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**Critically exploring the Judeo-Christian norms present in normative ideas about
sexuality among Limeña women**

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[Figure 1: Mochica ceramic art representing sexual acts.](#)

List of Acronyms

CdC:	Circuitos de Compartir (Sharing Circles)
CMHNTM:	Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas
CG:	Coloniality of Gender
RP:	Research Paper

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Abstract

This paper aims to critically explore the role of Judeo-Christian norms in the ideas, notions and experiences that women from Lima have regarding their sexuality, sexual agency and sexual pleasure. To do so, I will navigate the religious narratives we grow up with and which are reinforced in Lima's patriarchal gendered society.

The analysis in this paper is centered on decolonial feminist theories to challenge western epistemologies focused on scientific method, which devalue other types of epistemological creation, such as many of those originating in the Global South. Furthermore, this paper makes use of a theoretical framework centered on the enfleshment of our lived experiences as racialised mixed-race women in a conservative society to create new narratives of pleasure and eroticism.

Keywords

Judeo-Christian, religion, decolonial, feminist, sexual pleasure, sexuality, coloniality of gender.

Critically exploring the Judeo-Christian norms present in normative ideas about sexuality among *Limeña*¹ women.

First Chapter: Introduction

The choice of this paper responds to a personal need to give visibility and to go deeper into an issue that I find worrying in my country, and that is the relationship between sexuality/body-religion.

Coming from a conservative Catholic family, I lived in flesh the pressures of complying with Judeo-Christian moral norms in different aspects. One of that marked me for years were the norms related to sex as something you should not do or talk about, along with the idea of the body as sacred to one man, and the pressure to fulfil my role as a woman-wife-mother.

These pressures had a significant impact in my life because in my journey to distance myself from them, I noticed in conversations with different friends in my life, how many of them shared these feelings of guilt, as well as sexual and body shame. How hard it can be to resist these norms in a patriarchal and sexist society!

Thus, in this paper the reader will find my own personal journey in which I reflect and question together with my *amigas* (friends) the influence of Judeo-Christian norms on the normative ideas we have or had about our sexuality, pleasure, eroticism, and body.

In this first chapter I will delve into the context of my city and country of origin(Lima, Perú), followed by the relevance of conducting this research paper.

Next, the second chapter is influenced by feminist and decolonial theories of methodology, which allow me to refuse the still hegemonic idea of conducting research with positivist methods. This is especially necessary given my intention to make this research relational (Patel, 2016), where my stories are part of what I have to offer to my *amigas* with whom I conduct the *Círculos de Compartir (CdC)*.

The third chapter is composed of a theoretical puzzle in which I put at the centre of my framework the power of the feelings and experiences of racialised women, such as enfleshment from Hurtado, Nyanzi's concept of pleasure and Lorde's Erotic as Power. Also, having come across Lugones' concept of Coloniality of Gender in this academic master's life, I include it as a necessary part of understanding and questioning pre-colonial and contemporary religious and gender concepts. Subsequently, I use this concept to be part of a healing process for those colonial wounds that were present without being conscious. Finally, I refer to Body Politics, a concept that although in tension with the others, is useful for the purpose of making visible the policies of our bodies.

I considered it relevant to make a brief reflection on the concepts of sexuality and complementarity of gender roles in pre-colonial Peru to challenge the still present idea of the role of the submissive woman as timeless (and thus to stop naturalising it). This forms part of chapter four, along with comments regarding the Christian collective Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas and its current influence on the lack of sexual education in Peru as well as its involvement in Peruvian politics to avoid policies in favor of gender equality.

¹ *Limeña*: use to refer a woman from Lima, capital of Peru.

Likewise, the reader will find our conversations in the last Chapter Five on sexuality, eroticism, *pla-ser*, and the body and their interrelation with Judeo-Christian norms and their intimate relationship with patriarchy, for which analysis I rely on the authors mentioned in chapter three.

Finally, in Chapter Sixth I will share the reflections and lessons I have learned from living, sensing, reading (for) and writing this paper.

1.1. Our city, our context, our country

Lima, the city where the women of my *Círculo de Compartir* (CdC) and I are, is preponderantly religious and conservative. Indeed, an example of the religious aspect is the obligatory Catholic course that students must take during the eleven years of school, where they teach students dogmatic fundamentalism that leave no room for critical thinking, creating a circular reasoning based on the scriptures (Bible) to impose their arguments. In that sense, they teach us that there is a one male Almighty God; the irrefutable existence of a heaven and a hell, the latter being the eternal punishment for those who live a life in sin; the creation of the woman from the body of a man; the sin of the pre-marital sexual act, among other pseudo-truths. All of this to finally emphasise that we must seek a sacramental life as God's children.

The National Curriculum of Basic Education from the Ministry of Education (2017, p. 322) states that in education, it is as fundamental as it is necessary that people discover and assume the existence of a Being and a Truth that give us human identity and dignity; that they become aware of being God's children, created in his image and likeness, recognising him as the one who acts providentially in their lives and gives meaning to the events of human history. Regarding this, I wonder: do they want peruvian students to discover or assume? What Truth (in capital letter) is that? Why does our human identity and ontology have to be shaped by this catholic Truth as if living under any other option strips us of our dignity? Considering the importance education can play in shaping the identity of a student, the stated aim of the national curriculum sounds dangerously dogmatic.

On the other side, in relation to sexuality, a study carried out by Palomino (2003, p.157-165) on sexual and reproductive rights in the cities of Lima and Huamanga, the author comments on how "women's experiences of exploring or viewing their own bodies, genitals, commonly referred to as 'parts', were kept in the greatest secrecy. (...) No woman mentioned the clitoris, nor with an analogous term, despite its importance in female arousal and orgasm. (...) Some women in Lima also expressed their disbelief at the possibility of female masturbation, which they considered a dirty act (...). The notion of the woman and her functionality as a partner to satisfy male desire is reaffirmed".

I am not surprised by the findings of the study, indeed, women from middle class, cisgender, like me, especially with a religious background tend to grow without any knowledge of sex, sexual pleasure, or eroticism. We are mostly told in different ways, especially by our closest relatives (parents or female figure) what we are not allow to do when it comes to our own body, given that if we do not follow those rules, the society will perceive us like an '*chica facil*' which will have a negative impact in our life, given that it will be harder for a man to respect us. This led us to grow in silence regarding our pleasure, disconnecting us from our body and our sensations related to the erotic.

Additionally, there is another relevant context, and that is that Peruvian women live in a constant state of physical, psychological, and sexual violence towards them. According to the report of the

National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI) (cited in Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables, 2020, no pagination) regarding *Limeñas* situation of vulnerability, in 2019, 56.6% have suffered violence from their partner. Likewise, between January to March 2020 alone there were 8 femicides and 49 attempted murders. At a national level, according to the Interinstitutional Statistics Committee of Criminality (CEIC) there were 137 deaths of women victims of femicide (2019, p. 19).

And while I recognize that my class, skin colour and gender make me a privileged woman who experiences violence on a lesser/different level than other women, we are not exempt from the systemic violence that occurs in our society.

In this violent context, we² have asked ourselves questions that break with the silence that our society imposes on us. We have questioned why we do not talk about the body and pleasure, where did this almost ordinance of silence come from, what we feel or why we do not feel it, among other doubts. However, what most of us have not questioned is if there is any connection between our colonial wounds and our embodied erotic silence.

1.2. Justification and relevance of the research for development studies

When researching about this subject, I realised that the literature that exists on the analysis of women's sexual pleasure is primarily studied from a medical point of view (Nyanzi, 2011). The studies that have analysed power relations, the influence of patriarchy, the subjectivities that have been created by the influence of religion, focus on sex but as a biological-cultural category, that is to say, the study of sex and gender (Parker, 2009).

Likewise, in development studies the presence of the topic of the racialized women's pleasure (cisgender) as an important part of their sexuality, is still incipient (Antillon cited in Corwan and Jolly, 2016). The topics of sexuality in racialized women from latinoamerica are related to disease and reproductive rights with a strong focus on abortion (*ibid*).

Hence, this paper aims to add to the literature regarding sexuality an analysis of the construction of pleasure or the construction of eroticism, seen with a decolonial approach. As such it considers as a starting point coloniality of gender, and how our pre-colonial understanding of sex/erotica, as well as a feminist approaches, provide new lenses to understand how the Judeo-Christian norms influence our subjectivities and agency in such an intimate aspect seen through the stories of the women I will be sharing experience with.

To this end, the following questions will be addressed:

Main: How does contemporary Judeo-Christian norms shape *Limeñas* understanding and experiences of sexual pleasure?

Sub questions

- In what ways do *Limeñas* internalize Judeo-Christian moral values related to their erotic/pleasure?
- How have these moral norms and which other social norms shape their sexual agency and understanding of their sexual pleasure and bodies?

² The 'we' will be explained in a further detail in the second chapter.

- How have they resisted the influence of the power relations that come from the religious moral norms?

