

**PERUVIAN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:  
A RAINBOW OF MOVEMENTS**

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**MA THESIS IN:   COMPARATIVE WOMEN'S  
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## INTRODUCTION

My father was born in The Netherlands in the year 1950. At age 23, seeking adventure and following an exciting job, he moved to Cochabamba, Bolivia. The same year, my Bolivian mother, 20 at the time, had managed to run away from Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile where she had been studying economics. She was trying to continue with her education in Cochabamba. My parents met during a hectic and turbulent time, both socialist thinkers and politically devoted people, believed in equality and freedom for all. Most of their dedication towards political activism changed very little after my birth in 1984. As a baby, I was brought to many meetings and slept through clouds of cigarette smoke and passionate conversations over Bolivia's political situation. It is not a coincidence that throughout my childhood I became very conscious of the reality outside my safe home.

As a half Bolivian, half Dutch individual, my upbringing was caught between two worlds. Due to my father's job, I grew up moving between Bolivia, Peru and Nicaragua. This unusual childhood made me grow up faster, and it forced me to step out of my comfort zone. In my memory, Latin America is a place of richness, beauty, tradition, family, devotion, hard work and passion in contrast to a harsh reality of poverty, hunger, inequality, frightening differences and political instability.

I recognize my privileged position, and I have to consider how I have been influenced by western education as much as I have been influenced by my surroundings. My interest in feminism was instigated by a sense of self-awareness and anger towards violence and abuse. Feminist thought has taught me not to make assumptions or try to speak on behalf of others but myself. My desire with this thesis is to learn how women in Peru have found ways to empower themselves, despite the harsh circumstances they faced in dissimilar environments.

Peru's history, as the history of other Latin American countries, is marked by a colonial past, a struggle to gain independence from Spanish domain, followed by a series of unstable governments, military governments and a constant battle to obtain and sustain democracy. The country has been hit by a severe economic crisis and terrorism, and both have scarred the nation deeply. (Vargas, 1990)

There are abysmal racial, ethnic and economic differences in Peruvian society. While women are a group in itself, women share these racial, ethnic and economic differences. Women have always been active participants in the battle for social change, contributing early on to the liberation movements against colonial power. (Rousseau, 2009: 67) Women from various areas of Peru have organized and have fought to gain freedoms and rights. Women have used various forms of organization and not all women have worked together as a single movement.

Women of Peru face countless realities and this has contributed to the emergence of women's movements. According to Peruvian feminist and sociologist Virginia Vargas there are three streams of women's movements: a feminist stream, a working class and poor women stream, and a stream of women who have organized within their communities organizations. During Peru's political and economic transitions in the 60s and 70s, women have had to endure obstacles, during this period, women started to break silences and fight for their rights.

There has been a trend in Western feminism and in Latin American feminism: intellectual, middle class women have not always been able to relate to women from lower classes, with other working and living conditions (Kuppers-Villavicencio, 1994) Race and ethnicity have played a key role in this division too. The feminist movement in Peru is not an exception. Intellectual women from middle class backgrounds had more in common with women in the West than they did with women from their country. Although Peruvian feminists faced several difficulties in creating a lasting movement, it is in recent years that women from different backgrounds have started to come together. While difference among women is present, middle-class Peruvian women in later years are more assertive in their activism. Feminist organizations such as Flora Tristan, Manuela Ramos, Calandria have been working closer together with working class women and poor women. There are women's organizations that have been founded by indigenous women, such as Chirapaq, which is an organization where women are committed to protect the dreams, aspirations and rights of indigenous people.

## **THESIS QUESTION**

**In what forms have Peruvian women broken away from traditional institutional structures and worked towards equality and empowerment in their communities?**

The purpose of the thesis is to analyze the women's movements that formed in Peru in the late 70s and 80s, and how have these movements continued growing, changing and transforming.

My thesis aims at finding points of connection between Western feminist thought and Peruvian women feminist thought. I will be looking at how the movements are similar, and how the feminist movement in Peru is unique. Besides the feminist movement stream, I will also focus on the poor and working class stream, and the stream in which women became leaders in their communities. "Women's mobilizations and participation have dynamics of their own that entertain a complex relationship with patterns of democratization, especially when one considers the distinct social, economic, cultural context of different groups of women within the same nation-state". (Yuval-Davis, 1997) The main goal of the thesis is to demonstrate how women with ethnic, economic, social, religious differences have worked for their empowerment, and the various ways in which they have shown leadership, organization skills, and strength.

The following chapters are about the past and present, separation and reconciliation, identification, growth, challenge and most importantly empowerment.

The first Chapter will provide background information of Peru's political, economic situation in the 60s. The events that occurred during president Velasco's regime have influenced the women's movement in the years that followed. I will mention when and how women gained the right to vote, and whether having the right to vote meant gaining full citizenship.

The first section of Chapter one will discuss citizenship and the transition to democracy, and how women participated during this particular period. I will make comparisons to Western feminism, and the struggle to gain the right to vote. This will

demonstrate that fighting for citizenship has been of great significance in women's movements.

The following section of Chapter one deals with the emergence of the women's movements, specifically the feminist movement, and the earliest goals of this movement. This section discusses the ways in which women realized that gaining the right to vote was not enough, and much more needed to be done to be respected and recognized as citizens. Women joined political parties to further their empowerment, and with great disappointment they learned that their parties had no interest in a gender agenda. By separating from left wing parties, women create a movement in which gender and equality are priorities. This Chapter concludes with an overview of the events that marked the Peruvian feminist movement.

Chapter two will address the origins of other women's movements. The first section of this chapter discusses the differences that exist among women in Peru. Ethnicity, race, social, economical differences have influenced the ways in which the movements have taken place. At the same time, women from rural areas have had different responsibilities in their communities than those of women in the urban areas, and this is a key factor that has influenced the various forms of women's activism in Peru. I will discuss difference in language, ethnicity, traditions, and other values to provide a perspective of the multiple factors that affect women on a daily basis.

In the second section of Chapter two I will explain the origins of the three women movement's streams, and the activities they have carried on. I will start describing the feminist stream, which was formed by educated, intellectual, middle class women who had a history of political participation. The feminist stream was established late in the 70s, and begun to grow during the 80s. The second stream that I present is the poor and working class women stream. Women from this stream create organizations to help their families and communities. Last, but not least, I describe the women's movement stream that emerges from traditional spaces, such as community's peasant organizations, or peasant associations. The difference between the second and third stream is that the second stream originates from women's initiative, women create communal kitchens and milk programs to fulfill their families basic needs, and they receive help from churches and international organizations. The third stream originates in rural areas, and women set up commissions within peasant organizations, they confront male leaders, becoming leaders themselves.

In the third and last chapter of the thesis I will demonstrate with examples the ways in which women have organized and tried to work for their communities, and the ways in which they are working towards their empowerment. I present three case studies that will show specifically how women have organized, and each case will represent a different stream.

The purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate that the women of Peru, despite cultural, traditional, ethnical differences have found ways to speak up openly and loudly about abuse, their rights, and equality. Women are showing resistance to their role as second-class citizens, and are showing signs of activism. Whether women have had education or not, money or no money, women are recognizing that change begins with their actions.

## CHAPTER 1 - THEN AND NOW

### Peru's political Background

Peru's government has alternated between periods of democracy and military governments. Since Peru became independent from Spanish Rule in 1821, the country has had 13 constitutions and only 19 elected governments completed their terms. (CRS report, 2008) Peru's political development has been influenced not just by the military coups, but by the way in which each government has handled economy and resources. In 1968, Juan Velasco Alvarado overthrew elected president Fernando Belaunde Terry of the Popular Action Party. Velasco tried to implement an agrarian reform and he nationalized the fishmeal industry, petroleum and mining companies and several banks. However, Velasco's ways set Peru in a difficult economic situation and in 1975, he was replaced by General Francisco Morales Bermudez. The new leader made efforts to restore the country's economy, and in 1980 under a new constitution, elections were held and Belaunde Terry returned to office.



1. Velasco takes over Peruvian presidency

In the 1980s economic problems from the prior governments persisted and worsened. In 1982-1983 the weather phenomenon "el Nino" caused widespread flooding, and draughts in different parts of the country. The fishing industry, which is one of the most important industries in the country, was affected deeply. (U.S. Department of State, 2010) The fall of international commodity prices, the natural disasters, depress wages, exacerbate unemployment, and spur inflation affected the population in numerous ways. The economic crisis reflected in the worsening living conditions, especially of the poor. During this period two terrorist groups emerged: Sendero Luminoso, (Shinning Path) in the rural areas, and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Lima.

In 1985, Alan Garcia of the American Revolutionary Alliance party (APRA) won the election. This was significant political moment as it was a transfer of power from a democratic government to another, the first in 40 years. Garcia's government did very little to improve the country's sinking economic situation, and he was accused of corruption. The Shining Path gained more power, and terrorized people in urban and rural areas. In the elections of 1990, populist candidate Alberto Fujimori becomes president, and he is in power for the next decade. Peru's political and economic transformations have shaped the country and its people. The economic situation, the terrorist groups, the emergence of leftist parties and resistance towards military governments and oligarchy have influenced the women's movements, and women have influenced the country too.

My intention with this chapter is to explore women's earliest forms of activism. I want to show women's participation in political movements, and how they have maintained a certain devotion and sense of self-awareness towards its country, towards others and later to themselves.

There have been many obstacles women had to defeat before they were even able to join political parties. During the 1960s, women saw the rise of leftist parties as an opportunity to fight for basic rights, and equality for all. After years of participation and dedication they realized that their needs were not being taking into account. Women begun to break from political parties, social movements and started new chapters, feminists started a process to gain women's rights and opportunities. "Important parallels with socialist or other revolutionary processes have been made where radical changes did not necessarily carry forward women's demands, although they often have unleashed new women's movements." (Moghadam 1995; Kampwirth 2004 and 2006) Even though women did not receive the recognition they deserved, it pushed them into following their own voice and creating new forms of expression.

Peruvian women's movements did not occur out of nowhere. There were several events that contributed to women's participation in the political, economical and social sphere. From the years of independence against Spain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the guerrilla wars of the 1960s and 1970s, women have been active in various movements. Women organized strikes, urban street demonstrations and joined political parties even before they had the right to vote. (S. Jaquete, 1990) This chapter presents the importance of citizenship for women.

The first section of Chapter one explains the significance of citizenship for women, and emphasizes on the different meanings it has. I will discuss women's political participation and their efforts to gain citizenship before the social and political movements of the 60s and 70s. This section provides background information to grasp the economic, political situation of Peru at the time, which had an impact on the country's population, triggering the formation of women's movements.

