VIOLENCE FOR THE RECORD: AFRO-PERUVIAN WOMEN AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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To my family for their unfailing love and support, and to the women of Afro Peru for keeping me focused
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<td>CEDET</td>
<td>El Centro de Desarrollo Étnico, the Center for Ethnic Development</td>
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<td>CEDEMUNEP</td>
<td>El Centro de Desarrollo de la Mujer Negra Peruana, The Center for Development for the Black Peruvian Woman</td>
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<td>CONAPA</td>
<td>La Comisión Nacional de Pueblos Andinos, Amazónicos y Afroperuanos, the National Commission of Andean, Amazonic, and Afro-Peruvian Peoples</td>
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<td>ENAHO</td>
<td>La Encuesta Nacional de Hogares, The National Household Survey</td>
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<td>ENCO</td>
<td>La Encuesta Nacional Continua, The National Continued Household Survey</td>
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<td>ENDES</td>
<td>La Encuesta Demográfica y de Salud Familiar, the Demographic and Family Health Survey</td>
</tr>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>The International Labor Organization</td>
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<td>LIO</td>
<td>Ley de Igualdad de Oportunidades de Mujeres y Hombres, the Law of Equal Opportunity for Women and Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>INDEPA</td>
<td>El Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo de Pueblo Andinos, Amazónicos y Afroperuano</td>
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<td>INEI</td>
<td>El Instituto de Estadística e Informática, the National Statistics and Information Institute</td>
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<td>PLANIG</td>
<td>El Plan Nacional de Derechos Humanos 2006-2010, the National Plan for Human Rights 2006-2010</td>
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<td>PNCVFS</td>
<td>El Programa Nacional contra la Violencia Familiar y Sexual, the National Program against Familiar and Sexual Violence</td>
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VIOLENCE FOR THE RECORD: AFRO-PERUVIAN WOMEN AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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Due to the introduction of an ethnicity question on intake forms in women’s emergency centers (CEMs), Afro-Peruvian women’s experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV) are being rendered visible by the government. This dissertation takes a black feminist approach to understanding the socio-political context in which violence against women of African descent takes place, the way it has been rendered invisible through stereotypes, and the methods that some women use to protect themselves from abusive partners without relying on with government resources. I consider the way social constructions of race and ethnicity shape intake workers’ decisions about classifying black women and the implications that their choices have for official data records that only include numerical data about Afro-descendant women’s experiences with violence. This work is the result of 22 months of research in CEMs in Lima and Callao, and interviews primarily conducted with Afro-descendant survivors of IPV and CEM workers.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Commitment

As most of my experiences in Peru, this project came as an unexpected, trying, and immeasurably fulfilling surprise. I find myself in disbelief as I consider that I have written a dissertation about Afro-Peruvian women and intimate partner violence for two reasons. One, I did not want to work in Peru. Truth be told, I ended up traveling to Peru for the first time in 2009 because Colombia, the country I had my sights set on at the time, was experiencing high levels of violence in parts of the country where large portions of the Afro-Colombian population reside. Intrigued by the descriptions of race dynamics in Peru as told to me by a friend who I would end up making the trip with, and an eye-opening performance by Perú Negro, a folkloric troupe from Lima, I decided to venture into Peru.

Two, I did not want to work on gender violence. Upon finishing a documentary on Afro-Peruvians and a completing a master’s thesis on two activist groups while filming two years prior, I found myself in search of a dissertation topic. My relationships with the activist community were strong, but I felt that I had spent enough time as a participant observer to have developed some gendered critiques and questions about what I had seen, particularly in regards to the silence around issues affecting Afro-descendant women. Discussions of violence as they pertained to Afro-Peruvians openly consider acts of intimate and interpersonal violence, and many of the women I spoke to felt that they were expected to wait until racism was eradicated before problems they faced as women could be addressed. These sentiments have been articulated by other women of African descent throughout the region (Safa 2005;
Alvarez 2000; RMAAD 2009). I wanted to put my skills as a budding anthropologist to use in a way that would be useful for the people I had come to care about. Course work brought domestic violence—more specifically, intimate partner violence (IPV)—back to the fore, and I became interested in recent studies on Peru that pulled issues of racism into analyses of violence against women (particularly Alcalde 2007 and 2010; Theidon 2012).

My professional and personal interest in domestic violence grew alongside strong feelings of trepidation. Should I follow through with this? How would I deal with violence research? How would the project be received? What had I gotten myself into? Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ words rung true: “so-called participant observation has a way of drawing the ethnographer into spaces of human life that she or he might really not prefer to go…” (1993, viii). When Gerald Erchak (1987) wrote his critique of the way anthropologists had ignored domestic violence in their studies, he attributed it in part to our roles as “uninvited guests” in communities we work with, who, as a result, have a tendency to ignore unsavory aspects of culture to avoid casting those we study in a bad light. Anthropologists who study violence have also made mention of this in more recent writing (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003; McClusky 2001).

When I proposed my ideas for this project to friends in Lima they were supportive and excited at the prospect of making black women’s stories visible, especially those that could reveal the realities of intimate partner violence. They claimed to have seen or heard about instances of this kind of abuse while working with women even though no one wanted to talk about it, and recognized it as one of many kinds of violence faced by women of African descent. They thought that a black woman with ties to the community
and an affiliation with a US university would be well-suited to the task; women would talk to me, and the state would listen. It seemed that this was a project that did not want to let me go, and so, once again I committed to Peru.

**In/visibility**

In the simplest of terms, this dissertation undertakes the task of making Afro-Peruvian women’s experiences with intimate partner violence visible. I consider the ongoing systemic and social invisibility that surrounds this particular kind of violence, examine timely state efforts to rectify this problem, and draw attention to the ways in which these tactics do, and without further attention and thoughtful adjustment, will continue to hide important facets of its nature. I acknowledge that the project of state visibility is on-going and never complete, as noted by scholars who have critically and thoroughly analyzed this process (cf Scott 1998 and Merry 2016). They argue that the diversity and complexity of life within the boundaries of any given state is too nuanced to be captured in its totality by a single overarching governing body to the same degree that it is understood by those who live their realities every day in their communities. Although complete visibility in the eyes of the state is unattainable, abandoning efforts to affirm the presence and gather more information about Afro-Peruvians would be to the detriment of this population. Invisibility continues to be one of the cruxes of Afro-Peruvian activists' demands for state attention and action in favor of Afro-descendants. There continues to be great uncertainty regarding basic characteristics of the population, including its size, and overarching issues it faces. This has been done with good reason. The continued lack of visibility is detrimental to the well-being, dignity, and existence of Afro-descendants both individually and as a collective identity group. Apart from being inherently violent in its erasure of the population’s history,
contributions, and legacy, it also facilitates the continuation of severe social and systemic injustices against Afro-Peruvians.

To talk about women of African descent and violence is to actively dismantle the invisibility of inequality around violence, blackness, gender, and class in Peruvian society. This has been a central objective of black feminist theory and praxis throughout the Americas, and so I rely strongly on the insight and writings of black feminists—particularly Afro-Latin American feminists who themselves have been rendered invisible at times due to the politics of publication—to make sense of what I observed during my time in the field. Additionally, I highlight how a new ethnicity question on state intake forms for women who have been abused reveals local understandings of race and ethnicity, and limits visibility for Afro-Peruvian women who have reported. I present my research findings and insights with the goal of improving policy and practice for a specific group of women who have been systematically barred from discussions about intimate partner violence (IPV) and whose experiences are important to consider as we seek to create effective solutions. I believe that this is crucial to the disruption of neoliberal multiculturalist politics that tout cultural diversity while preserving racist, sexist, and classist hierarchies that continue to oppress and denigrate Peruvians of indigenous and African descent (cf Hale 2002, 2006; and Curiel 2009). In this regard, my aims for improving policy and practice are in the same vein as those of recent anthropological projects that contest neoliberalism and its impact on women of color (as presented in Crista Craven and Dana-Ain Davis’ [2013] book Feminist Activist Ethnography).
This dissertation was informed by the accounts of twelve Afro-Peruvian women in heterosexual relationships who sought help in Centro Emergencia de Mujeres (women’s emergency centers, CEMs) in the Constitutional Province of Callao, a region to the north of Metropolitan Lima. I base my analyses on what I learned about identity, race relations, and IPV from the process of finding and following these cases, and interacting with CEM staff over an extended period of time—22 months in total. I was also heavily influenced by my experiences participating in activist work with other Afro-Peruvian women, many of whom are also activists and friends, as we collectively undertook the work of creating a space for ourselves to reflect upon our lived experiences and work towards developing our own black feminist discourse. The lessons I learned over the past two years as a founder of the collective called Mujeres Afrodescendientes: Presencia y Palabra (Afro-descendant Women: Presence and Voice) have helped to frame my outlook and my work.

**Literature Review**

In this section I provide more in-depth context regarding the processes of visibility that are currently taking place on different fronts—violence against women, race and racism, Afro-Latin Americans, and Afro-Latin American women—that form the basis of my study.

**Violence Against Women**

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines “violence against women” as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” This project narrows the focus to consider
instances of intimate partner violence (IPV). While domestic violence is a term used to encompass violence between nuclear and extended family members including partners, IPV specifically refers to acts of violence committed by a current or former intimate partner, including spouses, civil union partners, or less formal relationships including sexual partners (WHO 2016). Peru has one of the highest rates of IPV in Latin America, with over 50% of women having experienced violence at the hands of a current or former intimate partner over their lifetimes (WHO 2005; MIMP 2013). According to ENDES, the Demographic and Family Health Survey, in 2015 70% of the women interviewed said that they had been abused physically, sexually, or psychologically by their partner or husband in the prior twelve months (ENDES 2016). Although the past few years have seen a slight but steady decline in the percentage of abused women, the Peruvian rate of intimate partner violence remains alarmingly high—higher than both regional and international averages (WHO 2016).

At the state level, former President Alberto Fujimori ratified important human and women's rights documents, including the Beijing Platform in 1995. He also passed the first laws against domestic violence in 1993 (Güezmes, Palamino and Ramos 2002; Boesten 2006). Although his motives would prove to have had more to do with his interest in gaining international support and diverting attention away from the rampant corruption taking place in his government, Fujimori’s actions gave way to the creation of a legal framework that continues to be used to protect women from violence (Boesten 2006). The simultaneous boom of gender specialist NGOs allowed feminist activists to ground their claims in a set of new regulations while violence and crimes against humanity were fresh in the minds of Peruvian citizens (Alvarez 1999).
The increasing levels of national and international awareness and action around the problem of violence against women has resulted in the creation of more legislature and policy guidelines, the most recent being the new law passed in 2015, Law 30364, that aims to “prevent, sanction, and eradicate violence against women and families” (El Peruano 2015b). This law defines violence against women as “any action or conduct that causes death, harm, or physical, sexual, or psychological suffering in a public or private environment because of her condition as a woman” (El Peruano 2015b, 567009). It is the first law to criminalize economic violence, and contains protocol to expedite judicial processes in efforts to encourage women to report abuse and see their cases through to sentencing. These advancements aside, underreporting continues to be a concern for women in general, and the government continues to work to offer a variety of options for those seeking to report. Women’s emergency centers, where I carried out my research, constitute one such institution.

**Women’s Emergency Centers**

Beginning with Brazil in 1985, Latin American countries began creating centers for women to provide legal help for those experiencing partner violence. The first of these were women’s police stations (McDowell dos Santos 2004; Hautzinger 2007; Jubb et al. 2010; Macassi et al. 2010). Peru followed suit in 1988, making it the second country to do so. There are now a number of options for women seeking legal justice and other state services. These include police stations, women’s police stations, and Centro Emergencia de Mujeres (Women’s Emergency Centers, CEMs), in addition to legal centers in palaces of justice.

*El Centro Emergencia de Mujer* was created by what is now the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) in 1999. At the time of this research there
were 226 CEMs throughout Peru, spread between urban and rural areas in all of the 24 departments (MIMP website). Each CEM is equipped with an area of admissions, psychology, social work, and legal aid, and a community outreach branch, all for the specific purpose of offering support to anyone who has suffered familial and/or sexual violence (MIMP website). While CEM staff work with the police, the centers are different from women’s police stations that are run by the National Police of Peru (PNP) in that they are not affiliated with the legal system in the same way. Women who report in the CEMs (called usuarias) must still have their claims filed by the police since the former is not a legal institution. In 2015, 58,429 cases were registered in CEMs nationally, most of which filed by usuarias.

**Race and Racism**

The second major theme is race and racism. The construction of race and the nature of racism in Peru are central to understanding the way that black women are portrayed and understood in the context of Lima and Callao. I want to offer an overview of the differences between race and ethnicity and how they interact in Latin America before delving further into the history of race and racial dynamics in Peru that have shaped the way racial discrimination functions in modern society. Most scientists today have concluded that race is a social construct without biological basis. In contrast to more rigid conceptualizations of race that use phenotype, the idea of bloodlines and ancestry to determine one’s race, Latin American understandings of this concept have largely approached race from more of a cultural perspective that places more emphasis on phenotype and culture than ancestry. The region has accordingly been associated with a more relative and mutable approach to race (de la Cadena 2001). Like race, ethnicity indicates ancestry and origin, but it also refers to cultural difference in the
context of space, therefore situating culture geographically (Wade 1997; de la Cadena 2001; Hale 2006). Accordingly, many people have multiple ethnic identities that interact with racial identities that are made more or less visible depending on the person they are interacting with and the space in which said interaction takes place (Wade 1997, 18). Race and ethnicity do at times co-mingle on a conventional level when physical characteristics associated with a particular racial group are associated with cultural spaces. Indeed, cultural traits can become essentialized and thus serve as racial markers (Harrison 1995; Mullings 2005). Thus it is possible to have both racial and ethnic identities. The overlapping scholarly and popular definitions of race and ethnicity reinforce the notion that these two concepts should be studied together.

**Afro-Peruvians: Life between the Crown and the Inca**

Africans and their descendants have been Peru since the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521 (Aguirre 2005). In an effort to make Afro-Peruvians more visible in the present day, scholars and activists have dedicated time and energy to revealing the legacy of this population, first in the Spanish colony when Afro-descendants comprised a significant portion of the coastal populace, and then in the new, independent nation-state of Peru (see Aguirre 2005; Cuche 1975; Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Águilar 2015; Arrelucea Barrantes 2009; Gootenberg 1995; Bowser 1974). Afro-Peruvians have never been well-represented in state ledgers, as I will show in this section, but the invisibility that they face today is strongly linked to the changes in race relations that occurred between the abolition of slavery and the birth of the republic. This coincided with the assimilation of vast Andean populations and the birth of mestizo identity taken on by the new, young state. Effectively, Peruvians of African descent were rendered invisible as they were caught between the Crown—later the state—and
the Inca, whose descendants were the most visible Others and whose communities continue to be the prototype of what an ethnic group should look like. This information sets the stage for current day race relations.

**The crown**

Between the beginning of the conquest in 1521 and 1821 when Peru achieved independence from Spain, an estimated 100,000 Africans were brought to Peru (Aguirre 2005). They were principally imported to provide agricultural labor on the coast. As the enslaved population multiplied during the 16th and 17th centuries, so too did the free black population. Castillo Román (1977 in Sue and Golash-Boza 2009) estimated that half of the 80,000 blacks and mulattoes in 1591 were enslaved. The colony quickly grew dependent on the labor of Africans and their descendants where slaves and free blacks contributed to rural and urban economies (Bowser 1974). Historians have indicated that state-gathered numbers for the population in question are incorrect, and underrepresent the quantity of Africans and their descendants in the colony (Gootenberg 1995 in Sue and Golash-Boza 2009; Mori 2005). They attribute this to racial and gender dynamics in the slavery period. First, only men were counted and slave owners often underreported the number of their enslaved to avoid taxation; maroons were difficult to locate and count, and many free Afro-Peruvians occupied labor positions not considered of importance to the state and were therefore not recorded (Mori 2005, 160). Furthermore, the illegal trading of Africans brought in more bodies than the legal exchange leaving swaths of the population unaccounted for; and finally, Afro-Peruvian communities were inconvenient for census administrators to access (Mori 2005, 160). Under this schematic, black women were invisible, as was what can be estimated to be a significant portion of the population. These findings
reaffirm the limits of the state visibility project as set out by Scott (1998), and also offer concrete examples of how numbers alone cannot convey the full story of Afro-Peruvian history. They also reveal a legacy of gender inequality as women of African descent have historically been excluded from national records because of their gender in addition to their racial identity (I expand on this in the context of my work in Chapter 7). Even with diminished numbers, many coastal cities in Peru, including Lima, the seat of the Spanish crown (called el virreinato de Perú), were considered “black cities” due to their high volume of Afro-descendant residents, and were likened to well-known black cities in the diaspora, like Salvador de Bahia in Brazil or Santiago de Cuba in Cuba, and Buenos Aires (Andrews 2004; Mori 2005, 160).

The large number of Afro-descendants in urban centers was by default in close physical proximity to the criollo elite and, by extension, culture. Many people of African descent arrived from other places in the Americas already speaking Spanish. Furthermore, in contrast to other colonies with sizable black populations, urban slavery and work afforded few chances for the preservation of African languages and cultural traditions to the degree that has been seen in Cuba or Brazil where slave populations were able to interact away from their masters (Feldman 2006; Cuche 1975; Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015). As a result, Afro-Peruvians are Spanish speakers and overwhelmingly Catholic (Sue and Golash-Boza 2009).

Afro-descendants were included in the casta system and relegated to a low socio-political position. However, there were opportunities for social ascent for members of both the free and enslaved populations. In many cases access to jobs in certain sectors facilitated this process of class ascension (Arrelucea Barrantes and
Many of the *casta* terms used to indicate various “levels” of blackness continue to be used today. These include: *negro/a* (black), *moreno/a* (brown, lighter than black), *zambo/a* (a person of Andean and African parentage), and *zacalagua* (a black person with very light features), though at present they are often used interchangeably.

The abolition of slavery in Peru created a shift in the hierarchy. Without the difference in status between free and enslaved Afro-descendants, blackness became a racialized marker that became intimately tied to poverty as this population continued to carry out the same labor as it did before abolition (Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015, Part 3; Feldman 2006). Colonial stereotypes about the primitive, backward nature of African culture, and by extension, Africans themselves, intensified as they were stereotyped as ignorant, degenerate, sexually deviant, and violent, as were any cultural practices associated them (Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015, Part 3). The quest to collectively whiten the population by seeking out lighter-skinned and non-Afro-descendant partners to have children that would—hopefully—be less recognizably black became one of few mechanisms for upward social mobility. This goal continue to figure into teachings imparted onto children of African descent, and to be a contributing factor to low self-esteem among black Peruvians (Muñoz 2014; Carrillo and Carrillo 2011).

**The Inca**

The larger state focus on Andean populations and shrinking official numbers of Afro-Peruvians rendered the latter consistently more invisible, though some historians attribute diminished numbers to a state project to hide those of African descent and not to an actual disappearance of the population (Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015).
Aguilar 2015, 117-118). Although they are recognized as having contributed to limeño culture, African descendants are not part of the national heritage discourse that centers on the Incan empire and present-day descendants, if only symbolically (Greene 2005). While it is true that in Lima it may indeed be difficult to find someone who would deny the existence of Afro-descendants in the city, Afro-Peruvian contributions to society have been largely overlooked and rendered invisible in part because they have been so deeply integrated into limeño culture that their origins have been forgotten (Feldman 2006; Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015). As a result, Afro-Peruvians have been constructed as members of a racial group identifiable by phenotypic markers, but not as a separate ethnic group. This is a common problem for urban Afro-descendant populations that are assumed to be culturally mestizo, differing from others only in appearance (Hooker 2005).

**Racism and the State**

The Peruvian state has recently undergone a discursive change in its approach to diversity, veering away from an openly homogenizing message and towards another one that allows for the possibility of recognizing the country’s extensive ethnic diversity. Afro-descendants have achieved more recognition and protections under the second framework, but are still collectively considered different from Andean and Amazonic group, indicating where work must still be done. Most widely read texts on race and racism in Peru center on indigenous populations, more specifically, ethnic groups from the highlands (Callirgos 1993; Marisol de la Cadena 2000; Portocarerro 2009; Poole 1997; Quijano 2000). The birth of the republic in 1821 brought the “indian problem” to the fore for Peruvian elites and politicians, that is, how to control a part of the population that numerically overwhelmed the European sector and lived outside of its cultural
framework. Like other countries, during the nation-building period, Peru’s struggle to consolidate the new state included a search for a unifying identity, which became that of the *mestizo*, a person of indigenous and European (Spanish) heritage, and non-Indigenous culture. The 19th century produced the discourse of *mestizaje*, race mixing, as the origin of the *mestizos*, and a new assimilation project for indigenous peoples (García 2005; de la Cadena 2000). *Blanqueamiento* (a Spanish term for the “whitening”) was the underlying goal of *mestizaje*; race mixing was a way to *mejorar la raza*, literally translated to “make the race better”, by making it whiter. This process of whitening was a tacit cry to breed undesirable cultures and races out of the nation (Wade 2007; Whitten and Torres 1998). Having attracted few European immigrants in comparison to neighboring countries, Peru vigorously promoted *mestizaje* as the primary means to a whiter end.

As a smaller, less threatening population by comparison, Africans and their descendants, who had made up almost half the population of large coastal cities including Lima during the height of slavery, were also affected by *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* even though they were not the primary targets (Sulmont and Callirgos 2014; Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015). There was official interest in eradicating cultural expressions such as dancing and religious festivals that were created by or associated with African descendants, and were viewed as lascivious and unsightly. As for the state records, some scholars claim that officials intentionally downplayed the number of Afro-Peruvians in the country (Sue and Golash-Boza 2009) while others argue that the state simply lacked the methods and will to count members of this group of undesirables (Mori 2005; Valdivia 2014; Arrelucea Barrantes and...
Cosamalón Aguilar 2015), but ultimately they are in agreement that the end result for this population was invisibility in official state records.

The most recent national discursive shift has moved away from *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*—though both continue to figure into Peruvian racism and identity politics—and towards multi-culturalist discourses, a trend seen throughout the region (Hale 2002, 2006). This change has been accompanied by anti-racist, inclusive legislation and ratification of international laws that recognize cultural diversity and the rights of these groups. Afro-Peruvians are not mentioned in the constitution in any capacity; however, there have been important steps taken to recognize Afro-descendants since 2001 when they were first acknowledged as such (Noles Cotito 2017). For example, the National Commission of Andean, Amazonic, and Afro-Peruvian peoples (CONAPA), later to become the National Institute of Andean, Amazonic, and Afro-Peruvian Peoples (INDEPA), formed by the Toledo government in 2001, first positioned Afro-Peruvians as political subjects and sought to create national policy for the populations in question (Valdivia 2014). Further advancements on the human rights front gave way to the National Plan for Human Rights (*el Plan Nacional de Derechos Humanos* 2006-2010) that outlined the need to include ethnicity in the census data (*el Peruano* 2005). Accordingly, the 2017 census will be the first in 77 years to feature a question about ethnicity and will include an option for citizens to self-identify as Afro-descendants (I address this in more detail in Chapter 7).

Ethno-racial questions that include the category “Afro-descendant” have slowly been integrated into national surveys, most notably, the National Household Survey (ENAHO), the National Continued Survey (ENCO), and the Demographic and Family
Health Survey (ENDES). This happened as a result of processes that included the ratification of important international legal documents, namely the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 in 1993, though this has primarily benefitted Andean and Amazonic peoples. Nonetheless, these questions will yield data about the lives of Afro-Peruvians. In addition, the influence of international discourse surrounding discrimination and ethnic recognition produced leading up to and during the Durban Human Rights conference in 2001 alongside international development projects from the World Bank and the International Development Bank in the region helped these efforts. Afro-descendants are recognized as an ethno-racial group by the state, which created the Department of Policy for the Afro-Peruvian Population (la Dirección de Políticas para Población Afroperuana) within the Ministry of Culture (Ministerio de la Cultura, MINCUL) in 2013 to promote and preserve Afro-Peruvian culture, oversee projects, development plans, and policy development and implementation for this sub-sector of the population (MINCUL website).

This discursive shift has been met with skepticism. Ochy Curiel (2009) and Charles Hale (2006) have critiqued what Hale calls “neo-liberal multiculturalism”, and described as “the mestizaje discourse for the new millennium, offering a parallel mix of opportunity and peril” (2002, 491). Neo-liberal multiculturalism places value on cultural differences between ethnic groups within the state and affords them certain rights but ultimately does not address inherent problems with underlying power structures that are the causes of inequality and oppression (Hale 2006). This can be seen in the near veneration of Andean peoples who are held up as as descendants of the Inca, and therefore constituting a symbol of national identity amidst rampant acts of racism carried
out against members of highland communities both systemically and interpersonally. Under neo-liberal multiculturalism the hierarchy of ethnicities is maintained whereby ethno-racial groups with land, language, and specific cultural traits—what Greene (2007) calls the “holy trinity”—are prioritized over those without them (cf Greene 2007). Afro-Peruvians, for example, are not recognized as a people (pueblo) and while they have been recognized as a distinct population, their collective rights that extend to territory, and cultural autonomy, are not recognized as they are for Andean and Amazonic populations. Those Afro-descendant groups that have been recognized as pueblos in other countries have largely been able to do so because they have sufficiently demonstrated (enough of) the necessary criteria that continues to be associated with indigenous peoples (Greene 2007; Hooker 2008). Furthermore, they are largely excluded from education curriculum that is supposed to promote more inclusive, culturally sensitive learning, but in practice focuses primarily on non-Spanish speaking ethnic groups, indicating an on-going adherence to the “holy trinity” of diversity markers (Valdiviezo 2006; Valdiviezo 2012; MINEDU 2013). Consequently, Afro-Peruvians are more visible now with regards to legal statues and as a population, but their position in the hierarchy of non-mestizo groups has arguably remained unchanged.

Finally, change in the language of difference from “race” to “ethnicity” has given way to the illusion that racism is no longer a problem. Race scholars have provided convincing examples of the shift in racist discourse since the 19th century whereby the existence of different races has been vehemently denied but racism continues to play out on the basis of essentialized cultural traits (Mullings 2005; Harrison 1995, 2000; Hale 2006). Despite their designation as an ethno-racial group,
Afro-descendants in Peru continue to be viewed socially as a racial group. In a discourse that heavily emphasizes culture, Afro-Peruvians continue to fight to make visible the race-based oppression that they face.

**Race in the streets**

This divergence between state and colloquial racial discourse is of particular importance to understanding the ways that CEM workers and usuarias are approaching and reacting to the new ethnicity question on intake forms, particularly when it comes to Afro-Peruvian women. This section highlights the differences between state conceptualizations of race and ethnicity and the way these constructs play out in daily life for limeños and chalacos (people from Callao). In Peru, racism is colloquially understood to be an individual problem, and one that can only be proved to be present through explicit acts of discrimination, such as denial of entrance to public spaces because of traditional dress or other cultural markers, the yelling of insults, and even at times open discussions about racism (Luciano 2012; Oboler 1996; CEDEMUNEP 2011). These narrower definitions hide larger patterns of systemic oppression, reducing them to interpersonal interactions that are frequent enough to be normalized such that unless they meet the above-mentioned criteria—and at times, even when they do—they are not recognized as racist aggressions and are often brushed off as jokes (CEDEMUNEP 2011). Under the current state discourse and in academia, Valdivia (2011; 2014) has shown that even amidst a growing wave of political correctness in regards to talking about different ethno-racial groups and the recognition of race as a social construct and not a biological fact, every day interactions are fraught with racist undertones. There is a heightened awareness of physical features, differences in
accent, and customs, and commentary about these characteristics are often
generalizing and racist.

Peruvians are very aware of how they themselves and those around them look
physically, and readily classify each other accordingly. Brazilian anthropologist João
Costa Vargas (2004) has called this the “hyperconsciousness of race”; a heightened
awareness of race and racial difference that is accompanied by a denial of the
importance of race in everyday interactions. It is extremely common to hear people
describe themselves and others as chino/a (chinese, but used broadly to indicate East
Asian descent or to refer to someone with almond-shaped eyes), negro/a (black or
comparatively dark-skinned), serrano/a (a person is or is perceived to be from the
highlands), or blanco/a (white, usually referring to light skin but also hair, and eyes)
even as the populace continues to affirm its colorblindness. These terms that are also
frequently used pejoratively, have historical significance as many hail from the Spanish
casta (caste) system of the 18th century that classified the racial variation of the colony
and was tied strongly to the class system (Wade 2007; Arrelucea Barrantes and
Cosamalón Aguilar 2015; Valdivia 2011).

Afro-Peruvian Mobilization

Modern day Afro-Peruvian activism has played a major role in creating the
current legal protections and institutions that support and protect Afro-descendants
throughout the country. This activism is intricately linked to the process of bringing Afro-
Peruvian heritage and culture back to the forefront of limeño culture through music,
dance, and poetry, which began almost a century ago. Demographic changes, namely
the large-scale influx of Andean migrants to the capital in the early part of the 20th
century, induced elite criollo nostalgia for earlier times (Feldman 2006). This desire to
return to the colonial past that featured black servitude created an eager audience for Afro-descendant theatre, music, and dance. This set the stage for a cultural renaissance in which Afro-Peruvian folkloric groups and iconic families and individuals, including Nicomedes and Victoria Santa Cruz, and the Vásquez and Campos families, revitalized traditions and created music and dance based on images, archival documents, and research in urban and rural communities that would form the basis of what is now recognized as Afro-Peruvian culture (Feldman 2006). This renaissance also featured social critiques that contributed to the onset of anti-racist activism from the 1980s onward. Numerous NGOs and organizations have been created to demand social justice for Afro-descendants in the face of on-going racial and cultural discrimination. While Afro-Peruvian music and dance had become popular, studies carried out by these organizations revealed worrying levels of poverty, lack of access to basic necessities including quality education, and other forms of social exclusion (CEDET 2005, 2008). Colonial and republican stereotypes continue to permeate the media and dehumanize people of African descent, portraying them as unintelligent criminals, sexual deviants, and specialists in dance, sports, cooking, and sex (CEDEMUNEP 2011).

Activists have denounced the persistence of mestizaje as a discourse and entrenched social practice as it encourages people of African descent to be complicit in the invisibilization of their existence and oppression (Lewis and Rodriguez 2012). Scholarly and state focus on indigenous peoples has yielded information that greatly surpasses the data on Afro-descendants, both in quantity and quality. Activists have argued that the absence of recognition of racial inequality and the lack of information on
this population coupled with the *mestizaje* ideology will ensure the continuation of the status quo.