Second Chapter: The dialogue in the search for a methodology and the interrelation with my positionality

Deciding a methodological stance seemed easy at the beginning of the path of this RP. Given my background in corporate law, I had learnt that the correct way to do research was to assume a hypothesis, test it, which I intended to do through interviews, then analyse the data or information and provide my conclusions, following the 'universal' scientific method.

However, the feminist methodology was my first approach critiquing this dominant position as a researcher that states that we can objectively position ourselves in the research, what Harding (1992, p. 445) calls “God's trick”. Complementarily, given my own positionality as a mestiza, the decolonial feminist methodology crossed my path, which ended up influencing the methodologies and conversations through which this RP is conducted. By Mestiza, I mean a woman of (Andean) Indigenous and Spanish descent, who, as Anzaldúa (1999, p. 101, cited in Falcon 2009, p.663) points out, finds herself in a "space of contradictions and ambiguities", accentuated by migration to the Netherlands, a place where my *latinidad*, my *Peruanidad* and my indigenous heritage form part of my interactions, academically, at work and personally. Hence, as a mestiza in the Netherlands, I feel more than ever ‘sandwiched between two cultures and their value systems’ (Anzaldúa, 1999, p.100, cited in Falcon 2009, p.663) and even a third Dutch one.

2.1. The voice of reason, and the feminist approach

The need to choose an academic stance, methodologies, and epistemologies has been another personal journey. Given that now I am aware how citing is a tool by which we reinforce the type of knowledge that prevails in the academy and which does not (Dupuis et al., 2022), in this paper I have chosen authors and epistemologies that, in my opinion, resonate with the process of unlearning the dominant westernised concepts of research, body and sexual pleasure.

I began, as I briefly mentioned, assuming as someone with a legal background that socially obliges the rational to prevail over the emotional, that the ideal method of research was to follow a scientific, exclusively cerebral (as opposed to affective or reflective emotional), 'perfectly' objective methodology, that does not seek to relate to the people with whom I am conducting the analysis. This is what I call my previous voice of reason.

Nonetheless, as feminist and decolonial authors appeared in my learning journey (Rhee, 2020; Patel, 2016) I felt this voice of reason, which is primarily western, increasingly obsolete I asked myself, why could I not include my reflections in this paper? If I am going to write about a topic that is personal and intimate to me and my close friends, why should I be ashamed to write what I feel before, during and after the research? Or why shouldn't I recognize that the relationship I have with my friends is part of this research, and therefore I will not be aiming for objectivity but subjectivity and relationality?

In this sense, the feminist approach was a starting point to address these doubts and is one of the approaches I will apply in this paper. In particular, I draw from Dupuis (et al. 2022) because it aims to break with the type of research still dominant in academia that seeks to have a research object - research subject relationship, denying the existence of a subjectivity and innate assumptions of the person who is researching, as if being researchers we could somehow metaphysically detach

ourselves from what we are (including our gender, race, ideologies, etc.) in order to analyse the subjects of our research.

Likewise, a feminist methodology informed by Isasi-Díaz (2004) allows me to accept and embrace that as a researcher and writer of this work I do not need to completely set aside my language (Spanish) and my understanding of life as I ask questions (Smith 1989, cited in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2022) which are reflected on the research experience. More importantly, because this approach is an "embodied practice and this embodiment is evoked in reflections, memories, stories, illustrations and drawings as authors explore the importance of bodies and feelings in the ways feminisms shape their research and their lives" (Dupuis et al., 2022 p.9), I challenge the masculinised idea of emotionless, and unself-reflexive research, which ignores or deems unworthy of mention the power relations intrinsic to the relationships we form in our research.

2.2. Why telling stories?

The reflection on decoloniality generated in me a need to revalue my pre-colonial origins, and in doing so, my first flashback was not to remember the history I learnt at school (mostly written by white men), but the myths, stories and legends told to me by the old locals when I travelled to the provinces in the Andes, especially Lima. I went back to the stories that my *mamita* (grandmother), as a *huanuqueña* (Department located in the Andes) who migrated to Lima, told me about her life and her special knowledge of the natural medicinal herbs that we still use today to cure us of many illnesses.

Remembering my *mamita's* storytelling about traditional herbal medicine made me reflect again on what we modernly consider scientifically valid, and therefore socially acceptable knowledge and what is not. I now see these stories and practices as my *mamita's* (perhaps) unconscious resistance to accept that there is only one form of knowledge (Western medicine) related to health and heal.

Therefore, that is an important part of this work, resisting silences about our bodies, social expectations and constructions of how we should feel about our erotic selves, our understanding of pleasure, our agency in sex, and disrupting normalised feelings of guilt and shame, bringing awareness collectively to the systems of oppressions we were born and grew up with and live by (Motta, 2016).

Storytelling as an applied methodology for this paper allowed me and us to embrace and welcome different type of emotions, which is especially relevant for the stories touched in this RP. It also allowed me to construct collectively the aforementioned *CdC* in a "dialogue through nurturing safety and recognition" (Motta, 2016, p.43).

Due to this nurturing safety is that we were confident to speak out about our violent experiences as middle – class mestizas living in Lima, through a "narrative agency as an attempt to invert the charge of the that violence" (Egaña Rojas, 2018, cited in De Nooijer and Sol Cueva, 2022), to create ways of healing. In that regard, our storytelling becomes a "political act that alters the meaning and value of our diverse experiences" (De Nooijer and Sol Cueva, 2022, p. 248).

2.3. *Círculos de Compartir* as a decolonial methodology

The concept of Aminata Cairo's of Holding Space (2021, p. 302) as an "alternative space to the larger, dominant narrative give credence to one's value and humanity (...) where existence is resistance, are created out of a need, an answer to an inner calling to be armed in this world (...) a space for each other to use and acknowledge all of our humanity", and where we lovingly could

“shake conditioned behaviors that had hundreds if not thousands of years to develop, become seasoned and settle in” resonated with me when I first read it. I was sure that I wanted to create a safe space with the people I was going to do my research with, and I would like to highlight the ‘with’, because I was aiming for this space to be one where we, as a collective, could allow ourselves to talk openly about not only the questions I had in mind and previously shared with them but also to learn from each other and un-learned together, heal where there was room to be healed and care for the other.

To achieve this goal I previously talked to them individually trying to explain them that this space that we will create is a not judgmental space, we should be able to talk freely despite maybe the initial reactions or thoughts of being critics or criticized, especially because we are in the era where everybody thinks they have the right to negatively criticizes someone, we should aim for a space of love, and the reactions from some of them surprised me: one of them told me *‘I will be more aware of what I say or if I laugh about the experience of the other person’*, other said: *‘I know sometimes I am really not present in mind, but I will do my best’*, I am glad to say that these were not empty words given that I noticed a difference on the empathy and relational careness for the other person’s stories when we talked in our different groups, which in my opinion but in words of Cairo was a way of “stay focused and committed to uplifting the community “ (2021, p. 303).

Although I use Cairo's Holding Space as the main concept as part of my methodology, it is important to mention the existence and presence of *circulos de compartir, circulos de mujeres, colectivas de autoconciencia*, in our region (Gargallo, 2019; Ramirez, 2019), which even though they have different nomenclatures, have also the characteristics as a safe space in which women of different origins, races and classes come together to learn new ways of healing, which led them to expose themselves vulnerably in such circles, to unlearn in body the pressures and notions that the patriarchy has normalised for them and in others to find a network of support and sisterhood.

The main reason why I chose to do *CdC* and no other research methods such as ethnography, participatory, focus group, life stories, interviews is because I wanted to make this RP a relational one, avoiding repeating situations where I only extract information from the people who would be part of it. By being part of the *CdC*, I feel that it generates a form of relational accountability (Patel, 2016) with what I am going to tell them, what I am going to analyse, and what I am going to end up sharing. It was not easy. At first, I found it hard to talk about new experiences that even they, being close to me, did not know about, but I needed that discomfort to be truly part of the process and to give them the reciprocity that they were giving me by sharing so many stories with me.

2.4. Who is the ‘I’ in this paper, who are ‘we’, and who are ‘they/them’

My name is Jocelyne Bazalar Obregú, I am in my early thirties, I was born and raised in Lima, Perú in a big family of 8 (six children: four men and two women) and until I arrived at the Netherlands in August 2020, I feel I have lived in a mainstream bubble.

I come from a conservative family with catholic religious beliefs, and although I considered myself quite liberal, deciding to not being catholic and supported different causes that are not conservative such as abortion, the necessity to implement sexual education, LGBTQ rights, among other, I realized while studying this master’s the strong binarism of my mind; my understanding of sex or pleasure was quite westernized, meaning that it was reduced to obtaining an orgasm and I was unaware of the embodied knowledge, and feelings of the colonization that is remained in ourselves.

Having said that, this paper will reflect not only the academic objective whose questions are detailed below, but also my process of unlearning what for 30 years I considered normative, especially about gender, sex, religion, normativity, and decolonization; a process I invite the reader to do with me.

