wider society. Rebecca Irons trains her feminist critique on the often active yet frequently unnoticed sexuality of rural Quechua women, who are represented in middle-class mainstream Peru as passive recipients of male desire (except when, as *cholas*, or urbanising Indigenous women, they are sexualised by white Peruvian men). She points to times and places where women express a more open sexuality, as during fiestas and the annual events of Carnival, or in the *puna*, the high grasslands, apart from everyday settings in their communities. In those spatiotemporal zones of relative freedom, women may enact a more positive sexuality that is rarely available to public view.



Irons notes the persistent and deeply prejudicial colonialist thinking about Indigenous women living at high altitudes, who are perceived by *gente decente*, or proper urban folk, to be animal-like in their sexual practices and to 'breed like guinea pigs'. She offers a much-needed decolonial perspective on rural women's agency and desire in the face of efforts, by their men and by the dominant mestizo and white society, to discipline women and their bodies. Dehumanising Indigenous women (and often Indigenous men, who may be disempowered, or feminised) has been a long-standing mechanism of the coloniality of power, though it is rarely entirely successful.

Irons's title 'Prudish in the *puna*' has an ironic ring, as we have found the *puna* to be precisely where women may have more freedom to express their sexuality, beginning when they are flirting adolescents and courting young adults. This was something I found long ago when I read the archived field notes from the Cornell Peru Project of 1952–62, a widely hailed experiment in applied anthropology. During that time in the mid-twentieth century, the chroniclers of the project took little note of the active ways in which women participated in the Vicos community, the field site of the project in north-central Peru (during and after the time of the *hacienda* system); yet the unpublished notes told another story, of women's considerable influence in households and beyond, and of their efforts to be heard when anthropologists from the United States and Peru sought to shift power to young men in the community (Babb 2018).

If rural women have found ways to escape dominant-class expectations of their gender and sexuality, what of those rural men and women who do not conform to the heteronormative ideal of desiring the 'opposite sex' and forming monogamous family units? Micaela Giesecke-Chero turns attention to racialised 'queer' Andeans or Andinxs who are often rendered invisible in their communities and beyond; the term queer (or *cuir*, as it is sometimes rendered in Latin American contexts) may be most useful as an analytic or provocation, and like Andinxs it is not a word that is in wide use in the Andes. Colonial and Catholic religious attitudes tried to erase such individuals from social view, yet their presence has been documented, revealing their history dating to the pre-colonial period and the contemporary social suffering they often experience. While this chapter focuses on the portrayal of homophobia in rural Peru through analysis of the film *Retablo*, the author indicates that the film's representation resonates with their own experience identifying as queer in Andean Peru; it also resonates with the quietly told stories that are related in the *sierra*, or highlands, of women whose intimate friendships may be something more, or men whose more openly 'gay' aspect in such

professions as hairstylist in provincial towns may be granted exceptional status. Still, even those heteronormative highlanders who are forward-thinking and inclusive in other ways will often espouse intolerant views in regard to those who are sexually dissident.

This collection of new feminist scholarship is successful in opening up exciting lines of discussion and debate that are timely and relevant – and not only to the Andean region. While we may desire still more fresh and innovative interventions from Bolivia and more widely throughout the Andes, this volume encourages us to raise questions that have growing urgency. How can we further decolonise our thinking as transnational feminists, to join forces across rural/urban and South/North divides, to consider both individuals and collectives in processes of social transformation? Can we bridge the gap between decolonial theory's privileging of ethnoracial over gender difference, and feminist theory's frequent favouring of individual freedom over community well-being (*buen vivir* in the Andean context)? To cite an example, would the Indigenous women Stavig discusses, who view their bodies and their community interests as closely intertwined, run up against unsympathetic men who shun them as sterilised (and 'incomplete') women? Would they experience what rural Ecuadorian women did in cases of domestic violence reported by Espinoza Carvajal, that Indigenous systems of justice might sometimes fail to protect them even as well as the state system of justice? Have the Lima feminists discussed by Martin, who engage in protest to defend the reproductive rights of affected Andean women, truly found common ground with rural sterilised women? Do the variants of insurgent and popular feminism in Colombia that Bates discusses have parallels elsewhere in the Andean region, or would they share more in common with the experiences of women in other post-conflict and post-revolutionary nations like Nicaragua and Cuba?

This volume inspires such questions and many more. I would like to see more discussion of the ample and intellectually diverse existing feminist work relating to gender and sexuality as well as political ecology and economy in the Andes. While several contributors draw attention to a sharp generational divide in scholarship, I would suggest that there are some far-reaching earlier works that should not be overlooked. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere and Stavig shows so well in this volume, such long-standing debates as that around gender complementarity in the Andes should not be consigned to the dustbin of history – indeed, there is a solidly decolonial feminist rereading of this notion of Andean gender relationality that does not foreclose on examining gender and power. Finally, I would love to hear more about the incipient Indigenous

feminisms, masculinities and queer activism in the Andean region that are referenced in the text. Having said that, I enthusiastically welcome this next generation of scholarship and the critical interventions it is making to stir up needed discussion.

What this collection accomplishes is considerable as it resets a research agenda that has too often regarded feminism as an urban phenomenon, and sexual difference and agency as self-conscious features of cosmopolitan society. We find in this rich edited collection evidence of political strategising and sexual openness among rural women even as some express their painful history of violent aggression to their bodily integrity and autonomy; of alternative gender and sexual practices that may have deeper Andean histories but have generally been suppressed since the time of colonisation; of feminists actively navigating leftist militant and popular feminisms, while also manoeuvring in relation to the state and non-governmental organisations. There is a great deal to learn from and celebrate in this smart international assemblage of new feminist scholarship from the Andean region.

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# MODERN AMERICAS

'*Decolonizing Andean Identities* is a brilliant contribution to the scholarship of the Andean region that offers readers a new grammar for thinking about gender and feminist activism in a decolonial register.'

*Julieta Chaparro-Buitrago, University of Cambridge*

'This is a timely and inspirational collection that captures the power and potential of intersectional feminist activism in the Andes. Breaking new ground conceptually through the term "Andinx", it also provides fascinating decolonial insights into gender, sexualities, indigeneity and feminism.'

*Cathy McIlwaine, King's College London*

*Decolonising Andean Identities* presents ground-breaking work from scholars carrying out social science research in and from Andean Latin America. It addresses themes of central importance to contemporary perspectives on interdisciplinary gender studies and politics in societies undergoing significant social transformation.

The collection aims to develop the field of decolonial gender studies by showcasing interdisciplinary work at the forefront of scholarship. It draws on international expertise through its diverse contributors, including predominately Latin American scholars. There is an urgent need to broaden the perspectives on gender and gender-based activism in Latin America beyond the Southern Cone and Mexico in order to bring the region as a whole into dialogue with global scholarship.

The contributors use the term 'Andinx' as a provocation to encourage scholars of the region to reconsider approaches to the politics of gender, sexuality and (de)coloniality. By responding to the question, 'Who are Andinx (Andin-exs)?' the collection interrogates the postcolonial, gendered and political subjectivities currently undergoing dramatic social change in Andean Latin America.

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