These efforts have rendered some notable gains for Peruvians of African descent in addition to those mentioned in previous sections. For instance, in 2009 the Peruvian government issued a historic apology for enslavement, and subsequent abuse and social exclusion. In the apology it recognized the contributions to Afro-Peruvians national identity and culture (See Noles Cotito 2017 for a broader overview of legal advancements for Afro-descendants in Peru). In addition, in 2006, congress announced a national day for the celebration of Afro-Peruvian culture on the birthday of the late Nicomedes Santa Cruz on June 4th. Finally, in 2014, the Department of Policy for the Afro-Peruvian Population carried out an extensive national study on Afro-Peruvians (MINCUL and GRADE 2014) that generated an ample public policy document. These advancements are important as they are important steps towards the inclusion of Afro-descendants in national policy and in the nation as a recognized ethnic, racial, and cultural group; however, these advancements have not been fully incorporated into social constructions and perceptions of Afro-Peruvians.

**Negros and Afro-descendientes**

My work focuses on Afro-Peruvian women, but I frequently use the terms “black” or “negro”, and “Afro-descendant/Peruvian”. The latter term is the product of a significant political shift brought to fruition by Afro-Latin American activists and scholars that has created an important difference between *negros* and *afrodescendientes*. As an opener, I recount a joke a friend told me that is predicated on an understanding of what it means to be *negra*, before delving into the difference between the terms:

“Have you heard this one?” Mia asked, raising her head from the large cushions.
My good friend was sprawled on my couch on a hot Saturday afternoon after lunch and we were swapping jokes.

Mia stifled her giggles at the thought of the pending joke, and put on a solemn face, imitating a child’s voice:

“Mamá, papá, I need to tell you something… soy negra!”

We both laughed uproariously.

This joke and others like it are funny because they are redundant. They reveal an important difference that exists now due to changes in terminology, and the creation of the political term “Afro-descendant” or “afrodescendiente” in Spanish. “Negro/a” is a descriptive term that denotes dark skin color and implies African descent (though it is worth noting that Tanya Golash-Boza’s publications (2009, 2011) have shown that this is not always the case). Those who are negros have no way of hiding it; they know they are black and so do others in society. This term is also charged with pejorative historical and social meaning due to the racist system that created and used the word to subjugate people associated with the it (Whitten and Torres 1998; Wade 2007). There continues to be some aversion to using the word “negro” to describe someone or self-identifying with it because of the stigma of slavery and oppression (CEDEMUNEP 2011). Many prefer other terms like “moreno/a” and “zambo/a” because they are not as “harsh” as “negro”. Activists from the African diaspora who attended the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001 and the pre-conference meetings collectively agreed upon the use of the term “Afro-descendant”, a political term that would allow for discussion about African ancestry without the stigma of the word “negro”, though it and others mentioned above continue to be used (Wade 2007;
Harrison 2005; CEDET 2005; MIMP 2014). In Peru, the term “Afro-Peruvian” began to appear in state documents in the aftermath of the conference (Noles Cotito 2017). “Afro-descendant” as a concept has a wider reach than “negro”. Since it focuses on descent—and in Peru, on cultural influences—and not just on phenotype, it is possible to be both negro and Afro-descendant, or Afro-descendant without being negro.

**Afro-Latin American Women**

Afro-Latin American women’s contributions to their communities, activism and academia are substantial and are more visible now than ever. Afro-Latin American feminists have made important interventions in these spheres with the goal of achieving social justice for Afro-descendants and specifically for women despite the fact that at the regional level, inequality within Afro-descendant movements and communities, particularly along the lines of gender, has only recently begun to be addressed in activist discourse and projects. As activists and scholars they have taken issue with their fellow comrades who do not address gender inequality and how it makes women’s experiences different from those of men (Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; Carneiro 2003; Caldwell 2007; Safa 2005). Additionally, they mirror the statements made by black feminists in the US who have also stated that while the feminist movement posits that women have historically denounced discrimination based on gender and class, black women face triple discrimination because of their racial identity, a condition makes them vulnerable to social, political and economic exploitation and subjugation (Isis Internacional 1983: 77; Guy-Sheftall 1995; hooks 2005; Perry 2010, 2013; Ritchie 1996; DeCosta-Willis 2003). Although black feminisms in Latin America have been influenced by US black feminisms, Afro-Latin American feminists have organically created their own discourses that address the regional, national, and local realities of
black women’s lives in the region in addition to stimulating black transnational feminisms (Álvarez, Caldwell and Lao-Montes 2016).

In comparison with other countries in Latin America, there is still significantly less literature about women of African descent in Peru; however, in the time I have spent among Afro-Peruvian feminists and women who have dedicated extensive amounts of time to working on women’s issues I have heard of and seen important similarities between their experiences and those of other Afro-descendant women in Latin America. Through their own work and in dialogue with other women at regional events, including RMAAD (Afro-descendant Diaspora Women’s Network) and EFLAC (Feminist Encounters of Latin America and the Caribbean) meetings, they have developed their own perspectives on Afro-descendant women’s experiences and are inserting themselves and their platforms into discussions with the government and within the Afro-Peruvian movement about women and gender.

The gender equality framework from the MIMP, namely the Law of Equal Opportunity for Men and Women (LIO) passed in 2007 and the National Plan for Gender Equality (PLANIG) 2012-2017, have spurred the creation of important policy initiatives that will benefit women of African descent, but visibility around the specific problems facing women of African descent has not be adequately addressed (cf Noles Cotito 2017). In recent years, more disaggregated data on the Afro-Peruvian population has become available and revealed gender inequality, supporting Afro-descendant women’s claims. Results show that a higher number of Afro-Peruvian women-headed households earn less than the monthly minimum wage (750 soles, roughly $230 USD in 2015) than those with male heads of household, and that household work obligations
continue to keep women out of the workforce (MINCUL and GRADE 2014). In the social sphere, stereotypes about black women are continuously reinforced, convincing the public that they have a tendency to be violent and aggressive, in addition to being superior dancers, domestic workers, cooks, and inherently fiery and skilled sexual objects (Muñoz 2010; 2014; Carrillo Zegarra 2014).

There have been efforts to bring black women’s voices and stories to the fore in the historical record as well as in modern times to combat their invisibility both in the feminist and Afro-descendant movements. Publications by historians like Maribel Arrelucea Barrantes (e.g., Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015), and the Center for Ethnic Development (CEDET) (e.g., CEDET 2015) have brought attention to national historic protagonists such as Micaela Bastidas and Catalina Buen Día del Pecho. Books about the lives of Delia Zamudio (1995) and María Elena Moyano (her autobiography was edited and published by Diana M. Túpac in 2000) have been excellent contributions to a growing collection of literature about important modern (Afro)Peruvian figures.

In 2014 the MIMP released a multi-disciplinary publication about Afro-Peruvian women spurred by the Afro-Peruvian Women Working Group (MTMA), which was created in 2001 by what is today the MIMP to facilitate communication between the ministry and women representatives from a selection of Afro-descendant organizations. Noles Cotito’s critique (2017) regarding the overwhelming lack of productivity of the MTMA reveals the limitations of both the LIO and PLANIG in regards to Afro-Peruvian women. There are a number of organizations that are dedicated to addressing problems that women of African descent face, and at times these organizations work
with the government to remedy them. The Center for the Development of the Black Peruvian Woman (CEDEMUNEP) and Lundu have both carried out important work in their efforts to validate, visibilize, and support women of African descent. Newer additions include Presencia y Palabra, a diasporic collective based in Lima of which I am a founding member, has begun the process of developing a black feminist stance and social analysis of the Peruvian context.

**Naming Violence against Afro-Latin American Women**

Violence is a a reoccurring theme in discussions and accounts of the lives of Afro-Latin American women, and increasing awareness of the subject requires skillful articulation of the problem. Subsequently, Afro-descendant feminists have undertaken the task of learning to categorize the violence they experience individually and collectively. In addition to the multiple forms of violence endured by black and Afro-descendant women, feminist activists have begun to talk more directly about domestic violence in Afro-Peruvian communities, and violence against women and girls (Muñoz 2011; Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; Carrillo Zegarra 2014). This violence exists in what Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Phillipe Bourgois (2008) call a “continuum of violence”, which refers to the spectrum of different types of violence that overlap and play out at all levels of society. Intimate, interpersonal violence, while certainly the most readily visible form, is no less insipid than others. These include: symbolic (see Bourdieu ), political (Feldman 1991), everyday (Scheper-Hughes 1992), or structural violence (Farmer 2004), which encompasses the systems—governments, economic structures, and social institutions—that generate, replicate, and exacerbate inequality and suffering. Gender violence and violence that is experienced differently because of the way gender is shaped by race, sexuality, class, and other identity markers at their respective
intersections span this continuum, and are experienced by women of African descent, as demonstrated through an emerging body of literature (I discuss this further in Chapter 4). Indeed, structural violence underscores the experiences of Afro-Peruvian women that I have outlined to this point and will continue to do throughout the dissertation.

Writing by Afro-Latin Americans scholars from the diaspora, and others who work with these communities situate the violence that they experience along the continuum of violence proposed by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2008) in their exploration of the many different kinds of violence that constitute their individual and collective experiences (e.g., Whitten and Torres 1998; Mullings 2009; Dixon and Burdick 2012; Perez Sarduy and Stubbs 1995). Ethnographic work centered on the lives of women of African descent in the region reveals that much of what African descendants endure is structural violence that manifests in the form of racism, sexism, and poverty among other oppressive systems that degrade their quality of life, exclude them from broader social life, and frequently result in serious harm and death (e.g., Perry 2013; Smith 2014; Campos de Almeida and Jaquetto Pereira 2012).

Recently, Afro-Latin American scholars have undertaken work on race, gender, and violence that link systemic and intimate partner violence. Smith (2014) links interpersonal violence against black women in Brazil to racism and sexism that labels these bodies as deserving of abuse. Lozano Lerma (2015), an Afro-Colombian scholar contests the misrepresentation of state and political violence that gravely affects women in Buenaventura as domestic violence, thus erasing state responsibility. Jaquetto Pereira and Jaquetto Pereira (2012) address the deep history of systemic violence
against Afro-Brazilian women and its implications for IPV research. This body of work seeks to name violence and relate it in its various forms to others. It also broadens anthropological understandings of what constitutes violence by focusing on the role of culture and society in determining the parameters of violent acts (e.g., Sluka 2000; Theidon 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Bourgois 2003; Taussig 2005).

**Reporting Violence**

Overall, there has been an increase in civil society awareness around violence, but as was stated in the first section on violence against women, reporting continues to be infrequent and there are many questions about how women decide to seek justice and protection. There has been an increase in civil society awareness around violence against women due to government and civil organizations. Lundu, and Afro-Peruvian NGO, recently had a campaign called “Rostros de Poder” (Faces of Power), that aimed to make Afro-Peruvian women’s stories visible. Additionally, it sought to increase violence reporting among this population that activists and community workers suspect grossly underreports IPV. If this is true, it gives way to two questions: first, why Afro-Peruvian women may not report violence, and second, what women who do not report do to protect themselves against intimate partner violence.

Anthropologists have identified state responses to IPV as a major deterrent to reporting. Research shows that victim blaming and beliefs that violence is a normal part of the culture of victims of certain racial and ethnic groups are among the factors associated with victims not reporting to the state via the police and other institutions (Fregoso and Bejarano 2011; Ellsberg et al. 2000; MacDowell Santos 2004; McClusky 2001; Ewig 2010; van Fleet 2002). Other reasons for not reporting, such as wanting to protect the offender from prosecution and/or concern for children, factor into the
decision-making about options for escaping violence and seeking protection. Negative experiences with law enforcement and state representatives, whether first hand or recounted by others, may account for reduced reporting among marginalized racial group, including Afro-Peruvians.

While anthropological studies depict the ways in which women in abusive situations draw on their available resources to avoid violence and in some cases to remove themselves from danger, research on variations in decision-making with regards to reporting has not been a primary focus. The literature that gives the most insight into reasons why women do report comes largely from criminology and sociology. Although these studies' results are not necessarily applicable to populations outside of the US, they do provide a plausible starting point. They show that the belief that the abuse has become too serious or severe a problem, and desire for self-protection can override the previous reasons for not reporting IPV (Felson et al. 2002; Chen and Ullman 2010). Unfortunately, these studies did not focus directly on race, which is imperative to understanding Afro-Peruvian women's decision-making regarding reporting.

In Peru, women of African descent are disproportionately underrepresented in the information that exists about reporting trends by ethnicity (MIMP 2015). Of the 58,429 cases reported in CEMs in 2015 only 59 of them (0.1%) belonged to Afro-Peruvian men, women, and children, landing them well below even the leanest estimates of what constitutes the national Afro-descendant population, which is approximately 10% according to CEDET (2005). Anthropologists, in their efforts to explain violence in the context of cultural institutions, have provided insight into why
women might not report domestic violence to the authorities. These include: mistrust of police and the legal system, and consequent trust in community resolution tactics to end or decrease violent episodes. Attention to racial and ethnic minority groups have shown that in some instances there are cultural mechanisms and practices that are used to diffuse situations that could lead to violence or to help women escape from their abusers. Kerns (1999) presents the example of the Garifuna culture of Central America where other women in the community of study intervened to shelter and protect abused women, and to return them to their parents' homes. Merry’s (2006) work described Fijian mediation ceremonies that seek justice for abused women. These processes indicate why some women might not report the violence they endure to the state because they feel that their problems are or can be resolved within their communities.

As a researcher, I was eager to learn how Afro-Peruvian women's decision-making regarding reporting to state authorities and alternative routes for escaping violence compared to these findings.

These major historical, social, and political trends provide the context for the circumstances in which I conducted research. They also greatly influenced the questions I sought to answer.

**Research Questions**

After consulting the literature and conducting exploratory research, I formulated three questions that framed my research. First, I wanted to develop an understanding of the nature of IPV against women of African descent in Lima. I also sought to understand whether there were tactics they used to combat and escape this violence that did not involve the state. Lastly, I was interested to know how usuarias and CEM workers were faring with the newly implemented ethnicity question on CEM intake.
forms. I specifically wanted to know how workers and *usuarias* understood the question, how it was administered, and the role that social perceptions of race and ethnicity played into identifying and registering Afro-Peruvian women.

**Theoretical Framework**

There is no single theoretical framework that guides my research. Instead, I draw on different theoretical constructs in order to make sense of the core issues I address in this dissertation.

**Black Feminist Theory**

Black Feminist theory has deeply influenced my theoretical and methodological approaches to research and analysis. At its core, it centers “ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women” (Collins 1986, 16) by critically exposing, analyzing, and exploring the intersection of racism and sexism where black women are oppressed at socially and systemically. Contributors to Black Feminist theory have successfully identified and expounded upon other axis of oppression as they impact black women, including but not limited to: homophobia, classism, ageism, and ethnic discrimination. In the US context, Black Feminist theory can be traced back to the contributions of black suffragists like Sojourner Truth, who delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech in 1851 (Guy-Sheftall 2013), and Anna Julia Cooper (1892), both of whom addressed social issues as they pertained to black women and girls. Later, in the 1960s and 70s, black women’s observations and first hand experiences with sexism in the civil rights and black power movements, and the racism in the feminist movement prompted them to further reflect upon their unique positions as black women, and contest their oppression (e.g., Collins 1990; hooks 1981; Davis 1981; Combahee River Collective 1977). Black Feminist thought affirms that black women’s
struggles merit attention and study in their own right (Combahee River Collective 1977; Guy-Sheftall 2013; Collins 1990; Davis 1981; Lorde 1982). It highlights the interconnectivity of experience and consciousness, and thought and action (Collins 1990). Black feminists have emphasized the pivotal role of personal experience as a source of knowing and a base for knowledge production with respect to their position in the world and the aspects of their lives that make them different in comparison to other women and people in general (bell hooks 1981; 1989). They also acknowledge that actions are driven by changes in thought patterns; for instance, an awareness of injustice fosters a commitment to taking measures to achieve social justice (Collins 1990, 2000). Finally, Black Feminist thought demonstrates on-going commitment to community wellness and the betterment of humanity (hooks 1981).

Black Feminism is not native to the US, but the power dynamics of publishing and scholarship has make it more difficult for the voices of Afro-Latin American to be heard in the US and Canada even as US scholarship has been widely dispersed throughout the region (Lao-Montes 2016). In Latin America, black women also figured into political movements in the 1970s and 1980s that were dedicated to celebrating and fighting for the rights and dignity of Afro-descendant populations, though historical research reveals a rich legacy of Afro-descendant women’s reflections on racism and sexism (e.g., Rubiera and Martiatu 2011). With these struggles came writing from black women who also noticed inequality within the movements, whereby women worked tirelessly but did not receive the credit while their male counterparts did (e.g., Caldwell 2007; Álvarez and Caldwell 2016). Nevertheless, Afro-Latin American feminists have provided poignant insight into the regional and local dynamics of race and gender, in
addition to environmental issues, class inequality, sexuality, colonialism, etc., that influence black women’s realities and lived experiences. They critique mestizaje and blanqueamiento, describe the race dynamics in countries where indigenous populations are larger and more visible, address issues of language and land rights (Curiel 2009; MIMP 2014; Carrillo and Carrillo; Vega, Alba and Modestín 2012). The scholarship of Brazilian Black feminists like Sueli Carneiro (2003), Leila Gonzalez (1988), may be the most widespread, but important contributions have come from other parts of the region. Ochy Curiel’s (2009; Curiel, Borzone and Ponomareff 2016) work on decolonizing feminism and the effect of neoliberalism have been illuminating, and work by Ana Irma Lassén from Puerto Rico has helped to bridge US and Latin American Black Feminisms (Lassén, Borzone and Ponomareff 2016). Additionally, important themes of self-awareness and political consciousness have been revealed through poetry written by Afro-Latin American women activists, including Shirley Campbell from Costa Rica and Victoria Santa Cruz from Peru have deeply impacted activist and theory. Similar to Black Feminist groups that formed in the US, organizations and trans-national networks have proved invaluable sites of theory and activism, influencing international politics, and creating spaces of community learning, organization, and advancement (Lassén, Borzone and Ponomareff 2016).

Afro-Latin American feminisms have expounded upon themselves that have featured heavily in North American Black feminist thought, including intersectionality, which is most often associated in the present with Kimberly Crenshaw’s work (1991) have featured in their work for some time (Gonzalez 1988; Carneiro 2003; also see Álvarez, Caldwell and Lao-Montes double special issue in Meridians journal, 2016;
Vega, Alba and Modestín 2012; DeCosta-Willis 2003). It is important to acknowledge that the presence of these concepts in the work of black feminists cannot and should not be attributed to the diffusion of North American thought throughout the region. Instead, they should be recognized as similar and complementary diasporic interventions that reflect on-going inter-regional knowledge exchange. As such, I rely on Afro-Latin American feminist works where possible to move towards a deeper, more accurate understanding of black women’s experiences in the context of my research.

Black Feminist theory and theorists have been instrumental in addressing violence against black women throughout the diaspora. Anna Julia Cooper called attention to black girls’ susceptibility to sexual violence (1892). The Combahee River Collective’s work on violence against women considered race and gender as axis of oppression (1977). Kimberlé Crenshaw’s renowned article on intersectionality has been remembered more for the concept she presented than for the context of violence against women of color in which it was written. Intersectionality helped to highlight the political and legal problems that Crenshaw saw for non-white women as the went through the justice system because of their race, gender, class, and at times, their status as immigrants (Crenshaw 1991). Similarly, in Latin America, Black Feminist thought has given great consideration to violence as it affects Afro-descendant women in the context of internal conflict as seen in Colombia (Lozano Lerma 2015), and in of Brazilian society (Jaquetto Pereira and Jaquetto Pereira 2012), and recognize it as a manifestation of the legacy of violence that encourages the abuse of black women (e.g., Carneiro 2003; Muñoz 2014).
My research takes a Black Feminist approach to understanding IPV as experienced by Afro-Peruvian women, the context of normalization of structural and social violence, and the invisibilization of intimate violence against these women as one that is predicated on the abuse of black womanness. I center black women’s stories and convey their experiences results of the oppression they face on the basis of race, gender, and class that have been addressed in other parts of the diaspora (cf Combahee River Collective 1977; Collins 2000; Guy-Sheftall 2013; Carneiro 2003; Bairros YEAR). Beyond theory, I look to Black feminist anthropology, and feminist activist ethnography, both of which offer useful theoretical and methodological tools for studying the intersections of varying facets of identity, and different axes of oppression. They allow us to see the complexities in black women’s lives, collectively, but also as individuals. I rely on intersectionality, a tool used to examine the places where different forms of oppression interconnect, to draw out the particularities of social inequality faced by Afro-Peruvian women as different aspects of their identities interact (Crenshaw 1991; Collins and Bilge 2016). This analytical approach provides the opportunity for relational thinking that allows for the convergence of ideas that have been thought of as fundamentally binary (Collins and Bilge 2016, 27). Black Feminist thought situates my work within the realm of the Black feminisms that continue to advance our understandings of black women’s lives throughout the Afro-American diaspora.

Legibility and the State

I use James C. Scott’s writing on the process and effects of creating state legibility and its subsequent drawbacks to conceptualize the current political process of registering ethnicity information in the CEMs. Scott posits that local realities, while legible (meaning recognizable and understandable) to people that live them, are only
legible to the state on its terms (1998, 35). State legibility is closely linked to citizenship in so far as receiving crucial services including social welfare and specialized policy (1998, 3). This legibility comes with caveats; to be recognized is also to be reduced, simplified, and made uniform, as this makes it easier for a centralized state to attend to, control, and regulate diverse issues and groups (1998, 31). Scott claims that as a result, “all data involved is incomplete, filled with omissions and inaccuracies” (1998, 80). This is why, he concludes, standardized codes and forms of measurement can never offer a full view of reality.

**Indicator Culture**

I draw from Sally Engle Merry’s concept of “indicator culture” to structure my arguments about the perils of undervaluing ethnographic data and other qualitative forms of data collection and interpretation. Merry defines indicator culture as: “a body of technocratic expertise that places a high value on numerical data as a form of knowledge and a basis for decision making. Its characteristics are trust in technical rationality, in the legibility of the social world through measurement and statistics… it builds on social science expertise and its claims to objectivity for credibility and legitimacy” (2016, 9). Indicator culture explains the backdrop against which my research takes place. Similar to Scott’s work Merry disrupts the notion that statistical and numerical knowledge and their production are inherently neutral or objective, and unaffected by social, political, and cultural power dynamics with specific reference to gender violence and human trafficking. Both caution against the erasure of complexity that results from oversimplification, in her case via the creation of indicators used to collect quantitative, comparative data on domestic violence. She notes that “the current
rush to quantification risks sacrificing the insight of rich ethnographic accounts” (2016, 2).

**Hyperconsciousness of Race**

João Costa Vargas’ (2004) concept of the “hyperconsciousness of race” helps to frame race relations and the process of determining blackness and ethnicity in general in Peruvian society. Vargas coined this term during his work with Afro-Brazilians to describe the nature of daily interactions that demonstrated a constant awareness of race even as Brazilians denied its importance. He recognizes it as a strategic discourse of oppression: “by silencing the relevance of race in social relations, the hyperconsciousness/negation of the race dialectic obscures the role that race plays in determining one’s position in the historical structures of power and resources” (2004, 446). This accounts for the hyper-visibility of black Peruvian bodies in daily life due to their historic erasure, and stereotypes that continue to point to and exoticize phenotypic characteristics that denote blackness.

**People as Infrastructure**

Abdoumaliq Simone (2004), a South African urban anthropologist, presents his concept of “people as infrastructure” in the context of Johannesburg, South Africa. The city has become a hub for migrants from the continent over who, abandoned by state and civil institutions, create their own connections and networks to provide services and goods to meet their on-going needs (2004, 409). He describes it as “remaking the margins” after the economy and overarching government has dissipated (2004, 441). Simone focuses on the informal economy of a bustling city; however, I am using his “people as infrastructure” to make sense of what I view as a reliable—and frequently functional—network of people willing to work separately or as a collective unit to reduce
violence. I also consider “people as infrastructure” through a racial and gendered lens to understand how these protective mechanisms interact with stereotypes about black women and black family units.

**Ethnography and Fiction**

The third chapter and the vignette at the beginning of the fifth chapter in the dissertation are fiction informed by my ethnographic research as a participant observer. James Clifford (1986), Ruth Bear and Deborah A. Gordon (1995), and Kamala Visweswaran (1994) have demonstrated that anthropologists have used fiction as a narrative technique in their writing for decades. In the introduction to *Writing Culture* (1986), Clifford affirms that there is a false dichotomy between literature—thought to be subjective and non-factual, and tied to art and culture—and ethnography or scientific writing, which was conceptualized as “rigorous” and based on fact (1986, 4). Ella Deloria, Mourning Dove, and Zora Neale Hurston are shining examples of women anthropologists of color (the first two were Native American and the last was African-American) who had literary ambitions that had to be tamped down, and whose work was not appreciated in its time because their writing styles were thought to air too much on the side of literature; they wrote about their communities and identities using ethnography and fiction in ways that academe deemed too personal to be objective (Hernandez 1986; Finn 1986).

Didier Fassin defines reality as that which has happened or exists now. It is “horizontal, existing on the surface of fact”, while truth is vertical, and is defined as “that which is “that which has to be regained from deception or convention (2014, 41). Fassin believes that the goal of anthropology is to “articulate the real and the true—the horizontal and the vertical—in the exploration in of life (2014, 41). Ethnography can
reveal what is real; it reflects what was seen, heard, and learned by the ethnographer about the society, culture, or trend they are studying. But fiction offers a creative means to present what is true. Faye Harrison writes that “fiction encodes truth claims—and alternative modes of theorizing—in a rhetoric of imagination” (1995b, 234). Fiction allows the writer to create a believable world that illuminates what research participants may leave out of their stories or observations, and gives the writer the opportunity to intertwine history, social nuances, and detail with ethnography to produce writing that may seem more real than a direct recounting of real events (Fassin 2014).

Chapter 3 and the opening sequence of Chapter 5 are fiction in this sense. They are both based on ethnographic data but written to emphasize truths that would not have been brought to light had I confined myself to writing only real events. The characters have aspects of people I have met, friends, and colleagues in them, and therefore can be thought of as composite characters in a way. The events are also compilations of my experiences and observations, and events that were told to me by other black women. The scene in Chapter 5 is based on the recounting of family interventions by a usuaria and her mother over several discussions. I do not offer guidance as a writer throughout the third or fifth chapter because I am more interested in presenting information for reflection and thought. I do situate myself in other vignettes throughout the dissertation to tie them to the chapter subject matter. I aim to reflect the polyphony of voices that I have heard as well as my own, as Zora Neale Hurston did in her work (Hernández 1995). I believe that black women, their relationships, and their lives, are worthy subjects for literary writing and not simply for “scientific” academic study; they can, and should be, written about in multiple genres.
To write about Afro-Peruvian women is, in many cases, to write about experiences that cannot be cited because they have largely not be written about. To that end, fiction becomes a tool used to portray lived experience, and to challenge positivist demands for empirical evidence. As Harrison explains, “fiction resists constructs of validity and reliability that privilege elitist white male representations and explanations of the world” (Harrison 1995b, 234).

My main intent was to showcase black women’s lives without focusing primarily on violence and oppression, though those topics figure into the writing. I wanted to provide a rich, sensory experience for the reader so that they can understand black women’s lives as vibrant, changing, enmeshed in their environments, and intertwined with the lives of friends, family, and other black women. The women in Chapter 3 are individuals; they are women who can—and do—have loving relationships, and they are self-aware and reflexive. I depict them in this manner to write “against the dominant grain” (Finn 1995) and counter stereotypes about black women with information I gathered that constitute what Harrison (1995) calls “truth claims”. I do this so that when I shift my focus to the problems of invisibility, violence, and the narrow confines of state legibility, the reader can understand pain and violence as one of multiple facets of Afro-descendant women’s lives rather than as the totality of our lived experiences. Ultimately, I am writing to center the humanity of the women; the very essence that invisibility seeks to hide.

**Presencia y Palabra**

*Mujeres Afro-descendientes: Presencia y Palabra* is an Afro-descendant women’s collective based in Lima, Peru. It was founded at the EFLAC meeting in Lima in 2014 by Afro-descendant women, many from Peru, but also from other countries in
Latin and North America, myself included, who rallied together to voice their collective disapproval of the absence of panels on black and Afro-descendant women at the event. We named ourselves “Presencia y Palabra” (Presence and Voice), a rallying cry and a demand that our inclusion not be limited to images but that our voices be heard as well. As a collective we wrote a public statement expressing our disappointment and refusal to be excluded from the programming even as we were mentioned in the official statement on inclusion. We took the stage at the final assembly that was attended by over a thousand participants, and read the statement after a powerful reading of Victoria Santa Cruz’ poem “Me Gritaron Negra,” a self-affirming statement of negritude. During my stay in Lima for research I, along with the other founding members, made good on our promise to expand the group and create a space for discussions about Afro-descendant women in preparation for the next EFLAC event, but also with the hopes of forming a political group that could draw attention to women’s issues within the movement and in interactions with the state.

I list this collective in my theoretical section because the work we carried out during my time in Lima and that is still being done as I write my dissertation in Toronto has greatly influenced my approach to this work. As a group we have established our own theoretical views on blackness, Afro-descendance, and womanhood by drawing on Black feminist theoretical concepts and uplifting the lived experience in order to create a framework that is reflective of the Afro-Peruvian experience but also lends itself to transnational exchanges. Although I do not reference the group as much as I do the authors of articles and books, my theoretical approach to race and gender in Peru and specifically in Lima and Callao is rooted in the collective teachings of my comadres, my
dear friends, who continuously and valiantly address sexuality, history, territory, and legacy even as ideologies like mestizaje, blanqueamiento, and of gender oppression work to silence their voices and invalidate their knowledge. Our work and camaraderie has also reassured me that it is appropriate and, in fact, necessary to write about black women’s joy and sisterhood because it is a keystone of our experiences. They have taught me that discussions about Afro-descendant women that do not at least acknowledge our capacity for happiness, love, friendship, and hope are horribly imbalanced and antagonistic to a holistic understanding of our existence as Afro-descendant women.