On the other hand, the main reason that motivated the topic of this paper was the conversations I had throughout the years with different female friends, about our body, pleasure, and sexual experiences. Observing that the components of shame, silence, lack of knowledge of what do we like, what provides as pleasure, were constantly present in our erotic/intimate experiences which were partly influenced by morally religious standards motivated me to delve into these experiences and try to understand how these normativities intersect with our pleasure, under what contexts, in what places, who intervenes, how it has affected us and how we are resisting them if that is the case.

Returning to the we, the women who were part of the *CdC* were formed based on intentions, meaning those who were excited and committed to share their stories with me, in a safe space (Cairo,2021), but being aware that these stories were going to be analysed in my RP.

They are women from Lima, mestizas, cisgender, middle class, like me, some of them also grew up in a conservative Judeo-Christian home, another in a home with apparent more liberal values, and another where religion was present in their lives but more in theory than in practice. For reasons of anonymity each chose a name for the present research. The sessions were as follows:

1. First circle: Angela y Paola.
2. Second circle: Julieta y Aida.
3. Third circle: Valentina

This RP uses a qualitative approach, with a series of semi-structured questions to initiate conversations with the women who were part of the *CdC*.

At the beginning, I had the intention of forming one big circle of women to share our experiences, but in the process of listening and interpreting their wishes, it seemed to me that it was more comfortable for some of them to divide them among those who already knew each other, since talking about such intimate topics would have been more difficult for them to open up emotionally with people with whom they have no relationship whatsoever. Valentina was the last to join my research, in one of our calls as friends I told her about my research topic and she was so willing and excited to talk about it that I improvised a final circle just between her and me, which was wonderfully vulnerable.

The conversations took place online, there were two sessions with each group and although at the beginning I thought that everything was going to be scheduled and the conversations were going to go smoothly, I encountered different interruption such as technological, or people from my *amiga's* home trying to appear on camera. These events, at times, made me lose the emotional connection that I was having in the conversation, which made me feel frustrated at the beginning but also showed me the limitations or different realities that one can have when trying to engage in this virtual space.

In this first phase, I feel that I kept very much in mind the intention of trying to not reproduce hierarchies or oppressive types of research (Potts and Brown, 2005); nevertheless the more I go back to the questions I asked and the need to try to control and redirect the direction of conversations, the more I realized how I was reproducing the power relations I was trying to avoid.

Being awake now of the fact that for many years communities in the Global South have been considered solely as 'research subjects', and the researcher has focused exclusively on analysing the data found, arranging it in theoretical form, so that privileged academic spheres can have access to it (Izquierdo, 2019), marginalising the 'research subjects', prompted me to refuse to do research in this way (Tuck and Young, 2014). Therefore, in this paper I try not only to write in a way that I consider understandable to a sphere outside the academy, but also to see how to break this distancing relationship. In search of a reciprocal *co-“sentipensante”* (Rodriguez, 2020), I involved my *amigas* in the final version of this research, as far as they would like to participate, to give them a voice and contribution.

Finally, as a reflection on who are 'they', I am aware that one of the limitations of this paper is that I am sharing experiences of people who (in the female gender) are considered normative in my society: cisgender, Spanish speaker, privilege women, and, therefore, I am leaving aside from this RP: indigenous, afro-peruvian women, *quechua/aymara* speaking women, women from other economic situations, handicapped women, trans-women, senior (60+) women, among others.

Due to time constraints and the impossibility of travelling to my country, I was not able to form a circle with women with more intersectional stories, and for this reason, I do not dare to generalise or uniformise the experiences of *Limeña's* women, as I recognise that we do not have shared the same reality when it comes to religion and sexuality.

Third Chapter: The Theoretical Puzzle

While reading about theoretical frameworks on sexuality, sexual agency and body, the most common approach on the topic was sexuality as a social construction to understand gender; sexual agency from a psychological lens evaluating the experiences of women categorizing them and analyzing the meaning in their culture (i.e Delgado - Infante, 2014) and body mostly seen under reproductive right lenses or related to health/disease. But the experiences that I will detail below are full of feelings and emotions regarding sexuality, and that was one of the central axes to build my theoretical puzzle: the emotions.

I call this chapter a puzzle because the theories that will be described complement each other, as I mentioned they have in common to put emotions, embodiment or enflesment at the centre of their frameworks.

First, I referred to Nyanzi's concept of sexuality which has a wide comprehension, including situations, struggles, feelings, structures, that conforms our sexuality and agency as an embodiment of these social experiences. In this section, I analyse the need to reposition pleasure in the conversations about sexuality which the consequent shift of power it can bring.

Second, I critic the constant dualism the body has been immersed and studied, to propose an understanding of the body as enfleshed experiences drawing on Roberta Hurtado's concept of enfleshment. This perspective argues for moving away from discussions of the body as site, geo-space, etc., and invites us to think, and more than think feel the stories in our flesh. On the other hand, I make partial use of the concept of Body Politics, although I am aware of its limitations and tensions with the concept of enfleshment that I prioritise in my analysis.

Third, I analyse the concept of Erotic as Power from Audre Lorde, and her unlimited ways to use our female eroticism to challenge patriarchy, silence about our passions, constraints of showing emotions, and how empower this can be for women.

Fourth, the concept of coloniality of gender (CG) from Lugones is extremely important to understand and critic the new roles imposed to racialized women post-coloniality, to de-learn naturalised patriarchal, and religious relations including our role in marriage and sexual relationships.

3.1 Why pleasure is not the main character?

With regard to sexuality, we can find a vast literature on the formation of sexual subjectivity, with significant divergence of opinion. Of note is the debate between the social constructivists centering around whether sexuality is shaped by society, and therefore, we cannot speak of a timeless, essentially static sexuality, as it changes depending with the periods and social structure (Rupp and Thomsen, 2016, p. 895) and the post-structuralists, centering the analysis of sexuality in society on “how we come to exist as intelligible sexual subjects in the first place” (ibid, 2016, p. 897) becoming gendered and sexual beings through “repetitive corporeal acts that are naturalized to the extent that we view such performative acts as a reflection of our inherent desires or identities” (Butler, 1999, cited in Rupp and Thomsen, 2016, p. 897). From my perspective, this analysis, leads us into abstract discussions about the constitution of the gender/sexuality category placing pleasure in a subcategory of relevance.

In that sense, the aim of this thesis is not only to analyse the answers to my research question and, by extension, the theoretical framework, but, as far as possible, to arrive to a conclusion- or starting point, depending on the reader's point of view - that will generate further discussion. This is because the act of speaking about pleasure constitutes a form of resistance in reaction to the silence experienced by women in Lima's society - and one could extend this to Peruvian society. Consequently, the aforementioned theories did not have an enflashed³ element that I could delve into.

Hence, Nyanzi's is more relevant to the present analysis, as the author invites us to think about sexuality and pleasure as associated with “emotions, sensuality, fantasy, intimacy, commitment, power, relationship, negotiation, exploration, exploitation, expression, trust, personhood, belonging, identity, pleasure, entertainment, consumption, obligation, transaction, dependence, work, income, resistance, abuse, masculine entitlement, feminine property, respectability, spirituality, custom and ritual” (2011, p. 48 cited in Marais, 2019, p. 89). Pleasure encompasses the elements above and does not exclude the fact that it is culturally rooted, an individually perceived expression, regulated by hetero-normative and hegemonic religious discourses, especially in patriarchal conservative societies like Lima's, in which its expression is allowed for some people, and restricted for others (Marais, 2019).

It is important to have discussions that see pleasure as a sexual right, not only in a declarative and theoretical way, but for the practical utility that these conversations and the relevant knowledge can bring to women's lives. If we better expressed ourselves and knew more about our own bodies, pleasure and eroticism, we could use this erotic power as a "political resource in transforming our various social spaces and ourselves" (McFadden, 2003, n.p.).

An example of the aforementioned transformation would be breaking with the religious idea that some of us grew up with that sex is bad, it is filthy, it is a sin and enjoyment is no part of the act. This sentiment is very present as we will see ahead in some of the *compartir* I had with my *amigas*, which ultimately translated in essentialist biological ideas that men were naturally sexual beings,

³A concept for enflashedment will be provided later on.

while women were not, and, therefore, the women that behaved openly sexual got socially shamed, reinforcing patriarchal ideas about gender and the power relations it implies.

3.2 The enfleshment and the body

The epistemology of the body has evolved from challenge the enlightenment philosophers who analyze the Cartesian body-mind dualism, by which the mind was conceptualised as rational, intelligence, strong, often analogous to whiter men, while the body was associated with emotions, fickleness, irrationality - often, considered the realm of women, animals, the poor, and as a result of racialist ideologies from the 19th and 20th centuries (Oyewumi, 2005) to another dualism, that of the space-time: Body as a place in which power relations are expressed and through which, by our own agency, we decide to act out different roles (space), and at the same time, where these roles change according to the discourses and ideas of the society in which the body exists (time)

For this paper, I choose to partially challenge the different theories of body seeing through a space-time definitions and conceptualizations, using instead the concept of enfleshment from Roberta Hurtado (2019, pp.30-31), given that it “brings flesh back to the bones of Latina experiences to map not only targeting of Latina flesh by coloniality but also infuse an understanding of sentient-flesh into her experiences, redirecting focus away from the body”, generating a more real narrative about the sexuality we experience as middle-class mestiza *Limeñas*, in a violent geopolitical and social context in which we grew up, developed and, without knowing it consciously, in many cases, resisted colonial ideas such as the shame of our sexuality, which differs from how open sexuality was represented in our pre-colonial cultures (Figure 1).