In the following section of this chapter I will discuss the formation of women's movements, focusing particularly on the earliest stages of Peruvian feminism. This section will discuss western feminism.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide basic background information about Peru's political and economical situation, as this is a contributing factor in the events that unravel throughout the country, in this case, the women's movements.

## 1.1 History: Citizenship and the transition to democracy

The ways in which a State is constructed and how elites emulate a national identity within its society contribute to nation building and citizenship ideals. “Citizenship provides a political language for thinking about broader questions of social membership which have been sharply reposed by global trends such migration, nationalism, indigenous claims and social marginalization.” (Molyneux, 2001) What does citizenship mean to women?

The preoccupation with citizenship and democracy is one to which feminism has fought for strongly. “The relationship between women and citizenship has been contentious in the western European liberal and democratic traditions.” (Radcliff, 2002) To be a citizen means to enjoy inviolable rights and be a full and equal member of the political community. Citizenship is a social condition and women are a key component in society, however what exactly has been their role? Have all women gained citizenship and equal rights? “The category of female citizen has always been problematic, torn between the universal language of citizenship and the “difference” associated with women.” (Radcliff, 2002) While women have made great contributions to their communities, their path towards claiming full citizenship has been and continues to be a difficult one.

According to Tesania Velasquez, present day Peru shows signs of economic growth along with an increase in inequality and a persistent number of people living in extreme poverty. “The disadvantage in which women are in respect to their basic rights, access to justice and sexual autonomy is one expression the current situation.” (CLADEM 2006) However, it is important to recall that universality of citizenship conceived as generality operated to exclude not only women, but other groups as well. (Young, 1989:254) Racial, ethnic and socio economic difference exclude certain people from owning full citizenship. Yuval-Davis argues that state citizenship means to be a member in national collectivity, and it is the most inclusive way to integrate to the nation. Women, however, have been regulated in a different way than men, and women have been constructed in the State as dependent on men. (Yuval-Davis: 45) If we perceive citizenship as a membership with civil, political and social responsibilities, the rights of its citizens do not end in the State, but they have other forms of expression. “The construction and evolution of democratic citizenship is a fluid process that takes place at the intersection between political, social and cultural history.” (Radcliff, 2002)

Throughout history, women’s rights have been constrained, and women have been restricted from dictating their own meaning of citizenship.

“Citizenship, understood as the legal foundation of social membership, is context-dependent in three main ways: as a system of rights it defines a citizen’s entitlements and responsibilities within a particular legal tradition and social context, in signifying the social and political membership of a nation-state it makes claims on loyalty and identity within the framework of a specific set of cultural understandings; within political struggle, citizenship claims may assume a variety of different means and ends depending on particular political discourses, priorities and opportunity contexts” (Molyneux, 2001)

Besides these three factors, diversity of law, politics, and nationhood in the same country influence citizenship. “Gendered accounts of citizenship therefore presuppose



an understanding of the gender regime that prevails in given societies.” (Rosseau, 2009) When creating new forms of citizenship, gendered markers influence the formation of female citizenship. Pamela Radcliff argues that democratic rights are conceived under universalistic terms and do not include the parallel language of difference that marks women. For instance, the right to abortion or the right to reproductive methods and sexual freedom are not considered as universal rights, but as women’s private concerns.

Simone de Beauvoir has stated that women are classified as second-class citizens in relation to men. (De Beauvoir, 1984: 689-91) She has also stated that both sexes have affirmed this relationship. European women, as much as women in Latin America have struggled with this second-class citizenship position. During the independence movement from Spanish Rule, women were allocated in their roles of mothers and “guardians of hearth”, even though women had firsthand war experience as nurses, troop followers and even soldiers. Men were seeking their empowerment and freedom, and women remained excluded from citizenship. A gendered account of citizenship demands a distinction between the formal rights, and the actual rights people have. Much as European feminists, the first goal of the earliest feminist movements in Peru was female suffrage. “While opponents of female enfranchisement argued that women were variously too passionate, ignorant or domestic to exercise political judgment, its supporters also deployed this language of difference, inverting its terms to argue that women’s innate qualities of altruism and morality would serve to improve political life.” (Molyneux 2001:168) When women were told that they did not bear arms, this being the ultimate test of citizenship, feminists started to claim, “[that] they bore children, and sacrificed their sons to the nation in war.” Using motherhood as a true test of loyalty to the nation. Peru’s first feminist wave, including a few male supporters, focused on the issue of difference and demanded citizenship based on idealized representations of motherhood and wifely duties. “Women’s social roles of wife and mother were woven through the history of women’s citizenship in Latin America.” (Molyneux 2001: 178) Motherhood had become a symbol of femininity. Nevertheless, even though it had become a symbol, the meaning of motherhood and the idealization of it varied strongly between class, age and ethnicity. This meant that women’s citizenship was shaped around motherhood and the duties allocated to being a mother and a wife. Female identity was limited to a patriarchal structure. “The character of gender formations also influences the entitlement which women have demanded and the kind of political presence they have sought and achieved.” (Molyneux, 2001) The history of people’s citizenship in most of Latin America has been partly determined by the colonial history, as much as the political instability experienced in most countries. Peru inherited from Spanish colonialism a new religion, and ever since the country has been influenced by a division of class and race. Ethnic division and racial inequality are an issue to this day.

The fact that Peruvian women did not have the right to vote despite their active participation had roots in fear. In Peru, the lack of correlation between economic and educational indicators and the vote for women was mainly caused by the widespread belief that women would vote for the status quo rather than for change. “Progressive governments were reluctant to risk giving women the vote for fear of losing elections and ironically women were enfranchised by conservatives in Peru with the explicit intention of using the women’s vote to counter growing political radicalism of increasingly mobilized male electorate.” (S. Jaquete, 1989) Women were not

perceived as citizens who would contribute to positive change, rather, women were being used for political strategy. “As a modern regime of power, the state utilizes a series of ‘mechanisms of normalization’, that come to rest on the body and through which power relations are produced and channeled.” (Foucault 1977:Chatterjee 1993) The state contributes in the formation of people’s identities and roles in society. Discourses of nationhood have linked men and women to the nation in gendered ways. Citizenship was perceived as inherently masculine, based on dichotomies of male/female, public/private. (Radcliff, Westwood: 137)

The law that granted women the vote was passed on September 7th of 1955 and the first election in which women were able to vote took place in 1956. According to National Newspaper *El Comercio*, women had solicited the government for suffrage rights since 1910. Nevertheless, women’s right to vote was a political move, and it had very little to do with recognizing women as full citizens. In western countries the right to vote had not come much earlier, in France women earned the vote in 1944. De Beauvoir argues in the *Second Sex* that women’s reconciliation with their position as second class citizens would come to an end, and that “economic independence and women’s right to vote are a step forward in an endeavor to design a new kind of femininity and a more balanced relationship between men and women.” (De Beauvoir, 1984:27) The right to vote did very little for women’s empowerment at the time, not just in Peru but also in many other countries. In Latin America, “the two gendered spheres of public and private are a central part of cultural resources used to explain and order social life, and through which relations with citizenship rights and duties are mediated” (Radcliff & Westwood, 1996:137) Women’s lives and rights did not automatically improve with their right to vote, neither did their education or their position in society. Men continued to dominate the private and the public. While I do not dismiss the significance of earning the right to vote, women had/have to liberate themselves in moral, social and psychological terms. Women have had to change their attitude towards who they are as women, and their role in the public and private sphere needed/needs to change too.

## **1.2 Peruvian Feminism, the 60s and onwards**

The year 1968 saw the emergence of social movements that challenged oppressive governments and social systems worldwide. Young men and women stood against cultural definitions of gender, however the revolts did not challenge the hierarchies of gender. As a result, women had to revolt within the movements, “the lived experience of freedom and community in the intense experience of community organizing and campus occupations offered women new possibilities for self-definition and schooled them to engage in political action in their own behalf.” (Evans, 2009:333) Even though women’s experience in the movements confirmed a continuation of a patriarchal structure. “Around the globe, governmental and police power had a male face,” (Evans, 2009:337) and male narratives describe women as witnesses, but not as protagonists.

There is an international link between 1968 and feminist movements that emerged in various countries. Feminists came to the realization that they needed to create a movement of their own. A new wave of feminism in Peru started in the late 60s as a result of the political and social events that were happening at this time.

From 1968 to 1980 a military government ruled Peru. Juan Velasco became head of State during the first phase of this military government. Velasco's government was unique compared to other dictatorships and military governments in Latin America. Velasco's military government was established as a protest against the dominant upper class. "A key anomaly is the fact that labor and the left were not eclipsed, but instead emerged strengthened by the period of military rule in their mobilizing capacity and electoral presence."<sup>1</sup> During this period of time, strong social movements emerged: women, young and a new revitalized Church began to rise. "Their role instead the transition was quite significant, as they brought new perspectives and called for change in areas formerly seen as outside the realm of politics." (Rousseau, 2009)

Rejection towards an outdated and oppressive institution contributed to the formation of social movements. Peru has had a limited system of political representation that had excluded the majority of the population through ethnic, cultural and social discrimination. Surprisingly, during the military regime, Velasco started an economic reform and radical social ideology. "The Velasco reforms opened new channels of representation, even though the government had control, agrarian cooperatives and worker-managed firms provided new spaces for political participation and created expanded expectations of citizens rights." (Barrig, 1984) Velasco shut down the Parliament, but supported other forces, such as the Communist Party, which in return supported Velasco. There was an emergence of a new left, and while critical of Velasco, they benefited from the reforms. The new left, "discovered a fertile terrain for developing its ideas and expanding its base of support among leaders of the unions, the shanty-towns, and the universities." (Pease, 1982) Velasco built a powerful attack on the oligarchy. He had contributed to social mobilization; he supported miners, rural cooperatives. Though Velasco supported an agrarian reform and nationalization of Peru's resources, he did contribute to damaging the country's economy. Velasco's policies were short lived. A more conservative government took over in the period known as the "second phase" of the military government, and Velasco's policies were reversed. During the late 1970s the government changed its structure to deal with the economic crisis, social movements began to protest, and the military was anything but tolerant or supportive. This triggered uprisings, and thousands of Peruvian people began to protest against the government, 'Down with the Dictatorship' they screamed.