Chapter Guide

This dissertation is composed of eight chapters, introduction and conclusion included. In Chapter 1, the introduction, I give an overview of the journey that led me to this project and the backdrop against which I conducted my research in Peru. I also lay out my research questions, theoretical approaches, and then provide a chapter guide for the project. In Chapter 2, I introduce my field sites and myself as the researcher before providing insight into my experience with violence research, my methodological approach, and the methods I used for data collection. The title of Chapter 3, "Negras del Callao", reveals its content: Black Women’s Stories. This is a work of fiction informed by ethnographic research that provides insight into life in Callao from the perspective of a young black woman. My aim was to portray women of African descent as complex individuals without centering pain and violence, and demonstrate how they interact with, and relate to one another and their surrounding environments. In Chapter 4 I engage with James C. Scott (1998) and Sally Engle Merry’s (2016) ideas about legibility and the state, and seek to introduce Afro-Peruvian women’s accounts of
intimate violence into discussions about violence against women. I address the history of systemic violence against black women in order to contextualize commonplace, deeply entrenched and constantly perpetuated stereotypes about them—in particular, myths about their hyper-sexual and aggressive nature—that create the conditions for IPV to be rendered socially invisible. I then further dismantle these stereotypes by presenting the accounts of the usuarias from my study to bring their experiences with different kinds of IPV to light. In Chapter 5 I trace the usuarias’ routes to reporting in the CEMs. I draw on Simone Abdoumaliq’s (2004) concept of “people as infrastructure” to frame family as the primary source of protection for usuarias before reporting and even while their cases were being processed. Chapter 6 explores the CEMs and the new ethnicity question. My findings reveal how colloquial understandings of race and ethnicity, and African descent and blackness influence in-take workers’ processes of determining how to categorize usuarias who self-identify with the aforementioned terms. I employ João Costa Vargas’ (2004) “hyperconsciousness of race” to frame the interactions between admisionistas and usuarias around this taboo subject matter. Chapter 7 reveals the dangers of what Sally Engle Merry (2016) calls “indicator culture”, characterized by a heavy reliance on statistical data. I use ethnographic material to highlight factors that influenced how Afro-Peruvian women were reported as such in CEM records, and how and why others were left out of the numerical data. I call for the continued use of qualitative and ethnographic research that can compliment statistics and to bring more visibility to Afro-descendant women’s experiences IPV. In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I provide a brief summary of my findings, and then close with suggestions for possible future research and suggestions for policy.
CHAPTER 2
LIFE AND RESEARCH

This project offers a snapshot of the lives of the people involved in my research. It is an account of events, stories, interactions, and dilemmas as told to me and seen from my perspective. My position and array of identities affected the way I moved through the city, was seen and saw myself, related to those in my surroundings, and ultimately made sense of the many moving parts of the study. Harrison writes that the multiple identities and the tensions and fluxes that characterize them form the basis for intellectual growth, especially for scholars of color who may be part of Western society and academe while also belonging to marginalized groups (1997, 90).

My research continues to be of great importance to me; aside from my desire to do good work as a graduate student and to position myself in regards to future career prospects, I have a vested interest in the well-being of black women and Afro-descendants in general. Many of the relationships that began as professional interactions between activists and researcher when I first traveled to Peru blossomed into personal friendships that would be sources of support and on-going mutual learning. I also developed new relationships with CEM workers, and with some of the women that I interviewed as part of my study. I spent time waiting with usuarias before legal appointments, chatting in their homes, and discussing work, life, and their cases. I also made an effort to visit CEM admisionistas who had been some of my first points of contact to see how they were doing, and to talk with them when the foot traffic lightened up. My connections with the activist community helped me to see the converging and diverging opinions about Afro-Peruvian identity and violence between activist standpoints and those living their lives outside of the small activist circle. Frequent
sessions with Presencia y Palabra members as we embarked on our journey of collective teaching and learning allowed me to talk about what I was seeing in the CEMs with women who had been working on women’s issues for years, and to think critically about my position and opinions. Our collective was a space of belonging and refuge from the emotional labor involved in researching violence.

What follows is a snapshot of life in the field, of myself, the researcher, and the process through which my project took shape.

**New York, New York: Working in Peru**

I share a running joke with my dear friend John Thomas III, a colleague, ally in research, and the only foreigner I know who had dedicated over a decade to working with Afro-Peruvians outside of the disciplines of history and the performing arts. Whenever we are faced with the headaches that arise while working with black people in Peru, we recite our adaptation of the New York tag line: “if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere”. Together, we have seen graduate school students, independent researchers, and musicians flow in and out of the offices of the Afro-Peruvian organizations. Most do not stay long, and many are not heard from again. Working on topics related to Afro-descendants in Peru, particularly when the focus is not on music and dance, is difficult. The movement is smaller and has been described as weak, especially in comparison to those in countries like Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil in terms of public visibility and successful dissemination of information about Afro-descendants to the broader public and institutions (Thomas 2011). Comparatively, the Afro-Peruvian population is also smaller. There are currently no black cities as are found in Brazil, Colombia, or Cuba, and in Lima, despite the recognition of districts that are historically Afro-Peruvian, the population is spread across the city and is not readily
visible. There is also scare literature about the present day realities faced by Afro-
descendants, and when combined with the popular belief that blackness does not
belong to Lima, all of these factors create a daunting challenge. Research on this group
is not for those short of time or patience. Many researchers become discouraged and
opt to conduct investigations in other more accessible countries.

Although I had conducted research in Lima on Afro-Peruvians before, these
obstacles shaped my research experience and results in ways that I had not previously
anticipated. The search for cases took me from the north to the south of the city, and
inwards to other districts to visit CEMs. This city of nearly 10 million inhabitants is vast;
most people know the areas in which they live and work, but are unfamiliar with much of
the metropolis. I learned to navigate more of it than I ever had before as I spent a large
part of the first ten months of field research traveling to different districts, each with its
own different dynamic and history. Lima on the whole is different from Callao where I
would end up conducting most of my research. Callao is located to the north of the city,
is home to over 1 million residents. It contains the most important port in the country,
and one of the oldest parts of colonial Peru.

I found an apartment in Lima Cercado, a district located in the center of the city,
near the border with Callao in a lower middle class neighborhood. The location was
equidistant to the three CEMs I initially planned to work in, but would later prove to be a
good base from which to travel to the other districts that were farther away. I travelled
not only to Callao but through and to different districts in search of cases and leads for
women who had not reported, an aspect of research that I would later leave aside.
Primarily, I ended up focusing on three of the seven districts of Callao: Callao Cercado,
the most densely populated and historic center district, Ventanilla, the second most populated district to the north of Callao Cercado, and finally, Pachacutec, a then sector of Ventanilla now scheduled to be turned into a district given its rapid expansion.

**Turning Down Black Mecca: Choosing Lima**

When it comes up in conversation that I work in Peru but do not do archeological research or work with indigenous populations, most are perplexed, wondering what else I could be doing in the land of the Inca. I work and live in Lima, I tell them. Many who have traveled to Peru remember Lima as an overcast coastal city where they spent one or two nights before leaving for Cusco, or perhaps Puno, or Arequipa, cities found along the most well-trodden tourist trail. They stayed in the Miraflores district, an upperclass district and tourist hub to the south of the city, or maybe in Barranco, Miraflores’ bohemian neighboring district that also hugs the coastline and caters to the upper middle class. They might have gone to an organic, gourmet, or vegetarian restaurant, and wandered around the famous Parque Kennedy. Any excursion outside of these areas was most likely to the Plaza de Armas, and, if they they had the time, they might have ventured into the Mercado Central, a sprawling maze of stores and shops to the east of the historic center.

Peruvians and foreigners alike were surprised to find out that I, a North American with research funding, had intentionally opted out of living in the upscale areas—Miraflores, Barranco, and San Isidro—where many ex-pats have made their homes. But my experience in Peru, both as a researcher working with black populations and as a black woman, led me to areas less known, and at times actively avoided by locals and tourists. When *limeños* found out that I was working with Afro-Peruvians they wanted to know what I was doing in Lima. Their confusion was predicated on the common
assumption that while black people could be seen in Lima, the majority were not from the city, but rather from a city called Chincha, four hours south of Lima by bus or car. I wrote about these kinds of interactions on numerous occasions in my field notes and offer up an excerpt from a conversation I had with a CEM worker:

“She asked me why I didn’t go to Chincha because there are so many black people down there and it would be a better place because there are more ‘pure’ blacks since in Lima everyone is mestizo. Her voice dropped and she said excitedly, ‘there’s a place—I don’t know if you know it—it’s called Chincha. There’s a ton of morenos there.’”

CEM workers, Peruvians not involved with the Afro-Peruvian movement, and government officials had all advised me to go to Chincha if I wanted to find black people. In the limeño imaginary, Afro-Peruvians come from Chincha, or more broadly, from the southern part of the departamento (the equivalent of a US state) of Lima, and Ica, the departamento to the south of it. This belief is the result of a socially constructed myth that Chincha is the cradle of black people and culture (Heidi Feldman provides an in-depth exploration of this process in her 2006 book). Chincha is marketed to limeños as a place of diversion and partying centered around black dance, music, and cuisine. This has had damaging repercussions for many Afro-descendant communities, and particularly for black women and girls who are sought after for sexual activity, which has contributed to HIV transmission via unsafe sex practices and prostitution (Carrillo and Carrillo 2011). In Lima, most of the Afro-Peruvians in my circle (and I myself) had been asked if they were from Chincha though almost all had been born and raised in the
capital. Although limeños are not unfamiliar with seeing black people, they are assumed to collectively be outsiders, which makes them hyper visible.

During preliminary research in 2013, before the ethnicity question made its way onto the CEM forms I obtained permission to go to the CEM in Chincha at the advice of a director of the PNVFS (the National Program of Familiar and Sexual Violence). I had to rely on workers’ memories in order to find Afro-Peruvian women’s cases. Even in Chincha, the supposed black mecca, CEM staff could only recall two cases in their time at the center. While I am sure that Chincha has much to offer in regards to IPV research, I opted out of working in the region for three reasons. First, there was the ethical and very real issue of safety for women. The communities surrounding Chincha that have been identified as having significant numbers of Afro-Peruvian residents are very small. There was no chance that I would go unnoticed, and given that this was my first attempt at research and I was doing so alone, I was not convinced that I would be able to effectively conceal the identities of women suffering abuse. I was equally concerned that women who already endure violence could be at risk for even more abuse once the topic of my research got around to residents, including their abusers. Keeping women safe is a fundamental ethical concern for domestic violence researchers (Ellsberg and Heise 2005), and I thought it better to opt for a different research site for this project rather than risk causing harm. Second, the majority of the Afro-Peruvian population resides in the department of Lima and is most heavily concentrated in the capital city (CEDET 2005). If there were low numbers of Afro-Peruvian women reporting in the south as well as in Lima, then the latter could at least offer more options via the different CEMs. Third, Lima is the seat of power in Peru.
Ministry headquarters are located in the city, and subsequently policy-related decisions are made there. Since I wanted to have access not only to Afro-descendants, but also the government, Lima was the place to be.

**The Centro Emergencia de Mujeres**

Once I had been approved for research by the MIMP I only traveled to the somber building in the center of Lima that housed the ministry to deal with issues that could not be resolved via email. I spent a good deal of my time traveling to or in the CEMs themselves where I would conduct interviews, pass the time in the halls and waiting areas, and talk to the admisionistas. What follows is a descriptive introduction to the three CEMs in Callao that I formed a home base for my research.

**CEM Callao**

The CEM in Callao Cercado is the most similar to the lay out of an office building. The Palace of Justice has three floors of offices and halls that are dedicated to different legal branches and courtrooms. It is a clean, sterile space with spotless linoleum floors and brown carpeting, off-white walls, and fluorescent lighting.

The Palacio is located just off of an arterial avenue in old Callao, and the admissions office for the CEM is to the right of the entrance, past the large glass box that contains el Señor de la Justicia, a stately, somber saint, covered in gold finery and robes, and surrounded by flowers left by visitors. It is a small room with a desk and a filing cabinet that contains the hundreds of case files that the center attends to. The window lets in the noise from the street and the natural light. Claudio, the *admisionista*, loves the lighting and says he would gladly deal with the noise than the hard fluorescent bulbs in the main office. In the summer, rays of sun peek through the plastic blinds and
leaves stripes of light across the papers stacked in neat files on the desk. His office is the only part of the designated space for the CEM that receives sunshine.

The other offices are down the carpeted hall that extends out in front of the admissions entrance, each with their own doors. The CEM team is comprised of two lawyers, two psychologists, and one social worker. An adjacent door gives way to a small, rectangular room reserved for the outreach team that holds workshops and events to educate the surrounding neighborhoods about violence and CEM services.

Outside, lining both sides of the hallway are four wooden benches. Those waiting to be attended to sit here for varying lengths of time. Occasionally they speak to one another, but mostly, they sit in silence, unless they are speaking in soft tones to the person accompanying them or to impatient children. There are two posters on the wall: one for paternity testing, the other an advertisement for a legal course. Apart from the sounds coming from the offices and the soft humming of fluorescent lights, the space is quiet.

**CEM Ventanilla**

Down a quiet passageway off of *avenida* Gambetta CEM Ventanilla sits amidst an insulated row of houses. The one-story brick building features a large red CEM sign overhead. The right double entrance door is always open during work hours while the other remains closed. The single window is also open. Inside, the roof extends over the two front offices on the right and the left, then stops, leaving a space in the center of the office uncovered. It begins again further back, covering the last three offices. Cobwebs grow between the brick along the walls and in the offices. Posters cover the left corner upon entering, some stuck to the uncovered brick wall, others plastered onto a mobile easel. A lone image of San Martin de Porres sits above a small table with an
electric kettle tucked into the corner. Beside it, the outreach office door is firmly latched shut.

To the right, just past the front door, is the admissions office. A sheet of white paper with Quechua writing on it is beside the frame. Lourdes, the admissionista, put the sign up to make Quechua speakers feel welcome. The bookshelf sags under the weight of the broad binders bursting with case files. The desk and computer are flush against the window. In the summer it is open in hopes of directing a welcome breeze through to the office. The dogs in the front yard of the house next door periodically work themselves into a frenzy barking, drowning out inside conversations. In the winter the cold, damp winter air makes its way through the front door and down through the open ceiling. The open door and a gap in the back of the office joining the adjacent social worker’s office to the admissions room means the occupants and the strains of cumbias and huaynos from the social work space can move freely from one room to the other.

Unpainted wooden benches line the walls in the hallway, ending at the doorways. People—mainly women—wait on the bench closest to the door they wait to enter. The washroom, a small stall, begins where the roof begins again towards the back of the building. Light shines through the spaces above and below the door where ends before the door frame begins. Four rooms that house the offices of the five other CEM workers line the back of the space, each with a desk, shelf, and computer sat in the middle of the floor like islands surrounded by dusty painted ground and old, bare walls.

CEM Pachacutec

CEM Pachacutec is a series of rooms on the second floor of a compound perched on a hill. The compound is across from a public service building on a street with no name. The road leading to the compound is often covered with a fine layer of
sand that snakes over the asphalt from either side of it, uninhibited by the absence of trees or benches. To the right the incline continues, and orderly rows of houses organized into larger blocks can be seen further up the hill. To the left the slope reveals the same—more wooden homes broken up by bigger brick buildings marking businesses and schools. Straight ahead there is nothing but the compound and the sound of waves hitting the shore below. The tuktuks that buzz by seem to roll past the building and off the edge of the world.

Pedestrians trudge back and forth along the sides of the road, exposed to the elements. In the summer months they squint, heads bowed under the relentless summer sun that beats down for most of the day. In the winter they walk slowly through the heavy fog that jealously hides the surrounding wooden houses, revealing them reluctantly as one approaches them. An older woman half-heartedly raises her voice to passersby to offer passport pictures and stationary from behind the lone ceviche stand that sits beside the entrance. It is the only restaurant in the area, though there is a new one being built on the corner. The CEM staff members still prefer to bring their own food to eat at their desks to avoid walking to the end of the road or taking transportation to the market in search of sustenance.

Inside the compound children’s voices can be heard from the rooms on the right of the entry gate that are used by a children’s education program. At times they play in the courtyard or work on projects outside when they are not in the classrooms. A small store appears wedged underneath the open-air flight of stairs to the second floor on the right. White signs encased in plastic paper protectors advertise the prices for printing as well as a CD and DVD disc sales. The second floor bends around like a horseshoe-
shaped balcony. The bench against the wall on the right is for those waiting to be attended in the CEM. Small children and women occupy this space daily.

The first door is the outreach office, the second is the legal office where the head of the center works with the other lawyer. Between the two rooms is the bathroom. Hugo, the *admisionista*, walked me through the bathroom ritual of using the facilities than using the pitcher inside of the large plastic drum to pour water into the toilet bowl to flush.

“The septic system around here is terrible. Actually, it’s almost non-existent,” he chuckles one morning. “You’re lucky you weren’t here yesterday; the truck that empties the porter potties set out for the school down the hill came in the morning and the whole block could smell it.”

He followed up by saying that the municipality was putting in a a septic system there so flush toilets could be installed.

The largest room is the main office. The social worker’s desk is on the other side of a large divider that separates her space from the admissions desk. The iron grates above the windows allow for ventilation, though everyone complains about the heat in the summer and the cold in the winter. CEM workers keep their jackets on as they work at their desks and move from office to office. Posters promoting the MIMP and representing the different campaigns against violence line the walls, covering sections of the brick. Some of the same images are on an easel in the hallway across from the bench. They show the various processing steps of the legal system and offer information about different forms of violence and how to access help.
The printer beside the admissions desk has been a source of on-going headache and triumph. The black box has tape around the bottom of it to keep the tray together. Without the internet there is less demand for the scanner, but the printing and photocopying mechanisms are vital for work. Hugo proudly tells me that he can take it apart and put it back together by himself, a feat he and the other CEM workers took on when they grew tired of waiting for the ministry to send someone out to fix the machine from central headquarters, hours away. After all, most have no idea where the CEM is located anyway.

An Afro-Caribbean-Canadian Woman in Afro-Peru

Upon considering how best to talk about my position as a researcher I follow the advice of Chicana anthropologist Patricia Zavella:

“…Rather than assume some type of pan female solidarity or lack of shared experience between researchers and subjects, we should realize that we are almost always simultaneously insiders and outsiders and discuss what this means for our particular research projects.” (Zavella 1996, 142)

I am a black woman researching black women’s experiences of intimate violence in Peru. I identify as an iteration of Lila Abu-Lughod’s “halfie”, which she defines as a person “whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (1991, 137). Abu-Lughod also makes it clear, however, that “two haves cannot adequately account for the complexity of an identity in which multiple countries, regions, religions and classes may come together” (in Narayan 1993, 673).

Blackness in Real Time

Cheryl Mwaria has stated that black feminist anthropologists often “live [their] anthropology” (2001: 204-28). “They often experience the inequities of race and gender
in their own lives, even as they document it in others’; thus, writing and speaking about their research and experiences becomes inherently both personal and political” (Crista Craven and Dana-Ain Davis 2013, 4). In this sense, I too lived my anthropology. I am a black woman and I am read as such. I know this because of the ways I was treated and experienced social interactions. I experienced the humiliation of racist treatment while apartment hunting with my partner who is Afro-Peruvian. I was told by government officials that I should know how to dance *festejo*, a traditional Afro-Peruvian dance, because I am black and so I have the ability to dance in my blood. The security guards inside the MIMP building eventually got used to my presence but for months they walked by other people in the building, some that could have clearly used some help finding an office, to block my way and ask me where I was going in an accusatory manner. New guards either repeated the process, or were pulled back by those who recognized me.

I was sexually harassed on the streets, and during these episodes it was abundantly clear that I was targeted because I am a woman and because I am black. Comments whispered in my ears about my skin color and assumptions about my sexuality erased any lingering doubt. I was never mistaken for a prostitute (to my knowledge) though I learned that this was common from black women activists, friends, and *usuarias* who had been propositioned for sex or asked what their going rate was. I learned from these women how to be respond to these micro-aggressions by appearing hard and getting loud, and sometimes just ignoring them because they happen so often that it was not worth the energy. These experiences made abstract concepts of the nature of race and racism personal (Caldwell 2007).
There were moments in interviews where *usuarias* explicitly told me or implied that they were willing to discuss race with me because I was black. The most memorable instance took place in November 2016 when I was finally able to secure an interview with a woman who I had been trying to get in touch with for a year. The process of establishing contact and setting up interviews depended on the CEM workers. I would be alerted about a case by the *admisionista* who would hand the file off to whichever worker was attending to the case. That person would then call the *usuaria* to schedule a follow up meeting for her case and tell them that I, a researcher, would like to speak to them when they were finished with case business. There were no-shows, but the women who did go to the CEMs agreed to speak with me and I would interview them in the centers or in their homes. This particular *usuaria* told the psychologist who had called me that she would speak with me but that she only would be able to for fifteen minutes because she was very busy. She looked shocked when the psychologist introduced me, and later during the interview, paused to sheepishly confess that she had been actively avoiding me, thinking that I was a government worker or foreigner who wanted to interrogate her about the violence she had suffered. It was clear that she thought I would not be black. We spoke for an hour and a half, after which she hugged me and told her to call her any time to follow up.

My blackness was also read as foreign, at times. I was once told that I did not look like an Afro-Peruvian woman because I looked too proud and comfortable, and that my hair looked too healthy and differently styled. This was referencing the fact that products for natural hair are scarce and of poor quality, and there are no formal hair salons that cater to women with coarse, kinky hair. My social network also affected my
perspective of life for black Peruvians. As an academic with strong connections to Afro-
Peruvian activism, most of my closest friends and acquaintances are activists, and the
activist community is many ways my base. This means that I spend time around people
who represent a small sector of the Afro-Peruvian population; they generally have
completed higher levels of education, hold formal jobs, many within the government,
and have had the time to analyze identity politics in a way that other have not.

The facets of my identity were always at play in my research. Being black and
from a foreign institution seemed to make government workers, all of who were mestizo,
more hesitant about talking about racial stereotypes they had about black women.
Consequently, I was unable to determine how any prejudices they might have had
factored into the kind of attention they gave black women. Activist friends said that my
nationality might factor into their aversion to these topics because while racist thought is
very commonplace they would not want to tell me because I am black but more
importantly because they would not want to make a bad impression on a foreigner who
was going to later write about her experiences.

As for positive aspects, as a foreigner I could ask questions and for clarification
that would not be appropriate or offered to a Peruvian. I was allowed to be more
outspoken and blunt than would have been tolerated had I not been know to be
Canadian. People wanted to explain aspects of society to me because they assumed
that I did not know, and so I became familiar with popular constructions of race and
racism through these kinds of lessons. I have tried to use the access my nationality
afforded me to make my research better, especially when talking to the PNCVFS staff
about the importance of research on Afro-Peruvian women. In the spirit of addressing
citation politics (see Bolles 2001 and Harrison 2013), I make a conscious effort to cite Afro-Peruvian women’s written work in this dissertation, bringing their voices to the fore, and sharing them with a public that might not otherwise be exposed to them.

**Methodological Approach**

In addition to employing black feminist thought as a theoretical cornerstone of my study, I used black feminist methodology to guide my choice of methods, content of inquiry, and approach to field research. A black feminist framework emphasizes the acknowledgement and study of lived experience as a key site of knowledge production, or what Patricia Hill Collins calls “embodied knowledge” (2000, viii). In doing so, it valorizes ways of knowing and learning that at times continue to be discredited in favor of epistemologies generated in and venerated by academia and disseminated through print text. This requires me, the researcher, to closely consider the everyday meanings of race and gender for black women and the impact of the implications on their lives. It also reserves space be created for black women’s self-determination and identification, and recounting of their own experiences as protagonists, a core focus of this project (Collins 2000, 263).

Black feminist methodology also calls for attention to what Irma McClaurin refers to as the “simultaneity of oppression,” that locates black women at the apex of class, culture, gender, and race, and calls for a recognition of and exploration of these intersections and the myriad of ways that they are experienced by as many women (2001, 34). Lastly, it fosters a reflexive approach on my part, demanding that I consider my positionality and how it shapes my understandings of social phenomena, as well as how others might make sense of me (Harrison 1995; Caldwell 2007; McClaurin 2000).
The interplay of these tenants is precisely the framework needed to understand the convoluted nature of the interactions between black women’s experiences with violence from both a historic and cultural standpoint as these women undergo a process of state classification and recognition.

**Methods Adapted**

Initially I was interested to find out about any differences that might have existed in the nature of the violence experienced by *mestiza* and black women, and the methods they chose to protect themselves. I was also curious about the perception of this violence by CEM workers, and any differences in the treatment they might have received on the basis of their racial identities. I planned to conduct research based on participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with Afro-Peruvian activists, CEM workers, 12 Afro-Peruvian and 12 mestiza CEM *usuarios*, and 12 from each group who had not reported. Additionally, I planned to conduct a series of focus groups with these same women to strengthen themes from individual interviews and to monitor differences in how the major themes were discussed in a group setting.

This initial plan was worked, re-worked, and then reborn a number of times. In retrospect, fieldwork felt, at many points in time, to be less about methodical plotting of how to get from point A to B and much more being ready to adapt to whatever came. And came it did. My methods changed significantly over the course of this project, and were shaped and restricted by two institutions, the Internal Review Board at the University of Florida (IRB), and the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) in Lima, before I began the process of finding cases, then again later by the unexpected changes in the field.
When I turned in my initial proposal for research to the Internal Review Board in the fall of 2014 I foresaw having to make some minor adjustments to the project as I had done for preliminary research in the summer of 2013. My most pressing concern was what might happen should they have requested to meet with me as they had for that proposal since I had since moved back to Toronto to prepare for the move to Peru in January 2015. Over the next four months I was requested to make changes that would have altered my project so drastically that it would have changed the results—and the essence of the project—in their entirety. These concerns were primarily in response to the open-ended nature of the study that did not guarantee a predictable outcome, but also cloaked a desire to protect the university in language that concerns about the well-being of research participants. Elizabeth Chin’s (2013) critique of the way feminist methodology and practice does not fit into IRB conceptualizations of what research should look like in a neo-liberal context closely mirrors my experiences:

“…Feminist ethnography … often receives greater scrutiny, despite posing few to no risks to participants of the sort for which IRBs were formed in the first place. Grounded theory, emergent methodologies, and reflexive practices are some examples of the specific challenges feminist research tends to put before IRBs, which generally want all possibilities spelled out beforehand. Furthermore, fine-grained work with the homeless, battered women, transgender youth, and drug users often faces challenges from IRBs that, primed as they are to protect institutional interests, find it difficult to imagine how the research can be undertaken in ways that render the institution damage-proof. The kinds of questions researchers face from IRBs reflect more the
limitations of institutional imagination than ethical concerns for research participants” (Chin 2013, 209-210).

There was also a lack of cultural literacy, particularly around intimate violence, that became difficult to surpass. Sarah Hautzinger expressed similar troubles when her proposal for domestic violence research in Brazil sent her review board into a panic as it expressed grave concern about the absence of anonymity in focus groups and potential for criminal charges to be brought against perpetrators—worries and outcomes that are much more salient and probable in the US than in the context in which she was working (Hautzinger 2012, 28-29). I faced scrutiny on the very same issues, and my response, that I only wished that the Peruvian legal system were more efficient and interested in prosecuting abusers, was identical. My justifications for choice of methods and methodology were eventually accepted and I received clearance shortly before making the move to Peru.

**MIMP**

I arrived at the MIMP in January of 2015 with my IRB-approved documents translated and in hand, and spoke with the program director of the PCVFS with whom I had been in correspondence via email in the months leading up to my arrival. From January to March I waited for approval, revising my Spanish proposal and butting heads with my liaison about anthropological research methods, the length of the project (much too long for their liking), and explaining the necessity of talking to Afro-Peruvian women about their particular experiences instead of focusing on women from all backgrounds. The MIMP, much like the IRB, wanted a protocol set in stone for which I would be held accountable, not one that, to their exasperation, I knew I would have to alter at various points throughout its duration to adapt it to the reality of working with women on
domestic violence issues. They were seemingly happier about the prospect of work being done on Afro-Peruvian women where no information existed than about actively facilitating the process. It was my first direct experience with the chasm between policy and practice. Later on, I would look back on this encounter as a foretelling of future run-ins, but also as a baptism by fire of sorts. Friends quickly commiserated with me, sympathetically shaking their heads and sharing their horror stories about the system, while recognizing the experience as part of the process of becoming limeña.

**Field Reality**

I will talk in greater detail about the realities of domestic violence research, but I choose to address it here by way of my experiences with Clara that embodied the particularities of this type of research. Clara is a pseudonym for a young woman I interviewed relatively early on in my time in the CEMs. Hers was the first case of extreme violence I dealt with. Clara was also the first person of many to fall off the grid, so to speak. Friendly, warm, willing to share her experiences, she answered the phone and even called me back after I had called her, an act that shocked me considering its rarity. Her boyfriend called me after finding my number in her phone, and I called her a week later at a new number she had passed on to me in the CEM to check in. I called her weekly, and then as time went on, once a month. I did this initially because I was deeply concerned for her safety, then later as part of my routine follow-ups in hopes of catching other MIA usuarias since limeños generally do not leave messages and prefer to simply call back. Her lawyer would ask me if I’d heard from her from time to time since I was the last one to speak to her. Over time other workers would do the same regarding other cases of Afro-Peruvian women. I would dial her number, listen to the rings, and without fail hear the same smooth, automated voice from the telephone
company, Claro, her namesake: “this is a message from Claro. If you would like you may leave a message in the mailbox.” Clara never answered the phone again.

This is a common occurrence in the emergency centers. The admisionistas patiently explained that I shouldn’t get my hopes up when trying to get in touch with any usuaria. As I became a more common fixture in the CEMs I would hear talk about women who would stop answering their phones, who would switch numbers without providing a follow up, whose phones were suddenly turned off or out of service. This became a standard part of my life as a researcher, and over time I learned to expect it, as did CEM workers who frequently turned to one another to wager whether or not usuarias would return. No one ever took it to heart; it is a simple reflection of the reality of women who are avoiding aggressors, trying to find safety, moving to new places, looking for other options for protection, or simply not wanting to talk. At times they would resurface to file another complaint when their partner hit them again, but sometimes they just went away all together and their cases remained unresolved.

This dynamic greatly impacted my research methods. I removed the comparative aspect with mestizas and dedicated myself to finding Afro-Peruvian women’s cases in the CEMs since doing so required a great deal of time, and the latter were the group I was most interested in. It took me 19 months to find 12 cases. I spent the lions share of my time tracking cases. This process consisted of identifying cases and getting CEM staff to make calls, following up with more calls to phones that capriciously went out of service, and traveling for hours to wait in CEMs for usuarias who never showed. Indeed, the question of broaching the topic of race, which I had anticipated being the biggest hurdle I would face, was swiftly surpassed by that of
determining how to generate data that would form part of a project that showed
continuity, and tell a compelling story. I sought answers while balancing my interests
with information promised to the MIMP in my proposal.

Methods

I left focus groups by the wayside after attempts at the snowball method for
recruiting women who had not reported violence (Bernard 2011) yielded poor results.
The logistical chaos of crossing the city from Callao to San Juan de Miraflores in the
southern part of Lima during evening rush hour to conduct focus groups with women
associated with a CEDET community project proved nearly impossible. What was born
of this thinning of methods was a clarity I could not have expected, nor probably have
hoped to have obtained with my initial method set given the size of the net I had cast.

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recruiting women who had not reported violence (Bernard 2011) yielded poor results.
The logistical chaos of crossing the city from Callao to San Juan de Miraflores in the
southern part of Lima during evening rush hour to conduct focus groups with women
associated with a CEDET community project proved nearly impossible. By narrowing
down the scope of my study I was able to develop a deeper understanding of the issues
at hand among a smaller group of research participants than I likely would have had
gone through with my initial plan.

This dissertation is based on research conducted between June and August
2013, January 2015 and June 2016, and in November of 2016, a total of 22 months. I
conducted semi-structured, interviews, most of which were very informal, with 12 Afro-
Peruvian usuarias, 5 admisionistas, and 8 CEM workers (psychologists, social workers,
and lawyers), activists from the Afro-Peruvian movement, Flora Tristan, and one
university professor. I also conducted archival research in CEDET’s library, the library of Callao, the Ministry of Culture in Callao, and the MIMP.