On the other hand, although the concepts of Body Politics and enfleshment are in tension, given that the former returns the body to the centre of discussion and analysis, I will use the concept of Body Politics to the extent that it refers to the “politics of administering and governing of life where the body is measured and analysed in an array of strategies that produces the modern sense of gendered individual and social subjects” (Foucault 1976; Harcourt 2009, cited in Harcourt, 2019, p. 248), which helps to visibilise patriarchal gendered bodily experiences of mis *amigas* and the policing of female mestiza bodies from a conservative society which discourse of maintaining the ‘traditional family’ is still very present from civil actors but with a strong support from the State as well.

3.3 Erotic as Power as a fulfill way of living, thinking, and feeling

The only image included in the extract from 'the erotic as power' published as a pamphlet for the 1978 Conference on the History of Women where Lorde's paper was submitted, reads 'your silence will not protect you', a short statement that generates powerful emotions in those, like me, who grew up with the idea and the feelings of acting incorrectly if we did not complied with the maxim of silence about our erotism.

Audre Lorde has challenged me, and hopefully it will challenge the reader to think beyond anatomically pleasure. Before reading Lorde, I used to confine sexual pleasure to clitoral stimulation and the physical sensation it made me feel, but the author invites us to look at our own erotism as an “unexpressed or unrecognized feelings rooted in our spiritual and female plane” (Lorde, 2000) and realise the power they have and the power we have when we embrace them.

In that sense, Lorde's eroticism framed in the sexuality and experiences discussed in this paper, will serve to analyse through different lenses, the embrace of feelings generated in conversations about our intimate experiences; the knowledge about our bodies that we have learned and that we

recognise, in other cases, that we would like to know more about, ‘demanding most from ourselves’ (*Ibid*) in our relationships, which ultimately makes us feel empowered in our lives.

3.4 Coloniality of Gender

In ‘Visualizing the body’ (2005), Oyewumi tell us of how Yoruba society was organised in a non-gendered way, generated in me the first critical seed of whether my pre-colonial society was also organised on the basis of such characteristics as seniority, wisdomness or roles, or any other different than gender.

But the real question is, why have not I asked myself if there were a different social reality in the *Inca*, *Wari*, *Nazca*, *Tiahuanaco*, etc pre-colonial societies in my thirty years of living? If language is a social construction that reflects the way a society is organised, what could it say about our pre-colonial society that *Quechua*, one of our traditional languages, has no grammatical gender? I had to recognise the erasure of knowledge that modernity marked in my ontology and epistemology, which has led me to assume as a reality the timeless existence of the patriarchal, heteronormative, anthropocentric society I know.

This recognition leads me to include CG as part of the theoretical framework to be used, in order to analyse the "gynecratic equalitarianism" (Lugones, 2016, p.24) through which the natural deities (*Inti*, *Pachamama*, *Quilla*, etc) that complemented each other (moon and sun, earth and water) were replaced by a single, male, white, supreme God and scriptures (Bible), written by men, disposing the indigenous woman who previously had access to roles of power, from a religious moral point of view, to an inferior role in society. In addition to this, the idea of community (*Ayni*) was destroyed and the nuclear family structure was implemented, with westernized gender roles that continue to influence to this day (Lugones, 2016).

CG helps this paper to unravel how as a racialized women we have experienced the discourses and structures imposed by this heterosexualist system, the control of sex, the gaze they have towards us as over - sexualized beings and at the same time virginals/ *señoritas de su casa* to have social respect.

Reflection and connections:

As a further reflection, I consider relevant the time constraint for the present RP I had, as I could not delve into other relevant theories and concepts related to embodiment, *cuerpo-territorio*, *Abya Yala*, or even theories that position *sentimientos* even more centrally as part of the analysis of experiences.

Regarding the connections, to close my theoretical puzzle, I should mention that Nyonzi and Lorde, helped me and some of my *amigas* understand our limited westernized concept of sexual pleasure and erotic, which eventually became part of my (and in some cases our) resistance to social norms related to sexuality.

The enfleshment concept from Hurtado and CG from Lugones made as look further about our colonized religion and imposed roles on women. I rely on them to navigate the Judeo-Christian colonial norms that has shaped our sexual pleasure which have enfleshed in ourselves. Likewise, I use both concepts to understand how these moral norms affect our sexual agency and pleasure in our own skin.

Finally, the concept of Body Politics was helpful to give visibility on how our society polices our bodies in different ways, showing how other social norms shapes what can or cannot do with our own female bodies.

Fourth Chapter: Peru – a brief context about sexuality and the struggle of power around the topic in our society

This chapter consists of a brief reflection on the role of the women and sexuality in the precolonial Peru. The objective is not to make a historical account of our pre-Colombian and *Inca* cultures, much less romanticize the type of society we had pre-colonialism, but to shed some light on the existence of other social systems in which our female sexual subjectivity and rights were different from those of today, which we unconsciously take for the reality that always existed. I believe this reflection is relevant for those who, as me, are trying to use decolonial lenses in their research and, more importantly, trying to unlearn the mainstream concepts about our bodies, senses and roles.

On the other hand, considering that Peru is a secular country with a high religious interference in politics, I will discuss this relationship by analysing the important intervention of the collective ‘*Con mis hijos no te metas*’ in the setback of having a comprehensive sexual education policy.

4.1. The erasure of a complementary society – a reflection

When you are taught history, you realise you know? That we, women, have always been subordinate to men, and that is the way that it has been since... well, forever.
(Valentina, CdC, 2022)

But take the Incas, for example, the Inca is seen buried with several women, so I think that there were also differences (of gender) and the woman was submissive to the man, because at that time it was only the Inca, a male figure governing. (Aida, CdC, 2022)

I also remembered our pre-colonial history as Valentina and Aida, the dominating figure was the *Inca* (the male figure of the last culture that was defeated by the Spaniards) and the women were dedicated to housework and childcare, subjugated to their patriarchal culture.

Although it is difficult to have reliable histories of what pre-colonial Peruvian society was like, given that most of the documents we have are chronicles written by the Spaniards, seen through European lenses, it can be said, according to various studies, that the female/male role and the role of sexuality in our societies was very different from what we know today.

In her book "La Mujer en el Perú Pre-Hispánico" (Women in Pre-Hispanic Peru) Maria Rotsworowski analyses the different roles that women and the feminine had both in Inca and pre-Colombian cultures. In relation to the feminine divinities, she highlights the *Pachamama* (the earth); *Mama Cocha* (sea); *Urpay Huachac* (fish and seabirds) which were related to covering people's needs, complementing the male divinities related above all to natural phenomena, such as avalanches, seismic movements, storms, lightning and events that had to be controlled through sacrifices and offerings, denoting the important presence of what was considered feminine in Inca cosmology, by elevating it to the category of divinity (1995, p.6).

Likewise, Rostworowski (1995, p. 11,12) gives an account of the different roles of power women used to have access, such as the position held by the *Capullanas* of the Piura region in the north of ancient Peru, who could even leave their husbands and marry another, or the famous *Curacas*, rulers of an *Ayllu*, the *Ayllu* being the form of political, social and economic community in which the *Inca* Empire was organised. Similarly, Beatriz Guardia highlights the duality in the *Inca* cosmovision regarding the feminine and masculine. Guardia describes (2013, p.44) how men and women could base their right to the resources of the *ayllu* through various sets of systems that governed access to the wealth of the community. Women inherited these rights from their mothers, including access to land, water, communal herds, and other needs. In this sense, we can see how *Inca* women had land and economic rights that did not depend on their condition of being the partner of a man of the community, rights that were taken away from them during colonisation.

Regarding sexuality, there are several stories and sculptures that reflect how sexuality was seen as a natural part of the different Peruvian cultures. According to Rostworowski (1995, p.17), one of the practices that the Spaniard priests tried to eliminate because they found them aberrant and sinful were the practices that implied sexual freedom. Couples used to live together before marriage and in case of a break-up, the young woman would return to her *ayllu* with the child she might have had as a result of the relationship, which would be well regarded according to the historian, since children meant an additional work force for the community. Evidently, the sexual freedom with which women acted put at risk the maintenance of the nuclear family, the basis of Christian society today, and the idea of the necessary female virginity that should be religiously maintained.