The urban middle-class women perceived the State as the main agent for social change. During Velasco Alvarado's government in the period of 1968 to 1975, it was middle-class women who played a very active role in the democratization of Peru. "But they never gained any leadership positions, nor did they get involved in the process on behalf of their own sex." (Kuppers, Villavencio 1994: 60) At this moment in history, feminists were a part of a new generation of radical leftwing students. A group of Peruvian women were motivated with new ideals, and started to participate actively in this leftist movement. Feminists saw an opportunity, even though they did not voice gender demands, they had high expectations for a government that would perceive them as equals. Unfortunately, after their participation and hard work, they realized that "the left-wing parties simply reproduced the age-old gender-specific division of labor and power, this hindering women's advance." (Kuppers,

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<sup>1</sup> Eveyne Huber Stephens, *The Peruvian Military Government, Labor Mobilization, and the Political Strength of the Left*.

<sup>2</sup> Clubes de madres are women organizations that are created by women themselves to support each

Villavicencio, 1994:60) This has been true in other Latin American countries, Europe and even the United States. Women's political participation was not beneficial to their gender, because women did not make gender inequality an issue. In France, the Movement Pour Liberation des Femmes (MLF) emerged as a result of their disillusionment to the parties they had been loyal to: "women realized that far-left groups perpetuated women's oppression through the power struggles inside the groups, the way men monopolized discussions, spoke in a masculine political language with which women did not identify," (Picq, 1987:24) Sexual division was sustained, and women were perceived as inferior. The MLF first meeting took place in October of 1968, and three women took the initiative of organizing women-only meetings. In a similar way, feminist movements across the globe started small and with particular groups of women who were trying to justify what they were doing, and what they wanted to do. Some movements occurred sooner than others, but the political transformations that unraveled in the late 60s and 70s triggered women to create their own movements.

In Peru, relations between the feminist movement and political parties had been plagued with disagreements. The authoritarian male domination, which permeates society was reproduced within the organizations of the left. Vargas said of her experience that, "while the men led and theorized, the women were secretaries, served up the coffee and organized *fiestas* to fill the party's coffers." Feminists fought for autonomy and gender issues but "party leaders tended not to recognize the autonomy of the women's movement and felt threatened by criticism of their beliefs and organizational practice." (Davies-Vargas 1987:45)



2. Woman leading a protest against the government

During the late 70s many Peruvian feminists emerged from several left-wing parties that had formed in the late 60s and early 70s. (Rousseau, 2009) "After participating in the elaboration of the Left's platforms and struggling unsuccessfully for the recognition of gender oppression as phenomenon not to be subsumed under class oppression, many leftist women decided to leave the parties to form feminist groups in order to address gender oppression in an autonomous fashion and as a central priority." (Rousseau 2009: 69)

Their break from the parties symbolized a rejection to their position as second-class citizens. These feminists recognized that if they began fighting for social change, eventually their demands would become invisible again. As Virginia Vargas wrote:

“We must overcome our schizophrenic practice of not converting the private into the political, of taking on the development of our identity in a closed process, without confronting the public, that political space to which we carry our other demands, where we submit ourselves to a logic that is not ours, where we demand (for “other” women) economic assistance and support in support of general political causes into which we bring, although with shame, our own issues: control of our bodies, changed relations between the sexes and an end to the daily violence against women. It was a first step away from the awareness of permanent guilt (for being middle class, for not thinking only about hunger, for thinking about ourselves, for not being sufficiently political) toward a consciousness that all of these attitudes were in fact legitimate and necessary.”

This new stage of feminism pertained to a selective group of women. In 1978, academics, students and intellectual women of the middle-class started a feminist movement. “In recent years a handful of women from the urban and poor working classes have joined them but in the absence of a mass membership, the basic social composition remains unchanged.” (Villavicencio 1994:61) It is from disappointment that Peruvian middle-class women decided to push a feminist movement. Peruvian feminists did not have an attachment to leftist ideas, and shaped their new identity on cosmopolitan middle-class European and North American feminist women. However, feminists became an elitist group by imitating women from Europe and North America, they no longer could relate to the majority of Peruvian women whose day to day lives had nothing in common with European and North American standards and ways of living. “The roots of Peruvian feminism do not lie in the general dissatisfaction of women as a whole or of the women of a particular social class,” (Villavicencio 1994: 64) The feminist movement in Peru was shaped and originated by a particular group of academics, students, and intellectuals in Lima who wanted to claim autonomy, independence and gain equality, even though they were not fully aware that their gender demands were not representative of other women. Interestingly, in the same way that feminists in Peru were disconnected from other women, in the United States white women “have had difficulty in viewing black feminists as the foremothers to their own feminism. In turning to the first wave to create a history for themselves, many white second-wave feminists overlooked the black women involved in the suffrage movement.” (Henry 2004:169) Similarly, in Peru, middle-class women did not view women from other backgrounds as key components of the feminist movement, at least not at that particular moment.

Regardless of women’s comfortable socioeconomic position, being a feminist was no easy task. Feminists were creating action centers where they could provide legal aid, organize courses, produce cartoons as educational material, run journals and radio shows, “the initial public reaction to this activity ranged from derision to horror.” (North, 1999) Peruvian feminist and activist Maruja Barrig recalls, “Feminism was satanized. Feminists were perceived as ugly, fat, frustrated, spinsters and/or lesbians.” In an article published by the Canadian Women Center, Vargas said, “the media presented feminists as crazy women who are out to destroy the family and want to be men.” Even today, feminists continue dealing with a level of rejection from the public and authorities. For example, on October 26<sup>th</sup> of 2010, feminists held a peaceful march in defense of women’s rights to abortion. The police tried to break off the

march by hitting and pushing women. A feminist told newspaper *La Republica*, that five years had passed since Karen Llantoy, 17, was denied from an abortion even though the fetus did not have a brain and died few days after birth. The women present in the march wanted to remind the government of this case and the right women have to a safe abortion under Peruvian law, and they ended up hurt and abused by the authorities.

Feminism has been a form of political expression, but there were/are several forms of social and political expressions by women. There were/are groups seeking new economic strategies and social changes. In recent years the urban poor and working-class women organizations are an active sector of the women's movement. This means that women's movements are not necessarily under the initiative of the elite women. "Among middle-class women, social practice took the form of feminist, and among lower-class women, the creation of community organizations for economic survival." (Barrig-S. Jaquette 1989: 119) Popular women's organizations presented solutions for problems such as food scarcity, and their children's education. The Peruvian government had ignored the necessities and rights of the working class and the poor, women tried to fill in that void by creating organizations to support each other. "Whether consciously or intuitively, these women tried to democratize human relations in those places that had been bypassed by the grand strategies of politics." (Barrig 1989:119) However, Barrig also argues that women still dealt with strong inhibitions and did not extend their cause to the political sphere. Women of the working class were mostly concerned with the wellbeing of their communities, and did not raise gender issues in the way the feminist movement was trying to.

Throughout the 1980s, Peru's economic situation worsened and the rise of terrorism frightened the entire population. The shinning path terrorized peasants and people in the cities alike. Terrorists attacked people in their homes, placed bombs in cars, raped women and abused children. The economic crisis affected the poor even more deeply and men and women were trying to defend 'their right to a basic standard of living.' They could not demand a better life because they were trying to survive. At this particular moment, women of the slums create the Communal Kitchens and the Milk Programs, in order to feed their families, help their communities, and protect their children.

"From the moment a woman and her family occupy a piece of land and through sheer perseverance begin to make it habitable, individual and private, family domains are mingled with collective, public and communal ones. The roles of woman, mother and pobladora all overlap." (Villavicencio, 1994)

All the roles women must fulfill in their communities are influenced by their gender, but also by their race, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic situation. "The basis of autonomous feminism is gender, but the ambiguity of the concept makes it difficult to distinguish the diverse and conflictive ways in which the oppression of gender is lived on a daily basis by women of distinct social classes." (S.Jaquette, Barrig 1989:130) As it has been studied and established by third-wave feminists, gender is one aspect of feminism. Adrienne Rich created this concept of politics of location, a concept that has contributed greatly to feminist theory and activism. "Rich argues that the unproblematized feminist 'we' should be deconstructed. White feminists especially should be accountable for the significance of their ethnic and class positioning's and should not depart from the notion of 'the faceless, raceless, class-less category of "all women".'" (Wekker 2004: 55) Third-wave feminists have come to recognize that the

differences between women are significant and need to be taking into consideration in order to make the movement stronger and effective.

According to Clare Hemmings, “Western feminist theory tells its own story as a developmental narrative, where we move from a preoccupation with unity and sameness, through identity and diversity, and on to difference and fragmentation.” (Hemmings, 2005) The shifts in feminist theory are the outcome of a learning process that feminists have experienced since 1970s. There has been a shift in Western feminism as feminists were exposed to other ways of thinking and being. In the same way that Western feminists have undergone transformations and processes to arrive at the discussion of the connection between class and gender, it took some time for Peruvian feminists to recognize this factor as a significant one for all women. In 1987, Rocio Palomino “proposed that the movement should open itself up to other social sectors and that activities described as ‘feminist’ should be more accurately defined.” (Villavicencio 1994: 68) Feminists organized a meeting in which they invited women from the poor and working class sectors that had been actively involved in organizations such as the Milk Program and the Communal Kitchens. Poor and working class women from Lima and other provinces joined the meeting. This First National Feminist Meeting took place in 1987. During this meeting, the working class pointed out that the reality and demands of the majority of the Peruvian women should be integrated in the feminist agenda, or a separation between women would widen and continue. This first step allowed women to exchange ideas, frustrations, ideals, and it allowed women to speak openly about common and different struggles.

Peru’s political instability, economic shifts and declines, corruption, terrorism, it all has shaped the life of its people. Throughout the transformations and crisis, women have emerged, and have created movements to battle against everything that was happening to them and their communities.

During the 60s, 70s and early 80s feminists were trying to create a space for themselves, they had broken away from political parties and they, as an educated, middle-class group faced many obstacles to gain credibility. From its early beginnings, women have not always managed to work as one, and women have not always agreed on their goals. “In Peruvian feminist practice, the limitations of the feminist practice of working from small groups that are disconnected from the causes of poverty are evident, just as it is clear that it is counterproductive to make demands in the name of “other” women when they are really our demands.” (S. Jaquete, Barrig 1989:120) This has been true for feminists in Peru, as it has been true for feminist movements worldwide.

While at the beginning feminists did not represent all women, throughout time the concept of politics of location, and intersectionality has become more evident and feminists have started to make connections with women from various backgrounds. Feminist organizations carry out meetings and workshops for all women in order to create a space for discussion. Through the workshops and meetings, women are learning from each other. Vicky Villanueva is one of the founders of the center “Manuela Ramos”, a center that since 1978 provides legal aid, publishes a bimonthly bulletin and educational leaflets, and organizes training courses. Villanueva says that the courses offered to women from the barrios introduce the discussion of feminist issues, but the courses attend to specific requests of women from the barrios too, and there is an exchange of ideas necessary for the movement to grow.