The bulk of this dissertation relies on ethnographic data collected through participant observation that took place in CEMs, and in private homes where some initial and follow up interviews were conducted with usuarias. Additionally, I participated in activist events in conjunction with CEDET and coordinated and attended bi-monthly meetings with Presencia y Palabra members. Participant research goes beyond these “work” moments and into everyday life in Lima and Callao, that have taught me more about these places than I can fit in these pages. Russell Bernard tells his public that they are good participant observers when they know “when to laugh at what people think is funny,” and because “when people laugh at what you say it will be because you meant it to be a joke” (2011, 258). For reference, I am fairly certain that I qualify by his standards, but my friends and partner still gently poke fun at my poor ability to tell a false coin from a real one, a skill that still sets me apart from limeños and chalacos.

Life at Work

The following four vignettes delve into the dynamics of field research and aspects of the lives of the women I worked with. They are accounts of moments that I think best illustrate important aspects of daily life in the CEMs and the streets. The first offers a glimpse into my relationship with the admissionistas, with whom I spent the most time on a daily basis. I highlight the separation between the state and the CEMs, and how I developed a familiarity I was able to develop with Afro-Peruvian cases because there were so few of them. The second speaks to the state of emergency in Callao that extended over many months of my study. I consider its effect on my research and
reflect on the absence of gender and women from state discussions about the effects of violence in the region. In the third, I consider the nature of usuarias’ relationships with their partners and with the police, both of which affected the way I conducted interviews and are topics I address further in Chapter 5. Finally, I use a particular case to talk about women’s time and work, and the way they restricted their ability to speak with me, but more importantly, to see their cases through the legal system.

By Heart

Hugo and I are in his office again after five months. I’m back for follow up research and he has welcomed me back with open arms. I’ve missed him and our chats dearly. The ministry representative who was in the small space when I arrived is now sitting on one of the benches in the hall way. He’s tucked his ministry ID between one of the gaps in his button down dress shirt but the lanyards bright red lettering is still visible from where I am sitting in the office. He opens the folder, and scans a page. Nervously he fingers each sheet as he reads and re-reads the checklists inside, glancing furtively up at the women who come in off the street and eyeing the bare walls and open roof. His discomfort is palpable.

“Amiga, ¿qué es de tu vida? ¿Cómo estás? When did you arrive?” Hugo ushers me into the room. The ministry worker peeks into the office and at me in the chair he had been occupying, still surprised at our familiarity. When Hugo introduced us he hesitated, then nodded, recognizing me.

“Ah yes, you’re the researcher who’s always emailing to ask for data on Afro-Peruvian women.”

“I am,” I smiled.
I was finally face to face with the Luis from the data collection center who sent me the monthly numbers for Afro-Peruvian CEM usuarias. The three of us paused, awkwardly, before Hugo cleared his throat and asked Luis to sit outside while we spoke.

“I am sorry to interrupt,” I tell him.

“Ah, don’t be.” Dropping his voice, he continues. “I’m glad for the break. He’s been interrogating me about filling protocols. They don’t have a clue what it’s like for us here.”

To lighten the mood, I present Hugo with a present from Canada. He’s never seen maple syrup before. I explain the harvesting process to him and what we usually eat it with, reminding myself as I do that pancakes aren’t a common breakfast food in Peru.

“But you can add it to cuaker,” I tell him, using the limeño word for oatmeal, particularly Quaker oats. He eyes the bottle curiously, then grins widely after trying it.

“¡Qué rico!”

“I’m glad you like it,” I laugh. I glance out the door to make sure there isn’t anyone waiting to be seen. I look back in time to catch the admisionista stubbornly shaking the down turned cup he had poured some syrup into in attempts to drain the last bit of the sweet liquid. Failing to do so he puts a finger in the cup, determined to catch the lingering drops.

“Excuse me,” he says sheepishly.
Content, he tosses the cup and takes a seat. I fish my notebook out of my purse thinking that we'll get down to case business. Hugo is sizing up the bottle with calculated mischief.

“I don't know if that's going to make it back to my house,” he says.

“Make sure your wife gets some,” I say sternly.

He laughs, then turns to get down to the impending task.

“A ver, casos de mujeres afro…,” Hugo turns to his computer screen, moving the mouse and pulling up what I assume to be the filing system.

“I was told by the ministry that there have been three cases since I left,” I offer.

“I have five names here,” he says after pausing for a short while. “But I'm sure you've met with some of them.”

I hear Lourdes's voice in my head. She said the same thing the day before. We sat in her office carrying out this ritual: Afro-Peruvian role call.

“Vanessa Muñoz Calderón.”

“Sí, la conozco. Already interviewed her.”

“Clara Goyoneche Álvarez.”

“I haven't talked to her in ages but I interviewed her last year.”

“Bueno, she reported again. Boyfriend beat her up badly. Ask Rebeca about it.”

“Alright, who else?”

“Natalia Flores Rivadeneyra.”

“She never answered. She reported but never came in again.”

“Nancy Castrillón Yáñez.”

“Disappeared, came back, gone again.”
“There are a lot of Afro-Peruvian children… Alright, three more. Sarita Blanco Reyes.”

“We scheduled her for an interview twice but she never showed up.”

“Okay, well, that leaves us with… Claudia Martínez Vázquez and Rosa Navarro Romero.”

“I don’t know them. Can we pull those files and call?”

“Sure.”

What stayed with me most about the visitor with his lanyard was how uncomfortable he looked in the space. Government officials showed up at CEMs on rare occasions. Their visits were more frequent in Callao Cercado because the CEM was inside of the Palace of Justice where other offices were located, but aside from the young man I mention in this vignette, I never saw any government representatives— from the MIMP or any other ministry—in the CEMs. The centers seemed to be isolated.

Pachacutec was the most extreme of the three cases, and it showed not only in the distance between the center of Lima and the CEM perched on a hill, but also through workers’ understanding of how CEMs were run on a daily basis. CEM admisionistas had different approaches to dealing with usuarias; the state has its protocol but CEM admisionistas have a better understanding the limits of policy in real time. This became clear when I began to observe the goings on in the centers and even more so when I broached the subject of the ethnicity question.

The ephemeral nature of IPV reporting was quite evident among Afro-Peruvian women because their cases were so few and far between. Even now I can list the names of every usuaria I have seen by name, and rattle of the details of their cases, as
well as the last time I saw them. My intimate knowledge of these cases can be measured in the hours of waiting I did over my fieldwork stint for women to arrive at CEMs. Sometimes they arrived late. In many cases they never showed at all. If I was lucky, I was able to follow up once before I lost contact with the usuarias. I came to regard each interview and exchange as a snapshot of these women’s lives at a particular point in time.

**The State of Callao**

I found out about the state of emergency by accident, a few months after it had been declared in early December of 2015. I was in CEM Callao one hot morning in February and Claudio mentioned that there was a paro, a car check point, on avenida Venezuela, one of the arterial roadways leading to the palace of justice, which was why it was so quiet in the office. I didn’t think much of it. I had seen police making rounds, but nothing to make me suspect something was different. This was Callao, after all, everyone said it was dangerous, though I had generally felt relatively safe.

On my way to the front doors of the palace I spotted four trucks—two SUVs and two pick ups—with the national police SWAT logo plastered across them. They were filled with officers dressed in black and in the process of donning more protective gear. I wasn’t the only one who had noticed them. The security guards at the door and the bank guard were looking out across the street with mild interest. Outside, onlookers stood in clusters on both sides of the avenue, relaxed and unafraid. Everyone was waiting with the kind of expectant anticipation. I had seen this happen before; people in some neighborhoods were so familiar with this pre-chaos ritual that residents were more interested in getting a front row seat for the main event than avoiding potential danger.
I had planned to mind my business and get on the bus, but I sensed no tension among the onlookers and so I decide to mix and mingle. We all watched as green bulletproof vests were velcro’ed into place. Then came the gloves, the balaclavas, and, of course, the guns. Strolling up to three women at the edge of the crowd I asked what was going on.

“They’re going into a building,” I was told.

I stood a few meters back and waited the five minutes it took for officers to turn the car engines on. Everyone started to perk up. The excitement was short lived as the trucks sped around the corner and out of sight. We all ran together to the end of the block to see what side street they entered. It was one of the narrow roads leading away from the Palace of Justice that I had been repeatedly told that I was not to walk up.

“Lots of problems over there, lots of drugs and crime,” Cassandra, a psychologist, warned.

Disappointed by the lack of action, everyone went back to business, and I hopped on the bus and went home.

A few days later, through bites of apple pie, my friend Emilia paused to ask me how work was going with Callao under a state of emergency. I paused on the couch, looking clueless.

“I’m never up there, but it’s been on the news,” she continued.

Indeed, Callao was under a state of emergency due to high rates of drug smuggling, crime, and gang activity. What I had assumed to be normal sights suddenly took on new meaning. It explained why there were police at every turn. It explained why there had been an order to shut traffic down in the area, and why the SWAT was
out puffing its chest and stretching its arms freely into *chalaco* homes and neighborhoods.

I had been told to be careful. I had been told both explicitly and implicitly that Callao was the lawless northern badlands, a locus of crime, drugs, and trafficking through the port. A short while after beginning to work in Callao I stopped watching the news. I had grown tired of listening to endless reports about violence at the end of days filled with the a kind of violence that was not causing social and state panic. Ultimately, Callao was where the cases I was desperately looking for were found, and I was still going to continue to work there regardless of the incessant cautioning against it, and so I did. This stigma played heavily into daily interactions in the province and adds more dimension to the kind of violence I was studying. It also provided perspective for *limeño* perceptions of Callao and context for the conversations I had about my research.

For many *limeños* Callao is synonymous with drugs and violence, primarily petty theft, but also with more serious criminal activity, including organized crime, trafficking, extortion, and murder. Levels were rising during my time in Lima, so much so that on December 4th 2015, president Ollanta Humala announced that Callao would be under a forty-five day state of emergency. According to the official decree, said state of emergency placed the region under the control of the national police forces (PNP) (*El Peruano* 2015). In addition, the president ordered a suspension of citizens’ constitutional rights as they pertain to personal freedom and security and freedom of movement, and allowed the police to enter private homes without warrants (*El Peruano* 2015). The order would go on to be renewed five times, lasting 315 days until the new president Pedro Pablo Kuczynski announced its end.
As a domestic violence researcher, the reports about the state of emergency in Callao and the depictions of dangerous criminal activity have parameters that are clearly marked. State responses are dedicated to reducing public violence. Armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, arms and drug trafficking and sales, and gang activity are the targets of organized police efforts. In the media, these kinds of criminal activities are gendered whereby both the perpetrators and victims are male. Visual depictions and verbal descriptions of both the criminal activity and police interventions reinforced the masculine nature of these acts. While news coverage mentioned the impact these crimes had on public safety and on the families of the people involved who can become collateral damage, there was scant attention paid to the effect they had on family life, on long standing gender inequality, and on women.

Considering the rate of violence against women in the country it could easily be argued that women are living in a state of emergency of their own (in 2015 ENDES noted that 70% of women reported receiving abuse from a partner in the last 12 months); yet gender violence and IPV did not figure among the types of violence that were causing such concern. I found this unnerving seeing as in some ways it was clear that these problems were intimately connected. For instance, I can recall watching a news segment about the rise in drug sales and consumption one evening after coming home from speaking to a usuaria whose partner frequently got high on pasta básica de cocaína, a cheap cocaine derivative similar to crack cocaine, and abused her. On another occasion, another usuaria told me about how a verbal dispute with her boyfriend ended with him pulling out a pistol and holding the muzzle to her head. I wondered how on-going discussions on prime time television about the illicit and arms
and drug trades could completely omit the implications that increased access to drugs, guns, and war grade weapons can have on family structures and intimate relationships.

Aside from the lack of connection between these different types of violence, it was difficult to tell what the effect of the state of emergency was on my research. There was no indication that *usuarias*’ relationships worsened during this period and there was no way to infer a direct connection between the incidents with drugs and guns, and the emergency since in both were cases the men had long histories of drug abuse and possible involvement in crime. The state of emergency did not seem to weigh on the minds of my research participants, nor was it evident in interviews that they attributed any changes in their relationship dynamics to state-sanctioned safety measures.

Although I heard about other SWAT raids, the one I witnessed was an isolated event for me. It was out of the ordinary and did not give me the impression that it was the result of more frequent violence in the area; I only began to think that it was after I found out about the state of emergency. I heeded the safety precautions, leaving valuables at home and trying not to draw unnecessary attention to myself, but there was not much difference between the way I conducted myself in Callao as opposed to Lima. Overall, I felt that there was little, if any, direct impact on my study; however, I was left with questions about what differences I might simply not have been able to see over the course of my work.

**Ysabel’s House**

Ysabel is a bold woman, direct and outspoken with a penchant for bright colors and gold jewelry. Her family is from Chincha where she was born and lived before moving to Callao where she was working and raising her two daughters when we met. Ysabel lives a ways away from the CEM in Callao in an old, one-story home with heavy,
austere bars on the windows. I had planned to take a combi to her house, but ended up walking when the small bus took a sudden detour. I followed her street, one of the smaller roads that Hugo had repeatedly told me I was not to walk on—“too many delincuentes”—and knocked soundly on her large door.

Ysabel knew I was coming, which was the only reason she opened the door.

“Their father won’t stop coming around,” she motions to her daughters who sat at the small dining room table coloring.

“When I kicked him out he would sneak back in; break the back door, come through the window. Now that I’ve filed the report he’s taken to saying he has money for the girls to get me to open the door. But I’m done with it. Once he starts raising his voice I slam the door shut.”

Ysabel tended to give short, thoughtful answers to my questions, but when I asked her about the police she talked for five minutes straight. They never came around, she said, even before the state of emergency. In fact, the police actively avoided her neighborhood, especially at night, she told me. Ysabel said the police were more afraid of the men in the area than the men were of the cops. No one called them, it was futile.

“We have to sort out our own problems here.”

Ysabel, like like most of the other women I spoke with, she was still in contact with her ex-partner. She was constantly monitoring the door since he came by regularly, oftentimes without her consent. Most of the women I met either still co-habitated with the men that abused them, or were receiving unwanted and habitual visits from them. These visits were often violent in one way or another, and made
homes unstable environments for their residents and for me, a stranger and a researcher. Ysabel’s views of the police also mirrored those of other usuarias who also lived in areas that were stigmatized as dangerous and avoided by the police. Ysabel and other women in her neighborhood relied on alternative measures of protection since they could not trust the authorities to intervene. Consequently, I spent more time with women in the CEMs than their houses and apartments because of the threat of violence that could present itself at any given moment.

**Work/Time**

I walked through the market stalls, passed the herbalists and vegetable vendors to the seafood section. Vanessa’s hands selected, weighed, chopped, and wrapped fish, before placing the packages into reaching hands as new orders were yelled out from amidst the throng of impatient customers. She was pleasant and alert, even after working for six straight days. We smiled and waved at each other before she turned back to fill the next order and I went in search of lunch. Vanessa used to work in the fish terminal beside the port in old Callao, but she was saving up to start a small restaurant out of the side of her home. Her husband, Marco, still drove a taxi on and off, but his drug habit had ramped up again and he’d taken to sleeping during the day and yelling at her at night. The restaurant will be good, she would say. Once she could hire someone to help out she would have a bit more time to stay home with her youngest son who was recovering from a bad case of bronchitis. The medical bills had depleted some of her meager savings, and she had to buy another phone when Marco traded hers for drugs. The woman she used to work for at the terminal offered her a shift leading up to the Holy week when fish sales were high, and she took it, hoping to save more for her dream.
Vanessa was out of work when I met her. She had worked before as a telemarketer but had since left her job. She was happy about it. Though she sorely missed the income, she was able to pursue her case, which, she said, she never would have had time to do if she had a job. There were forms to be signed and taken to other legal offices, court dates, and other reasons to make the trip to the CEM in the middle of the day, all of which would have been impossible especially since she been working in the informal sector like most of the others.

The last time I spoke to Vanessa we were trying to coordinate a follow up meeting in the weeks before I left Lima. She had finally saved up enough to open her restaurant and she was elated but exhausted from all of the work. We set a meeting but she called to cancel and reschedule because of work and familial obligations. When I arrived at the CEM in Pachacutec on the newest date we had set, Hugo looked surprised to see me.

“I don’t think she will come,” he said.

He was right.

Time was a precious and in short supply for usuarias. Employment was unstable, and many women could not afford to miss work when they could so easily be fired. Some usuarias sold candies in the streets, other cleaned houses or engaged in seasonal agricultural labor. When they were not working for wages they spent time caring for their children and partners, and attending to extended family. This left little time to follow up with their cases. The legal system required time and money, both of which they had in short supply, which made it a luxury many could literally not afford even though CEM services are free. The lack of faith in the system and with the time
commitment were two of many reasons why women abandoned their cases. As a researcher I had to conduct my first interview with a new usuaria as though it might be my last, which proved to be beneficial since most of the time it would be.
Lima at six in the evening is almost the same as at eight in the morning. The difference is most felt in the changing motives for the frantic rush of bodies and cars. Anxious desperation to cross the teeming metropolis is replaced by a yearning for relief from noise and gridlocked traffic, signs of a city overwhelmed by inhabitants. Early mornings feature coiffed and perfumed limeños whose heads bob then nestle against metal doors and window frames, only to be roused by gales of salted air that rush in with new passengers. In the evenings faded cologne gives way to the scent of sweat from weary, wilting bodies, heavy with sleep. Lia gazes out the small window on her right. Securing an individual seat in the cramped combi had been easy enough since two major stops had sent the majority of passengers from Lima streaming out of the small bus. They merged into the strong current of pedestrians, weaving between vendors stalls and towards the voices of other cobradores competing jealously for passengers like seagulls for scraps. Lia cradles her purse in her lap and kicks her feet out, easing the weight off of her tired soles. With Lima behind her, Callao awaits. This crossing of invisible boundaries incites changes in behavior on the combi. Fingers tighten around purses. The back row is avoided when possible and approached with trepidation. Passengers demonstrate their refined ability to meticulously size up their seat partner while appearing nonchalant.

On a minor avenue, a woman in a neon pink windbreaker flags down the bus. Lia sees her huddled with four other women perched like crows on back of a small bench. She yells goodbye, flashing several gold teeth, and adjusting her fanny pack
before climbing into the *combi* and sitting in the double seat beside Lia. Her perfume and hair gel mingle and waft into Lia’s nostrils. The woman’s curly hair is dyed a rust color, but the texture is just like Lia’s, like her papis—no, papi’s is more tightly curled. Like her mami’s. Like her *tía* Tati’s; Tati who is waiting for her in the market with her hard face and soft silences. The bus snakes down the streets, the door slides open, then closes marking the beginning and end of so endless trips. It takes them deeper into Callao, closer to home, closer to the ocean, past weathered houses that bear centuries of scars and continue to withstand the havoc of damp, salty air.

One story brick homes, brightly colored and sandwiched together, are punctuated by four story apartment buildings that face one another across the street like pawns on a chess board. Spray painted proclamations of love share walls with gang tags and profanity. Political banners hang from second floor balconies. A caution against the spread of venereal disease is endorsed by San Martín de Porres; here the sacred intermingles with the profane. Wide smiles and campaign promises cover the reality of port life and poverty: wooden slatted rooms, faded cloth curtains, cracked cement walls, and rotting wood doors.

A woman with creamy chestnut skin and curly black hair nestles a dark-skinned baby against her breast and smiles serenely down at the chaotic traffic circle from her perch on a poster atop the school in the *Óvalo* Zavogal. The poster’s colorful lettering encourages breast feeding for new mothers. Lia stares at the woman as the combi makes its way around the oval round-about. She touches her own curls. The passengers cross themselves dutifully when passing a church. She wants to cross
herself when she sees this woman, a beacon brown familiarity amidst the hordes of foreign white models.

The bus slows at the light between a gas station and a man selling coconut flesh and candies. From his cart he sells hot drinks in metal vats that send steam up like white flags and cut the cool evening breeze, attracting the people huddled around his stand on plastic stools. They warm their hands around cups of *emoliente* that replace the morning concoctions of *quinoa, trigo*, and *macca* root.

A young man bows his head as he gets on the bus and slaps a ten *soles* bill into the *cobrador*'s expectant palm as he shuffles to the last open seat in the car. Lia takes her eyes off of the fat toddler sitting on his mother’s lap in front of her to watch the bill checking ritual. Dirty fingers and thumbs pinch and rub the bill firmly. Satisfied that it hasn’t been printed on standard paper, his nails score the stoic aviator hat and goggles of Quiñones Gonzales then settle on the lapel where they check for the faint imprint left by the mint. The *cobrador* leans into the window and twists the bill note, letting the purple number ten shimmer and switch to green then back to violet before he holds the paper to the light in search of the watermark. He furrows his brow. Thumbing the corner again, he turns to the young man.

“This bill has blood on it,” he murmurs.

The man tenses. Thirteen pairs of eyes dart to the bill as panic blooms, filling the bus interior with its stench. The windows are open, cool air rushes into the *combi*, then exits when no one inhales. The *cobrador* lets out the nervous laugh. Pressure builds swiftly, fermenting, apprehension grows like yeast. Lia glances at the mother of the toddler who is in front of her, facing the owner of the bloody bill. Her eyes reveal
nothing. Her arm tightens around her child. The conductor’s eyes flash in the rearview mirror while the thigh pressed up against Lia’s clenches.

The cobrador slides the door open for new passengers. Fear snakes out, grazing the newcomers who search seated faces for signs of danger they take their seats.

“¡Mercado, mercado! ¿Alguién baja mercado?"

The market is just up ahead.

Lia breathes in the cacophony of smells that vie for her attention. Fresh-pressed orange juice, vegetables, towers of eggs, fried pork, and sweet potato come first. They clash with the underlying aromas of perspiration from the men in rubber boots whose bodies strain under the weight of the products they tote on weathered dollies. Human and animal feces and sewage boldly stake out their space. Parents hurry their children home from school, four or five-year-old girls with heads full of ribbons and backpacks bobbing up and down behind them. Women huddled around shop fronts repeat their orders diligently until attended.

“Si no lloras, no mamas,” tía Tati always told her, “if you don’t cry, you don’t get milk”.

That applied to market culture and most other situations where Lia hadn’t spoken loud enough for her aunt’s liking.

Tati’s stall was in the center of the north market building where the restaurants were. A few steps away from the vegetable vendors and down the hall from the children’s toys and clothing, she sat behind mountains of abarrotes—dried fruits, beans, and nuts, mainly. Tati used to have a sandwich stand outside until she saved enough
selling buns stuffed with morcilla and torreja to move into a more comfortable setting. Abuela was so proud when Tati purchased the shop that she almost cried—almost. Her dream had always been independence for her daughters, she said, and Tati had come so far. Mami would never tell her what happened back then but Lia had overheard whispered phone calls with her tías about Génaro’s bad temper and Tati’s scars when she was younger.

Lia loved her tía Tati, the youngest of her mother’s sisters. Tati had cared for her as a child when her mami finished her weekday job and then went north on weekends to harvest strawberries in Huacho, and her papi was driving taxis. Lia would spend weekends at Tati’s house where she played in the streets for hours with her cousins. Héctor, Rogelio and Lucila were around her age, and after running around all day Tati would braid her hair and sing cumbias. Then suddenly, Lia didn’t see tía much for three years. Mami said she was resting a lot in the time after her husband was shot and Génaro started coming around. Her tía was harder now, after Génaro, but happier.

“¿Mamacita, cómo ‘tas?” Tati called to her, standing and kissing her firmly.

They were the same height and shape; curvy and short with strong legs. Lia used to drive her mami crazy asking if she was sure Tati wasn’t her real mother.

“Bien, tía. Busy day?”

Tati patted her permed tresses.

“Como siempre, mi amor. I have something for your mami. Imelda wanted raisins and dried fruit for the cake. Take them before I forget and she calls me again.”

She pulls a black plastic bag out from behind a tower of quinoa and extends it to Lia who pauses to glance at the long scar on the back of her hand. Tati catches her
and her faint smile drops. She puts the bag in Lia’s hastily and pulls her sleeve over her 
hand.

“You’re almost nineteen. You have a boyfriend yet, querida?” her tía asks, staring at her.

“No, tía.”

“But you would tell us if you did, no?”

“Pues, sí…”

A couple begins to walk towards Tati’s stall from the children’s section. Tati eyes the pair then looks back at Lia and holds up her scarred hand.

“Lia, you see this? He had just started when my sisters and your abuela showed up. Now he’s gone because of them too. You’ll make better choices, but don’t keep things from us, ah? Now take that bag to your mami so she’ll stop calling me.”

Tati hugs her fiercely and presses a kiss to her forehead before turning to her customers.

Lia stands still for a beat, stunned to hear her tía speak so openly about a family secret. She turns and makes her way back through the winding walkways out to the market square to where more combis wait to take her home.

**Cercado de Callao**

The fishmongers hiss and call to her, “¡negrita linda!” through the open doors of the fish market on the Avenida Colón. Lia ducks her head, dodging their words. She adjusts the strap of her duffel bag and increases her stride, hoping to get past the men as quickly as possible. What would tía Meche do? You could never tell with Meche. That’s what made her so chalaca, the embodiment of Callao. She was achorada—unsettled, unpredictable, quick to strike. Tía Meche was likely to unleash a throaty
laugh at an off color joke as she was to tell your whole family that they came from and could crawl back into la concha de su madre. Achoradísima.

Just like her best friend Minerva who Lia was certain had a sentence quota for cuss words. Lia had passed Minerva on the way to the bus stop this morning. Mini, a large light-skinned woman, was sitting on a green plastic stool in front of one of two large windows covered with curving wrought iron bars, drinking warm emoliendo and surveying the streets. This was her quinta, a colonial housing compound with three or four families per unit. Hers was the only blue-walled quinta on the street. On either side of her building and across the wide pothole-marred concrete road the walls were broken up by color, marking the beginning and end of other homes like lego blocks. Further down the street the old two-story buildings began.

Mini’s short chestnut colored hair had started to turn grey around her heart-shaped face. She had finally cut the long, lifeless ends, that were tattered after years of chemical perms and punishing irons combs. It had always made Lia sad to see hair covering negras’ shoulders like shrouds. Tired hair, battered and weary, shards of broken crowns. Hair laid to waste by a fiendish, hopeless desire for pelo bueno, for buena presencia. And yet they never really got the roots. Curling chaos that hugged temples, napes, and foreheads, glimmers of legacy and new beginnings. Some smoothed into gentle waves below the point where heat could be applied. Others upheld their dense and curly resistance until the straightener caught them.

Lia remembered Meche’s recounting of Mini’s parting with patience.

"I walked in and there she was just chopping all her hair off, ¿lo puedes creer?? ¡Es una loca!" she screeched.
“The line in the hair salon is atrocious,” she’d said to her gobsmacked friend through the mirror. “And I’m not fooling anyone. We all know what my hair really looks like. Besides, I’d rather spend my money on cerveza!” and with a final snip of the scissors she grinned triumphantly at her handiwork: a close cropped, fluffy halo.

Lia had come up on Mini as she was fishing around in her bra for one of her cellphones. Mini looked up, smiled widely at Lia, and lifted her cheek for a kiss.

“¿Cómo estás, reina?”

“I am fine, tí—”

“You asshole, you never answer my fucking calls!”

Lia glanced at Mini’s scowl and turned around to find an old man shuffling towards them. Don Lara’s faded corduroy pants fluttered around his thin legs, folding into crisply ironed pleats around his hips that disappeared beneath a thin burgundy sweater. It was Tuesday. Doña Isabel, his late wife, had left strict orders for his sister to keep up with his clothing schedule. The barrio thought she had done it for them as well. For decades they had been able to tell what day it was by the color of the Don’s shirt. Keeping up with tradition was almost as important as cleanliness. His shoes shone with black polish despite the overcast skies.

“A man who doesn’t shine his shoes is dirty!” her mother had always warned her. Everyone knew that; she had learned it in colegio from her teachers and had it reinforced by the shoeshines that posted up on street corners more consistently than street signs. They weren’t as fancy as the ones in el centro. She remembers staring at the hunter green doors that unfolded like retablo doors revealing cushioned seating for men and women to sit while reading their papers. It was the perfect height from which
to peer down periodically to scrutinize the polish. The shoeshines perched on stools.

Lia always thought they looked like artists, surrounded by bottles of different tones of brown and black polish, water, and rags used frugally and meticulously to coax color out of even the most worn leather.

Don Lara’s hunched shoulders and paper boy hat brim couldn’t hide his wide, toothy smile. His daughter had sent money from Chile where she worked cleaning houses for his dentures. With his sister at home to cook and clean up after him Don Lara left the house for the sole purpose of showing off his new, startlingly white, unnaturally large square teeth, and to the buy fried lima beans he so loved to eat. Black eyes twinkling, he waved a small burner phone at Mini, and without missing a beat he shouted:

“This thing doesn’t receive bullshit calls!”

Mini’s sharp barking laughter reverberated off the walls, following Don Lara around the otherwise deserted bending street. She turned back to Lia.

“Ese cholo,” she shook her head. “Where are you going, mi amor?”

“To the market to catch the bus.”

Lia stepped towards Mini, freeing the sidewalk for a nervous man with shifty eyes scurrying past them down the street. They watched his head incline subtly from side to side looking for house numbers. Even with his head straight they would have known he wasn’t from these parts. *Le falta calle,* as Tati would say. Rebeca, a teenager from the next *quinta* down peeked her head out after he passed, whistling.

“You going to see la Meche?”

“No, mi abuela.”
“Con cuidado, ¿ah? El barrio se está poniendo bravo. And you’re so soft.”

“I'll be fine, tía.”

The sound of fast footfall stole their attention. The nervous man was yelling, running after two men who were jumping into a parked car. His shout was drowned out by the screech of tires on the slippery concrete passage way. He ran a few paces then threw his hands up and disappeared up a side street leading back to the Avenida. The car promptly rolled back to where it was parked and the men jump out. They walked toward Lia and Mini, whistling. Rebeca’s head appeared again. She opened the heavy gate and they walked past her into the complex.

Mini’s gaze hardened. The road was quiet again. Too many outsiders mistake silence for safety.

“I thought he might make it,” Lia said absently.

Mini pulled a pack of Marlboro’s out of her bra and a lighter from her fanny pack. She lit a cigarette and took a drag that turned a quarter of the white stick to ash.

“No way. Rebe’s the best campana on the block.”

Mini drew herself up on the plastic stool and trained her piercing gaze at Lia as she handed off the cigarette.

“Toughen up, Lia. All of this softness isn’t safe. Not for us.”

Lia looks into eyes like her mothers, like her aunts’ that spoke of lessons learned the hard way. She inhaled slowly then flicked the ash into the road.

“And what about you, tía? You should be careful out here.”