In order not to romanticise or idealise the situation of women in pre-colonial times, it is worth pointing out that just as there were women in power with their own economic rights and what we would now consider greater sexual freedom, there were also women who were chosen, without considering their will, to live only for the *Inca*, confined in the *Acellabuasis*, with no possibility of living a life other than the one they had already chosen for them. The situation of the women chosen by the *Inca* shows what some authors would qualify as an example of *entronque patriarcal* (Guzman, 2019) showing that patriarchy was present before and after the conquest. However, I consider that given that patriarchy is intrinsic to capitalism and its forms of exploitation as domination in society, I would not use this term to refer to the situations of subjugation and/or gender inequality that *Inca* or pre-*Inca* women may have experienced.

Finally, the reflection on this section add to my personal de-learning process, challenging and resisting contemporary Judeo-Christian norms that has shaped our lives, not only theoretically but on an ontological level. I cannot generalize this de-learning process on all of my *amigas* but some of them indeed, show surprise knowing about the existence of a different pre-colonial reality regarding gender roles and sexuality which is a starting point to keep discussing further the subject.

4.2. The close relationship of Peruvian politics and Judeo-Christian religion. The role of the social movement 'Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas' as a major actor in the discussion of the inclusion of a sexual education in Peruvian schools

When observe at the regional level that countries such as Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile are advancing in the protection of reproductive rights and gender equality with the decriminalisation of abortion, comprehensive sexual education, and/or the legality of marriage for same-sex couples, among others, it is relevant to ask what is happening in Peru, since not only are we not advancing on issues of gender equality, but we seem to be going backwards with the election of ultra-right-wing conservative representatives, as has just happened with the recently elected mayor of Lima, Rafael Lopez Aliaga, a member of Opus Dei, who has stated that "the whole

gender doctrine is obviously going to be exterminated, this gender approach is an ideology that destroys families, life and the innocence of children" ⁴.

Rousseau (2022) also points out that the anti-gender opposition, which they call 'gender ideology' began as a social movement in 2011, reacting to legislative initiatives that were being presented such as the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In 2016, the Archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani refers specifically to 'gender ideology', a few weeks before the massive march Ni Una Menos against the systematic gender violence that was experienced against women in the country (Redacción Mulera, 2016, cited in Galera). In his declarations, Cipriani affirms that this type of campaign (referring to Ni Una Menos) damaged the dignity of women, as women and mothers, imposing the so-called "gender ideology" (Redacción Mulera, 2016, cited in Gallego and Romero, 2019, p. 17).

That same year, "the National Pro-Family Coordinating Committee (CONAPFAM) together with the Save the Family Foundation organised a meeting between different Christian movements and political personalities with the aim of signing a document called the 'Declaration of Lima' which expressed a commitment against gender ideology and a warning of war against the State and its secular policies (Castro, 2017). The event was attended by the then mayor of Lima, Luis Castañeda, and several congressmen. This was the beginning of the collective Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas (CMHNTM)" (Rousseau, 2022, p.11).

It is undeniable that the formation of the CMHNTM collective carries with it a Christian religious, conservative and even more worrying political component, given the support it has been shown to have from different congressmen/congresswomen and mayors.

The CMHNTM collective's slogan is supposedly to defend life and the family, and, hence, they call themselves pro-life or pro-family, creating a polarised figure in society (González et al. , 2018; Vega, 2017) in which there are those who act under the 'divine mandate', and on the other side of the spectrum are the pro-gender, 'progressives' (a term used to refer to those people usually with socialist political and liberal ideas. Although they present themselves as a civil collective, Gonzales rightly points out that it has been planned from the most fundamentalist religious sectors of the evangelical spectrum, articulated in the Coordinadora Nacional Pro Familia (CONAPFAM), and in coordination also, although with less prominence, with the Catholic Church (Gonzales et al. 2018, p. 93-94).

The idea of family that they defend is the heterosexual patriarchal nuclear family, denying the existence of any gender/sex other than male or female, essentialising the role of women to the sphere of reproduction and care, and to this end, they try to exert control over female bodies through their fight against the legalisation of abortion, the emergency pill and some figures have even demonstrated themselves against regular contraceptives ⁵.

It is not difficult to assume that as far as sex education is concerned, the CMHNTM collective showed its total rejection to the incorporation of comprehensive sex education in the educational curriculum at the national level. In 2016 they marched against the inclusion of topics related to

⁴Ortiz, S. (2021) "Rafael López Aliaga: "Toda la doctrina de género, evidentemente va a ser exterminada," *El Comercio*. Available at: <https://elcomercio.pe/elecciones-2021/rafael-lopez-aliaga-toda-la-doctrina-de-genero-evidentemente-va-a-ser-exterminada-renovacion-popular-entrevista-elecciones-2021-noticia/?pref=ecr> (Accessed: November 7, 2022).

⁵ Neldy Mendoza, catholic catechumenate, ex candidate to the vicepresidency of the politic party *Renovacion Popular* from Rafael Lopez Aliaga, stated in a conference that women who make use of contraceptive pills were raped by their husbands. With no references to any sources, she added that 89% of family violence were experienced by women who were using contraceptive pills. *El Comercio*. Available at: <https://elcomercio.pe/elecciones-2021/rafael-lopez-aliaga-que-dijo-neldy-mendoza-la-candidata-de-renovacion-popular-sobre-las-mujeres-los-anticonceptivos-y-la-violencia-familiar-elecciones-2021-noticia/>

sexuality in the educational curriculum and requested the elimination of these topics as well as the elimination of any topic related to sexual orientations, which according to the collective encouraged homosexuality. This led to the document being revised again and after a massive march in 2017, two ministers of education were dismissed for supporting the inclusion of gender equality (Gallego and Romero, 2019).

Another of the objectives that the CMHNTM collective seeks is the inclusion of parents in the approval of school textbooks, as they consider that sex education does not belong to the State, insofar as it is a subject that should be discussed, or as we can see throughout this paper, should not be discussed, at home; in other words, the CMHNTM collective wants to perpetuate the silence on sexual matters, with the consequent control of the hegemonic heterosexist religious patriarchal ideas that this entails for people.

Unfortunately, the CMHNTM collective continues to have a strong presence as a counterweight to inclusive policies and gender equality; however, I consider it important to mention how feminist resistances, especially the Ni Una Menos collective have been making the personal and the private political, politicising the intimate world, which in our Lima society is influenced by Judeo-Christian or biomedical approaches (Baez, 2016), and in this sense, they resist the biological essentialisation of the sexes, the roles that are still being imposed on us and gender violence.

Lastly, the relevance to look into CMHNTM movement is to explore in contemporary Peru the Judeo-Christian and patriarchal values that shape *Limeña's* sexualities, in this case, the ideas that a women's body is not her own but serves to conform a family; the silence regarding sexuality that maintains virginal religious ideas and phallogocentric ideas regarding pleasure; the need to control the knowledge about sex in a private sphere, leading us to grow (by default) with a pornographic understanding of pleasure, affecting our idea of orgasm, erotism and other concepts related to our intimate life.

Fifth Chapter: From the flesh – Our stories, *nosotras*

As I mentioned in the methodology chapter, for the purpose of this paper I formed three *CdC*: First *CdC*: Angela and Paola; second *CdC*: Julieta and Aida; third *CdC*: Valentina.

5.1. A glimpse of us

At this point I would like to share a little about us. For this purpose, I asked each of my *amigas* if they would like to say something about themselves so that the reader can try to visualise them and create a special connection between the reader and the stories that are shared. At first it seemed to me that they felt a bit self-conscious about giving a self-description about themselves, but then they were willing to say a few brief words, which I will complement⁶.

The reason why I felt compelled to add my own perspective about my *amigas* is because on some of their stories, their personal struggles, their journeys, and even in certain aspects of their personalities I find myself. This is one of my ways to have a “relationship-building” research, challenging western forms of neutrality research (Datta, 2018, p.6).

⁶ The personal opinions I add in the brief descriptions they made about themselves was the first part of the RP shown to them as the beginning of the promise of reciprocity I made to them.

Angela

I consider myself an empathetic person, I like to listen to people, to know what they think, what they like and what they do not like. I am interested in talking about this subject because sometimes I have certain blockages, and it is good to talk about it, to let it out, to say it. What else? I think I am a liberal person, in the sense that with me there is no problem to talk about different topics, I think that if a person wants to do something, I respect what that person wants to do, the only thing I ask is that they respect that if I do not want to do it, they do not force me to do it. (Angela, SC, 2022, translated by the author)

Angela grew up with two very strong maternal figures, her grandmother, and her mother. Her grandmother was evangelical, her mother was evangelical at one point, then she decided to become Catholic, then agnostic. Currently she considers herself agnostic as well.

In my eyes, Angela is a combination of a sweet and strong woman at the same time, physically and maybe in a first impression she might even look delicate and reserved, but when you get to know her you realise that she is very opinionated and if she sees that something is not fair, she will not shake her voice to say that she agrees or disagrees with what is going on. Like many of us in our 30s, I think she is in a moment of seeking and doing professionally and personally in life what she is passionate about, and among those things is seeking experiences by travelling, which I think has helped her to open her mind to other realities and to have less prejudices. I can talk to her for hours on any subject, because as she indicates, she is a good listener, and an excellent friend.