## CHAPTER 2 - WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS



3. Indigenous Peruvian women during a meeting to discuss women's rights, fears and concerns

In this chapter I want to point out the differences that existed, and that still exist between women in Peru. The differences among women contributed to the formation of various women's movements. Women with education, and who had been involved politically and managed an intellectual language did not share the struggles of women without education, and poor living conditions. Feminism is influenced by the intersection of variables, difference does not mean a separation, it rather stands for an understanding that women are influenced by other aspects of their lives and not just their biology.

I find it important to recognize that feminism can not affirm the subjectivity of women, because, "Speaking 'as a feminist woman' does not refer to one dogmatic framework but rather to a knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers and levels of the self." (Braidotti, :94) There is a connection to other women, because women are interrelated, affected and influenced by various factors. According to Grosz, "feminist theory is a practice and a politics whose time is limited and whose function will cease to be necessary when certain political, social, economic gains are achieved. Feminism itself is and always has been highly provisional and contextual: it arose only as a result of the growing awareness of the oppression of women and will cease when this oppression is overcome." (Grosz, 2005:155)

The redefinition of a feminist paradigm as a holistic social movement is important for the advancement of women. It is necessary to include indigenous women while redefining feminism. The active participation of indigenous women should be perceived as a process of feminism. Tarcila Rivera, from the center of Indigenous Cultures Chirapaq says, "Inside mixed indigenous organizations and inside the feminist movement, we, indigenous women face the following question: Are we indigenous women, feminists? How do we define feminism through the eyes of an indigenous woman?" According to Rivera, on many occasions she has heard her sisters express that feminism has provided them with significant knowledge, especially because feminist organizations encourage women to fight for their rights. However, indigenous women have said that the incorporation of feminist ideas is



challenging. On one hand, indigenous women want autonomy, sexual reproduction rights and education but their indigenous men criticize them because the ideas women present spring from a culture different from their own. Indigenous women are self-critical and they wonder, “can feminism have an indigenous vision, or can indigenous vision be feminist?” (Rivera, 2005) The indigenous women that have been participating in community organizations and local and regional governments have concluded that they can not fully appropriate feminism, but they can use certain crucial feminists ideas that are necessary for their growth and empowerment.

The fight of indigenous women is based upon their own cultural, social, linguistic experience, and it is clearly different from other Peruvian women. The process of building an identity is a working process. Indigenous women are feminists, and they can have a feminist vision without ignoring who they are, where they come from and what they want to accomplish for themselves and their communities.

## **2.1 Differences Between Women**

“Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are charters” (Lorde, 1984:111)

Feminists such as Gloria Wekker and Rosi Braidotti have demonstrated that differences between women are just as significant as the differences between men and women. “Difference, refers much more importantly to differences among women: differences of class, race, and sexual preferences for which the signifier ‘woman’ is inadequate as a blanket term.”(Braidotti 2009: 93) Much as any country in the world, people of Peru are different in various ways, and this has had an impact in the way women participate in Peruvian society. Location, race, ethnicity, tradition, and language have an impact in gender relations. Women in certain locations and with certain histories have struggled in countless forms to empower their communities.

In this section I would like to discuss some of the differences between Peruvian women to further understand the country’s multicultural background and the impact these differences have had on women and their movements. Intersectionality has brought awareness to conventional thinking by demonstrating that difference matters in the context of social change. Intersectionality was first introduced in 1989 by feminist law professor Kimberle Crenshaw. The term was meant to indicate a manner of thinking within gender studies, which involved a mutual co-construction and simultaneous operation of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other axes of signification, such as age, nationality and religion. (Wekker, 2009:63) The intersectional approach means that gender is always influenced by ethnicity and race, which already have a gendered content. The differences between women then, are always in relation to their origins, their language, and their gender position within their communities. When we think about differences between women of Peru, we need to consider that their role in the private and public sphere is related to the way they are expected to perform in society. Women in urban and rural areas have to respond to certain expectations.

As an outsider, it results inefficient to capture the complex and diverse reality of women from different indigenous (and non-indigenous) cultures. It is not only about recognizing the extent to which indigenous women are discriminated against, but it is about recognizing the internal differences amongst their own groups, and how this affects their individual choices.

According to the CIA World Factbook, Peru has a total population of 29,248,943 million people, and 48.9% is female. The process of urbanization accelerated in the past 50 years and only 27.7 % of the total population live in rural areas. (Ruiz Bravo Lopez, 2003:74) The level of poverty in Peru is high, 45.3 % of the entire population lives in poverty, and 31.5 % live in extreme poverty. This country has great geographical, climate, language and cultural variety. Geography plays a significant role in societies as it contributes to the formation of national identities. There are non-official imaginative geographies and spatial relations within the nation. (Radcliff and Westwood, 1996) Difference between the urban and the rural, the educated and non-educated, the rich and the poor, the Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish speaking Peruvian, it all has an impact in formation of power structures, citizenship and identification. “Geographies of identity can be defined as the sense of belonging and subjectivities which are constituted in different places and social sites.” (Radcliff & Westwood, 1996)

Within these imaginative geographies, there are socioeconomic, racial and ethnic differences that have contributed in keeping certain groups of people as second-class citizens. Language, forms of communication and social representations of women from Andean and Amazonian areas have been rejected historically by western culture. I can not help but to think of Gloria Anzaldua who said: “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without always having to translate, while I still have to Speak English or Spanish-when I would rather speak Spanglish and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.” (Anzaldua, 1987:81) There is powerful language discrimination in Peru. The country is known as a Spanish-speaking country, when in reality there are about sixty Amerindian languages. Quechua is spoken by approximately 5.2 million people, and Aymara is spoken by nearly 0.5 million people. In the cities, people speak Spanish and not Quechua or Aymara, which are perceived as indigenous languages, or native languages, but not as Peruvian languages. “Discrimination implies an unjust an arbitrary treatment in the imposition of obligations, recognition of rights or benefit enjoyment. Therefore discrimination and exclusion are the two faces of the same coin: discrimination becomes exclusion and exclusion strengthens discrimination.” (Fronteras Interiores, Velazquez 2006)

Peru has inherited from its colonial past a hierarchy of powers based on class and ethnicity. Indigenous people are at the bottom of this social ladder. “Indigenous peoples were constructed as truly the ‘others’ of the Americas in relation to culture as well as skin color, while the enslavement of Africans brought black people to the continent as labor power, as chattels.” (Radcliff & Westwood 1996:32) Peru’s multiplicity of races makes racism and discrimination difficult to deconstruct. “Ethnic identity in Peru has been transformed through significant processes, such as mestizaje and migration, and as consequence of these transformations, we are permanently struggling with an understanding of ‘continuities’ and changes in ethnic identity in Peru.” (CRISE, 2006) Indigenous women and black women, or women of African descent have had struggles within a patriarchal internal structure, and have faced

racism and discrimination outside their culture.”

Ethnic identities can be used to promote or suppress political identities, “Races are not, then simple expressions of either biological or cultural sameness they re imagined-socially and politically constructed.” (Gilroy 1993:20) Ethnic identities, as well as class identities are constructed through gender identities. “The differences between women do not stop at differences between races, but the role women have within their own groups varies. Women’s responsibilities and society’s or cultural expectations differ too. Categories of identity are always in relation to their position in society.

I would like to use a few examples of women’s experiences to demonstrate what I mean with imagined geographies, racism and discrimination.

Margarita Camacho Mamani is from Puno, and she speaks Aymara. When asked what are some of the main problems women face in Puno, she said that political authorities have always discriminated against Aymara women. (Chirapaq, 1999) Margarita has said, “when we go to their offices to do some errand, they won’t pay attention, they tell us ‘return tomorrow’ even though we have to walk 25 or 30 kilometers to get from our communities to the province of Callao, were the nearest offices are.” Women often have to suffer humiliation, they are thrown out of the offices, and they waste time waiting to be helped when they have a lot of work to do to support their families. When women need to get loans, it is their men who have to arrange the paper work, because authorities will not pay attention to them. According to Margarita, this is only one of the problems women face on a daily basis.

There is a history of abuse in most households in rural areas. Based on Margarita’s story, about half of the men hit their wives because men do not value women’s work. (Chirapaq, 1999) When the men manage to earn money, they spend it on drinking. Women have to work the farms and take care of the children. According to Isabel Suyo Medina, from Cuzco and a Quechua speaker, it is normal that women work the farms, “we are the ones that take responsibility for the agriculture, the cattle and our children and even the communal work.” (Chirapaq, 1999: 32) Isabel confirms that “machismo” continues to rule in the household. “Even women themselves have sexist opinions.” Isabel admits that when raising the children, boys are allowed to play while girls have to work and help their mothers. Women themselves show disappointment when a girl is born, and joy and gratefulness when a boy is born.

When women in the rural areas get sick or their children get sick, health care centers are often too far, and medicines too expensive. About 25 percent of the most vulnerable and poor sectors are completely excluded from the health care. (Fronteras Interiores: Cardenas Farfan 2007:142) Some basic indicators of this are the high levels of anemia, malnutrition, and the persistence of several sicknesses that have been eradicated in other countries. (Francke, Arroyo, Guzman 2006)

Another issue Margarita talks about is that women in rural areas have many children, because, “nobody has explained it to us.” (Chirapaq, 1999:30) Women have a lot of children even though they do not want to. In Peru, the role of women as mothers is significant. It is normal for women to have loads of children. To have a large family is linked to a man’s prestige, and reinforces his virility. (Mujer en el Peru, 1993)

Women's function is to reproduce and take care of the children, fulfilling their role in the home. This perception of women and men has not changed much, especially in rural areas and poor urban areas. There is a percentage of about 7.4 percent of single mothers, which is most common in the urban areas. Because of the difficult accessibility to health care, maternal mortality is high, and is highest in the poorer areas of the country. In the period between 1994-2002 there were 185 deaths per 100,000 newborns, one of the highest in all of Latin America. (ENDES 2001) However, in Lima for example the ratio is 50 maternal deaths per 100,000 newborns, while in an area such as Huancayo the numbers rise to 300 maternal deaths per 100,000 newborns. Women who live furthest from health centers and poor neighborhoods are at higher risks. "Poverty, low levels of education, absence of crucial services are factors that increase maternal mortality." (Fronteras interiores, Cardenas Farfan 2007:144) The issue is not only the absence of health care centers, but the absence of education about sexual reproduction, and the access to reproductive methods.