Mini’s amusement rumbled in her chest.
“Don’t worry about me, reina, there isn’t an asshole alive that would mess with me.”

The yellow and orange striped combi flies around the corner. Lia extends her arm into the street, turns her palm to the grown, and flaps her hand frantically towards her body. The van lurches to a stop as the cobrador slides the door open and motions her inside.

“Negrita,” he whispers hotly as she steps into the vehicle.

Lia pauses a beat, then takes a seat in front of him and tosses fifty centimos into his palm.

“Vete a la mierda.”

Cercado de Callao to Ventanilla

Lia could have walked straight to the obelisco to take the bus up north. The small combis cram an extra row of seats in the back, which eats up the leg space and forces her knees into the metal frame just beneath the vinyl covering, behind a thin layer of old foam. But she loves the ride, especially in the summer, and she only ever waits a few minutes for one of the combis to come whizzing down Saenz Peña, an arterial avenue of Callao that runs west to the San Felipe fort at the ocean’s edge just south of the port. She adjusts the duffel bag on her lap and squints out the window against the rays of the sun at noon, thankful that her mami persuaded her to wear a tank top and leave her sweater at home. She pulls the window open and the wind begins to pull her curls from the knot atop her head.

The bus is empty for now, so she’s moved to the window seat, something she would never do if there were more people on board. When she started riding the combis alone tía Meche held her chin between her thin fingers and said:
“You sit on the outside seat. If a man gets on you move your knees to let him have the window. If you move to the window he can rob you. If it’s a woman, you decide which seat you want, but you do not give men the upper hand. ¿Entendiste?”

The combi races forward, crossing Avenida Dos de Mayo where an elderly man sits with a large wicker basket filled with galletas and rosquitas that her mami adores for their subtle sweetness and crumbly texture. He sits calmly amongst the other vendors selling empanadas, fresh juice, and newspapers. Lunch time smells waft out of small restaurants boasting ceviche, cau cau, and cold chicha on the seven soles menu. Soon they veer to the right past the fort and on to the port.

Her papi loves the port so she loves it too. It is the heart of Callao, the constitutional province that takes its name from the sound of water that knocks the large rocks on the shore together. She likes the narrow cobblestone streets and the way the old Spanish balconies offer shade. Most of all, she loves her fathers history lessons about the Plaza Grau.

“That's where the ships came in, mi amor, right there where the lanchas that go to the islands line up, beside the cranes,” he would say on Sunday walks, pointing to the small inlet.

At the stoplight, Lia looks out onto the plaza and the monument in its center. Papi would stand there and talk about the resistance, waving his arms in his excitement.

“This is Callao and we are chalacos, and we should always be proud of how we have fought for Perú. Lima is the capital of this country because of Callao, because of the port. And it wasn’t the fuerzas armadas that fought off the Spanish, ¿ah? It was el vecino who came out of his house with his rifle and his courage! And we were part of
that, your tatarabuelos were there. Never forget: we are here, we have always been here.”

The road is now lined with the trailers that bring the freight crates that lie stacked like bricks in the yard amidst the cranes. Across the street men rip apart the wooden boards that cushion the crates, deconstructing them to turn them into walls for houses. Mami has forbidden her to ever get off the bus in this corredor.

“Son puros choros ahí, they’re all thieves in there.”

Lia’s cousins live two blocks to the north, but she has learned not to point that out.

On Friday afternoons the traffic becomes lighter, alleviating the bottleneck that congests the southern part of Avenida Gambetta and the port area. It is now three o’clock which means there is less traffic, and that she is late. Retrieving her small burner phone from her bra she glances again at the time and then back out the window.

The chofer leans on the gas. The busy avenue, the airport, the air force base, and the stops in between give cause for the kind of jerky stopping and starting that characterize the combination of a bustling street, unexpected pauses for frantically waving hands, and the maneuvering of a large vehicle with manual transmission. Smaller cars weave between trailers and buses in a manic maypole. Soon enough, the shift happens. Houses are more exposed brick and wood than painted concrete. The air smells more of fish than gasoline. The sound of incessant honking gives way to that of wind snaking through wide open windows bringing the smell of the morning catch from Ciudad del Pescador, the fisherman’s city.
The shipping crates block the view of the Pacific Ocean to the west as sand dunes sprawl to the east. She watches the human settlements Oquendo and Márquez pass. Jerky movements evolve into the smooth acceleration permitted by open highway. Running shoes are replaced by the dusty rubber boots of dock workers and fishermen, t-shirts peek out from beneath bright orange safety vests, and suddenly the bus is filled with men in navy blue work jumpsuits who shuffle off at Repsol gasoline plant.

Her favorite part of the journey is the moment when silence settles over the passengers on the open road. It is gradual and sudden and calming; the singing wind, the mounds of sand, the yards of stacked shipping containers sooth the eyes and ears. Many passengers are lulled to sleep in this moment of hushed calm between the rush of getting aboard and hurriedly arriving at work. Chins nestle into chests and metal frames cradle heads that doze in the lull between stops. The bus glides up the coast, the wind whistles encouragement and ruffles hair. Colored wooden homes dot the hilltops like watch towers as the road dips down into Ventanilla.

At the bus stop Lia walks towards a shock of red hair under a grove of trees in the parquette.

“¿Más tarde podrías llegar? Mami’s been waiting for you, querida.”

Lia stands on her toes to touch her cheek to her tía Irene’s. She is the tallest in the family and the only zacalagua: her light skin and brown hair stood out next to her sibling’s darker features, but matched her father’s in color almost identically. That is, until she dyed her hair red after Shakira went blonde declaring that she needed a change, too. Meche made fun of her for weeks, calling her La Sirenita, the little
mermaid. Lia takes two of the six plastic market bags from her tía and runs to keep her short legs in time with Irene’s long stride.

Her tía bought the lot that her house sits on when Lia was ten with money she’d saved up from working at the salon. Abuela moved in after abuelo passed away, leaving her house in Cercado de Callao to Meche, her eldest, and joining Irene, her second youngest, who wanted company. The house is neat. The cement floor is swept clean and through the door way to the kitchen a steaming pot sits on a ledge, cooling to be warmed up again for dinner. This is all abuela’s doing.

Abuela Tomasa sits on the couch facing the front door underneath a picture of San Martín de Porres with his broom and animal entourage, and a grainy wedding picture. In it, she stands beside abuelo Ignacio in a white shift dress with lace gloves, one hand resting in the crook of his arm. He is a head taller than her with white skin, soft eyes, course wavy hair, and a proud chin. He looks aristocratic in the suit she made for him. When he passed abuela carried the picture with her everywhere, and when they convinced her to leave it in the living room, she began sitting with the picture for hours a day. Her skin is finely wrinkled and her hair is pinned neatly underneath a starched white headwrap. She sits, back straight, in a clean, pressed yellow dress. Abuela’s body is still strong after bearing five children and a life of long hours at a sewing table. Her fingers are long, nimble, and tapping impatiently against her purse.

“And where have you been, hijita? Look at you, out of breath! Irene, you made her run, didn’t you? Ven, salúdame.”

Lia kisses the papery upturned cheek and throws herself down beside her grandmother on the couch.
“Don’t slouch! Siéntate bonita.”

“I’m not slouching, abuela.”

“So, what’s this then, gordita?” she pokes a finger into the flesh of Lia’s side. Lia winces and pulls her shirt down over the exposed roll, hiding it from her grandmother’s scrutinious gaze.

Irene breezes into the kitchen, drops the bags on the table and rifles through a small cupboard.

“Mami, leave her alone. Where is your carnet? You’re late.”

“It’s here, in my purse. And we wouldn’t be late if you didn’t insist on taking me so far away. I like the doctor at the medical post.”

Irene slams the cupboard and comes to sit on the large chair across from the couch in front of the open window. A small voice chirps through the window.

“¡Un marciano de mango, señor!”

Irene reaches into a cooler beside her chair and hands a long tube of frozen mango juice out the window in exchange for a sol. She turns back to her mother, rests her elbows on her knees and speaks sternly to her mother.

“Mami, you’re seventy-five year’s old. You’re a señora, a respected woman, and that man won’t call you anything but ‘negrita.’ It isn’t right, and I won’t listen to it anymore.”

“Yes, but he’s just joking.”

“Do you think he calls those mestiza women “mestiza,” or the short women “chata,” or fat women “gordita”? Ah? So why are you the only one who gets a nickname?”
Lia feels the tension in her abuela’s body.

“Ay, Irene! Always trying to start a fight. Let’s just go to this new doctor.”

Tomasa waves her daughters words away, then lifts herself carefully off of the cushions and smooths her dress.

“Lia, mi amor, I left the garments for your Tía Marisol on the machine. Finish it for me and—“

“I'll look at it when I’m back,” Irene and Lia chorus. Abuela’s shrewd eye was what made her an expert seamstress and a tough mother.

Tomasa bristles.

“Well, I’m glad I’ve given you all something to bond over. We’ll be back soon, mi amor. There’s sopa seca in the kitchen pa’ que comas.”

**Ventanilla**

Waking up in her grandmother’s house reminds her of sleeping in her papi’s parents’ old home. Morning light filtered through the thatched roof into the middle of the room, creeping onto the straw mattress where she slept. The hens ventured out into the chakra that backed onto their room and cooed softly below the window. Here in Ventanilla the light blue curtains in the spare room of Tomasa’s home undulate softly and sunlight filters through, bathing the walls in a soft glow. The gentle whirring of abuela’s sewing machine breaks the dawn silence.

Abuela’s sewing was the backdrop to their lives. Lia played and fought with her siblings and cousins while Tomasa stitched cloth together for her clients in the house in Callao and then again here when abuelo died. When birthdays were on the horizon they stood obediently while their “agüela” measured them and hovered around her while she turned odd shaped fabric into dresses, pants, and coats. When the economy
crashed Tomasa’s income supported them all after abuelo lost his government job. Though money was scarce, providing for her family made her proud. No one wanted to hire a negra to be an accountant all those years ago although she was well-trained, but she had used her other skills to get them to give her their money, she would say.

“We women have always had to work, we have to know how to make money, hijita,” her abuela always said.

Lia had learned to sew on her grandmother’s black machine. Her short legs stretched to meet the pedal. Abuela was a demanding and expert teacher. She remembered how her grandmother’s eyes had danced when Lia made her first skirt. It was a long, dark blue, pleated skirt for her school uniform. It was cheaper to buy fabric from the vendors in the Gamarra district, where Lia now works, and sew the skirts at home than to buy them in the stores. They weren’t supposed to, but the fabric was identical and Lia was skilled enough to replicate the design almost as well as her abuela could.

When abuela and Irene arrived back at home from the new doctor—Irene was satisfied with this new man’s demeanor as was abuela—Lia organized her new medication while Irene served out lunch. They all sat to watch the fragments of the news over chanfainita. Her tía had added a small mountain of mote and cancha serrana on top of the beef lung stew, just the way Lia liked it. The soft kernels of mote yielded under her teeth while the salty cancha kernels crunched and popped.

Frecuencia Latina’s “Especial de Humor” personality appeared in his standard Negro Mama attire: a painted black face with enlarged lips and a wide, flat nose with huge nostrils, with a curly wig slapped on his head. Irene snorted in disgust and
snatched up the remote to change the channel to *Al Fondo Hay Sitio*, an abuela approved *telenovela*.

“You have a problem with everything, Irene,” abuela sighed.

“I don’t like being made fun of, mami,” her daughter snapped.

“Well, he isn’t really making fun of you, *hijita*, you’re *zacalagua*, you’re not even *morena* like us,” abuela interjected, joking.

Lia looked back and forth from her aunt to her grandmother. They were mirror images. They had the same wide nose and full mouth, the same long lashes and round face. Irene looked the most like Tomasa save skin color. That she took from her father who was also very light skinned, while her mother was very dark. Mami said that Irene was sometimes treated better because she was *zacalagua*, even preferred by abuela at times, but Lia always noticed that it bothered Irene that she was often assumed to not be related to her family members because of her color.

Irene put her fork down and looked at her mother.

“Yes, I am *zacalagua* when they like me, but when someone is angry and yells at me in the street I’m “*la negra*”, mami, just like you, just like all the rest of you. *Todas somos negras.*”

Abuela had excused herself shortly after to return to her sewing machine where she did most of her thinking. Lia left her there after showering and finds her there again this morning.

“*Buen día, hijita. Toma*, this is for Marisol. You did a good job, but I finished it,” she says handing Lia a white bag.
“Irene has leftovers for you to take to Sarita—you’re still going to see her now, no?”

“Yes, abuela. I told her I would go see her today.”

“Ya, niña, if you go now you shouldn’t run into Mauro. I left some cuaker for you on the stove. Go eat that oatmeal before you leave.”

“¿Mi tía Irene?”

“She went to Meche’s to help her set up. You’ll see us later,” she kisses Lia’s cheek and shoos her from the room.

**Ventanilla to Pachacutec**

Another *combi* at *paradero* Teléfono where she met Irene on bustling Avenida Gambetta takes Lia to Pachacutec for one sol and twenty centimos. The run down bus she has chosen has no shocks. Her rattling teeth harmonize with the creaking floors that scream in surprise with every pothole the wheels find, and the grinding of gears as the door slides open and shut. She glances upwards and takes in the naked roof, dirty cloths tucked into the lip of the frame, and a hastily stored plastic tube of *maní confitado* within reach of the cobrador. Corazón Serrano’s new front singer wails coquettishly through the radio, begging her lover to return over the electric keyboard and *chicha* rhythms that blare through the speaker.

The *combi* veers off the main road onto the sandy streets of Mi Perú, the newest municipality, before the road starts its steady incline towards Pachacutec. In the winter the moist sea air keeps the sand heavy, pressed to the ground. In the morning the fog rolls in thick like smoke, covering everything farther than a few feet in any direction. Under the summer sun the sand flies into the air, kicked up by sandals, car tires, dogs, and cats. Passengers open and close the windows to avoid to sudden gusts of wind
that inevitably cover every exposed surface with a fine layer of sand. A woman with long, straight black hair, light brown skin and Andean features hands a small child to the cobrador, sits beside Lia, then reaches for her child again.

Soon, the roads become sand as well, marked only by houses in neat rows leading up to the top of the dunes. Brick is saved for businesses at busy junctions while wood is again the cheaper and more plentiful option. Men break down the crate supports from the port and build walls that are propped up on the fences outside their shops for display. Residents dig their feet in to scale the cerros holding fast to grocery bags and children. A woman climbs aboard with an armful of tall corn stalks complete with choclo still attached. The fine threads from the opening ears shower down on passengers like confetti.

Lia listens to the changes brought with the sands. Spanish up here sounds different. Down in Callao it skips over the tongue like tumbled stones, rough consonants and r’s soothed by the costeño lilt and the ‘pues’ that softens orders and requests. Here it is choppier, like the beaches at La Punta that where fishermen’s boats dance on the waves. Buzzing Spanish, s’s like bees, z’s like zippers, words and phrases coated in Quechua brought with migrating families from the highlands. She feels fingers on her arm, two hands brushing her skin. Turning, she glares at the woman beside her who smiles and lowers both her hand and her daughter’s, happy to have touched black skin long enough to reap the good luck it is said to bring. More signs of the highlands.

Sarita lives near the market, down the sandy slope, at the end of the road. Hers was one of the first wooden homes constructed when Pachacutec was just an invasión,
an unestablished and unregulated zone. Lia came to see her for the first time when she was eight with abuela Tomasa. Now, there were houses surrounding her home, but it still feels the same. She remembers how she jumped down from the bus into the sand and stopped in awe. She had never seen so much sand, so much open space. There were no walls or people, no trees, no rules, just dunes kissing sky and ocean down below. She remembers spreading her arms and legs wide, stretching her fingers apart and her toes in her sandals, throwing her head back and opening her mouth and eyes until she had spread her small body as far as she could. The sun beat down and the wind blew the sand up around her and she stood there, in the vastness, taking up space.

Sarita is used to the open space. Her mother was indígena, from Carhuaz, a sleepy town nestled between the Cordillera Negra y la Blanca in the Andes. She met Sarita’s father when she came down to Aucallama, another sleepy town in a fertile valley near the coast that breaks up the dessert an hour or so to the north of Lima. Her father’s family had lived and farmed for as far back as she could remember. It was her birthplace, too. Sarita was zamba; negro y indígena. She moved to Lima and met abuela while looking for work as a seamstress in Callao and Lima. Both had brown skin but the similarities ended there. Sarita was absent-minded, spontaneous, and brash where abuela was responsible, proper, and fairly serious. The two made an unlikely pair but they were best friends. They spent a good deal of time together and Sarita was family.

The only unfortunate aspect of Sarita’s life is Mauro, her partner, whose voice Lia can already hear one house away. He is always either surly and silent or loud and,
frankly, frightening. Abuela loathes him; Lia has only ever seen her grandmother visibly angry around him, and she and Mauro actively avoid one another. Now that their children have moved in with their own families, abuela has been trying to convince Sarita to live with her, but she hasn’t been successful. Mauro is a small man from Puno who smells of rum and dedicates hours to yelling at Sarita.

Lia slows as she approaches the door, wincing at the insults pouring out the small open window.

“You never listen, ¡estúpida! I told you I was coming home for lunch so why is there no food on this table?” he screams.

“Mi amor, I just got home and—“

“No food for me but you always seem to be getting fatter. And uglier. Don’t you??”

Lia hears accelerating footsteps intermingled with retreating footfall. Taking a deep breath, she knocks on the door.

The footsteps pause, and for a moment there is silence. Then the footsteps resume, five paces, each step louder until Lia senses a body just on the other side of the door, and then she is inches from Mauro’s contorted face. He is breathing heavily through his nose and is so tangibly furious that she takes an involuntary step back.

“¿Qué quieres?” he growls.

Lia’s pulse slams against her neck. She peeks over Mauro’s shoulder, willing Sarita to appear.

“¿Qué chucha quieres??”
Her trembling hands find the zipper of her bag and produce the containers of food.

“This is for Sarita,” she whispers.

“Speak up, what the hell is that?” Mauro roars.

Suddenly Sarita appears behind her partner.

“Mauro! Don’t speak to her like that, Mauro, she brought something for me,” she says, then pauses. Keeping her eyes trained on Lia, she continues.

“Actually, it’s for you. It’s food… it’s your lunch.”

Mauro glances back over his shoulder, suspiciously, then turns back to Lia who nods in agreement. He eyes the bag, then snatches it from her hand.

“Who are you?”

“That’s Lia, Tomasa’s granddaughter.”

Mauro is suddenly uneasy. He stands up straight and clears his throat.

“Ah… Gracias.”

Lia catches a glimpse of Sarita once more as the door gently closes. She offers a lopsided smile. From where she is standing the house is still as though the people inside have not moved from where they stood. No yelling, no hurting, just for a moment. Lia closes her eyes and feels the sun and the blowing sands. Then the sound of rustling silverware comes through the window. Lia opens her eyes, digs her feet into the dune, and begins the climb back to the main road.

La Perla, Callao

Lia crosses the Avenida Venezuela to get on a large bus heading south. She likes this crossing where Callao meets Lima Cercado and San Miguel. Somewhere between the blue and white letters that spell out “San Miguel” on a grassy island and
the large overhead sign marking the beginning of Callao is a line dividing the two worlds. The sputtering of a resentful old school bus engine sends her fishing in her pockets for fifty centimos as she scales the stairs. She hands her coin to the chofer-cobrador, a small man straining to control the large steering wheel as he extends a dirty palm to receive her fare. Eyes fixated on the road, he rips a thin square of paper with the company logo from a pack and nods at her to move back.

The bus lurches to the west toward the origin of the salt air settling on her skin, toward more familiar territory. The buildings are more honest; they reveal the brick and mortar of their skeletons. Dogs roam with comrades barking furiously at cars and red and blue mototaxis bearing the names of children and loved ones. Lia jumps down to the concrete a ways down Avenida La Paz in La Perla and turns up the side street on her left that leads away from the chaos and towards the parque surrounded by houses. The Virgen de la Candelaria sits watchfully in her cement house in the center of the park, surrounded by fresh flowers and adorned in golden finery. Her brown face peers out from under her crown, brown like the face of the baby she embraces, like the face of her mami, a brown face like her own.

A group of men sit on stools and chairs outside under the green and yell awning of a cevicheria. Lia nods to the men across the street as they eat heaping plates of ceviche around a crate of Pilsen. The single shared glass is already in rotation.

“Hola, sobrina,” they wave.

“We get called chismosas,” her mami always said, “but men are the ones sitting in the street watching the world for hours all day.”
To be fair, her tíos did work, sometimes. Tío Jhon worked as a *chofer* for years after his younger son, Julio, who fixed cars for the Japanese embassy vetted him for an open position. He used to bring her imported sweets that the ambassador’s wife would give him on occasion. Tío lost his job a while back and then disappeared for a while, which meant the same as it did when the other men disappeared: *cocaína*. *Pasta básica* was easy to find and so were the *fumaderos*. He was back, though, looking worn but ready to try again. Her mami hated him for what he put Tía Marisol through.

“*Prima!*”

Lia looks up the street at the next block where a white ambulante stand sits on the corner and a tall girl with long limbs waves animatedly at her. Lia hops over the black chains that rope off the cactuses and geranio plants from the walkway of the sidewalk, holding her duffel away from the thick spines. Dashing across the street she makes her way to the stand and into the strong outstretched arms of Sabrina.

“¡*Primis!* ¡*Ta que te demoras!* *Mi mami* keeps calling to ask where you are, and *la tuya* is at home with her.”

“Sorry, I’m late, Sabi.”

Sabrina slides the glass door on her side of the stand open to retrieve a piece of chocolate cake and a plastic cup of *arroz zambito*. She places the slice on a styrofoam plate that she deftly places in a clear plastic bag along with thin paper napkins before handing it off to a woman and her two children.

“*Gracias, señor!*,” she smiles as they leave.

“Sales going well?”
Sabrina’s stand receives lots of traffic, and not just because of her prime location across from the school. Marisol’s dulces were much loved and always in demand. Sabi couldn’t bake, para nada, but she was warm and kind, and responsible, and she knew everyone. She had gathered her blonde extensions on top of her head and secured them with a bright purple scrunchie, revealing more dark brown skin and the hair that had already escaped from the braids. They’d been in for two months now with two more to go. Lucinda, who made money braiding hair on the side, said two months at most, but with the price of imported hair and the time in the chair and the cost of services, who could justify such little time?

“Normal, pues. I saved you some turrón. I was at Lucinda’s and this activista was getting her hair done and she said that una negra como nosotras invented our turrón, ¿sabías? Para el Señor de los Milagros. And that he was painted by a negro también!”

Lia loves turrón. The mild anise cookie bound and smothered with miel de chancaca, the first liquid from the cane, cooked with fruit, and clove, and cinnamon, and topped with multi-colored sprinkles and a prune. She remembers watching her mami and Tía Marisol in the kitchen making sheets of the dessert every October for the festivities of the mes morado, the purple month, in honor of the Lord of Miracles. Sabi and Lia would hide under the table, winding around the legs like cats, waiting for the perfect moment to snatch the dried fruit off the table then dart out of the room away from snapping dishrags and hardened palms.

“Really?”

“¡Claro! So… did you bring it?”
Sabi looks at Lia expectantly.

She unzips her duffel enough to let the midday sun hit the shimmering contents. Sabi lets out a shriek, startling a stray dog. She hurriedly fishes her phone out of her bra and waits for the caller to answer.

“Mami! She got them! We’re coming now, get ready!”

Lia laughs, helping her cousin store the napkins and bags, and push the cart the two blocks to the house under the setting sun.

Lia sprawls across her tía Marisol’s bed with a pillow under her chin, admiring her work. Sabi, tía Marisol, and her mami, Imelda, are crowded around a mirror looking at their reflections. After their last shopping excursion to Saga Falabella, a department store in plaza San Miguel, a short ride from La Perla, Lia had suggested that she make them dresses for Meche’s birthday party. She had blurted it out in desperation, really.

They all hated that place and all that it meant for them. It meant hours of primping, combing hair and carefully selecting outfits that looked middle class and appropriate. It meant make up and high heels and jewelry, practicing saludos and responses for sales clerks and security guards, anything and everything to help them go undetected in the stores, all the while thinking—knowing—it would never be enough.

The Saga Falabella is pristine. White tiled floors, polished displays, models with porcelain skin, women that offered fragrant perfume samples. Security men dressed in sharp suits at the door. Lia could never appreciate it, what with all the rules rolling around in her head.

“Only pick up a few items at a time, hold them where they can be seen, do not check your purse repeatedly, do not run or yell or laugh loudly…”
There was the staring; eyes like pin pricks on their skin. No one ever offered them perfume samples or badgered them about signing up for store credit cards. Women at the make up counters did not offer to show them new products. They did get special attention in the change rooms. Their items were counted once, then again. The fitting room attendant waited diligently outside their doors. Security guards paid extra attention to them. Sales clerks told them the costs of clothing as soon as they approached the racks. When Lia was young she thought they were being helpful, but the stiffness in her mami’s spine taught her otherwise.

Tía Marisol had found a dress the last time. It was emerald green with a shimmering bodice and a skirt that floated around her thighs. She spun, laughing, sending the folds swirling out around her. They all smiled and cooed; she was beautiful. The dressing room attendant eyed them, unsure of what to make of their joy. Outside with the dress in hand, she stood in line with Lia, Sabi, and tía Meche, eager to get to the cashier. A security guard approached demanding to see the tag on the dress. It had been ripped on the sales rack, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He called them thieves. Lia watched Marisol’s glow turn to confusion, then shame. Then Meche intervened, defending her sister, defending them all. Then the guard raised his voice, and Meche responded in kind, and then more guards came, grabbing them, pulling them outside. Suddenly, they were on the sidewalk across the street from the plaza with nothing of substance but their outrage.

“Negras salvages,” the guards muttered, walking back inside. A piece of the emerald dress hung, lifeless in Marisol’s hands.
Lia smiles at her family, twirling, clapping, strutting, laughing, shining bright like moons. She had found the shimmering green fabric and the material for the other dresses in a store in Gamarra, down the stairs from the tailor shop where she worked. They had cost her dearly in time and money. Marisol’s dress is identical to the one from Saga. A yellow dress makes Meche’s dark skin glow. Pink ruffles for Sabi, and blue for her mami, who loves the color of the ocean in the summer above all others. At their insisting she puts on her own dress and joins them. It is purple, *lila*, the color of her *quinceañera* dress. Sabi throws her arms around Lia.

“Thank you, *prima,*” she whispers in her ear.

Marisol hugs her as well, teary-eyed, then her mami follows. Tía Mari is happy, if only for a moment. She returns to the mirror, swaying, smiling at herself. Lia lies back on the bed, resting her head on Sabi’s bony knee and her feet in Imelda’s lap. She breathes deeply, content.

**Cercado de Callao**

At eight o’clock on Sunday mornings the Avenida Dos de Mayo is quiet. The steps of the Palacio de Justicia are empty. The stone lions on either side of the doors stare off into the stillness. Lia, Imelda, and Jorge, her papi, stroll across the wide street, over the divide and between the benches that separate the northbound from the southbound traffic. They turn up on block before heading to the right and into a house beside the *quinta* on the corner. They can no longer hear the music still blaring from the speakers behind the Palacio in abuela’s old house where Meche now lives. Meche, a self-proclaimed *farandulera*, began stocking up on *chelas* the week before her birthday. She put out towers of crates stocked with cold Pilsen bottles that would last the
standard twelve-hour time frame of her block party. The birthday woman was still in her
dress and heels, drinking and dancing when Lia and her parents left.

Old wooden stairs creak under their weight as they make their way to the second
floor, unlock the door, and wearily enter the apartment. Imelda and Jorge moved into
the home an aunt had left to him after they married. Both of their families had lived in
old Callao for generations. Imelda opens the wooden shutters, letting the morning light
into the living room, then sinks into the couch beside her husband who is dozing into a
beer-induced sleep. He came to the party at three o’clock in the morning after finishing
a stint of taxi driving. Lia comes from the bathroom in time to see her mami murmur a
gentle order for Jorge to go to bed. He stands slowly, then bends to kiss his wife and
touch her forehead. She runs a hand through his damp curls. They had danced chicha
and salsa for hours.

Jorge straightens and walks to the bedroom, unbuttoning his shirt along the way,
pausing only to repeat the ritual with his daughter. He crosses his thumb over her
forehead and whispers:

“Qué dios te bendiga y te proteja, hija.”

He closes the door, and Lia hears him moving around the room, and then his
sigh as he sinks into the mattress.

Lia joins her mother on the couch, nestling into the crook of her arm. As they talk
quietly her hand wanders absently to the raised scar on her mami’s hip that transverses
her abdomen. Lia is her mother’s only child and had been a high-risk pregnancy.
Imelda developed preeclampsia and Lia was born premature. Her papi told her that
preeclampsia was common among negras, even though the doctors didn’t know it, and that the family had been very concerned about both her and the baby.

“Nurses also make the worst patients,” he would chuckle.

Imelda hadn’t been a nurse when she got pregnant; she was still working long hours as a cook, but when Lia was in grade school Imelda began to study at night. Lia glanced around at the furniture. The couch they sat on and the two large chairs on either side had been there as long as she could remember. Her abuelos and aunts would always come visit—papi was the only boy in his family—to stay with her. She had been small and sickly, crying for hours on end. The women, convinced that she had had a susto, lined up to pass rolled newspaper over her body to draw out bad energy, then shower her with bendiciones. When she was two she was old enough for the egg, her spirit was strong enough, they said, but by then she was both fatter and happier.

“What do you think about Guillermo, Mami?”

“Ugh, he’s horrible,” Imelda snorts.

Meche’s new boyfriend, Guillermo, is mestizo but “negro por consumo.” He loves black people, he says to anyone who will listen. He looks at negros the way people look at giraffes in the zoo. He is always asking them to perform for him, or talking about his trips to Chincha and how he learned to dance festejo from a great uncle who was negro. He holds fast to this distant relative like a lifeline, recounting the fact compulsively. Guillermo also loves black women. He says he exclusively dates them.

“Better bodies, more sazón,” he laughs, wiggling his eyebrows.
When the men pulled out the *cajones* and *quijadas* at midnight for a birthday *festejo* and the customary singing of “Happy Birthday” everyone took their turn; first went Meche, then Guillermo joined in. He jumped, exaggerating his shoulder movements as he gyrated frenetically. It was almost comical. Eventually Meche retreated; she came to stand beside Irene who was sitting on the sidelines waiting her turn and looking at Guillermo, who was still enthralled in his solo performance.

“*Qué lindo baila mi Guille, ¿no crees, Irene? ¡Baila como negro!*”

Irene snorted and poured cold Pilsen into a communal glass.

“All the dance classes in the world won’t make that clown a *negro*.”

Meche’s eyes flashed and Lia and Sabi held their breath, hoping this was not the beginning of a spat. Instead Meche surprised them. She snatched the glass from her sister and pushed her into the circle.