Paola

I think the most important phrase to describe myself would be: I am getting to know myself, what I want what I don't want and in that process to give myself peace, and to silence my critical voices. (Paola, SC, 2022, translated by the author).

Paola, like me, grew up with a mother who actively practiced Catholicism. Nowadays she believes in the Catholic God, but does not actively practice the religion, in her words she is a Catholic in her own way.

Paola is a reserved person, until she feels comfortable (like me). She is very joking, sensitive, and almost always laughing her way through life. As she mentions in her brief description, I think she is at a point in her life where she wants to feel and is feeling very comfortable in her skin, breaking traditional ideas about love, and learning to enjoy her own company. I admire her because many of us who grow up with ideas of romantic love find it hard to break the cycle of repeating relationships of emotional dependency, to work daily to feel grateful for the little or much we have, and to try new things in life that go outside our comfort zone. I have known her for a long time and she was the first person who came to my mind when I wanted to do this paper, because she, without knowing it, is one of the people with whom I most shared my resistance to the religious moral norms that I felt circumscribed my personality and my being.

Aida

I come from a Catholic family, super conservative. My dad had a pretty passive attitude, and my mum was overbearing. I went to a Catholic school, and I grew up feeling like I could not ask questions about my sexuality or even explore it much because when I tried to do so, the response I got was to have my feelings and curiosity invalidated. (Aida, SC, 2022, translated by the author)

Aida also believes in a Catholic God, and in religion itself, plus tries to go to mass from time to time. Within my different circles of friends, there are few who have chosen motherhood, Aida is one of them.

Aida is an energetic, supportive woman and an excellent mother. She does not mention it in her short description but I could say that she is a mother who tries to instill in her children a different upbringing than the one she had, I know she wants to form a relationship of trust with them and break some macho stereotypes. Aida is a very strong woman emotionally and with a big heart. When I was growing up I remember a saying my mum always told me: One is first a mother, and then, a woman... which implied that you should always put your children first even when whatever is going on in your personal life ends up making you unhappy, if the children are 'well', that is all that matters. Aida reminds me that it is not healthy to live that way, that we must first seek to be happy as a person and with that mental and emotional strength, be able to give a better life to your children.

Julieta

I come from a non-conservative Catholic family, and I could say that I grew up with freedom of expression but also somewhat overprotected. I would not call my family strictly liberal because I feel that I did have restrictions growing up, but I was not instilled with Christian moral values. (Julieta, SC, 2022, translated by the author)

Julieta considers herself a Catholic, but does not actively practice the religion.

Julieta is one of those people who gets what she wants in life, she is organised, methodic, extroverted and she always speaks her mind. I think she is also one of the most adventurous people I know, she does not seem to be afraid of any challenge and if she is, she barely shows it. Although she is quite into corporate life now, I think deep down (or maybe later in life) she would like to have a much quieter lifestyle living in a small community where there is a sea nearby, because she is a water being. I feel a lot of affinity with her because she is a very empathetic person, and although sometimes a bit rough around the edges, you know you can count on her as a friend.

Jocelyne

I am 34 years old, I come from a large family, I have four brothers and a sister, I am middle class but have not stopped experiencing serious economic struggles. My family is conservative catholic and, like many families in Lima, I grew up in an environment that could be described as *machista*. In my journey to find myself as a person, I realised that feminism helped me not only to be able to say the things I always wanted to say but because of shyness did not say, such as talking about sex openly without taboos and seeking gender equality in the spaces where I shared or worked, but also made me feel that there are many of us who, under different experiences, want to change our reality to feel that we can live in a more inclusive society. I consider myself cisgender but currently questioning the tastes that I recognise are now socially learned and the things that I always considered 'normal' about attraction to the opposite gender. Decolonisation has been a big change in my life, because it has helped me to unlearn notions of what I considered as 'better' or 'more developed' and to see how the colonisation of power and gender is still very much present in our bodies, our minds and ourselves, consciously and unconsciously, and has been, and will continue to be a struggle that I believe is necessary to go through.

Valentina

I grew up in a family with Christian beliefs, during my childhood and adolescence I was taught to obey God, to pray, to respect others; however, I also had freedom of opinion and decision. At the age of 28 approximately I understood that I had to believe in a superior entity, in a God, perhaps in the God that my parents believed in. Now, at 34 years old, I consider myself a feminist woman, with freedom of decision, about the way I speak, dress, act, that nobody should have an opinion about my body, that nobody should decide about me and for me, I respect people very much, for me we are equal, and we should have the same rights and opportunities, and for the same reason, I also consider that I should be respected and treated with equality, as well as all women. (Valentina, SC, 2022, translated by the author)

I have known Valentina for many years, she was one of the first friends I met whose mother gave her a lot of freedom to be herself, which I found very refreshing. I think Valentina, like many other women, has relied on feminism for the sisterhood she feels, and for the self-confidence that feminism can help her achieve, the sense of rebellion it generates and the need to be more outspoken about unjust causes, attitudes that I see reflected in her. I am lucky to have someone as noble as her in my life.

5.2. When the *cállate!* sounds louder

Given that the all the conversations took place between the evening and early morning hours in the Netherlands, I felt a special sense of reflection when talking about such intimate topics with my *amigas*, almost like a therapeutic catharsis of the experiences I had lived through.

One of the questions we discussed was whether in our homes, our parents talked to us about sex, pleasure, or sexuality.

Angela: This is a subject that was simply ignored. Neither my grandmother nor my mother talked about it. I think I have always been the most modest of my friends - she says, smiling a little embarrassed. And even when my friends started talking about it (sex), for me it was like 'no, shut up! or don't say it out loud'.

Jocelyne: And that happened with all your circles of friends?

Angela: Yes, because if it wasn't talked about in my family, why should it be talked about elsewhere, right? But as I grew up, little by little I realised that whatever religion I followed (Angela followed at some point Catholicism and in other moment of her life Evangelicalism) the topic was still taboo and in fact when I moved away from religion, I felt free, and that I could talk about sex in peace.

Paola: Well, I learned about sexuality with my friends, because I don't think I learned anything about sexuality from my family, nothing, zero. I felt that, as I told you, for a long time I felt that sexuality was a sin and something I was doing wrong, 'giving myself to someone', because he was going to lose interest in me. It was pure guilt, right?

In our stories we find silence as a common denominator in our homes, lives, and experiences. Additionally, for those of us who grew up under strong Christian moral canons, talking or having sex was not only silence but sin, and therefore guilt, as Paola points out.

To discuss the phrases shared above, I must start from the theory that the Judeo-Christian religion is a social construction, unlike Christians followers who speak of a timeless belief in an all-powerful, omnipresent and omniscient God who created the world and the rules written in the Bible, I state that there was a before and after the Christian God and the rules of the scriptures that were imposed on us as part of colonisation, which I have discussed in greater depth in the previous chapter.

Likewise, the Judeo-Christian religion frameworks what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in society, what aspects it regulates, among them what it means and what is the role of women, men, marriage, sex and of course, the consequences of not complying with these norms, such as infinite hell, and on the contrary, the reward for complying with the norms, which is eternal rest in heaven.

These religious norms have a detailed and codified disciplinary power (Foucault, 1990, cited in Spade and Willse, 2016), exercised through the Church and civil society. They "reach into the minute details of our bodies, thoughts, and behaviors" (Ibid, p. 554), which leads to us growing up and developing in a society with a 'legitimised' moral religious ideology, that becomes naturalised as it is embedded in our culture (Mejia, 2001, p.52).

As the academic Maria Mejia (2003, p. 46) points out, "the Church has been in charge of the negative conception of sexuality: sex-sin, sex-reproduction, the denial of pleasure, the guilt associated with sexuality, have marked the consciences and lives of millions of people, especially women", starting from the fact that in the biblical literature it was a woman who was guilty of original sin and continuing with the most important female figure of the Catholic Church, the Virgin Mary, who represents an essentialist figure of the role of women: self-sacrificing and suffering mother, virgin and obedient to the designs of Christ (Muñoz, 2014), we can observe the main characteristics of the woman that our patriarchal religious society expects from us both in the intimate and public aspect.

In silence you can hear a lot, you can see and feel a lot.

In the silence that we live and that was imposed on us in other cases, we feel the categories and roles created for us by this colonising religion.

In the silence about the possibility of doing something as naturally human as having sex with a person, and in my case, the ever-present phrase that *'tienes que llegar virgen al matrimonio y no caer en el pecado, hijita'* (you have to be a virgin at marriage and you must not sin, daughter), I felt guilt, like Paola, and I wondered if what I was doing was really so wrong and unforgivable, so sinful. How can you enjoy sex with all those thoughts and feelings that you are doing something innately wrong, how can you even think about having sex if when you hear the word, you are completely ashamed like Angela?