When Isabel was asked which proposals would she make to improve the life of indigenous women, she answered, "that we are recognized as human beings, and with all our rights as members of indigenous peoples." This reaffirms the exclusion of citizenship to certain people of Peru, based on their ethnicity and gender.

In the Amazonian areas women face similar issues to the issues faced by women in Andean areas. The most prestigious roles are in the hands of men, and powers are not shared between the genders in the private and public sphere. Health care and education are not easily accessible, and women are not allowed to participate in community meetings in the same way men do. (Chirapaq, 1999)

Indigenous women belong to a sector that is greatly excluded in health matters, political matters and social matters. This fact has origins in a "triple marginalization that they confront based on their gender, class and ethnicity." (Cardenas Farfan 2007: 145) We are seeing here that the scarcity of economic resources, women's ethnicity, physical location, language, class, it all has a deep impact in their lives, and the ways in which they want to seek empowerment.

"In the potential overlap of territory, culture and population of the nation there can be an disjuncture between the national place and national identity." It is important to differentiate narratives and ethnic processes. Even though I am using experiences of women of the rural areas to showcase discrimination and daily challenges I do not mean to imply that women from urban areas, Spanish speaking, and from middle-class and upper-class do not face challenges within their own circle, because they do. My purpose with this section was to provide an idea of the kind of struggles faced by women who have been denied of their basic rights and who confront patriarchal power at home and outside the home.

Because of the variety of cultures and struggles women face it has not been possible for the feminist movement to claim rights for all women. It is important to recognize this difference, "To deny difference is to create a fiction of similitude that does not correspond to reality and instead feeds relationships of fusion, where others and us gets confused and dilutes in the relationship." (Velazquez, 2007:134) Recognizing difference has contributed to feminist theory in general.

I wanted to share experiences of women, because women's experience in their communities has pushed them to seek empowerment. In the same way that women in the cities are concerned with their basic rights, women of the rural areas want to be recognized as full citizens. Women's identities cannot be dealt in a separate way, because women's identities are in relation to their race, age, religion, and sexual preference, "this inclusive manner of thought, which reaches out to all sorts of marginalized groups and tries to define a common ground, is deployed to represent the intersectional, heterogeneous plurality of her identity." (Wekker 2009:65) Even though women are different, it does not mean that they cannot work together. Through the recognition of difference, and the embrace of various forms of being a woman, there is a possibility for change and growth.

## **2.2 Women seeking empowerment**

Empowerment has been a point of major concern in political agendas of social movements. Feminists see empowerment as a process that breaks the boundaries between the public and the private. This process originates from the personal and is brought into the social sphere, it is shared in the community and it is made political. If we take into consideration the concept of intersectionality, gendered variants have an impact in the way women seek empowerment. Many of the differences between women in Peru explain why the Peruvian women's social movement was not a homogenous process. Rather, a plurality of processes that showed and show the diversity of women's realities throughout the country. (Vargas, 1990) The women's movements in Peru have developed dynamics and goals according to the specific every day context in which women live.

According to Peruvian feminist and writer Virginia Vargas, there were 3 particular streams:

1. Feminist stream
2. Popular Women's stream
3. Stream emerging from traditional public spaces

I was drawn to these streams because they represent the struggles faced by women on a daily basis, and they reflect women's efforts to overcome them. I choose to discuss the feminist stream because a group of women started to question their position as women in Peruvian society. The Peruvian feminist movement was and is concerned with breaking traditional roles and gaining autonomy for all women. Feminists denounced the existence of a sex-gender system that subordinates women. They were the first to voice women's demands in the public sphere, and introduce gender discrimination as an issue.

I was inspired by the courage of working class and poor women. Peru's dramatic economic downfall was affecting the poor even more harshly than the rest of the country. Seeing that their children were starving, women fought to find ways to help each other. This stream has had an impact on me, because there is a true sense of solidarity and compassion among women. Rather than fighting for their problems individually, women believed that they could accomplish more by working together. The economic crisis in Peru forced thousands of people to move from urban areas to the cities, settling down in the outskirts without access to electricity or water. Due to

the crisis, food was scarce and it became more difficult for women to feed their families. Women of the slums or “barrios” organized and formed projects such as el Vaso de Leche (the glass of milk) and the Communal Kitchens in order to sustain their families. The first communal kitchens started in Lima, but the concept of sharing the cooking, the expenses, and sharing experiences spread rapidly throughout the whole country.

The stream that originates from traditional spaces intrigued me. For a very long time, women in rural areas were denied of education, and were forced to be silent. This stream of the women’s movements represents women who began to speak up in areas where previously they had not been allowed to say anything. This is a sign of women’s strength. The popular women’s stream tried to find ways to satisfy their needs and demands springing from their traditional roles, and at the same time they resorted to their abilities and skills as women. (Vargas, 1990:5) The third stream originated from and within trade unions and associations. The purpose was to open and modify these political spaces to allow more female participation.

In the rural areas men sustained a patriarchal structure, holding leader positions in their unions and peasant associations in which women were allowed to participate only under men’s orders. Women in rural areas were not permitted to participate in making decisions for their communities. An example of this stream is the “Rondas” which is a form of peasant organization to help protect each other from thieves and abuse from authorities. Women of this stream begin to speak up more, and demand more rights within organizations formerly ruled by men only. Eventually they become leaders who help other people in their communities, they solve problems, and organize meetings to discuss ways in which they can empower themselves.

The streams, and their differences “reflect the way women handle their varying realities, while continuing to build up the movement as they search for new identities, backed by the sense of belonging to a common gender.” (Vargas, 1990:6)

Women’s realities, and their personal experiences mix, and are influenced by various factors. There are many contradictions underlying women’s lives, from class, race, age, to motherhood, and geographic location. Women’s roles overlap, and intersect. Their dreams and ideals along with their needs and basic rights vary precisely because of these contradictions. The streams of women’s movements are a result of women’s distinct struggles.

### **2.2.1 Feminist Stream**

While there have been different expressions of feminism throughout Peru’s history, in 1979 women started to break free from male dominance in a way they had not done before. Women started to organize different missions and projects. Organizations such as Flora Tristan, Manuela Ramos, Socialist front of Women, ALIMUPER, can be categorized into the feminist stream of the women’s movements. Women began to question more and more their rights, their position as women in the personal and political sphere. The group of women who belong to the feminist stream had been educated, had a middle-class background, and they had participated devotedly in left wing political parties. Virginia Vargas says that one of their biggest challenges during the early stages of their movement was to believe that the gender issues they were raising were legitimate for women and for society. While discovering that the parties they worked so heartedly for were not going to consider their goals and gender issues,

women had to break from the political space and create one by themselves and for themselves. “We learned in a very brutal way that party politics was not our space; and if we didn’t also raise our own issues nobody would do it for us.” (Vargas 1990: 19)

One of the first issues feminist rose was women’s right to choose their own reproduction methods, and their right to legal abortion which received a great deal of reaction from men and women. Feminists who had been respected in the political environment were now called, “hysterical middle-class women trying to divide the people’s unity under the influence of Western feminism.” Abortion is still a controversial topic, and a cause that women have not given up.

Feminists have since the late 70s continued working and expanding, and they are a strong presence in Peru. Feminists have also started to raise more issues that conflict often with a more traditional, conservative and religious way of thinking of Peruvian people. While feminist might face opposition from different sources, they are a powerful force. Feminist organizations today work with social media, they spread their word through the Internet as much as they do through periodicals, magazines, agendas, and workshops. Feminists are poets, writers, journalists, filmmakers, and they use other experimental ways to express themselves.



Most importantly, the feminist stream has created feminist institutions and women centers, growing as a movement and allowing interaction and cooperation with other women.

### 2.2.2 Popular Women Stream

Much as the intellectual and middle-class women began the feminist movement, and started to fight for their rights and their position in society, poor and working class women began to organize a movement, perhaps without knowing that they were forming an actual movement. Women had been involved in traditionally male organizations in rural areas. Though the participation of women in the past had usually been assigned to “less important structures” such as health and social affairs. Women did not have a say when it came to making decisions or new policies.

According to Virginia Vargas, in some areas women focused at first on subsistence problems. They eventually obtained support from other institutions, and with some of this monetary support women managed to spread rapidly all over the country. Most of the earliest work and activities of the working class women was determined by their basic needs and those of their whole communities. These women had to confront several obstacles, one of them starting in the privacy of their own homes. They had to fight to be able to participate in the projects they were organizing. They were socializing their poverty and sharing it with other women (Vargas 1990:22) At the same time they had to stand up against their local organizations, which were trying to take advantage of their mobilizations.

Poor and working class women have a harsh reality since birth. Their gender determined that they did would not go to school, they had no voice and no power, and they would do as told. Throughout Peruvian history women have been physically and mentally abused. Rising against their husbands and going outside their homes to fight for the sake of the community was challenging. Women began to recognize that abuse and violence was not an isolated issue. “They began to speak about domestic violence inside their new organizations, thus discovering that being exposed to domestic violence was not just their individual bad luck but a social characteristic of women.” (Vargas 1990:22) While opening up about their personal experience, women still continued working for their communities, and their basic needs. This stream is the largest in Peru. These women have created different types of organizations. They also interact with outside agencies and institutions on various goals. Some of the projects and organizations that women started are the soup kitchens and the glass of milk programs.



4. The Milk Program in action. Mothers and children had something to eat every day

However it is difficult to estimate how many organizations exist throughout the country because the number is always changing. The programs and organizations that women started in the late seventies, survived terrorism years, and are incredibly relevant institutions for Peruvian people, and still function in present day Peru.



### **2.2.3 Stream Emerging from Traditional Public Spaces.**

The third women's stream took longer to establish itself as a women's movement, "because the traditional spaces from which it emerged are usually the most resistant to changing their visions of social relations and their view of political struggle." (Vargas 1990:24) As an effort to distance themselves from their political parties, mostly leftist parties, women began to set up commissions within their own political organizations. At the beginning women organized to offer an alternative discourse to feminism, than they were truly questioning their position as women outside their political roles. Eventually they came to realize that they were women and not just "political militants of a specific cause." It is from their realization that their role as women was significant, that they came to recognize how much of how their lives were shaped had to do with the fact that they were women. Peasant women started to organize with peasant national associations, and in great numbers. For instance in Puno and Cuzco rural areas women demanded land ownerships, credits, produced their own radio shows, and they started to get involved in male dominated community committees. Rural communities, men and women, created "rondas campesinas" (peasants rounds) to defend their lands and stop terrorist advances, and some women were able to take part in the leadership of the "rondas". Women also extended the work carried by the Rondas to oppose male domestic violence. An important mobilization to give an example is "Memorial de Mujeres Trabajadoras", whose first focus and purpose was to seek a change in the legal code and recognize sexual harassment at work.