“Well, you’re a *negra*, so impress us, *huevona!*”

Irene recovered quickly from the shock of the shove, flashed a wicked smile, and made a show of dancing Guillermo out of the circle before showing off her signature *pasos*. The crowd cheered, while Guillermo took a seat next to Meche and fixated on the rest of the family and other black guests with such intensity that Marisol joked that he was trying to steal their souls.

“Did you have fun, Lia?” Imelda asks, drawing circles on her daughter’s arm.

Lia thinks back to the street party that is likely still in swing. She can still smell the cigarette smoke, the marinated *anticuchos* brushed with corn husks on grills in the street, the *carapulcra* cooking in vats inside Meche’s home. Later came wedges of sweet potato and *seco de cabrito* simmered in fragrant green gravy and smothered with
salsa criolla served on square styrofoam plates. The tall speakers brought in on dolly’s by the neighbor’s sons blared salsa cubana and peruana, and when Lia pleaded with him, the Rafael, who was djing winked at her and played one of her favorites: “La Rueda” by Frankie Ruiz. Meche was la santa, la reina de la verbena perched on her plastic chair and surrounded by her court of women and men vying for her attention, making her laugh uproariously. The men huddled around beer and Havana rum and home made pisco brought up from Ica in recycled coke bottles.

She remembers sipping chilcanos outside in the warm night air and gossiping with Sabi about the boys from the barrio; who had been working out, who had gotten someone pregnant, who they would dance with. They mingled in the kitchen with the older women who bustled about tending to pots, scooping out spoonfuls of hot, sweet frejol cola’o set aside for dessert, then went back out to the living room that had been cleared and lined with chairs and tables for food. She remembers how beautiful tía Marisol looked in her dress, how she glowed when tío Jhon pulled her up to dance, how her sisters watched and cheered on the couple. Abuela sat in the corner with Sarita, smiling and greeting guests in her old home. She even got up to dance a marinera limeña with papi, swinging her hips slowly and spinning a long white pañuelo over her head then across his shoulder, laughing as he dipped her at the end.

She remembers the sky becoming lighter while they danced in the street, and the smell then the taste of picarones hot from the oil, filled with anise seed and drizzled with fig honey. Tía Tati had packed more of the golden rings in a bag with lots of honey for Lia to take home and eat later when they were swollen with the syrup. She remembers Tati running out of the kitchen to find Mini and Irene and dance “El Toto”. Meche kicked
them off the floor soon after to dance alone and belt out Alma Bella’s “Bombon Asesino”.

She remembers Sabi’s head on her shoulder at seven o’clock in the morning, heavy with sleep. The sequins on her dress caught the morning light and glimmered, mirroring the last wisps of pink skies. The crowd had thinned out but the party was still going. The owner of the panadería walked up the street to open his shop. Soon, the smell of fresh bread intermingled with the aroma of beer and food. Señora Dávila pushed her cart of ripe avocados and fried camote up towards the bakery, assuming her strategic position to make sales off of neighbors leaving the bread shop and looking for filling for their rolls.

Daylight spreads through the living room, warming the small apartment and the two bodies nestled on the couch.

“Yes, mami, I did,” she murmurs.

Her Imelda’s chest rises and falls rhythmically, and soon Lia’s does too.
CHAPTER 4
VIOLENCE FOR THE RECORD

In this chapter I disrupt the notion that Afro-Peruvian women do not experience IPV, explore the interlocking structures of oppression that have sustained this belief, and present accounts of intimate violence as told to me by usuarias. My intent is to make visible systemic, social, and intimate violence against Afro-descendant IPV survivors. I begin by addressing stereotypes about black women to demonstrate that the absence of their experiences from local and national narratives of IPV is not because they do not exist but because they are silenced. Pervasive messages about black women’s inherent Otherness make their bodies extremely visible even as they silence suffering. These constitute what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images”; images created and maintained by social elites to control views on black womanhood and normalize social injustice (2000, 69). Collins lists contesting and dismantling controlling images as one of the principle tasks of black feminist work (2000, 69). In an effort to partake in this deconstruction, I challenge the stereotypes that form the basis of accepted understandings about black women and erase their stories of violence. I then provide a record of different kinds of violence, and give special attention to racial violence, a topic that has been written about but with specific focus on indigenous women. I seek to broaden this conversation by focusing on how violence affects Afro-Peruvian women.

James C. Scott (1998) describes the concept of legibility as “the politics of measurement” (1998, 25). Scott argues that individual and collective identities and social practices are understood by, and therefore legible to, the people and communities that live them, but that the state is tasked with attending to the needs of a
vast and diverse population. In order for individuals, communities, and social phenomena to be legible to the state, they must be made to fit into standardized measurements so that they can be recorded and monitored. He emphasizes the importance of attaining state visibility, noting that it is an important step towards attaining services and attention from the state in the form of policy, for example.

This process holds important meaning for Afro-Peruvians, whose history and legacy is legible locally at the individual and community level, but not at the level of broader society or the state. Invisibility continues to be a major barrier to national recognition of securing crucial resources for Afro-descendants and for the achievement of full citizenship (CEDET 2005, 2008). However, black bodies are highly visible and socially legible when they subscribe to longstanding, rigid stereotypes of blackness. When examined through a gendered lens, socially, black women’s identities exist at the intersection of blackness and womanness, which, due to racist and misogynistic ideologies, have been constructed and widely accepted as aggressive and overtly sexual.

The implications for legibility within such stringent confines is that black women are not read as “victims” of violence because of stereotypes in public discourse that label them as aggressive and hyper sexual, in juxtaposition with common assumptions about white, mestiza, and Andean women. Violence against black women is made invisible as it is rendered an unthinkable act (Trouillot 1995). Recording black women’s experiences of violence is therefore an action of making black women legible.

Legibility, according to Scott (1998) is inherently political. He notes that “every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations (1998, 27).” The
creation of indicators about women’s lives, domestic violence, femicide, and ethnicity are all examples of the process of making gender violence legible to the Peruvian state. In the context of a heightened global awareness about violence against women and pressure from major institutions to document and work to eradicate it, work by scholars, most recently Sally Engle Merry (2016), demonstrates the inner workings of the politics that influence the creation of indicators and what they leave out.

Scott himself recognizes that much is lost in the process of making reality legible as it requires that we bring into focus “certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex…reality… (1998, 11). Merry (2016) does as well, and I will engage with her work more directly in later chapters. All data are incomplete, and filled with inaccuracies, making this an on-going problem for the state, a problem I address as it relates to CEM data collection in Chapters 6 and 7. There is also the question of state subject resistance to becoming legible. This gives rise to the question of whether or not legibility is something we should strive for; some scholars believe that the state cannot provide what is needed and therefore choose to opt out of the system (e.g., Simpson 2014). I am not without conflicting opinions about these issues, but I am committed to record-making as a way to support Afro-Peruvian activist efforts, and to affirm the importance of acknowledging the experiences of Afro-descendant women. In the following section I address the the roots of notion that black women are inherently aggressive, and discuss how aggression is often a reaction to a context of oppressive and dangerous social environment and a means of self-preservation before addressing the sexualization of black women’s bodies.
Black Women’s Aggression

To talk about black women and aggression is to acknowledge the neglected intersection where race and gender meet violence (McCall 2005; Crenshaw 1991). Blackness in Peru holds the stigma of uncontrolled aggression and criminality as it does throughout the diaspora, whereby black bodies are viewed with suspicion and oftentimes fear (Wade 2010). This commonplace stereotype is bolstered by a slew of cultural references, jokes and parodies, for example, el Negro Mama, a racist blackface character that frequently appears on a comedy special with a large viewership. Racist tropes are upheld by this character and others like it, in addition to narrow and essentialized portrayals of black culture (Harrison 2005, 9). Afro-Peruvians are expected to be excessively happy and appeasing, irate, lustful, and at all times unintelligent and lazy.

Black women in Peru are subjected to a specific kind of degrading expectations via widely disseminated images, advertising, and discourse that perpetuate reductive and discriminatory views of their collective identity, similar to experiences in other parts of the diaspora. To be recognized as both woman and black is to be presumed to be, among other things, angry and aggressive. Their blackness distances them from being viewed as delicate as white women are, but also from being submissive, like indigenous women (CEDET 2010). Both in physical attributes and demeanor black women are deemed more masculine due to their collective capacity for hard labor as shown through the legacy of slavery and backbreaking agricultural work (Zamudio 1995; Collins 2000; Muñoz 2014). Media depictions show black women with large mouths, buttocks, and breasts, unblinking eyes, and tough hair, all of which are used to imply that they are sure to dominate physical altercations. Black women also appear larger than
indigenous and mestizo men—additional surefire signs that they are indeed more than capable of causing bodily harm. This is reinforced linguistically through the frequent use of the word “brava”, that, when used in this context means “strong,” or “fierce,” and constitutes a cautionary warning, to describe them. Claudia described this to me during an interview:

You see it happen all the time with men on the street. A black woman walks by and she’s bigger than the other women and they lower their voices and say “cuidado, esa negra ‘ta brava,” like they are afraid of her.

The essence of the word “brava” is also conveyed through the fear of black women’s voices. There is considerable reference to black women’s voices as proof of their aggression. It is one of the primary examples that I have heard friends, and later usuarias, use to talk about how they have been perceived as intimidating, serving as a key “controlling image” to borrow from Collins (2000). Their voices have been called “grating,” “scary,” “deep,” and “loud,” because they are black, when they insist they were speaking in their normal voices. Angelina, one of the usuarias, recalled being chastized by her white mother during various conversations:

Angelina: We would be talking and she would suddenly cover her ears and say “shut up, you’re screaming like a negra!” and I wasn’t screaming! Maybe I was a little excited, but I certainly wasn’t screaming.

In Presencia y Palabra meetings we talked extensively and used personal examples to highlight the ways in which black women’s voices in particular have come to signify aggression to the general public. Members talked about their voices serving as more proof that black women are more masculine and less docile than highland women, and indicative of their supposed bad tempers. We also discussed the impact of these assumptions on the women themselves who felt that they are seen as walking
caricatures and that the poor treatment and subsequent embarrassment and upset they experience was directly related to the pejorative popular views of black women. In most cases the usuarias would only make mention of the “good” stereotypes about themselves when asked if they knew what people generally thought about black women, generally going straight to dancing and cooking.

**Aggression in IPV Discourse**

The problem of black women’s perceived aggression becomes all the more alarming in the context of domestic violence discourse. As shown in the previous section, black womanness is characterized by aggression and a physical ability to fight. This means that black women are only legible in the context of violence as either women who no one would dare to hit or as aggressors themselves. Simply put, they are not—cannot—be victims of violence. I became accustomed to hearing people say: “¿Quién se atrevería a pegar a una negra?/(Who would dare hit a black woman?)” This makes sense when one knows what it means to be negra in the context of violence. In a country where it is estimated that most black Peruvians are in interracial relationships, having a partner that is mestizo, Asian, or indigenous—men stereotyped as physically smaller than black women, particularly in the cases of the last two ethnicities—provides further “proof” that these women would not suffer violence or abuse. What they are saying is: “Who would dare hit a woman so strong and who clearly embodies the threat of violence?” In this way, stereotypes of aggression silence black women’s stories of violence because it is outside the scope of what socially conceived as possible for them. Though I have attempted to supply an explanation for why black women are perceived
as fundamentally aggressive, it is crucial to understand that aggression is important in this context both as a reactive posture and a protective tool.

**Reactive Aggression**

Afro-Peruvian women are highly stigmatized and socially excluded, and this realization and opposition to their own denigration is grounds for upset. Aggression is often a reaction to the hostility of the surrounding environment and the pressures of poverty, all of which are oppressive, compounded by acts of everyday racism as experienced through daily interactions with individuals on the street, and in government institutions and services. Because racist thought and practice have been normalized and reduced to banal components of human interaction, negative reactions to racism become more out of place and therefore noticeable than the actual offending actions or comments (Portocarrero 2009; van Dijk 2007; Ames 2011). Afro-Peruvian activists have argued this point time and again, and Susana, an activist herself, reiterated it during a conversation:

Susana: …If you’re bothering me why are you surprised that I hit you or insult you or I get aggressive? “Oh, black women are so aggressive!” Don’t be ridiculous. They are hiding the aggression of their actions against us. My aggression is the result of their actions. You provoke me and *I’m* the bad one! Explain that to me. I’m the only one speaking up so of course, I’m scandalous, I’m dramatic… ¡soy una negra, pues!

Susana’s comments describe a “micro-aggression”, termed by Chester Pierce in 1970 and later expanded upon by a number of scholars (e.g., Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Sue 2010; Sue et al. 2007). Sue et al. define racial micro-aggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (2007, 273). These acts induce
adverse effects on the mental health of marginalized people, leading, in some cases, to outbursts and anger in response that is reasonable rather than irrational (Sue 2010), which was how Susana’s reaction was perceived. In similar fashion, Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) hones in on black women’s aggression as a response to micro-aggressions, not a predisposition. She shows how these covert acts of racism are insidious because they frequently go unseen by white (in this case, mestizo) audiences, which allow outbursts to be interpreted as signs of unstableness or mental instability, and poor character. As Susana’s final comment indicates, the resistance via comments or attitudes viewed as angry are pathologized as black women’s behavior.

Susana: …You can treat me any way you want but I can’t respond in kind. Then on top of all of that I’m tall, I have this face and this (strong voice), papacito, of course I’m not going to look like Miss Universe when I retaliate!

Her final statement is a challenge to the racist hegemonic system that demands docility in the face of constant racist rhetoric and actions.

**Aggression as a Proactive Protective Measure**

Many districts of Lima and Callao that have been identified as historically Afro-Peruvian, for example, Callao Cercado, La Victoria, and Surquillo, are spaces that have been constructed as blacker and as dangerous and criminal spaces (Thomas 2011). To talk about La Victoria is frequently to invoke the meaning invested in these spaces, of which limeños are very much aware. Under these circumstances, protecting oneself against interpersonal violence become a priority and a mundane act whether conscious or not. Fist and gun fights bubble up suddenly, bus hold ups and interpersonal muggings and robbery is common. Aggression in this context becomes a tactic to ward off would-be offenders for many; the difference for black women is that there is a preexisting stereotype about their identity and this particular behavior.
The idea of the negra brava, the black woman who fights, is seemingly pervasive enough to stave off interpersonal conflict to some degree. Through discussions and personal experience it became clear that under circumstances where the primary goal is to avoid attacks, the stereotype can serve as a protective measure when little else will suffice. When I found out that I would need to go to some areas of Callao and Lima I was told “ponte dura y así evitas problemas / Look hard and you can avoid problems.” If I could convince bystanders that I was tough then I wouldn’t have to fight; a convincing illusion of force is often as good as the real thing.

When I started conducting research in some of these areas I was still skeptical about the advice I had received, but it didn’t take long for me to incorporate this tactic into my safety arsenal. I soon after came up against threats that would soon be registered as mundane aspects of fieldwork. Crime rates had been on the rise and bus hold ups and muggings were increasing accordingly, driving motives for the state of emergency. Given that I had little if anything that could serve as a defense were I to be held up, the best—and only—defense became a good offense and some luck. Looking surly in combination with other precautions worked well, and I observed many other women doing the same in addition to resorting to shouting and carrying themselves in an imposing manner, which also proved to be effective as it usually resulted in the other person—usually a man—backing down. Again, the difference between black women and others I witnessed is that this kind of response is expected only of the latter.

**Sexual Stereotypes**

Apart from aggression, the second stereotype that figures strongly in gender violence is about black women’s sexuality. Black women are portrayed throughout the diaspora as sexually insatiable, perpetually primed for sexual activity (e.g., Carneiro
2003; Collins 2000; Cuche 1975; Crenshaw 1991; Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; Muñoz 2014; Caldwell 2007; hooks 1981). The supposed willingness of black women to engage in sexual activity at any given time has been reinforced through media and society beginning in the era of chattel slavery and the colonial period. This discourse successfully created silence around sexual violence inflicted on women of African descent by characterizing them as women who could not be raped because their bodies belonged to the public rather than themselves (Crenshaw 1991; Carneiro 2003). When paired with on-going colonial affirmations of black bodies as property, this myth has dangerous implications for black women who continue to be sought after as exotic, sexual property prepared to satiate male lust.

Representations of these beliefs are plentiful. Examples include Sibarita, a Peruvian company that produces spices and herbs sold everywhere from small mercado to supermarket chains. The company mascot is a curvaceous black woman wearing a microscopic mini skirt, a form-fitting shirt, and a red and white polka-dotted head scarf to cover her hair. The colors—red and white—are reminiscent of attire associated with black servitude and performance as seen in peñas or nightclubs that offer dinner and traditional cultural dancing. The image of the Sibarita woman is consumed frequently; most homes have packets of pepper floating around their kitchens and therefore Peruvians are constantly exposed to the image of a coquettish black woman.

Chincha, a region in the department of Ica just south of Lima, is home to a number of Afro-descendant communities and is recognized as a cradle of Afro-Peruvian culture (Feldman 2006; Golash-Boza 2011). Recent studies have indicated a high rate
of HIV transmission that Afro-Peruvian activists have associated with sex work taken on by black women who are sought out by international and local tourists during annual parties that draw crowds from Lima and the surrounding areas (Carrillo and Carrillo 2011). Monica Carrillo (2009) points to the racist and sexist desire to have sexual relations with black women, and poverty coupled with black women internalizing the idea that they must please their guests as driving forces that sustain this public health issue.

Finally, a traditional Afro-Peruvian dance called “el alcatraz” is a present-day reminder of the difficulties enslaved women faced daily as they constantly had to escape their masters (Cuche 1975). The focal point of the dance involves a pañuelo, or handkerchief that is tucked into the back waistband of a woman’s pants or a skirt. A man chases the woman with a lit candle trying to light it on fire while the woman gyrates, keeping the pañuelo in motion to avoid the flames. Research into this dance has revealed that it began during the slavery era to depict black women outsmarting or outrunning their masters who wanted to have sex with them (Feldman 2006; Cuche 1975). This dance is a haunting representation of Sueli Carneiro’s (2003) assertion that the rape of black women by white men is the foundation of modern hierarchies. Today anyone can take a turn wearing the pañuelo as the dance has become a part of informal parties and celebrations, and performances but the morbid history behind el alcatraz has taken a back seat to the entertainment and public consumption of black women’s sexuality.

These stereotypes are innately violent; the degrade and deny humanity, personhood, and the right to individual identity and autonomy (Schepers-Hughes and
To move from the current status quo to centering on black women’s stories is not only to work through an understanding of the creation of silence about violence, but also to dismantle it.

**Accounts of Violence**

The act of writing the accounts of violence as told by the *usuarias* is one that discredits stereotypes and racist tropes that cause ongoing damage as black women are excluded from conversations about intimate partner violence. The following excerpts serve as proof of the multiple kinds of violence suffered by Afro-Peruvian women at the hands of their partners, and so, this is a contribution to the written record of abuse, which holds great political importance for Peruvians of African descent collectively.

**Naming Violence**

Legibility in the eyes of the state in this case requires compliance with standardized measurements that have previously been set (Scott 1998, 27). Because the women I interviewed had been registered in the system and had passed through the intake process, they were all familiar with and spoke about the violence they had endured using the categories outlined by the state: physical, sexual, psychological, and economic. Their engagements with a state apparatus has helped them to frame their violence in the context of state categories and specific terms that been approved and used by the Ministry of Women. Undoubtedly, these categories leave a good deal of space for important information to be left out (Scott 1998). Without having made contact with women who had not reported I was unable to compare the way that women who had not gone through the system made sense of what violence was in relation to their personal experiences, and how they might have explained them to me. These
questions can hopefully be answered with future research, but this does not lessen the importance nor the significance of these accounts.

**Physical Violence**

The presence of physical violence in numerous cases destabilizes the myth that black women are never hit. In many cases, these acts of physical assault occurred for the first time early on in relationships. Many women stated that violence of some sort was present from the start. Vanessa had the following to say about her partner, Marco, who she had been with for almost twenty years:

**Vanessa:** First came the blows, the slaps. The first time was when we first started going out. I was young, probably about sixteen, seventeen years old. The first time he slapped me it shocked us both. He pulled my hair and slapped me across the face. I looked at him, startled, and then he started to cry, ‘perdóname, negra.’ I felt that I had to forgive him because he was going through a difficult time.

Claudia’s husband of some thirty odd years began to hit her at the beginning of their marriage:

**Claudia:** He was upset about dinner and we were arguing about it. He hit me hard, right across the face. I was stunned. In those days you didn’t talk about things that went on in your house, so I just went to my room and shut the door. He beat me for years until he got too sick and weak to do it. Then he continued with verbal abuse.

The majority of women I spoke to had been physically abused in some capacity. Physical violence manifested itself in slaps, hair pulling, kicks, punches, and pushes. While in some cases they remembered the instances clearly because they were few and far between making them even more jarring, in other cases the violence escalated consistently, both in frequency and severity. Two usuarias were in the process of filing criminal charges against their partners for attempted murder, or femicide.

**Jasenia:** The last time he broke into the house we were yelling at each other and he pulled out his gun and aimed it at my head. I told my daughter to run to
get her abuelos. I ran to the bedroom and he ran in behind me, pushed me on the ground and started choking me. “If I can’t have you then he definitely won’t,” he said, even though I’m not seeing anyone! I tried to get him off of me but I fell unconscious. When my family finally got to the house he was slamming my head into the floor.

Clara’s boyfriend stabbed her and stomped on her head on more than one occasion. He also threw a machete in her window that ended up lodged in her couch where her four-year-old son was seated, barely missing his body. Clara listed off her boyfriend’s favorite tactics:

Clara: He’s a violent man, what else can I expect from him? He likes to kick me, hit me in the head with this," she points to her elbow, holding her forearm vertically in front of herself as she swings her arm, jerking the point downward to show me what he does. “Once on tv I heard that one good blow to the head can kill you. I think to myself “If he hits me in the head and kills me, my children, who will my children stay with?”

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence was seldom mentioned in interviews or discussions with usuarias. As with other types of violence, I cannot be certain that lack of mention means that it did not happen if I consider the added stigma of sexual violence in conjunction with that of blackness, and issues of consent in relationships. On a few occasions though women did tell me outright that violence extended to sexual conduct. Three women said that they had been forced to have sex or had been touched sexually by their partners against their will.

Economic Violence

The sporadic nature of work in the informal economy means that while most women worked or had worked for most of their lives, jobs available to them were not always consistent, or were carried out on a daily basis without contracts or accompanying benefits. As a result, when in between stable work, women relied on
their partners for financial support to help maintain their households. Given the vulnerable position that many women find themselves in, particularly because childcare is not institutionally mandated and in its absence women cannot go to work, their partners withheld money in order to punish, disempower and control them, exploiting the unilateral dependent nature of their relationship.

When Solsiret left her job to care for her first daughter her boyfriend, the sole earner, began using their finances as leverage:

Solsiret: I don’t know anything about our financial situation. I don’t know how much he makes or how much he has saved. If he leaves how would I cover basic costs? I don’t have a pension and I can’t leave my daughter at home to go out to work.

Claudia would go hungry when she and her husband fought:

Claudia: Whenever he got mad he would go out and not leave me money for lunch or dinner.

Inés’ ex boyfriend regularly stole from her, leaving her unable to achieve financial independence:

Ines: I would work all day selling candy and come home exhausted with fifty soles. He would wait until I was asleep and then find the hole in the mattress where I kept the money and take it. I would wake up to find five soles left. I had to use that to go buy more candy to sell. No money for breakfast, lunch, snacks, nothing. And I had two small children.

Allegra felt that her boyfriend used finances to keep her tied to him:

Allegra: When he left me I was stuck with his debt and he knew it. Now when we wants to see me he pretends it’s about money, but what he really wants is to see me, to talk. “Look,” he says, “we have to meet. Come out and I’ll give you five hundred soles.” He knows I need that money for the baby.

Clara has had to sell clothing to feed her children when her partner was punishing her by withholding money. The sustained threat of violence has also stopped her from seeking out work:
Clara: He wouldn’t give me money, not twenty soles for lunch for myself and the kids. So I packed my bag and I took his two pairs of his shoes to sell since I had no money, and I took the children to my mom’s house so they could get something to eat. He doesn’t want me to work. He always says he’ll give me money. I’m scared that if I take a job and he finds out or sees me at work and he’ll come for me. I don’t work out of fear.

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence as experienced by my research consultants manifested in an array of forms. It ranged from insults and threats ranging from physical violence to murder to controlling, manipulative behavior. Many women felt that it was the most painful of all the abuse they endured.

Angelina’s boyfriend forced her to move out of her family’s home where they had been living because he didn’t like that her parents intervened when they heard the couple’s arguments. They moved back to his home where his parents did not offer support or protection for her when he would physically abuse her and where he would discourage her from going to family events or back to her parents place for visits.

Angelina: There was always psychological abuse,” Jasenia confessed. Imitating her partner, she continued, “Ah, you have no personality, no character. Anyone can manipulate you. You’re not going there.” It was my sister’s birthday. “No, Angelina, I said no, you’re not going,” and we would get into an argument and I always ended up crying.

When Claudia’s husband would fight with her he would find ways to punish her.

After one fight he made her sit in a corner:

Claudia: He would come check to make sure I was still there where he left me from time to time. I didn’t leave, one, because I didn’t want to leave my son (with him)—although I knew he wouldn’t do anything to the baby, but my son was afraid. Also, because I was scared. “I’ll try to leave and he will pull me back by my hair.” So he had me sat there and he would go back and forth, playing with my son, then checking on me. “Alright then, what are you going to do? Are you going to leave? Huh? Do you want your little papers (referring to the legal papers she filed with the police)? Huh? Are they going to come defend you? It’s all this thing’s fault.” He grabbed my phone and destroyed it.
Inés lets out a wounded sigh before recanting the names her ex boyfriend used to call her:

Ines: He called me a bitch, he said I was dirty, that I was a whore. Those were his favorite words. That’s what he called me all the time.

**Racial Violence**

As I have shown, the myths about black women do not allow for them to be viewed as individuals or as women who endure violence. Because they are believed to be unscathed by a type of violence that plagues other ethnicities, Afro-Peruvian women face the significant pressure of being expected to uphold the fantasy. “Failing” to do so, they may be faced with disbelief and shaming. “Tremenda mujer, cómo te va a pegar a ti? Tremenda mujer que se deja pegar!” Sofia Carrillo, an Afro-Peruvian activist shouted, imitating reactions she had heard from people unable to reconcile the image of the strong black woman with that of the victim of domestic violence, often portrayed as a downtrodden, broken shadow.

Government legislation and constitutional adjustments to recognize the multi-ethnic nature of Peru in conjunction with increasing pressure from civil society have broadened public discussions of inequality to include racism. Nonetheless, race and ethnicity questions still do not appear consistently on government documents. The discourse of mestizaje has deeply engrained the idea of a nation without racism in the minds of many, including CEM workers and directors in the MIMP (Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables). The fact that merely speaking about racism is still seen as an act of racism in itself results in on-going intense discomfort around the subject (see Chapter 5). With regards to domestic violence, there is now a question about ethnicity on the CEM intake forms but there is no prompt to inquire about race-
based violence. This means that this kind of abuse is not yet visible or legible for the state, though there are current efforts being undertaken to change this.

Fortunately, in recent years some anthropologists have begun to analyze the effect of race in domestic violence. Cristina Alcalde (2007, 2010) deals directly with racism’s impact on women from the highlands living in Lima. Alcalde’s work has highlighted the way that racism permeates intimate relationships and the violence in these partnerships, and in doing so, broadened the scope of the study of racial discrimination in the Peruvian context. Anti-black racism also exists in these interactions and must also be recognized and addressed. This work has been undertaken by some Afro-Peruvian scholars in their writing based on small-scale research (Muñoz 2014; Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; CEDET 2016). Below I present some insight into how racism plays into Afro-Peruvian women’s experiences with violence.

**Accounts from the Field**

**Descriptions of racial violence**

Over the course of fieldwork few *usuarias* ever claimed that their partner had insulted or abused them because they were black or Afro-descendant. Inés and Allegra offered the clearest example of racial violence. Both had *mestizo* partners who verbally degraded them by making derogatory comments about their blackness.

**Inés:** He calls me “*negra de mierda*” (fucking black woman). Those are his words, “*negra de mierda, negra este*”, people always think that black women are dirty. ‘*Negra cochina* (filthy black woman), *negra de mierda*, it’s a common idea among ignorant people. I just shook it off because I don’t care, it’s ignorant.

**Allegra:** He was yelling at me, the usual, I’m stupid, I can’t do anything, I’m not good for anything, and I asked him why he says such hurtful things to me. He said “because you’re black and black people don’t have feelings.” I started to cry… Every human being has feelings. How could he think that I don’t because I’m black?
It should be noted that although Inés and Allegra’s partners were mestizo, the majority of the women in my study had partners who they described as black—negro, or moreno—or Afro-descendant because of their parents’ and/or their personal phenotype. When asked, the women who had identified their partners as either black or Afro-Peruvian said that they had not experienced racial violence because they looked like their partners, and implying that they would be insulting themselves. This logic does not necessarily correspond to anthropological findings on racial discrimination among members of the same ethno-racial groups. For example, when writing about the effects of the discourse of blanqueamiento among Afro-Colombians, Peter Wade writes “blanqueamiento… may mean that blacks themselves come to adopt disdainful attitudes towards blacks and black culture, while being unable to fully escape categorization as blacks themselves” (1993: 298). The same has also been shown to be true among Andean populations in Peru, whereby people who are often identified as indigenous readily denigrate others using the same racist slurs that may be used against them in an outward expression of deep-seated self-hate (e.g., De la Cadena 2001; Callirgos 1993).

Cristina Alcalde’s work (2007, 2010) takes expounds upon how racial discrimination plays into IPV among first and second generation Andean migrants in Lima. Ethno-racial identity was intrinsically linked to the violence women faced from their partners who, in many cases, called them indias and serranas to show that they abused women because of their region of origin and their ascribed racial background even as both partners shared the same heritage.

Scant in-depth work has been done on same and interracial relationships among Afro-Peruvians, but both the evidence presented by Alcalde and an understanding of
race and racism in Peru would suggest that relationships between Afro-descendants might also feature racial violence. Carrillo and Carrillo (2011) have estimated high levels of race mixing among Afro-Peruvians, which they attribute to a desire to complete the blanqueamiento project via mestizaje. Feldman (2006) references lyrics from children’s rhymes that were also featured in theatrical works from Afro-Peruvian ensembles in the 20th century that explicitly discourage young Afro-descendants from seeking romantic partners who were black. Discussions in Presencia y Palabra meetings on identity and love frequently returned to firmly reinforced ideas that blackness was ugly and undesirable, and the necessity of looking for non-black—or at the very least, lighter-skinned—partners in order to mejorar la raza, or “better the race”, by making it whiter.

Such strong evidence that people of African descent have been socially conditioned to despise this aspect of their identity leads me to believe while it is still possible that racial violence did not figure into the abuse that usuarias received from Afro-Peruvian partners, it is more likely that they may not have recognized this type of aggression.