Several times I questioned myself, but why do I have to be a virgin at marriage (later I questioned the idea of marriage, but that is another part of my life). My mother once told me how even in our family we had a relative who had gotten pregnant without having sex, according to the version of this relative, who was a generation older than my mother. How ashamed could we, women, feel, about the sinful sex to the point of saying that we conceived a human being like the Virgin Mary?

If we look at the Virgin Mary more closely, we see different messages, she was a pregnant woman who does not experience sex, the Bible de-eroticises her, and makes of her a womb that produces a divinity, and, in this way, the original sin is not been reproduced in her (Lagarde, 1990). Mary does not have a role of her own in the Bible, Mary belongs to someone, she is not like Christ, creator of Heaven and all things, nor like Jesus, who came to save our sins, Mary is not by herself, and those characteristics of woman: non-eroticised, virginal and suffering mother, continue to be embedded in our experiences.

Aida's mother also gave her messages about the importance of virginity, and Aida told us how she felt after having sex with a man for several years:

Aida: My mum used to tell me to take care of myself for the love of my life. Despite these messages, I started to experiment (sexually), but that message from my mum got to me so much that after (having sex) I would start crying, I mean, imagine! after being with someone, I would say to myself why did I do this? and I would keep crying.

The messages that Aida (and others of us) had from her mother was not only that she should not sin (keep her virginity), but that eventually, as part of our life cycle, she was going to get married, to a man of course. This discourse comes from the Christian idea that we are naturally going to choose heterosexual marriage.

Evidently, the institution of marriage is the institution for which the religion discussed in this paper is most vigilant, and with respect to marriage and sexuality I agree with what was stated by Mejia (2003, p. 48) "the traditional interpretation of the natural law of sexuality says that God designed human biology in such a way that sexual intercourse results in procreation and the birth of children, who must be raised by stable unions to satisfy all their material, spiritual and collective needs. From this, the church concluded: sex in marriage is designed for procreation and outside of it is both sinful and morally irresponsible", and this is where the control of our sexuality originates, since if we have no sexual desire, there would be no need to seek sex with anyone other than those men (in cisgender couples) with whom we are marrying, and in this sense, the State along with the religious clerical elite, which has a strong presence in places of power in our Peruvian society, is in charge of making us fulfil our role in society of watching over the institution of marriage. (Castilla, 2009).

5.3. "I did not know I could feel this type of *pla-ser*"

Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'Tedtalk (2009) 'the danger of a single story' has shown the world how a hegemonic discourse or history, in this case, the European colonizing discourse, affects people's perspectives on their identities, ways of life, and types of society, by establishing what is considered better or right, causing them to reproduce those realities even if they are very different from the people who reproduces it. In this case, the author reproduced a world different from her own, where they drank ginger beer, played with snow, among other experiences that she herself had not experienced in her native Nigeria.

That single story can be seen in our own stories in relation to the intimacy we experienced and how we grew up unaware that having sex with someone else also gave us the right to feel pleasure other than the actual penetration of the act.

Julieta: I think that in general, the subject of women's pleasure has been taboo, at least in my case. I started having sex and I really was not even aware that I had to feel something - she says, opening her eyes as if she was absorbed that at some point, she thought that.

Not even society made me understand that I could also have an orgasm - Aida nods in support of Julieta's idea.

I have experienced sex a lot, and nothing! and you know why it happens? because deep down you have it in your head that having sex means that the man has to come (to orgasm) and that is it, it is over, as if you were a tool for the other person.

Aida: You know, I think it starts from home because I mean, nobody told me you have to feel pleasure too. Nobody told me that - she says in a slightly indignant tone.

So I did not know... If a guy does not come and tell me "we are going to work so that you feel pleasure" I don't think I was ever going to feel orgasms because no one ever told me that.

Now, I remember that when I was younger, pleasure for me was orgasm, right? But now that I have been growing up and discovering other things, pleasure for me comes with cuddling, patting... I mean, I have been refining my taste, and now I know what other things I like in intimacy.

The stories of Julieta and Aida show us the hegemony of a single story in which all the women (and many more) with whom I spoke, including myself, have been forged, and it is the story of how we have understood and been forged in the concepts of sex, eroticism, and feminine pleasure in our religious-patriarchal society.

To unravel this single story, I begin by pointing out that I share the position of academics that argument that sexuality is a social construction, therefore, it is shaped by the society we live in; and our desire and identities, are formed dynamically in the relationships we have with each other's (Rupp and Thompsen, 2016), with our race, ethnicity, social position and other categories playing an important role. In that sense, we grow up as mestizas from Lima, daughters of a society that saw the prevailing annulment of eroticism (Marcos, 2011, cited Garcia, 2020) in our *Inca* and pre-colombinas cultures that still subsisted/co-existed at the time of colonisation.

The story that shaped us is encrusted with sinful religious ideas about sex, and the idea of "vaginal intercourse - but not pleasure - as a necessary and inevitable evil for the reproduction of the species" (Amuchastegui and Rivas, 2004, p.551). Although the idea of sin was a burden that weighed on both genders, Amuchastegui and Rivas (Ibid) point out how explicitly women were not to express sexual desire in an obvious way, maintaining their passivity in the relationship and, creating a gap in knowledge about their own pleasure and eroticism, allowing this to be limited to penetration as the entire satisfaction of the sexual act.

This phallogentric sexuality and passive positioning of women's eroticism was further supported by different 'sciences' and essentialist theories about the biological difference between men and women, according to which women are uniform and homogeneous, all inherently non-active in sexuality, who must be persecuted, insisted upon, and in some cases raped, because men are naturally sexual beings, and have an 'animal' urge for sex. Discourses that can be heard explicitly and subliminally to this day, as Angela and Paola show:

Angela: Well, you just reminded me of what my male friends used to say to me, when I was (in a relationship) with my ex-boyfriend, they used to tell me, 'oh, my friend, you know, don't you?, I mean, el hombre propone y la mujer dispone (the man proposes and the woman decides), it is what it is' and I was left wondering whaaaaat? - she says with a gesture of complete disbelief.

Paola: Yes pff, because at that age (about 19 years old) there couldn't possibly be a scenario in which the woman is just as horny, and I say that because you had to be the 'señorita de su casa' ... so that the boys wouldn't take you for a facil (an easy woman).

At the beginning of our sexual lives, we internalise the passivity with which we are categorised as mixed-race women, and not only that, but we are also denied to the possibility of having eroticism other than vaginal intercourse, by acting under the influences of what is considered 'normal' in our sexuality.

Sexual pleasure centered on phallogentrism has also been the subject of assertions by psychologists of great influence in modern times, such as Freud, who indicated that "the libido is of a masculine nature, whether it appears in the male or in the female and independently of its object, whether male or female" (1905, cited in Lagarde, 1997), adding that "a woman who fails to transfer her

sexual sensitivity from the clitoris to the vagina at puberty is regressive, infantile, neurotic, hysteric and frigid" (Geiger, 1977, p. 14), given the 'useless use of the clitoris'.

And these narratives formed part of the only story we grow up with about our pleasure and bodies.

At this point I must make a disclaimer, regarding a conceptual bias that I have been trying to battle with when writing about sexual pleasure given my westernized view of it. In a first phase I equated sexual pleasure or sexual awakening with the discovery of the clitoral orgasm, which many times, in my opinion, is even more intense and pleasurable than the one that could be obtained through vaginal intercourse.

The relevance that I gave to the clitoral orgasm was because, personally, it helped me to know my body a little more, and that did not depend on whether or not I was with a person, it was me, my feelings, my thoughts and my body, and I think that this awakening in knowing what you like ends up influencing the relationships we have with our partners as we will see later, because I break with the ideas that my pleasure depends on my partner, and that I can only get it with someone.

Nevertheless, Lorde and Nyanzi challenged me to think and feel pleasure differently.

The aforementioned authors, reminded not only of how talking about sexuality has been medicalised throughout history, and in countries like Peru, it has been strongly studied from the point of view of illness and reproductive health, under predominantly heteronormative lenses, and when it is not studied from heteronormativism, it is limited to a theoretical study of gender; but also that it is necessary to go beyond the Western understanding of sexuality and sexual pleasure and erotica in order to re-discover ourselves, shift the power of phallocentrism in our intimate experiences and see how this new river of empowering feelings and resistances influence in other areas of our lives.

In this respect, the wider concept of Nyanzi cited in chapter three urge us to leave behind essentialist conceptual binaries of sexuality that limit us in identities and categories such as whores-ladies of their house, sexual-frigid, mother-nonmother, so that we can see how our sexuality is shaped by this mixture of feelings, situations and expressions that we can show for example through art, and in the normalisation that we are not only the identity that they wanted to impose on us, feel freer.

In the reconceptualisation of sexuality, re-thinking and talking about our *pla-ser* is relevant, insofar as it illuminates the capacities we may have from the skin, the soul, the feelings (Tamale, 2011, p.30 cited in Marais, 2019, p. 89), feelings that as *mestiza* women we have been taught to deny, to be afraid to own it, in order to continue playing the role of 'being the persecuted', to not take initiative, to not speak it out loud, to minimise it, but at the same time to live sexualised.