While there are differences between the movements, "Many women from the popular and traditional streams have adopted feminist postures, but opt to maintain the prerogative to develop their own understanding of feminist strategies." (Vargas 1990:25) Poor and working class women have created their own way of feminism that closer related to their needs and personal experiences. "We have seen how women have different subject positions as a product of different structural conditions. This fact explains why women's practices are heterogeneous and don't necessarily point in the same direction." (Vargas 27, 1990) Women seek approval and legitimacy outside their comfort zones, while also confront and reject external influences. Therefore, women might be able to work with other women, but they will also protect what they have accomplished on their own.

## CHAPTER 3 – WOMEN IN ACTION

In this chapter I would like to discuss women's activism in the streams described in Chapter 2. The purpose of this chapter is to look into the work women did under particular circumstances and how they have grown from each experience. First I will elaborate on the feminist movement, using one of the earliest and most prevalent feminist organization, Flora Tristan. Next, I will discuss the Communal Kitchens, which are a perfect example of the poor and working class women's movement as women organized a system to protect and provide for their communities. Last, I will discuss the Rondas, a form of peasant association, in which women took leadership roles to help their communities.

### 3.1 Flora Tristan- Feminist Stream

Founded in 1979, Flora Tristan is one of the oldest and largest feminist organizations in Peru. Its mission is to work towards strengthening women's citizenship and expand her citizenship to political and developmental processes. It is an organization concerned with women's political action, expression and participation.

The institution is oriented to formulating and negotiating politics and creating legal reforms. Flora Tristan seeks to create specialized knowledge that can sustain and enrich women's political vision. The organization is also concerned with informing, teaching and communicating to the public about their activities. Flora Tristan has become a national organization that has numerous programs to support, encourage, defend and empower women. For instance, they have a program called "Women's Human Rights" that promotes women's rights at a regional and national level and the organization formulates reports for the United Nations.

Other programs include:

***'Sexual Rights and health and citizenship'*** this program pushes for women to be recognized in the national agenda as members with sexual and reproductive rights. The program tries to influence the way in which public health politics works, and tries to work on campaigns that will make health care centers incorporate women's needs and rights in the sexual and reproductive sphere.

***'Rural Development'*** Contributes to strengthening gender perspectives in development politics, and provides women access to production, social and institutional resources. It gives priority to work in themes related to access and control to land ownership in conditions of equality. The program pushes the 'Red Nacional Mujer Rural' which currently counts with 120 centers, and helps promoting the organization of 'Redes Departamentales Mujer Rural.' (Departmental Networks of Rural Women) This program also develops schools called, 'Escuelas Descentralizadas de Formacion de Lideresas' (Decentralized Schools of Leadership Formation) oriented to the empowerment of women's organizations in different regions. More importantly, the organization does research to reveal and get to know women's situation in rural areas, and show the existent hierarchies that exist in gender in different areas of the country.

***'Studies and Feminist Debate'*** is a program that promotes and develops national and regional research from a feminist perspective. The purpose is to establish knowledge

about the systems of subordination and power that sustain gender inequalities. This program carries out theory and feminist politics classes.

***'Political Participation and decentralization'*** Contributes to improving the quality of women's participation in the political sphere in the process of decentralization and regionalization. It supports women and their organizations in the elaboration and execution of their plans to develop locally and create participative budgets. It carries out campaigns to formalize social organizations. It proposes norms and instruments that will guarantee the execution of women's rights in the process of decentralization.

Flora Tristan is a very active and pro-active organization that is constantly creating new ways to support women's rights.

***Against 'femicidio'***: it is an ongoing campaign against violence and murder towards women. It also analyzes the causes of violence against women.

***Despenalization of Aborto***: this campaign has been working years on the despenalization of abortion in Peru. Flora Tristan continues trying different strategies and research to support women and claim women's autonomy.

***Rights of Citizens***: the campaign called "Por los derechos ciudadanos de las mujeres rurales: Mujer saca tu DNI, ahora te toca a ti." (For the Citizenship Rights of Women: Woman get your DNI, now it is your turn) Started in 2003, and continues its functions in different provinces. The idea behind this campaign is to help women claim citizenship. Thousands of women in Peru do not have a DNI (which stands for National Identification Document) There are many obstacles women face to be able to obtain a DNI, some of these include an economic factor, the distances between their communities of origin, and inscription offices. Lack of information and ignorance about the paper work also contribute to women not having documents. Another factor is a sexist take in rural areas, as men in certain areas do not believe that women need to have documents because men represent the family.

***Against Sexist Publicity and Advertising*** This campaign seeks to promote a way to do advertising creatively and successfully without hurting or damaging people, especially women's. The campaign will give an award, FEM-TV to the propaganda that best expresses women's advancements in society, and promotes equality between men and women. The Campaign will also give an anti-award called SAPO-TV to the most sexist and chauvinistic propaganda. This campaign started in 1988, was suspended during terrorist years, and returned in 1998. Flora Tristan collaborates with other organizations to make this event happen each year.

***Women for the City***: Flora Tristan collaborates with an international organization that is concerned with women's safety in the cities that often affect women's daily activities. It's a campaign that tries to create awareness and demands that governments commit to guarantee safer cities, and that promote gender equality.

Flora Tristan has grown greatly over the years, today it is an organization that participates in many campaigns, programs and offers a variety of services. Most importantly, Flora Tristan has started to recognize the importance of getting to know the struggles of women in the rural areas, and has started to take the relationship between feminists and women a step further. Flora Tristan is making efforts to work

with women from rural areas, to accomplish bigger goals. The organization is interested in breaking a division between women.

This organization however, from its early beginnings has been concerned with women's autonomy, citizenship and rights to sexual reproduction and a right to a safe abortion. The struggle to gain autonomy rights has proven to be exhausting and it is a continuous struggle. To show the way in which this feminist organization works, I would like to focus on their campaign for autonomy, abortion and reproductive rights. I'd like to explore and identify the different approaches and techniques feminist in Peru have been using to draw attention to this issue.

### **Autonomy, Abortion and Reproductive Rights:**

“True autonomy isn't about maintaining the cozy security of a small group, bent on preserving the purity of its doctrine. It's about taking risks and confronting patriarchal power at every level...all this discussion about the pros and cons of varying degrees of autonomy brought to light some of the most complex, controversial aspects of feminist theory and practice. How we organize, the ways in which decisions are made, the meaning of leadership, all add up to the tension between individual and collective interests/needs which tends to characterize the exercising of power.”  
(Davies, Vargas 1987:46)

On March of 1979, the feminist organization ALIMUPER organized a march for the despenalization of abortion as a sign of a greater international mobilization. On this particular moment, and to this particular march, very few women attended. As a result feminists were object of mockery and aggression from the spectators and passers by, and worse, they were ridiculed and insulted by leftist military, parties and press. The day after, a newspaper published an article by poet Francisco Bendezu, “Feminists are flowers without water” (Vargas 1994: 22) this was a crucial moment for feminists, “this was a moment of symbolic and real change in feminist strategy...towards new feminist discourse and creating their own vision.” (Vargas 1994 : 22) This is a moment in which feminist realized that no one else was behind them, or supporting them and they would have to find ways to claim their rights, and protect their futures. Flora Tristan emerges from collaboration between women, and a desire to create women's visions; it is a feminist organization that has made the right to autonomy a priority. Illegal abortion, absence of sexual reproduction education, and the inability to access safe reproductive methods are all issues that affect women. The illegality of abortion affects women from all backgrounds, ages, and classes. It is a universal issue, and it an issue that Flora Tristan takes to heart.

The poster shown here is part of one of the organization's campaigns to defend women's right to abortion.

It says:

“Woman: once more your life is worthless. They [the State] want to take away therapeutic abortion from us. We should not allow it”

March on November 13<sup>th</sup>, at 12:00 pm in front of Congress.





Flora Tristan has made it a mission to speak openly about abortion. Talking about abortion opens lines of discussion, and it avoids the sustaining myths and lies about abortion. The organization has created a website: [www.abortolegalyseguro.com](http://www.abortolegalyseguro.com).

This site is entirely dedicated to provide information, guidance, and to create mobilization. AbortoLegalYSeguro is also available as a Facebook page, where people hold discussions; promote marches, videos and campaigns. The page also provides viewers or readers with information about hotlines they can call with questions about various concerns related to abortion in Peru.



5. “Vote in Favor of Legal Abortion to avoid Death”, women marching in favor of legalizing abortion in Peru, defending women’s right to chose and to live, as maternal mortality is high in the country

Through their Facebook page, pro-choice activists upload videos, facts, and information. Unfortunately, the Facebook page is open to all individuals and a lot of offensive, sexist and oppressive comments occur. While pro-choice individuals and representatives of the organization try to provide its audience with information, a lot of posts are often answered with anti-choice propaganda, insults towards women who have an abortion, and in general they try to mislead people into thinking that abortion is murder.

Even though this particular campaign has confronted opposition from the Church and the Government, Flora Tristan has not stopped spreading the word, publishing articles, and creating different forms of advertising to reach out to women. This is a sign that women are no longer afraid of the opposition and that they are ready to counteract with intelligent and real based information.



6. Women are pushed and hit by the police

### 3.2 Communal Kitchens in Peru- Popular Women Stream

In this section I will discuss a form of organization initiated by working class and poor women. The Communal Kitchens is a movement representative of women's drive, strength and dedication that have contributed the entire country.



7. Women cooking large amounts of food to share and divide

Improvement of living conditions is a gender as well as class interest. (Wesemael-Smit, 1988) There is a division of labor, non-exclusive to Peruvian culture. This division of labor is influenced by gender as well as other factors. Women and men have a particular role in the family, as well as in the community. Motherhood as well as wifely duties is particularly strong in Peruvian lower class. The task of safeguarding has been designated to woman in many cultures, and in this section I will show how much women's participation is of significance.