Identifying racism

By the end of my fieldwork, I had heard women recall comments or interactions with mestizo partners that I would consider racist, but when asked about racism in their relationships, the usuarias denied that race-based discrimination ever figured into their unions. Both these discussions and those with women who claimed that their relationships with Afro-Peruvian men were void of racism because of their shared ancestry are small-scale examples of a broader social dynamic in which it is difficult to identify acts of racism when they occur. Anthropologists have written extensively about
the ways that racial hierarchies are eclipsed by pervasive subscription to ideologies of race mixing as proof of universal sameness throughout Latin America (e.g., Mullings 2005; de la Cadena 2001; Hale 2006; Wade 2010; Whitten and Torres 1998; Safa 2005, 2006). Social understandings of what constitutes racism are narrow and rigid, and the education system does not adequately equip students with the tools to recognize a number of types of discrimination, racial discrimination included. The result is at times a lack of awareness regarding racism, but also the inability to identify and aptly name the treatment they receive beyond feelings of indignation and upset. Additionally, in a society rife with micro-aggressions, many are left wondering whether or not they have in fact been insulted, while others come to accept them as part of daily life (Sue et al. 2007 and Sue 2010 thoroughly outline these processes).

Sofia Carrillo, an activist and journalist who currently works on public health issues and focuses on Afro-Peruvian women in her work shared that this is a common occurrence:

Sofia: We found that women in our study were able to identify other kinds of violence but they often did not recognize racism. It’s very difficult to openly state that you’ve been a victim of racism in this country, so much so that women can recognize that they were abused because they are women but not because they are black women.

There were a a few occasions where I noted that this might have happened to some of the women I was working with. Either they would show clear recollection of an interaction that I readily identified as racist but that they would insist that it was a joke, or they they would flat out deny that racism existed in their relationships. Claudia gave me an example of the former when she recalled comments that her husband had made about her:
C: He’s never insulted me because of my race, he just makes fun of me because I’m black to bother me.” (She makes a menacing face and, imitating her husband’s voice, she sneers) “you’re black, your family is black, you’re black!” But it was just him trying to irritate me, that’s all.

E: You didn’t feel insulted?

C: No.

The tone of her voice and the comments paired with the other information she had given me about her husband’s history of hurtful words gave me pause to think. In a country where identifying someone as black or calling someone as such continues to be inflammatory—calling someone “black” is rarely if ever a compliment—such comments made by a man to his wife, the same person that he had chronically abused for the better part of his life, was likely not simply a joke. I was given insight into the way racism manifests itself in the relationships of the women using CEM services because I specifically asked them, and because I prompted them to elaborate on any aspect of their experiences that I felt could related to racial violence. If CEM workers do not do the same racial discrimination is completely excluded from data collected about each case. The absence of this information points to an area that needs particular attention if racial violence is to be addressed effectively by the Peruvian state.

In this chapter I have debunked the widespread and damaging myths that black women are not abused because they are aggressive, sexual beings, and compiled a record of their stories with the goal of breaking the silence. I have also tried to advance the discussion about racial violence by considering how it specifically affects women of African descent. More of this kind of work needs to be done to understand how best to continue to raise awareness about IPV that includes racial violence among Afro-descendants and the broader public.
Doña Elena pulls back the frayed garbage bag covering the window. She misses the daylight but with the weather cooling and the sea winds sending balmy gusts of cool air through the cracks around the frame, choosing warmth over natural light is the logical decision. Patting down the gray coiling wisps of hair that morning chores had liberated, she turns back to the stove to check on the large, black pot of frejol cola’o bubbling on the stove. She feels something prod her leg and swats at it, knocking her hand against a small finger. Two of her grandchildren squeal in delight at being caught by their abuela.

“¡Fuera, fuera!” she grumbles at them, snapping a worn dish towel at their skinny bottoms and ushering them towards the door. The giggling chocolate-smeared faces disappear outside where their cousin’s birthday party is in full swing, leaving the older woman with the fading sound of flip flops on the packed earth of the road and the lingering smell of sweaty bodies. Couldn’t they see she was busy? Her small home has the tired appearance of a space overwhelmed by the number of inhabitants. Elena rubs her forehead wearily.

Marleny had moved back with her two young sons just after Gloria had left with hers. Miriam was back as well with her daughter in tow. Then there was herself and Tomás, her husband. All of them in the space just behind the kitchen. They had edged the kitchen cabinet forward to make more room. It now bookended the table where her granddaughter did her homework on one end and food preparation took place on the other. The gas stove sits at the other end. They had pushed the small fridge braced on
the wooden rack salvaged from the docks closer to the door. It would have scratched wood or tile terribly. Ah, the silver lining to the dirt floor!

She isn’t bothered by the floor or the worn furniture. The workmen are making ample progress on her new house across the street. Most of the straw thatching has been replaced with concrete and she has already begun to move her things in. More than anything she is fed up with the lack of space and noisy children. Elena glances at the curling picture of Jesus with his long fingers engulfed in lambs wool. His face smiled down at her from where the calendar hung tilted on the brick wall.

“Perdóname, Señor,” she mutters, hastily crossing herself. She just had to get through this party and she’d be able to relax.

Elena eyes the bubbling soup of sweet beans in the pot and peered out the window again. If Miriam weren’t such a gossip she would have been back from the market with the clavo de olor by now. God help her if her dessert was ruined…

“¡Mamá!”

Elena rolls her eyes and heads towards the door to see which of her children is calling her. She immediately retreats, startled by the flood of women spilling into her kitchen. Miriam is panicked and out of breath. Marleny hovers behind her, and Maite and Ariana, her daughters who live two doors down, stand in the doorway.

“¿Qué? ¿Qué ha pasado? How many people do you need to bring me fifty cents of clove, Miri?”

“I don’t have the clavo, ‘amá, l—“

“No clavo? Between the five of you? I had nine children and for what, ah?”

“Mami, let’s go.”
Maite’s stern tone makes Elena pause and looks at her daughters. Maite is impatient, cagey and distracted. Marleny’s face is pinched with worry.

“What is it?” She asks as she puts the pot spoon down and reaches behind herself to loosen the apron strings, readying herself for the still unannounced trouble.

“It’s Diego. We can hear her yelling from the second floor.”

Mother and daughters exit the house and move swiftly through the winding, narrow lane. They pass two, three, four wooden houses before coming to a narrow street where they veer to the right, away from the police station, and around the corner to the first house on the left. The concrete steps carved into the side of a small building lead to the door of the wooden second floor apartment. A frayed gingham cloth flutters away from the window pane in time for Doña Elena to see Gloria tumble across the floor.

The women flood the small room, startling Diego. He recovers quickly as they begin seeing to their duties.

“¡No se metan, carajo! Why can’t you just mind your fucking business?!” he screams at the intruders.

His impending rant is cut short as Maite’s fist connects with his face. He grabs his nose, blood trickles through his fingers. She shoves him backwards against the stove, slapping him wildly.

Ariana and Miriam pick up their sister, pushing tangled, curly strands of hair out of her swelling face. They run their fingers over her body in search of broken bones, easing away from spots that cause her to flinch with an effortless meticulousness indicative of practice. Elena assesses her daughter with a veteran eye. The bruises
usually set in by the time they get her home but today they’re already showing. He’s been particularly rough. There will be no hiding this from the children, or anyone, for that matter.

A piercing wail cuts through the chaos.

“La bebe,” Gloria moans.

“Maite, get your niece and get out!” Elena barks.

As happy as she is to let Maite throttle Diego, she wants this all to be over as soon as possible. Maite scoops up the screaming toddler from the small bed in the corner and snatches Gloria’s cell phone as she follows the others out the door, glaring back at Diego.

“The next time I see you, motherfucker…,” she growls.

On Sunday, Doña Elena walks back to the apartment alone. Her daughters are seeing to Gloria. At the top of the stairs she composes herself, then knocks on the door.

“Por favor, ábreme la puerta, yo voy a hablar contigo.”

She pauses in wait for what always comes next. Diego opens the door avoiding eye contact.

“Doña Elena, perdóname,” he whispers.

“Habla como hombre. Levanta la cabeza. Me tienes que hablarme a mí,” she says brusquely.

He raises his gaze. Tears shiver in his eyes. Elena sighs inwardly. Always with the tears.
“I just think it would be safer for everyone if you and your family didn’t get involved in my relationship,” he says. “If I had hit Maite back she could have been hurt.”

Was he serious? He wanted to hit another child of hers? *Este sin vergüenza.*

She stepped closer to Diego, forcing him to take a step backwards into the room.

“A mi no me vas a amenazar ni a nadie. I have come to tell you that I have had enough. We all have. Gloria is finished with you. The children will stay with me and so will she. And when you want to come visit you will come to my house.”

“But there is no privacy there!” he protests.

Elena nods.

“Precisely. Bring her things to my house. If you don’t I will send Maite for them. If you don’t give them to her I will go to the police. Do you understand?”

“But she belongs with me!” Diego insists, raising his voice.

“Do you understand?” Elena repeats herself quietly.

Diego nods his head, defeated. She turns and walks back down the stairs.

Instead of turning right to head back home, Elena continues straight for another block before turning into the *comisaria.* Gloria sits between Maite and Marleny. She can see both of Gloria’s eyes now but they are still ringed by angry purple bruises. Good, she thinks to herself, the police will pay attention to her.

She had insisted that Gloria file a report after Saturday’s events. Diego has becoming increasingly generous with his beatings and now he had done it with her grandchild in the room. Elena does not put much trust in the police. She’d never counted on the *comisaria* to do anything for her apart from helping her get her bearings; the flag on the top of the building was one block east of her home. But this was a
serious affair, one that would merit trying a new approach. Elena settled into the empty chair beside her daughters to wait.

According to 2016 ENDES results, 43% of women who were abused by a current or former partner sought help from a close family member or neighbor, and a mere 27% said that they sought help from state-funded institutions and the justice system while the rest opted not to. The underreporting of domestic violence in this instance is unsurprising given that it is consistent with trends in other parts of the world for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to: victim-blaming and other forms of hostile treatment from state workers, disillusion with the justice system, and lack of trust in authority (Fregoso and Bejarano 2011; Ellsberg et al. 2000; MacDowell Santos 2004; McClusky 2001; Ewig 2010; van Fleet 2002). In light of these facts, prior to delving into interactions in the CEMs, which is the topic of the last two chapters, in this chapter I consider the tactics that usuarias use to protect themselves from violence outside of the state. I use Abdoumaliq Simone’s (2004) concept of “people as infrastructure”, originally used to describe informal economic activity to compensate for an absent government, to position extrajudicial efforts to combat IPV. Simone’s concept effectively provides the groundwork to consider the individual efforts and networks through which women are able to obtain the support that they do not trust the government to provide. Most of the usuarias of the CEMs had prior interactions with the police through their local comisarias, and so I begin with recounts of their perceptions of the police through their personal interactions and indirect observations. I then talk about the two most common modes of defense, those being what the women refer to as defenderse, or retaliative violence, and familial interventions. Both options push back
against portrayals of abused women as completely isolated while in their relationships and show black women as active participants in deterring violence in their lives.

**Pulling Away from the State**

Low levels of reporting IPV to the government is reflective of a broader national pattern. Peru has the lowest levels of trust in the justice system in South America (IEP 2014). Aversion to interacting with the police and the justice system is also exacerbated when citizens belong to ethnic and cultural groups that have further reason to distrust authorities, and in the particular case of violence against women, machismo presents a great deterrent for those who might otherwise report. Instances of this very issue in Peru are well documented, though they focus either on women in general or indigenous populations from the highlands (Theidon 2012; Alcalde 2007; Jubb et al. 2010; Macassi 2010). On a larger scale, feminists involved in efforts to curb domestic violence continue to critique the emphasis on resolving violence through the legal system that has been antagonistic to the very demographic it is supposed to protect (Davis 2001; Merry 2009; Fregoso and Bejarano 2009). Alternatively, anthropologists have documented a variety of instances where women have used other avenues to seek help. These have included familial and social networks, leaving their partners, and looking for support through organizations and NGOs dedicated to women’s rights (e.g., Counts, Brown, and Campbell 1992; McClusky 2001; Merry 2006, 2009; Alcalde 2007, 2010; Hautzinger 2007).

In addition to the absence of trust in governance, Peru is second only to Paraguay on the list of South American countries most in favor of employing extrajudicial methods to punish criminals not apprehended by the legal system (IEP 2014). It is also a country that boasts an extensive informal labor market composed of
the majority of the population. These three components of the nature of Peruvian society—distrust, a firm belief in attaining justice outside of the court system, and customary informality—are reason enough for any entity committed to ending violence against women to give serious consideration to the way women in abusive relationships work to neutralize violence or escape it without involving the judicial system. Both qualitative and quantitative data shows that they are the avenues that women repeatedly use to protect themselves. They should be examined with even more care when women of African descent are in question since data from the MIMP clearly shows that they grossly underreport.

Since race, class, and gender-based discrimination shape the lives of a large portion of women of African descent by marking them as marginalized beings they are exposed to uncertainty and left to fend for themselves. Even among the women I was able to interview who had reported their partners, often more than once, they all listed ways in which they had tried to escape violence before coming to the CEMs. The government was, in most cases, seen as a last resort, and even while moving through the legal system, usuarias continued to rely on alternate means of protection. In some cases it seemed that these other tactics were more useful than the system, offering faster, more reliable interventions, and better chances of keeping aggressors away.

**Interactions with the Police**

Before addressing parallel avenues of support I think it critical to make an intervention about why so few women consider the police a first option—or an option at any point in time. Although protective social networks are important, all of the usuarias I spoke to had eventually sought out state services to help them. In most cases, the women had first gone to file a report at the comisarias, or police stations. The most
recent changes to the laws on domestic violence now stipulate that women may go
directly to the emergency centers and then be accompanied to the comisaria to file a
police report, but during the largest portion of my research—before the new legal
statutes came into effect—women were turned away from the CEMs until they had the
report in hand. This legislation made interacting with the police unavoidable and
oftentimes a solitary and hostile experience.

The general opinion of the comisarias was neutral at best and downright poor at
the worst. This was due to the treatment they personally received from the police and
years of witnessing lackluster responses to helping other women and community
members in general over the years. The excerpts presented below demonstrate the
circumstances under which the women felt it necessary to seek state help, but
alternately point to the very reasons why they leaned heavily on help of a familiar
nature.

Views of the Police

Beyond punishing gender expectations the other side of the problem was the
perception of the police held by the women that was often impacted by the interactions
between officials and citizens. With specific regards to domestic violence, the
complaints of the usuarias are identical to those of other women in Peru, in Latin
America, and globally (e.g., Boesten 2006; Jubb et al. 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano
2007; Macassi et al. 2010; MacDowell Santos 2004). Victim blaming is a rampant
problem, as is a glaring lack of understanding of gender dynamics in relationships.
Additionally, living in areas marked as dangerous in Callao means that police are
consistently unwilling to respond to calls for help.
Victim blaming

Issues of victim blaming and shaming in police stations are well documented in Peru.

Ethnicity also plays a role in these interactions. Police perceptions are colored by dominant social perceptions of gender as it interacts with ethnicity though research has overwhelmingly shown how they affect highland women (Boesten 2006; Theidon 2007; Alcalde 2007, 2010; Güezmes et a. 2002; MIMP 2013). Even as I was not told of any interactions with the police where racial discrimination was at play, there were plenty of accounts of victim blaming.

Ysabel went to the police looking for a restraining order for her husband. He had been violent towards her for years and had intensified in tandem with his growing drug dependency. Even though she had kicked him out of the house he continued to try to break in, frightening her daughter and keeping her on edge. After he destroyed her car and screamed at her in the street she went to the closest comisaria to report his behavior. She was outraged at the conversation that ensued.

Ysabel: You go to comisaria and they say ‘but what are you still doing there if he hits you? He beats you so why don’t you leave?’ I told the commanding officer, I said ‘So, I’m just going to leave him with my possessions and my house? So he can turn it into a drug den?’ He went silent… I leave, I lose. I leave everything behind and he gets another woman, turns my home into a halfway house, and I have to live in a rented room with my son.

Ysabel was the least willing to back down from police questioning of this kind but not the only one to have the grounds for their complaint questioned. Some had their cases passed directly to the CEMs after filing their reports, but other had to make a series of trips to ensure their paperwork was processed. First experiences with law enforcement weigh heavily in women’s decision-making with regards to pursuing legal
avenues in search of justice and protection. As such the MIMP and domestic violence reports have stressed the importance of providing a welcoming service that will encourage women to continue with the legal process (Macassi et al. 2010). Nonetheless, I heard resounding resentment from women feeling they had gone in search of help only to be told they were the problem.

**Police negligence**

Another major problem the women faced was getting the police to pay attention to them at all. In some cases they had to repeatedly demand that their case be processed, but in most the problem stemmed from a lack of willingness of the police to respond to their problems. The women attributed the disinterest to the fact that they live in poor areas with high levels of delinquency. The result was a lack of trust in authorities to help them when they were in danger.

Ysabel’s house is tucked away on a side street in old Callao. Theft and drugs are commonplace in her neighborhood and shootings have increased in the months leading up to the state of emergency. Police response is not consistent and seems to depend on the whim of the officers on duty who appear even less interested in braving the streets of her neighborhood at night.

Ysabel: My husband is going to come here in the early morning and what police am I going to call at that hour? If the police want to come, they come, if not, they don’t.

Celia also complained about police indifference and described the extra steps and deception she’d had to use to trick officers into helping her.

Celia: I have to call a number my friend gave me to get through to a special line to make the police come otherwise they just don’t. And even then I have to lie to them "I am so and so’s wife" or the sister of a colonel. They won’t come for domestic violence… even the patrol cars don’t come to this
neighborhood. At two or three am they park the cars behind the Real Felipe fort and sleep. There is no police support. Honestly, there’s none.

Allegra lives around the corner from the police station yet tells me that neither her nor her neighbors view the police as an option for resolving problems.

Allegra: I mean, in few words, it’s just there as a decoration, you know? ‘Comisaria.’ I have to… They have to see you bleeding before they (help you)... you know? There’s a woman whose husband beats her horribly and she has filed more than ten police reports but there is no solution.

Inés got the police to act by complaining and threatening to report their inaction to the MIMP, however she was able to do so because she knew about the changes brought about by the new law, while many other women most likely were not.

Inés: They didn’t believe me, because I had a ton of police reports and nothing was moving forward, but with the new law I went and I said “Sir, what’s going on? This is happening to me and you don’t do anything. I’m going to complain to the ministry.”

Reasons for Reporting

Despite these negative options of the police, all of the usuarias ended up reporting their partners to the authorities. When asked why they went to the police women generally answered that they were tired of the violence. “Ya me cansé,” they repeated, one after the other. Upon asking them to elaborate it became clear that most had reported because of one of two experiences: either there had been an incident involving their children—all of the women I spoke to were mothers—or because the physical violence had become so severe that they were worried for their personal safety, or even their lives.

The concern for children is easy to understand as a maternal desire to shield them from violence that they had tolerated up until their breaking point, but even so cultural factors are also at play here. Macassi et al. (2010) write about motherhood as a
deeply embedded principle in Peruvian society that habitually causes women’s rights and safety to take a back seat to “concepciones familistas,” conceptions of family (2010: 78; also see Flake and Forste 2006). These conceptions assign parents but chiefly mothers with the task of keeping the nuclear family unit together and frequently factors into their choices to remain with abusive partners. “Concepciones familistas” are closely tied to Marianismo, the practice of embodying traits of the Virgen Mary, specifically “women’s attachment to their children, and their submersion of their own needs and desires to those of their children (Parson 2010: 887).

Celia: Because I was tired of him and his insults… and once he took my son.

Allegra: No more, no more. It was when he did it in front of my son and he was scared, and you know, you really think that if you really love your son you are not going to allow him to see that.

Lourdes: Like I said, I argued with him twice but the third time he did it in front of the baby. That’s why I said ‘no more of this.’”

In all of these cases the women had endured years of violent treatment—physical, emotional, and economic—at the hands of their partners for years before interacting with the police. Strong sentiments of Marianismo correspond with the strong religious undercurrents of Peru as a nation. Even though the violence is exerted against the women, they base their reasons for leaving on their roles as mothers safeguarding children, not on their own desire or right to live lives free of abuse. The same motive has been documented in other cases (for example, Ellsberg et al. 2000).

Life-threatening violence was a lesser but prominent reason for involving the police. Brenda recalled her breaking point as the moment she felt she might be facing a mortal threat:

Brenda: Once, we were on bad terms and I had gone out to a quinceañera for a friends’ daughter. He arrived late and out of nowhere picked a fight,
accusing me of having been out with someone else. 'I’ve been here the whole time!' I kept saying to him. Even his mother came over to say I was telling the truth! ‘You’d better watch out or you’ll end up in a plastic bag,’ he said. Around that time a bunch of women had disappeared and been found dead in plastic bags. He wanted to go home but I didn’t want to go with him so he started threatening me. 'He’s going to beat the shit out of me when we get there,' I thought to myself. I went with him to calm him down but he wanted me to give him my cellphone. He said he was going to sell it to buy drugs. I was so scared, he was drunk. I went to the house, got my children, and went to the police station and I stayed there until dawn. I told them that he hadn’t hit me but he had threatened me. The next day I went to get the report.

Under these circumstances both her safety and that of her young children were threatened and she retreated to the comisaria to seek help.

Others reported because their families demanded it, though their motherhood remained a driving factor. After Clara’s mother got wind that her boyfriend had thrown knives through her window and almost killed her grandchild she told Clara that she would have to report him or make her legal guardian of her grandchildren. She opted to report her boyfriend to keep her children and the CEM workers said that it was clear that she was doing it for her mother. Clara’s comments corroborate their suspicions:

Clara: Oh, well,… For my mother and for myself—I mean, I would have already left this process behind (if not for her).

Jasenia and her family were ready to report her boyfriend after he came to her family’s home where she was living after they had split up. She said that he was fighting with her about a household appliance that he thought she had. The fight escalated and he went from being disrespectful to her mother to wanting to hit her in front of her family while she was holding their child in her arms. Her aunt came out to make him go away and after she and her mother had gotten him to leave they took her to the station.
These actions are representative of women seeking aid from the state as a last
effort to stave off danger.

The Meaning of “Defenderse”

Almost six months after beginning interviews I was sitting with Ysabel talking
about violence with her husband. We were mid-way through my usual questions when
she answered my question about her reaction to her partner’s violence.

Ysabel: …y bueno, me defendí.

I paused, letting the words settle in, and realizing that I had heard almost all of
my other research informants say when talking about their reactions to their partners’
vioence. I decided to probe.

Eshe: So, when you say you defended yourself how did you do that?

Ysabel: By hitting him.

E: By hitting. Hitting him.

Y: Yes.

E: So that he would stop?

Y: Of course! I defended myself so he wouldn’t keep going… He hit me and I
hit him too.

It was at that moment that I realized that I had unwittingly been making an
assumption about how violence happened in the relationships of the women I had been
speaking to. I assumed that “defenderse,” the verb that in English means “to defend
oneself” held the same meaning for Ysabel and the others. I had accepted the victim
narrative that is rigorously upheld through the media and public opinion that depicts
battered women as completely dominated by their partners and women who simply
endured or tried to stave off blows during violent episodes. “Defenderse” did not mean
self-defense as a wholly reactive set of actions or a strict blocking of blows, it also included retaliative violence of the same kind.

The following day at the CEM I asked Lourdes about it.

“¿Es común que las mujeres se defienden?”

She paused before saying no, he would estimate that five percent of the women the center had said that “se habían defendido.” I mention to her that I’d heard many stories about women who had “defended” themselves.

“What exactly does it look like to ‘defenderse’?”

“‘Defenderse’ means to respond with violence, return the blows,” she explained.

“If you slap me across the face, well, I’ll grab a bottle or the television set and I’ll break your face, I’ll scratch your face, your body. I’m not going to let you hit me without fighting back.’ That is what ‘defenderse’ means.”

I tell her how confused I had been when I had asked women if they had hit their partners back and they would say “‘No, no I didn’t hit them, but I did defend myself,” which, in my mental translations makes me think that they had reacted to avoid violence and harm done to themselves.

The term “defenderse” also includes verbal aggressions. There were cases where women stated that they did yell back but did not hit their partners. Shouting back insults is indeed seen by these women as a form of “defenderse” but judged as a safer option under some of their circumstances since they were afraid of their partners’ reactions. Clara’s case was a prime example:

Eshe: And how did you defend yourself?

Clara: Just by yelling. I wouldn’t dare raise a hand or push him because he would hit me back harder… Sometimes when he was sober he would hit me or kick me and I would watch him and size him up and then pa! I
threw something back at him, a rag in the face or the stomach and he got mad and he would hit me.

E: And that was one time?

C: No, that's the way it's always been.

E: So that's your way of defending yourself.

C: Yes. Once I threw water glasses at him. I threw them but none of them hit him. But I don't fight back much with him, maybe because I am afraid of him. But with other people and with women I do defend myself.

The idea that they were supposed to act in this way was an undercurrent of these conversations. In instances when they did not “defenderse” they expressed shame at not doing so, further indicating that it is what they should have done. Like Clara, Brenda and Claudia also said that at many moments in time they didn’t dare because they greatly feared the consequences of upsetting their partners, though on occasion they had yelled at and insulted their partners during shouting matches. Claudia recalled that the first time she had ever been hit she defended herself but that when he beat her soundly she didn’t dare hit him again.

“Defenderse” or retaliative violence has been noted by other researchers of domestic violence over the years however not a lot of direct attention has been given to why women fight back. Some studies reveal that women engage in this behavior in self-defense (Anderson 1997 and Campbell 1999 in Hautzinger 2007) or claimed that women respond with violence when they believe that police will not be able to help them (Macassi 2010). While I share the belief that as humans we are predisposed to fight for our lives, and that women take alternate measures when the police have been ruled out as a viable option for protection, I oppose the idea that this kind of retaliation is as
premeditated as the latter idea would make it seem. Ethnicity was not considered in these cases.

To place this action in the context of Simone’s (2008) “people as infrastructure” I regard it as a first response to violence and an attempt to deter the aggressor from continuing to abuse carried out by women instead of an apparatus of institutional infrastructure. In all cases where women did hit back, they did so immediately after being assaulted by their partners, claiming that they should understand what it felt like to be hit, or simply that they weren’t going to allow themselves to be hit without consequences. I understand through the explanations of the women who engaged in this behavior as a physical (or at times verbal) reaction that indicated an aversion to and indignation at being abused. My research informants speak of the act of ‘defenderse’ not as violence but as a reactive measure that embodies their opposition to the treatment they are forced to suffer. These acts of self-defense are, as implied by my research informants, normal; this was their way of retaliating against the pain inflicted upon them and displaying their upset.

**Learned Reactions**

ENDES (2016) asks women to list who they went to for help when confronted with violence. It does not contain information about the advice they might have received from their mothers, friends, or neighbors, the three groups of people in whom most of them frequently confided. While “defenderse” may not be a learned behavior solely in black households or among black women, it was certainly known, approved of, and encouraged by the parents and relatives of the usuarias. Inés recounts her father’s encouragement upon hearing that his daughter was being mistreated:
Inés: My father taught me to defend myself. I didn’t want to do it but I had to. My father said “what’s going on, daughter, how can you not defend yourself? You know how to do this, I taught you when you were little.” So when he (her partner) started coming at me I started to defend myself, and when he saw that was boxing he stopped. Even still I hit him with a broken bottle that I grabbed. I broke the bottle on him and I cut him (shows where she cut him), so he was scared of me for a while.

Inés’ assertion that she did it because it was a way to make him stop turned out to be correct when her partner gave her a wide berth for what she thought was a significant amount of time before starting up again. Jasenia’s partner’s family also encouraged her to fight back:

Jasenia: His aunts always said ‘hit him with the broom, hit him with whatever,’ that’s what they said.

Eshe: Who said that?

J: His aunts, whenever I was feeling like rebelling. So one day I hit him with the broom and he left… But he’s so fast. No matter how you defend yourself he’s stronger. That’s the way it is.

Jasenia’s description of her interactions with her former partner’s family and particularly her use of the word “rebelling” reinforces the notion that “defenderse” is a method for contesting abuse.

Racial and Gender Implications of “Defenderse”

The defenderse debacle fascinated me. It was a staunch departure from the narrative of partner violence that is one-sided where a man hits a woman who may run away, but certainly does not respond in kind. Moreover, I had never heard about this kind of retaliative violence talked about as a collective phenomenon.

When asked, CEM workers gave varied responses to the question of how frequent it was for women to “defenderse.” In Callao it was reported as not so common by the admissionista, but the social workers and psychologist claimed that it happened
often even though they made it clear to the *usuarias* that fighting back was not, in fact self-defense, and put their status as victim in jeopardy. One believed that retaliative violence happened often in Callao not because there were more black women there but because Callao, regardless of race or ethnicity, is an aggressive and violent space. Yet, when I asked Presencia y Palabra members whether or not this was something women only did in Callao I received an outpouring of anecdotes. Nadine, for example, told us that her grandfather had hit her grandmother once:

“She said he slapped her in the face during an argument,” she paused dramatically, waiting for us to demand she continue.

“What did she do?” We asked, leaning in anxiously.

Nadine’s ankle lowered down to the floor from on top of her knee and she pulled her chair closer to the table, as she looked at each one of us slyly, reveling in her audience’s anticipation.

“Well! She waited until he went to bed and then she grabbed a pounding stick—you know the ones they used to use to mix *mazamorra*?”

She raised her hand over her head, indicating the height of the fat wooden poles used to make stir the dessert.

“She used to cook, so she got one of those… My grandfather had to take two months of medical leave when she was finished with him. He never, ever, *ever* hit her again.”

Macassi (2010) does not specify the ethnicity or racial background of the women who participated in their research, and as such “defenderse” cannot be associated only with women of African descent. That said, the questioning of the ability of a woman to
suffer violence at the hands of their partners takes on new dimensions when the woman in question is black. The stereotypes of women of African descent as strong and aggressive already silence their pain (see Chapter 4), but the added aspect of “defenderse” would help sustain social disbelief that black woman can be abuse survivors.

These cultural stereotypes also affect the way black women view themselves and guides their decisions about the way they ought to respond during violent episodes. Rocío Muñoz (2010) discusses how black Peruvian women sometimes conform to stereotypes about their sexuality and their identities as a whole due to unrelenting social pressure. Hillary Potter (2008) follows suit in her analysis of black women in the US in abusive relationships who retaliate violently against their partners in order to avoid the status of victimhood and uphold the stereotype of themselves as strong black women.

A study on black women’s experiences with domestic violence in Brazil that considers differences between Afro-Brazilian women’s responses to violence by skin tone also offers a potential point of interest. The authors found that although lighter-skinned black women (mulatas) are stereotyped as possessing some level of feminine fragility not afforded to their darker skinned counterparts (pandas and pretas), women of all shades fought back because of an internalized desire for self-preservation—they sought to protect themselves because they had learned that society would not (Jaquetto Pereira and Jaquetto Pereira 2012). Here, low levels of trust in the police were compounded by an awareness of the implications for themselves given their gender and race. Simone’s (2004) concept takes on new dimensions under these circumstances,
offering new motive for relying on oneself for protection until the violence becomes unbearable.