This *pla-ser*, which looks at the feminine self as full of eroticism, and full of feelings that urge to be felt, heard, thought, and spoken, finds its place as part of Lorde's eroticism, who compels us to see it as "an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honour and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves" (Lorde, 2000), because in the connection with this *pla-ser* lies one of the many spheres of power we have, to challenge the supremacy of pornographic, male oriented pleasure with which we grow up and normalize. In that sense, it gives us the opportunity to re shape what an intimate relation should be about, putting our *pla-ser* back into our hands.

In the same line of thought, I believe that when one opens the doors to the connection with that erotic being, it also opens the opportunity for the discomfort of having felt that our pleasure and intimacy depended on our partner, or was for him (in our cases), to become a political voice against religious machismo, having seen how in our most intimate aspect they have tried to police our bodies and our feelings. Therefore, we move from reflection and bewilderment, and perhaps pain, to demand changes, for a non-conservative state, without the interference of the Judeo-Christian political elite, for a sexual education that is absent, and for state sexual policies that not only focus on reproduction but also on *pla-ser*.

5.4. Our bodies – *nuestras resistencias*

After talking about the sex education that Valentina did have for a while in a state school, which I found quite unusual, because there is no national policy to include sex education in the curriculum, I ask Valentina what was the approach to sexuality or sex she received at home, Valentina approaches the camera, gets serious and tells me '*to talk about sex at home? Joce, how can I explain to you, if my mum thought she could get pregnant by kissing someone. She was even afraid of kissing!*'. I would like to say that I was surprised by that statement (since that would imply that it is something atypical), but since I had heard the story of getting pregnant without having sex before, I could only say 'unbelievable', unbelievable the result of perpetuating ignorance about sexuality in society.

Valentina's mother, born in Cusco, although Catholic (she was raised that way), did not consider herself an active Catholic, and thus Valentina did not grow up with the messages that sex is sinful or 'you should leave this house dressed in white, daughter', which made me think at one point that her upbringing was, unlike mine, quite liberal.

However, the liberality is not such if we see that indirectly Valentina receives a message of control over her body, which, although unconscious and not malicious, still exerts power over her and her decisions about her corporeality and sexuality. In Valentina's case, the message she received was '*do not get pregnant, just take care of yourself!*', she tells me, and that is what she did.

The reality is that this control of our bodies and on our subjectivity has been exercised for centuries. We grow up thinking that it has been always that way, and that is why it is important to rethink the meaning and concept of the *mestiza* woman as we know it today, which is not timeless, nor are the roles that have been assigned to us in society. Maria Lugones and her concept of CG shows us the impact that the category of colonised women still maintains within the social, religious and economic pyramid that was imposed on us and that we have embedded to date, a category of inferior status, which had to be maintained as such so that the new forms of organisation of society could function properly, that is to say, the destruction of the family clan (*ayllu*) by the creation of the nuclear family with the role of the servile woman destined for care and reproduction, and the consequent elimination of women in roles of power as were once the *Señora de Cao*, the *sacerdotisas* (female priest) of San Jose de Moro, among other outstanding women of our cultures. In the same way, to impose the modern-colonial system it was imperative to eliminate the plurality of Gods that we had in the *Inca* era, most of them related to nature, in which the complementarity of the masculine with the feminine was extremely relevant, to be replaced by the veneration of a single God, male, white, European (Allen, 1986, 1992, cited in Lugones, 2016) with the null or servant role of female figures as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Nevertheless, that subjugation meets resistance, in our bodies and flesh marked by the stories of our great-grandmothers, grandmothers and mothers. In my case, an indigenous great-grandmother who did not want her daughter to dedicate her whole life only to be 'of someone and for someone', giving her the education she could with her minimum resources, and a *mamita* who refused to be

forcibly married off by the people she worked for when she was still a teenager, running away from a future that had already been written for her, from the role of being a wife even though she did not want to be one, and from the role of being a mother even though she did not feel ready at the tender age of 16.

These are not only stories of our ancestors, these are experiences that go through the being, sentient-flesh experiences (Hurtado 2019, pp.30-31) that generate pain, courage, admiration, and resistance, especially when decades after what they lived through one can see that the society that taught them that it was not appropriate to speak Quechua because Spanish, the colonising language, was the one spoken by intelligent people; that a *señorita debe serlo y parecerlo* to have the respect of society, which implies not talking too much, not showing too much skin, not being overtly sexual, is still repeating the same violent ideas in 2022, the year in which I am writing this thesis.

I highlight the importance of CG because it invites us to think about the relations between the feminine and masculine pre-colonial, to see that the binary division of society was not timeless and is a strong realisation in life for those who, like me, and like my *amigas*, in a small reflection that we made about it, think that there has always been a feminine and masculine gender, there has always been patriarchy as we understand it today, evidencing how we have universalised the fact that gender is an organising principle, with its subsequent power structures. There is power in the knowledge that knowing that it was not always the same reality, and knowing that we were not always on the bottom ladder of knowledge and political positions, generates rebellion. As Anzaldúa states (1999, p.48 cited in Rivera, 2019, p.245) "knowledge makes one more conscious and aware but knowing (the action of knowledge internalization) is painful because after we are not the same person we were before.

At this point, I must indicate that while our *relatos* have shown how heteronormative patriarchal religious norms played an important role in the construction of our sexuality and agency, there was also resistance to them.

When we started talking about our bodies, Paola told me that she felt little self-esteem in relation to her physique, and that this, plus the Catholic guilt of having sex, meant that the intimate experiences she had were not pleasurable. But over the years, she has become more comfortable in her skin.

Paola: *Now I would say (to the man) here touch me this way, to guide him too, because they don't know your body, and now that I know what I like, I say it.*

This transformation was also experienced by Aida, who told me that now she would not remain silent if the person with whom she is sharing her intimacy does not put interest in her pleasure, which for her is both emotional and orgasmic.

I congratulate them, who have broken the cycle of silence in the intimate, and I also consider it important to note how, without knowing it, they have also (we have) exercised resistance through the conversations we have had for this paper, especially when there are still state policies and pronouncements that restrict the sovereignty we can have over our bodies and sexuality, such as the criminalisation of abortion, the lack of empathy of the authorities in cases of street harassment which in many cases ends up re-victimising the victim, among others.

All these sanctions and indifference on the part of society towards us demonstrate the body politics aspect of our bodies, as something to be administered and regulated to maintain the heterosexist gender norms and, in this case, the religious ideas that govern us.

Sixth Chapter : Let us continue talking about it - Final reflections and lessons

The experiences shared in this paper allowed me to understand how Judeo-Christian colonising norms are embedded in our society and families. These norms had shaped our sexual subjectivity as cisgender women, under their standards of what is 'right', how we should behave to be respected, what we should not do with a partner, what we should not do alone, what we should not talk about even though we are naturally curious about sex.

The issue of moral punishment, feeling shame or feeling sinful are particularly powerful feelings that are generated by these religious discourses in the home to control our sexual agency and keep us unaware of our sexual pleasure.

This ignorance provoked by the silence that is demanded of us about sex, ends up turning us into subjects who shape their sexuality under a patriarchal phallogocentric culture. In this sense, our first (or many) sexual experiences are limited to the activity of having vaginal intercourse, omitting other forms of pleasure and eroticism.

However, in the last stories we can see that the situation does not end with us in the dark about our own pleasure. At some point in our lives, we feel that we take back some power over our own intimacy when we discover what we like, what provokes us, and experience an eroticism other than pornographic. This leads us to demand not to be only part of the pleasure of and for a man anymore. We resist without knowing.

We resist and fight the guilt and false sins. We resisted the role of a submissive woman. We resisted by talking about it to discover together *pla-seres* in life, because talking and sharing is also how we learned about sexuality.

Finally, I must confess that this paper has been part of a journey of knowledge that I did not know I needed. I started thinking and organising my research questions on the basis of sexual pleasure from the westernised concept of the clitoral orgasm, to now explore in my eroticism other concepts of *pla-seres*. I have opened myself to others *conocimientos*, which concept I take from Anzaldúa (2002, p. 541. cited in Rivera, 2019, p. 245) as a one that “requires confronting what you have been programmed by your culture to avoid or unknow (*desconocer*). The path of *conocimiento* necessitates that we confront the traits and habits that have distorted how we see the world”.

I began this master's believing in the timeless and universality of a binarism in society such as woman-man, mind-body, among others, ignoring how the current gender role of the *mestiza* woman was a product of our violent process of colonisation.

Nevertheless, now that I have *des-borrado* the erasure of a unique story created by the modern-coloniality system (Quijano, 2007), I return to my roots to re-evaluate them and continue my process of un-learning with my *amigas* about the power immersed in our feminine erotic self, and with those who want to join me in this journey as well. *Sigamos compartiendo*.

Figure 1



Ceramic from the Erotic Room of Museo Larco, Lima, Perú (Briceño, 2018)



Ceramic from the Erotic Room of Museo Larco, Lima, Perú. (Briceño, 2018)

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