8. Slums in Lima

Communal Kitchens are the result of women taking their safeguarding duties to a new level. Before communal kitchens even existed, women participated actively and devotedly towards establishing their communities. When women with their families moved from dwellings and rural areas into the city, they worked side by side with men to build, or settle in new barrios (slums)



Because women have a better understanding of the needs of the family in respect to their living conditions, they played an important role in the decision to move away from their earlier dwellings,

Lilliann van Wesemael-Smit documented the following statement during her visit to Peru during 1986:

*“Men are cowards, they do not want to take risks and only think about their own well-being. We women are different; we defend our property with tooth and nail. Why? Because we think about our children, it has always been the women who have defended our houses, if necessary only with sticks. The men were not there, nor did they concern themselves with community affairs. It was the women who went ahead, leaving men behind. Just imagine it, those bandits. Afterwards they said we are weak, and that men protect and always watch over women.”*

### Women of Barrio

To showcase how communal kitchens came into existence I will use Lima as an example. Between 1940-1960, Lima grew at great speed. “The expansion of the city mainly took the form of invasion.” (Wesemael-Smit, 1988) Lima today, continues to grow in the same manner. During this first phase men and women had to protect their homes against the police, bulldozers, and who kept their stand firmly. The formation of barrios resulted in people organizing barrio-committees to legitimize their situation. Men leadership has been more closely documented even though it is known that women worked in the committees too. (Wesemael-Smit 12, 1986) “In some cases the participation of women in the struggle even led to the emergence of informal female leaders, who have played a significant role in defending the barrios. These women became aware of their possibilities and strength.” (Wesemael-Smit 12, 1986)

The following phase was to gain basic services such as water and electricity. Once more, even though men were chosen as leaders, women were the ones who marched for the rights to have water. According to Porter, “...once the most acute developmental problems are resolved, rates of participation in community associational activity and all form of political action tend to decline sharply.” (Wesemael-Smit 1976:102) What he means is that community activities and solidarity decline. However, when looking at the activities women continued to carry on throughout time, the opposite proves to be true. Women’s activism started from the beginning of the formation of the barrios, and it never ended; it continues to grow as the necessities of the community and their families change with time too.

*“Communal kitchen do not only aim to fill our stomachs, neither do they form the entire solution for our problems. They should be places where women can develop in order to claim and to struggle for the rights of the people.”*

### Declaration of women of the FEDEPJUP.

The emergence of the first communal kitchens occurs in Lima at the end of the seventies. There is evidence that the number of communal kitchens changed rapidly, in Lima alone in 1983 there were 200; in 1984, 380; 1985, 800 “Diaz Albertini speaks of 700 communal kitchens in Lima in which 14,000 women participate and which serve 70,000 beneficiaries.” One of the factors for the emergence of the communal

kitchens is the economic crisis. It was becoming more and more difficult for women to feed their families, by participating in the communal kitchens “they hope to join forces and to face the problem of food shortage and malnutrition.” (Weseamael-Smit 27, 1986) The phenomenon of the communal kitchens does not occur in Lima alone, but is a movement that rose in many other cities throughout the country.

### *Where did the food come from?*

What is interesting about the communal kitchens is that while women joined forces to help their communities, help came from outside. Because of the crisis, organizations such as USAID and the European Community gave food donations. Even though the food women received was not adapted to their needs, it did help sustain the kitchens. Political parties have also supported the communal kitchens. “Various political parties have actively promoted and facilitated the formation of communal kitchens. This applies to Accion Popular, the government party in 1980-1985,” another party was APRA, and the left party Izquierda Unida.

Why were women in charge? If prior to this event, men had always taken the leadership roles in other types of mobilizations and groups, what was different? According to Wesemeal-Smit, in the machismo ideology it is a woman’s obligation to provide food. “For lower class women this implies the work to be done to prepare a meal” (Wesemeal-Smit 1986:26) In Peruvian society, middle and elite women had servants, and they did not need to care about getting the food, making or preparing the food in any way. For lower class women it was not just about preparing the meals, but they had to find and fund the food too. This obligation is part of their role, a role that women have had for many years, even before they moved to the slums. Indigenous communities worked collectively in the distribution of food and water, and this is a tradition that has remained essential for people of lower classes.

How did it all work? The communal kitchens were mostly situated on the outskirts of the cities. Before the communal kitchens women had already organized in women’s committees and ‘clubes de madres’<sup>2</sup>, and they shifted to organize the kitchens. These groups try to offer people an almuerzo, (lunch) as it is the most important meal of the day. The lunch provides a soup, and ‘segundo’ (main dish that is served after the soup) Women would join to cook together in a room of a house, with minimum equipment and resources. “Most groups have a territorial base, the women come from the same living district or quarter.” (Weseamael-Smit 1986:30) Local parish acted as intermediary between western aid organizations that helped the country with food.

Women shared and rotated tasks from buying, to cooking to cleaning up. Once women had finished cooking they would distribute the food equally so each woman could take a portion of the food prepared to their homes to feed their families. Not one single woman received any kind of payment for the work they did because each woman contributed each time. However, women did have to pay for the number of meals she needed to take home. “The price of these meals is subsidized through the food aid which the communal kitchen receives.” Women of each area had a leading committee to administrate, formulate and execute the communal kitchens. Women did receive advice or assistance from figures outside of their committees such as an ecclesiastical figure or development agent representative.

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<sup>2</sup> Clubes de madres are women organizations that are created by women themselves to support each other and share information about different issues that are affecting them.



Besides participating in the communal kitchens, women developed other activities just as important. They organized literary courses, and social awareness courses; they gave legal assistance and formed primary health-care units.

With time, the kitchens strengthened and became more popular. In the mid-eighties, the communal kitchens became of interest to political parties, and the food started to be sold to people who did not take part on the work. Most importantly, some of the kitchens of Lima formed federations and tried to tackle issues together and cooperatively. Feminist organizations along with ecclesiastical organizations and development agencies started to get more involved and have a more active role in the lives of these women.

The communal kitchens are an example of the ways in which women are able to work together, help each other and contribute to their communities and society. Even when women received help from outside agencies, it does not take away their ability to create an effective system that guaranteed that their families would eat. At the time of the emergence of these kitchens, Peru was in a dramatic economic state, to deal with these obstacles women sought each other and figured out ways to move forward. The communal kitchens also provided a place for women to discuss further issues; after all, they shared a common struggle and desire.

#### *Other motives and views of the communal kitchens*

How are the communal kitchens empowering for women?

*“I want to feed my family and since my children are still very young I can not go out to work. Here at least we get one decent meal a day. And I am able to meet other women, which is very important for me, since my husband never lets me go out.”*

#### Woman of a Communal Kitchen in Cuzco

At first glance, the most elemental reason of why women joined the communal kitchens was to feed their families. However, food shortage and malnutrition is only one of the problems faced during an economic crisis. The communal kitchens allowed women to cut down food expenditures, and use the money saved for other necessities as urgent, such as education for their children. (Dias and Haak 1987: 32)

Another aspect that benefitted women was the time saved. Because they worked collectively, they could use their time taking care of the household, and most of them hoped to try to perform income-generating activities. (1986:39)

According to Lillian van Wesemale-Smit, who lived in Peru for short periods of time and talked to the women of the communal kitchens, there was a motive that might not often be discussed. “Women state that they want to talk about the problems they have in common and learn new things.” This is important, because women found a space in which they could share their fears, ideas and experiences, realizing that they are not alone in what they go through in their homes.

However, studies have also shown that it was not easy for women to join the kitchens.

Women have had to make sacrifices and endure pain to continue working for the progress of the kitchens. Most women faced difficulties with their husbands. (Wesemale-Smit, 1986: 44) Men had issues with women participating in communal

kitchens because it would show or expose a weakness on their part, some of the arguments used by men against their wives are:

- Participation would show the community that he has not enough money
- Food quality would be inferior
- People would start to talk about the fact that a woman goes out alone and does not spend time with her children
- The children would be unattended.

The resistance of the husbands is exemplary of the machismo mentality in Peru that continues to be strong.

However, women had a responsibility to their families, and they saw an opportunity to obtain certain level of self-sufficiency and empowerment. Their hard work proved fruitful. The kitchens had remarkable successes all over the country; by 2003 this women-led movement was one of Peru's integral food distribution systems with over 10,000 centers that serve over 3 million participants. Taking into consideration that Peru depends highly on expensive and imported food, the kitchens and its sustainability demands a lot of hard work. (Wilson 2002:30)

These women have recognized Peruvian economy's lack of self-sufficiency and they are pursuing an economic remodeling in which the needs of the poor become primary. "Since over 85 percent of Peru's wheat and milk is imported, these activists intend to lobby both nationally and locally for an increase in domestic food production in lace of commonly produced exports such as cotton and flowers." (Kawel, June 21, 2004) Through the communal kitchens movement, Peruvians are recognizing that control over their resources, choices and decisions is necessary for a healthy and democratic development.

What started out as a system of survival, turned into a large movement led by women all over the country. Even though international agencies contributed in some form, it was the women who designed the communal kitchen's system, it was women who carried out the organization, the distribution, and it was women who recognized that they could do a lot more together, besides cooking together. Peruvian women invested their time to improve their lives, the education of their children. They rebelled against their husbands, they learned from each other. Women were not alone in their struggle because they had each other, and the communal kitchens became a support system.

In conclusion, the Communal Kitchens do not challenge the divisions between women. However, the kitchens allow women to talk about difference and find ways to change their current situation. This is why, women of the kitchens are not only concerned with cooking, but they are concerned in improving living conditions, and claiming basic rights to erase the difference between people.

### 3.3 Us, The Peruvian Indian - Las Rondas

The organization Chirapaq is a women's organization formed by Amerindian cultures in Peru. This civil association was formed by indigenous people to build a plural and equal society. More importantly, "the organization seeks to create a society in which the rights, dreams and aspirations of the various Peruvian cultures. Chirapaq is highly dedicated and compromised with the indigenous woman, as she, according to the organization, is the bearer of cultural heritage."



This organization has collected stories of women from different areas in Peru to share the different forms of female activism, and it allows people to learn and know the struggles, political, social participation women have in their communities.

Because there are many differences amongst women, as well as many different struggles and forms of organization, it would be impossible to discuss all of them in this section. I would like to share however a particular story and example of women's leadership and dedication.

#### *What are Rondas Campesinas?*

The 'Rondas Campesinas' are forms of organization created by indigenous people as a method of self-defense and self-empowerment as a consequence of the disinterest and lack of support from the Peruvian Government.

In the area of Cajamarca, in the north Andean area of Peru, during the late 1980s, people were facing thefts and rustling in their homes and crops. The general discontent turned into protests and when protests proved ineffective people started to organize and form the Rondas. (Chirapaq, Catrejon, 1999: 25) It was not easy to gain recognition and respect, and even more difficult was for women leaders to be respected and their movement recognized by the authorities and the public. "In the end, this presence was imposed, without them [women] we would have never reach the level the rondas have gained." (Chirapaq, 1999:25)

Segunda Catrejon is a leader and representative of the Rondas. She shared her experience with the organization Chirapaq along with many other women leaders from different backgrounds and stories. According to Catrejon's story, women and men organized together because there was exploitation and abuse from corrupt authorities and judges. "When someone robbed our animals, the thief would step ahead of us giving gifts to the authorities, and then when we would go to them, we would get arrested no knowing why, since it was us who had been assaulted." (Catrejon, my translation, 1999:25)

The purpose of the Rondas in Cajamarca, Castrejon says, was to defend what belonged to them, as much as it was to gain respect from others and each other. The Rondas were and are free of any political party or political affiliation. The Rondas were formed by and for all the 'campesinos'. The more Rondas started to appear, the less authorities seemed to change. Women and men alike were victims of physical abuse, they were thrown in with the pigs, and they were insulted by the authorities and even by the thieves. "We suffered a lot to form the Federacion de Rondas in the Angamos area, because we were the first Rondas to exist in Cajamarca." (Castrejon) Women were often arrested without cause of reason. A lot of the demands against women were based upon false statements. Women were accused of kidnapping, home attack, though according to Castrejon, they were making justice.

Women not only had problems with the authorities and thieves, but they had problems in their own Rondas with their own men and comrades. "In sight that the companeros and our own male leaders misbehaved, and used arrogant words, and there was marginalization towards us, we decided that we would no longer be exploited by bad authorities and our own leaders." Castrejon has written. "Us, women, even though we don't have education, we have the right to express ourselves as campesinas and according to our own experiences." The women noticed that they were accused of robbing other people in their community and they felt they had to do something about those accusations along with protecting their homes, their pride and their rights. "From the moment a woman and her family occupy a piece of land and through sheer perseverance begin to make it habitable, individual and private, family domains are mingled with collective, public and communal ones. The roles of woman, mother and pobladora all overlap" (Kuppers; Villavicencio 1989:66)

As the women's Rondas grew and strengthened, women were able to solve many problems in their communities. Men and women talked to them about abuse, robberies, and other problems they encountered. In a way the Rondas became a support system for members of the community, it allowed women to lead, to take responsibilities and find solutions to help their fellow members. The issues that people in areas such as Cajamarca confront are often issues in which authorities do not take seriously, or use to take advantage. There are many cases of abuse of power in which campesinos and campesinas have had to pay for crimes they did not commit, or they have had to pay bail when there was no evidence of a crime being committed.

According to Castrejon, who has been a woman leader in her Ronda, the purpose of the Ronda is to bring justice for those who are often silenced. The people who are part of the Rondas, men and women, take turns to watch houses, animals and crops, therefore making it possible to keep thieves away. (Chirapaq 1999, 26) Castrejon has shared that the Rondas have faced challenges and some members have been either killed, physically abused, and some women have been raped. As it has been mentioned, authorities in many areas of Peru abuse their power position to take money or other goods from campesinos and campesinas. The Rondas became a system of internal justice, and it has granted women the opportunity to show that they can lead and solve problems, helping themselves and others. "Now, with the Rondas in the 'campo' we have moved forward with the work we have been doing that we have almost gotten rid off the rustling." Even though the government did not pass a Law to defend the functions of the Rondas, people still trust this form of justice in the rural areas.

To conclude, the Rondas are forms of expression by people who are discriminated against. People in peasant communities were facing abuse by the authorities, when authorities should have been protecting the people. There is a clear division of power, and women realized that they needed to take matters in their own hands. The Rondas do challenge racial discrimination by demanding justice in their communities. At the same time, women no longer stay at home, and they take on responsibilities that were considered male.



9. Andean and Amazonian Women meet to build a national agenda of indigenous women

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was meant to reflect the ways in which women have broken away from institutional structures and have spoken about their rights and personal struggles. The thesis was meant to reflect the ways in which women have created their own organizations, and how they have introduced other issues into the public sphere. Peru's history of abuse and discrimination towards certain groups of people shows that absence of nation unity and citizenship has affected people deeply. There are still high levels of poverty, violence, corruption and neoliberalism and a struggling government. All of these issues influence women's lives.

Women's perseverance to gain the right to vote is one example of women's efforts to gain equality and break from a traditional social structure. Voting rights did not help women advance in the political and public sphere though. The late 60s witnessed an emergence of dedicated women who joined political parties to fight for social change. After a period of time, women realized that the leftist parties mirrored gendered oppression. Feminists finally stood up against leftist parties, they resigned from their political commitments to a party and fought for matters that were of concern to them, and to them only. It took some time for feminists to recognize that their ideals were not representative of the entire female population. Feminists realized that their gender demands were about a particular group of women and not all women. Either way, feminists compromised with their newfound identities and decided that they would no longer subordinate to men's power.

Even though at first feminists did not represent all women, throughout time the concept of politics of location, and intersectionality became more evident and palpable. Feminists arrived at the discussion of difference, and the importance ethnicity, race, religion and sexual preferences have in a gender agenda. The feminist movement has transformed through experience, they had to work hard to gain credibility and respect. Today, Peru is one of the Latin American countries with the most feminist organizations. Feminism is a process, it is always growing, changing, transforming and adapting to new ideas, and new forms of expression. Organizations such as Flora Tristan and Manuela Ramos publish books, have radio shows, carry out workshops, conferences, and most importantly are more involved in the causes of women from different backgrounds. Feminists are not telling women how to run their organizations or how to deal with their issues, but they are creating spaces for discussion. For instance, Manuela Ramos has published a book called, "Voices of Andean Women" in which women speak up about their struggles, experiences, and dreams. Women speak openly about violence, their role in the media as victims or witnesses but not as a protagonist, their role at home, as mothers as wives, as widows, as leaders and as fighters. Feminists have constructed a collectivity and gave specificity to gender through an analysis that questions the real conditions of female existence.

Empowerment has been a point of major concern in political agendas of social movements. The women's movements in Peru have developed dynamics and goals according to the specific every day context in which women live.

As a result of the economic crisis and terrorism, poor and working class women found themselves in difficult situations. Food was scarce, there was no safety in their communities, and their children's education was at stake. The economic crisis created

the conditions for the development of popular women's organizations. Women's efforts have contributed to political awareness of poor urban women and to their recognition of themselves as a collectivity. Women of urban lower classes have gained greater roles in local decision-making. Women's movements and their demands have become more visible at a national level. Poor and working class women have faced many challenges to be able to leave the home and speak up. This has been significant for the women's movements, because women started to break silence. Through the communal kitchens, the milk programs and the peasant unions and associations women learned that they were not alone, that more women were abused. Women learned that they had something in common worth fighting for. Women showed leadership skills and worked hard to defend their communities.

"Unity among women is not given, but rather is something we must build, supported on our differences." (Vargas 1990:47) The differences between women should not be an obstacle to separate them. It was important for feminists to recognize that their first demands and claims did not represent all women. The recognition of differences has contributed to women working together. To protect and promote civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are significant in the process of gender equity. Indigenous women have also incorporated in their gender agenda the discussion of equality in respect to ethnicity. Peruvian women history of citizenship is multilayered, and the efforts made by women to empower their communities are an example of passive citizenship that can be transformed through action.

Women's realities are influenced by various factors. As a result of the complex interrelationships between the family and economy in Peru, class and gender were highly intertwined. There are many contradictions underlying women's lives, from class, race, age, to motherhood, and geographic location. Women's roles overlap, and intersect. Their dreams and ideals along with their needs and basic rights vary precisely because of these contradictions. The streams of women's movements are a result of women's distinct struggles.

The feminist women stream that started in the 60s with a small group of then called "crazy women" has grown widely. There are many feminist organizations throughout the country, each organization focuses on several aspects and try to find ways to improve the lives of women. Flora Tristan started in 1978 with a few volunteers and today is one of the largest feminist organizations. Flora Tristan organizes debates, workshops, it promotes women's rights, and it supports other organizations that work toward the empowerment of women. An issue the organization brings up all the time in the public sphere is the illegality of abortion, and women's rights to a safe abortion. Flora Tristan fights for abortion and sexual reproduction rights are significant for all Peruvian women, because the illegality of abortion affects all women, regardless of their background. Women of this organization have faced abuse by authorities when trying to protest peacefully, but this has not stopped them from campaigning for the recognition of women's rights.

The poor and working class stream emerged in the 80s in response to the economic crisis. The communal kitchens and milk programs started small, women from barrios met and discussed how they could find a way to feed their families. Women begun to take turns to cook, buy ingredients and share the final product. This system spread all over the country. Women's efforts drew attention from international organizations, and it is then that they received some help from outside institutions. The communal

kitchens did not only help women sustain their families, but it helped women create a space where they could be themselves and where they could share their personal struggles.

The stream of women's movement that emerged from peasant organizations emerged in rural areas. The dynamics between men and women in rural areas present a dominant patriarchal structure. Women were not allowed to get an education, learn Spanish, or have an opinion. Women were taught to be obedient and work hard. The peasant organizations emerged in rural areas to fight against authorities and thieves abuse. In these peasant organizations, women's participation was limited too. However, women confronted male leaders and started to create peasants organizations ran by them. It was difficult for women to break away from traditional systems, but they did, and by doing so they helped protecting their communities, crops and animals. More importantly, they stood against authorities and abuse inside and outside their organizations.

As a result of women's activism, there has been emergence of indigenous feminists groups. Andean and Amazonian women have created organizations, such a Chirapaq, to support each other, to discuss the issues that affect them. These indigenous organizations have a gender agenda, but an agenda that is inclusive of their differences as women. Through meetings and workshops women are learning of their position in society and the ability they have to create change. Indigenous women organizations want to fight for the rights of women, without ignoring their ethnicity and cultural background.

To conclude, women did break away from traditional institutional structures, and they questioned their position in society. Women have recognized their differences and are defying socioeconomic divisions. Based on the activities women are leading, Peruvian feminism and the voice of women will continue to transform and influence their empowerment.

I grew up influenced by westernization, and I can recognize that my individual struggles do not represent all women. While I grew up privileged, I grew up feeling as an outsider, and this has made me question my nationality, my roots, and my place of belonging. I find that feminism is involved in all aspects of my life. My identity as a Bolivian intersects with my Dutch heritage. I speak and write in English and not in Spanish or Dutch. Through my countless moves, part-time jobs, studies I have been able to see that difference does not always have to be a wall that divides people. I believe that it is possible to share struggles with people who are very different from ourselves, and I also believe that change needs to happen from within and women in Peru have demonstrated that they are willing to change their present and future.



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