The usuarias I spoke to made little mention of any connection between “defenderse” and any aspect of their identity, including blackness. In fact, when asked directly if they thought that black women reacted in that way more than other women they often responded by vigorously noting that all kinds of women from different backgrounds fight back and that blackness was not an indicator of the likelihood that a woman would do so. This is to be expected given the strong overtones of concepts of sameness rooted in mestizaje. Still, as mentioned in the previous chapter, women made indirect comments about behaving aggressively because they are black and thereby showing an awareness of social perceptions of them.

Clara initially commented that she had screamed while her boyfriend was abusing her because she was black:

Clara: He grabbed me by the hair, he started to hit me, he was banging my head [against the floor], he was strangling me, strangling me, and since I am strong—because I am strong, too—he was covering [my mouth] with his hand so I couldn’t breathe. And I was screaming “help, help, help!” so he turned on the television and put a DVD with music on and turned up the volume so no one could hear me. So, I, since I am black, I scream louder. I was screaming “help, help!” I wasn’t going to give up. “Don’t scream,” he said, “if you scream I’ll hit you more and more.” So I screamed, and screamed, and screamed, and he didn’t stop hitting me, choking me, and kicking me wherever he could.

It sounded as though her comment was similar to stereotypes about black women’s loudness and harsh voices that I addressed in Chapter 4. When I asked her to clarify the connection between being black and screaming she seemed caught off guard, as though she did not remember her prior comment, then denied any difference between any women based on race:
Clara: No, I think that’s for women with complexes. We are all equal… although there are people who are racist…

Offhanded comments were often followed up with this kind of rhetoric about sameness when I asked direct questions about connections their opinions on the uniqueness of black women’s experiences.

Angelina was the only usuaria to speak plainly about stereotypes of black women and violence:

Angelina: People have this idea in their minds that black women are fierce, that our response to violence would be violent even though that is not necessarily true. There are black women that are very shy. But you can see it on television. There was a man who hit an Asian woman and she gave in to him, but he also hit a black woman and she grabbed a knife or a gun, something like that.

Television programs are saturated with racial stereotypes, primarily showing indigenous and Asian women as docile and black women as bravas. One particular program I remember seeing involved a man on a talk show aggressively throwing around a life-size doll of a woman dressed in a pollera skirt, two long black braids, a cardigan, and a traditional hat worn by women from the sierra. His actions were accompanied by uproarious laughter from the live audience and the commentators who encouraged the abuse. These shows are the subject of daily conversation and almost unavoidable as these programs are shown in restaurants, in stores, in the background at family dinners, and anywhere else a screen is to be found. As a result these same stereotypes are deeply embedded in the minds of the public, and affect the way they interact with others as much as they shape self-perception.

I am not convinced that black women “defenderse” solely or even primarily because they feel they must as black women, but at the very least they understand that their society expects them to react in this way. It may be that “defenderse” is a
retaliative action exhibited in higher frequency among Afro-Peruvian women and encouraged more by their families than others. Unfortunately, this is the kind of information that remains hidden when ethnicity and race are not considered in gender violence research making mine an argument for further diversified research.

**Family Interventions**

Despite the growing record of family interventions in instances of domestic violence in different ethnic groups (Kerns 1999; McClusky 2001; Merry 2006), the most prominent image of women facing abuse in the Peruvian media showcases them as isolated beings. Social isolation is one manifestation of emotional violence and severing or forcing an individual to cut ties with members of their social network is often a telltale sign of an abusive relationship dynamic (WHO 2002; Ellsberg et al. 2000; Flake 2005). This popular depiction differs from the women in this study because while they still suffer abuse they also have familial networks that offer support. In all except one case, their families were well aware that their partners were abusive, and though they generally did not coerce women to leave their relationships, they intervened consistently, and offered reliable and much needed protection. Brenda’s case lays out one of the ways that families lend support.

Brenda is immensely proud of her children. They take after her side of the family, she says.

"My eldest girls look so much alike you’d think they were twins! They’re not, but I call them ‘mellizas’ anyway," she leans back in her seat, smiling at images in the air.

Her mellizas and youngest daughter are her motivation for boarding the bus at sunset to watch the sand roads give way to pavement as the combi—or communal taxi colectivo if she can spare the money for it—rolls down through the fog, past the wooden
homes of the Asentamiento Humano Pachacutec and into the brick barrios of Ventanilla. Past the oil refinery spread out like a metal oasis, she smells fish, a sure sign that her journey is ending. The fishing terminal is close to the airport where she works her new job as the night shift as a cleaner.

“Real health benefits!” she beams when she tells me.

The scarce equipment and apathetic doctors at the local medical post will not be missed. She does miss the camaraderie of the fish terminal where she worked off and on when steady work dried up, but the money and security mean a great deal for her family.

The mellizas don’t look much like their own mother, but they do bear striking resemblance to Brenda’s mother, Rita. Rita lives underneath the fog in Callao, down the hill in a poor district that hugs the coastline. Her daughters’ faces comfort her as she doesn’t get to see her mother’s regularly, especially with work being so busy and her husband Ricardo’s unstable character due to drug abuse. She left him for them, she tells me.

“He would insult me, we would argue, fight, and my daughters were there. ‘I cannot let my daughters see this and think it’s acceptable,’ I said.”

Brenda seems confident in her decision—frankly, she looks completely fed up when she speaks of her partner and their dynamic. Her family is in large part responsible for this, she says. She has always been able to rely on their support.

“I don’t see them that often,” Brenda reclines in her chair, stretching her legs and lazily scratching an elbow in thought.

“We haven’t been the closest but they are there when I need them.”
Like the time her husband, Ricardo, hit her. He’s psychologically abusive, calling her lazy and stupid, and pushing her at times. But she can list on her hand the number of times he’s hit her.

“Once, he punched me in the face. There was blood everywhere. I called my mom who called my sisters and they all got moving.”

They arrived at the house and soundly beat her husband. On another occasion her husband came home while she was in the midst of a yelling match with his sister with whom she says she’s never gotten along.

“He grabbed me by the hair and dragged me to our house and tried to lock me in. ‘¡Quédate, conchatumare!’ he kept yelling."

She slid me a sly glance when I asked if she stayed. Of course she didn’t. She jumped out the back window and ran down the hill between the wide spread homes.

“I called my mother with the fifty centimos I found in my pocket.”

Imelda happened to be visiting her sister who was living to the south and they raced to the house.

“I got my claws out and did what I had to do… My family fought with his family too…”

Brenda’s case shows one way that black families intervene when the state does not. In her neighborhood in Ventanilla, like those of the rest of the usuarias, the police are seldom if ever seen as options for help. For them, families take on the role of supporting and defending women, forming their own informal infrastructures (Simone 2004). These incidents lend some truth to common beliefs about black families and domestic violence, as it was for the majority of the black women I spoke with about
family ties, though more research would be required to determine whether it holds true on a larger scale.

**Peaceful Intervention**

Simone describes the individuals that form the infrastructures of Johannesburg as adaptable, a result of enduring hardships they have faced in their home countries, as migrants, and as poor people (2004: 424). He notes their “willingness to improvise, change focus… to protect themselves” (Simone 2004, 424). Similarly, families did not serve as a source of physical might alone; they also intervened in more peaceful capacities. Most women stated that their families told them repeatedly that they did not approve of their choice of partner and at times took the initiative to look into other options. The *usuarias’* stories are filled with family members using a number of different methods to ensure their protection, examples of which are listed below.

Solsiret’s mother made long distance phone calls to speak with her husband. These served to put a temporary stop to abuse and her family could not do more because they live in Uruguay. Her mother still called persistently, showing her support from afar.

Allegra’s partner has since moved away from their shared apartment and currently resides far from where she now lives, which is close to her family’s homes. Her decision to relocate to her mother’s house in the center of the cluster of homes owned by her family was intentional. When her ex-partner comes around to visit their young children, the family makes their presence felt and keeps a watchful eye to make sure that he does not make her uncomfortable or abuse her. Allegra and her family said that he tried coming around to cause problems earlier on but quickly learned that his behavior would not be tolerated and has since ceased to cause upset.
Elena was living with her sister, Mayra, where her boyfriend, Freddy, would come visit her when he wasn’t working and she was babysitting her nieces. Elena said that Freddy, who would later be prone to rage-filled outbursts when they lived together, rarely fought with her during that time because of her sister’s reaction to his behavior soon after she moved in with her sister. On one occasion, Freddy showed up at their house drunk and wanted to come inside to see Elena who was with the children. When she said no he screamed at her through the windows and broke down the door to get into the house, unaware that her sister was home:

Elena: So my sister heard the noise and came out and kicked him out of the house. He didn’t want to go, ‘I’m not going to go!’ and he started acting up but since my sister got involved he left and my sister said she was going to call the police.

The families of Inés, Lourdes, Vanessa, Elena, Jasenia, Solsiret, and Magdalena have been supportive throughout their respective legal processes, and Solsiret was eagerly awaiting the holidays since her mother and sister were coming from Uruguay to spend Christmas with her.

After trying to contact her repeatedly for months after she cancelled our last interview, Ysabel finally spoke to me one last time on the phone. She said that she had had enough of the system and that she was moving out of Lima to Ica where her family lived to get away from her husband once and for all. Among the other women who had reported once and never returned were those who came back to say that they were moving to be with their families as well.

“It’s probably for the best,” Hugo sighs when I ask him about it. “Family often appears to offer more security than the law.”
Involvement of Partner Families

Familial involvement was not restricted to the family of the *usuaria*. In various instances their partner’s family also stepped in to calm tensions or to provide protection for the women abused by their family member. Like the examples above they employed both peaceful and violent methods.

During a fight, Inés’ children ran out of the house and around the corner to their maternal grandparents’ home looking for help for their mother. Their grandparents were in the middle of a late lunch with Inés’ partner Victor’s three younger brothers. The five adults followed the children back to the home where they rushed to pull Victor off of Inés, whose face had been cut in several places with the knife they knocked out of his hand.

Inés: His younger brother hit him, the last one. ‘How could you hit *la chata*? I am small, so my brother-in-law calls me ‘*chata*’

Family members from both sides speak up for their in-laws’ time and again. They open their homes to women and sometimes offer support that the women’s own families cannot due to physical proximity. When Jasenia’s boyfriend moved them out of her parents house because he didn’t like them getting involved in their fights, she found that his family was willing to help her escape him. Although she said his mother spread rumors about her and tried to turn the rest of their family against her, one of his aunts let her stay with her after a particularly serious fight. She returned to live with her boyfriend because she feared that her move was causing familial tension, but stated that the stay at his aunt’s house was a saving grace as she wouldn’t have had any other place to turn to otherwise.
Nonetheless, this is not always the case. Many women reported that their partners’ families saw them as the problem and cause of the violence and fighting. Brenda said Ricardo’s family looked down on her and accused her of being a troublemaker. Jasenia’s relatives are clearly not all on her side or willing to involve themselves to change their relationship dynamic.

Absent Presence

Family remained a valid and useful defense mechanism for women even when they were not called on at all. In fact, in cases where women decided not to summon their families they often did so because they were apprehensive about what they were sure would happen. In the same way that the myth of black women’s aggression was at times enough to stave off unwanted attention and abuse, the physical implications of family involvement was serious enough to stop women from calling for familial back up. In most cases where this happened there was concern that their partner would be harmed.

Elena said after the outcome of the last stand off between her family and her husband she did not want to involve them again. She had called them after Freddy had beaten her and what ensued was more than she had bargained for.

Elena: What happened is that the last time my family went after him they almost killed him.

Elena said that she preferred to go through the system in search of justice because she felt that to much harm would result from her family getting involved again.

Celia didn’t want to get her family involved because she associated their size and skin color with a violent outcome.

Celia: I thought about telling my cousins that my husband was abusing me but since they are big, black men I said to myself, no, I didn’t want to cause
any fights… they are very protective, we are very close. They would want to defend me.

Celia’s comments allude to stereotypes about black men’s size and aggression in comparison to indigenous, white, or mestizo men, like her partner. Her concern was strong enough to keep her quiet about the abuse for fear that she might put her partner in danger.

In these cases, even when women decided forego protection that might have decreased the likelihood of violence against them at a particular moment, their decisions were driven by a knowledge of the protective nature of family.

**Mothers-in-Law: Fighting for Both Sides**

To avoid a depiction of familial involvement as simple, straightforward, and positive, I delve further into Vanessa and Celia’s cases as they offer a glimpse into the more complicated aspects of life in a socio-cultural context that favors family unity and varied personal interests that impact interventions. Their experiences indicate the effect that close relatives can have on decisions about how IPV should be dealt with.

“They constantly told me to leave him. He wasn’t good for me, they said, he didn’t treat me right. But I was blinded by love. I know I could have left and gone to them at any moment but I took my time.”

Vanessa’s chronically abusive relationship is dotted with familial presence and intervention. Marco has been her long-term partner for twenty-five years. Growing up in the southern cone of Lima her grandmother, a migrant from Chincha, raised her grandchildren when their mothers went away for work. Marco was always trouble, she told me.
“My siblings and I, we always felt sorry for him. We could always hear his mother swearing at him. His father beat him with electric cables. He started drinking early, stopped going to school.”

Vanessa knew Marco from the neighborhood but came into closer contact with him through her brothers who were friends with him. Her grandmother’s indifference about her grandsons’ choice of company ended abruptly when their romance bloomed, at which point she began to express overt disapproval.

“My brothers didn’t like it either. ‘He’s trouble, Vane, he’s not good for you.’ They’ve been saying that for years now.”

Her family remains a constant presence in her life despite their disdain for Marco. In the south, her sister frequently kicked him out of the house when he came in drunk and got aggressive, and when they moved to Callao she took refuge with other family members on numerous occasions. They continue to express their disapproval but always assure her that their doors are open should she ever want to come back.

Vanessa’s case is marked by a complicated relationship with her mother-in-law. Lisbet, Marco’s mother, is Vanessa’s closest maternal figure since her grandmother has since passed and Marco’s family is in close physical proximity to her house. Lisbet takes care of her grandchildren when Vanessa is working informally as a waitress, and helps out with the small restaurant Vanessa is trying to get off the ground out of a room she’s saved to have constructed as an add-on to her house. Lisbet has also witnessed their relationship from close quarters since it began, taking Vanessa in when she needed a place to stay and offering herself as a go between when her son abuses
alcohol and drugs, or his partner. Vanessa and her sisters would call Lisbet when they couldn’t calm Marco. But Lisbet and Vanessa’s relationship has always been complex.

As the principal older woman in the couple’s life, and the only authority figure who has repeatedly intervened on behalf of Vanessa by using her status as a mother to get her son to desist, Vanessa is grateful to her but also weary. Lisbet has also brought the couple back together in moments when Vanessa told me she did not believe that they would have otherwise, because she does not want her son to be alone and because she likes her daughter-in-law. Vanessa feels that Lisbet has taken advantage of their relationship to ensure that she stayed with Marco because of her own desire to keep their family together despite the violence.

“Su mamá era una persona que siempre me había defendido, siempre, siempre, siempre me había defendido pero después llegaba a pensar que bueno, era su hijo. Entonces ya trataba de defender pero a la vez unirnos, no? / His mother was a person who always defended me, always, always, she always defended me, but afterwards she realized that, well, he was her child. So she tried to defend me but keep us together at the same time, you know?”

When Marco was serving jail time Vanessa had planned to take advantage of his absence to leave him once and for all. She had her sights set on putting the house in her name—Marco refused to do so—and save enough money to cover her children’s basic needs. She says Lisbet guilted her into visiting Marco in prison and encouraged weekly visits by saying that Marco was lonely and that she was his partner. By the time he was released, Vanessa felt her feelings for him were still strong and she welcomed him back home.
**Celia.** Lisbet’s efforts to keep her son’s relationship intact align with other mothers of usuarias whose cases I learned of. Celia’s mother, Roxana, a devout member of the evangelical church that had secured a stronghold in their community, intervened time and again in her daughter’s relationship. At times she entered into the home, blocking her daughter’s body from blows to bring her back to her own home a few blocks away. There she would tend to her wounds and counsel her daughter on the sanctity of marriage and the importance of remaining together before going to her daughter’s house to repeat the speech to Ángel, Celia’s husband.

Celia told me that this sequence of events happened seven or eight times before Ángel kicked her in the head and choked her unconscious, finally exhausting Roxana’s tolerance for his abuse. Celia was confident that her mother supported her decision to report Ángel but knew her mother was hoping the results of the hearing would help him to shape up so the two could continue to co-habit peacefully.

These examples show the complexity of family involvement in violence where there is on-going support for abused women. Both Lisbet and Roxana showed consistent opposition to violence but also operated according to their own moral codes that reflect previously discussed “concepciones familistas” that emphasize the importance of staying with partners. These seemingly contradictory positions prompted the women to search for short-term solutions to violence even as they continued living with abuse for years, which is a noted trend in violent relationships (WHO 2002). My intention here is to show family as actors that exist outside of their roles as mediators and with their own perspectives on relationships. Although I was not made aware of
any other glaring tensions between the actions and end goals of family members I think it important to show black families’ heterogeneity even as they work together.

**The Outlier**

In the interest of being thorough I think it important to mention the case in which family was not called upon for protection. Claudia, the oldest *usuaria* I talked to said that she did not receive much support from her mother or family over the years. She married in the 1970’s when domestic violence was both politically and socially viewed as a private family matter. Claudia noted that the first time her husband struck her she told her mother but there was not much to be done at the time. Claudia’s children have spoken to their father about his abusive treatment now that they are adults, but her husband’s temper always worsened with alcohol and they frequently drank with him, leaving her vulnerable to his violence and them silent because their father implicated them in his drinking problem. As a result, Claudia depended on the justice system to help her put an end to more than thirty years of violence. While she said that she had her children’s support she felt that she was moving through the process alone.

**Other Alternatives: A Field Note Excerpt**

*Una solución chalaca.* Her ex was attacking her again, and it was getting worse and worse. After recounting the latest attack on her home and body she lets out a defeated sigh.

“Honestly, señorita, the only way that this is going to stop is if he kills me or if I kill him,” she said.

There it was, plain as day: another option. I have been asking about other options, other avenues that women use to get away from violence apart from family intervention, moving, “defenderse”, and the authorities. The CEM workers couldn’t think
of any. I had begun to think there simply weren’t any more, but here was a brand new option. Perhaps other women had thought about it—I can’t imagine they hadn’t—but she was the first to say it to me.

I would like to say that I was horrified to hear it. Maybe I should have been, but to be honest, after listening to her tell me how he had almost killed her, how she had spent months in the hospital having her abdomen reconstructed, I myself had thought that if someone were to kill this man it would be a relief. Her children were traumatized as well, and who knows what kind of emotional issues she might need to work through. The police ignored her until she showed up bleeding on the station steps, and while she waited for a restraining order to come down he kept attacking her. I imagine she’d thought about him dying a number of different ways by now. It’s him or her, she says, and given the way things have been escalating I would have to agree with her. She said the psychologist scolded her for fighting back because she broke a bottle over his head, but if she hadn’t there’s a good chance he would have murdered her.

Her sister is concerned about her. She worries about leaving her home alone when she goes out for work. Her ex-boyfriend has some way of knowing when she’s home alone. Together, they had come up with three options. They could pay for a private lawyer, which her sister offered to do, and to hear her talk about it, it sounded as though they are at least considering it. Most women who use CEM services can’t afford a private lawyer, which is why they end up at the free centers. Two, move to a new house, though that doesn’t seem to be something they are willing to do because he seems willing and likely able to figure out where they would be going and that would defeat the point of it all. The third was extra-judicial killing—murder or hiring a hit man.
I don’t know much about murder for hire, but given the crime rate and the frequency of homicide in Callao according to news reports it sounds as though she’s in a place where there is a market for it. She’s got some good connections, or so she told me.

I challenged Alberto to a round of How to Get Away with Murder, to figure out what the odds were of getting someone killed with little to no blowback. It’s one of the perks of a living with an officer. He said that in Callao it’s possible—anything is possible if you have the money. There are gangs and people who would do it for you. Even so, he doesn’t think it’s a wise idea:

“The hit man gets caught and he’ll screw you over.”

He also wouldn’t opt for doing it himself:

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to commit murder without getting caught? There’s always someone who sees you, someone who saw you coming or going. How would you move a body? Where would you put it? Who is your alibi? The police in the homicide division are very good at their job. They have more experience as detectives than you do as a suspect. It’s not as easy as you’d think. It sounds like a good idea in the heat of the moment but people get in over their heads quickly.”

What a killjoy.

So, from a technical standpoint it’s undoubtedly risky. Regardless, it shows the possibility of this and other options for people dissatisfied or disillusioned—or desperate—with the system and the “normal” choices presented to them. If women must use the tools at their disposal to remedy their problems then for all its faults it remains a permanent solution to dangerous circumstance. Still, it’s sobering to hear
that her situation has become so unbearable that this option is even in the running.

How many more ways can a system fail a woman?

The prospect of hiring a hit man, whether a serious consideration or not, highlighted another set of services offered outside of the government that I had not yet considered. This moment, as described in my field notes, reveals the desperation and the willingness to draw on all available resources to escape violence, and an awareness that more drastic action could be taken. Having exhausted all other options, this woman was seriously considering tapping into illicit practices to protect herself, and with murder for hire listed as one of the motives for the state-sanctioned state of emergency in Callao, it showed her ability to take advantage of an accessible and highly visible opportunity to end the attacks.

This chapter has covered the way black women try to decrease violence in their relationships. As women stigmatized for being their gender, race, and class status in unique ways in the context of domestic violence they rely upon protective mechanisms that do not question the legitimacy of the violence they endure on these grounds. “Defenderse” and familial support are heavily relied upon to deliver the results that the police do not, as shown by high levels of disillusionment and distrust. This would indicate that serious efforts to eradicate intimate violence should recognize and draw on these mechanisms while making appropriate changes to police policy and training.
On a late morning in April I had one of my first conversations about the ethnicity question with Lourdes, the admisionista at CEM Ventanilla, after the line of usuarias waiting to see her had died down. What follows is my recollection of our conversation as I wrote it in my field notes.

I asked her about the ethnicity question. We were talking about ethnic invisibility. She said that she didn’t ask the question.

“I would never ask women what race they belong to just like that,” she said, shaking her head, wishing the thought away.

“It isn’t like in your country where people are open about these things. We are very sensitive to race. First of all, women are coming here to talk about painful experiences. If you ask them about etnia they don’t know what that is. When you ask them about race they get offended, they don’t see the relationship between that question and why they are here. They’ve been discriminated because of their race for years and now you’re asking them if they are indígena, nativa, negra. They don’t know what afro is. ‘What’s that?’ they ask me. They think you are going to discriminate against them. They want to know why you want to know. I have to explain it all to them. Then I’m taking time away from the issue at hand to teach them. No, I can’t ask them. And definitely not the morenitas.” She pats her cheeks when talking about black women.

“And what happens,” I asked, “when she asks the women about race directly?”

“Some say ‘mestiza’, some just don’t want to answer. Some get defensive. Some of the people who are from upper levels of society, they know what it means, but
even some of the people who are from Arequipa, from the *sierra*, the highlands, and now they are here and they are rich, they will never admit that they are from the *sierra* because of discrimination. But you know they aren’t white. They aren’t. They don’t look white and they are from Arequipa. But that’s what they say.”

This chapter shifts the focus from women’s chosen mechanisms for avoiding violence outside the scope of the state, to the CEMs, where I met all of the women I spoke with. By examining how *admisionistas*, CEM intake workers, understand race and ethnicity, and implement the new ethnicity question, I reveal how Afro-Peruvian women are registered in the state record by gender but not necessarily by ethnicity.

The past decade has seen an impressive rise in the number of countries that have incorporated questions about ethnic and/or racial classifications in their national censes (Morning 2008). Peru, like many other countries in Latin America has begun this process slowly and in piecemeal fashion across national ministries, and is currently preparing for the 2017 census that will feature such a question. At the national level, the rise of neoliberal multiculturalism and subsequent critiques have pointed to the reformatting of cultural diversity on restrictive terms that highlight select traits while silencing others, creating new possibilities for new incarnations of racist discourse (Hale 2006; Ames 2011). By moving towards discussions of culture and away from race and by extension racial discrimination based on skin tone, which is the source of much inequality lived by Afro-descendants, this salient issue is silenced again as it was through *mestizaje* even while the government increases its acknowledgement of the legacy of Afro-Peruvians (CEDET 2005, 2008; Urrea 2006).
In this context, the MIMP introduced a question to determine the ethnic make up of its *usuarios* as of January 2015. I therefore consider the ethnicity question in light of Sally Engle Merry’s discussion about indicators as political, where she says that “what is measured and counted by states and civil society organizations depends on which problems seem politically important” (Merry 2016, 29). Even as its existence is in place to generate data on violence, gender, and ethnicity and make it legible for the state, the question poses a specific set of concerns for Afro-descendants. Government officials and CEM workers alike have confirmed that this question is about recording the cultural backgrounds of the people who use CEM services and not their physical characteristics, but blackness continues to be primarily thought of socially as an indicator of belonging to a racial, and not ethnic, group (Valdivia 2014; Greene 2007; Hooker 2005). IPV researchers consistently emphasize the importance of using data collection methods that reduce underreporting as much as possible because low numbers can result in the assumption that violence against women does not need as much attention, among other reasons (WHO 2002). For Afro-descendant women who belong to a group that is already a minority in terms of population numbers, low numbers in domestic violence reporting can translate to less public policy development and special focus, which would be a major setback.

In this chapter I argue that even in the context of a shift away from discussions about race and a honing in on cultural identity and diversity, interactions remain fraught with a “hyperconsciousness of race” (Vargas 2004) that marks social interactions, including those that take place in the CEMs. In this on-going process of making Afro-Peruvian women’s accounts of violence visible to the state, I show that due to the
approaches to determining ethnicity undertaken by the *admisionistas* due to their working conditions, only Afro-descendants who can be phenotypically identified as black are classified as such, conflating two terms that are not mutually exclusive. Black women continue to be primarily identified racially by phenotype and culturally essentialist traits. This chapter considers the experiences of *admisionistas* as they endeavor to make sense of ethnicity in general and women of African descent in particular, in the midst of strong popular trends to that do not view these women as part of a unique ethnic group. I compare their outlooks and tactics to those of the Afro-Peruvian *usuarias* I spoke to determine whether there where discrepancies between the way they self-identified and how intake workers classified them. I am looking at what these indicators mean and how they are used, which also shows cultural meaning.

**Ethnicity, Multi-Culturalism, and Afro-descendants in Peru**

Peru has, to date, signed and ratified a number of domestic and international documents that outline and afford a variety of rights to historically marginalized minority groups in the country (Noles Cotito 2017; MIMP 2014). Afro-Peruvians have been among the groups listed in diversity laws, but they face a special set of difficulties that have made the process of being recognized by the state and other sectors of the population as being equally as deserving of recognition as a distinct cultural group. Contrary to the experience of indigenous populations that have been labeled as distinct ethnic groups or “*pueblos*” because of select (racialized) traits, most readily noted are: language, territory, and culture, the “holy trinity” as written by Greene (2007, 445), but also noted by other scholars (e.g., de la Cadena 2000, 2001; Wade 2007; García 2005; Quijano 2000). Although there is considerable scholarship critiquing the way that these markers of ethnicity continue to lead to the racialization of indigenous peoples, African
descendants, in many cases, are not thought to constitute a distinct ethnic group in popular conceptions of culture. Afro-Peruvians are currently considered an ethno-racial population (MIMP 2014). Shane Greene (2007) has written about how skeptical leaders of recognized ethnic groups (read: Andean) were of the inclusion of Afro-descendants in institutions like CONAPA and INDEPA because they did not believe that Afro-Peruvians constituted an ethnic group, even though these institutions outwardly acknowledged them as culture bearers.

I present two examples of the way that Afro-Peruvian continue to be excluded on this basis. First, the International Labor Organization Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (number 169) has been ratified by the Peruvian government, and recognizes the collective rights of those groups considered peoples (pueblos), including collective land rights, and the right to participation in any development efforts geared towards them (ILO website). Afro-descendants in Peru are referred to as a population and not as a pueblo, which excludes them from access to this framework and from having their collective rights recognized, and maintains the notion that they do not constitute a pueblo (or a series of pueblos).

Second, in October 2015, the Peruvian government issued a supreme decree that ordered the integration of an intercultural focus into all levels of the government (El Peruano 2015). The decree states that the purpose of this action is to guarantee the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and the Afro-Peruvian population, and to recognize the cultural diversity of Peruvian society, promote social inclusion, and eliminate discrimination (El Peruano 2015, 564789). Interculturalism (Interculturalismo) began as an education theory and policy that encouraged the valorization of national
ethno-cultural diversity in classrooms in order to bring quality education to marginalized groups (Escobar 2017, 4; MINEDU 2013). The latest policy document from the Ministry of Education includes a critical interculturalism perspective that focuses on addressing and dismantling the oppressive nature of race relations among different cultural and ethnic groups (MINEDU 2013, 29). In practice, this policy marks Indigenous, non-Spanish speaking populations as culturally different based on language and territory, and will only be implemented in intercultural and bilingual schools instead of throughout the nation. These are institutions for Andean and Indigenous children with marked histories of assimilationist practices. Again, Afro-Peruvians are made invisible because they are a Spanish-speaking population and educational programs in Afro-descendant communities will not feature an educational program that reflects the resident population (Valdiviezo 2012; Valdiviezo 2006; Escobar 2017). Without a discussion about racism in education policy and society high dropout rates at the highschool level and underrepresentation in post-secondary institutions cannot be properly contextualized and continue to be blamed on Afro-Peruvians because of strong stereotypes about their lack of intelligence (Escobar 2017, 21). Interculturalism constitutes an example of a neoliberal multiculturalist policy as described by Hale (2002, 2006) and Curiel (2009); it speaks of the importance of recognizing difference and the rights of diverse groups of citizens but leaves racial hierarchies and power dynamics in tact. Given that such an advanced and critical discourse on diversity and ethno-racial hierarchies gave way to a policy that reinforces inequality, there is justified skepticism about whether or not interculturalism will change the status quo when it is integrated into the government despite the clear mention of the Afro-descendant population.
Scholars working on issues of race and ethnicity in Latin America have argued that one of the reasons why Afro-Latin Americans tend to be recognized as a racial group based on phenotype alone and not as a cultural group is because large portions of Afro-Latin Americans reside in urban centers and are not necessarily culturally different from the larger mestizo population, nor do they recognize themselves as coming from a distinct culture (Hooker 2005; Valdivia 2014; Golash-Boza 2011; Sue and Golash-Boza 2009; Greene 2007; Feldman 2006; Telles 2014; Wade 2007; Muteba Rahier 2012).

In countries that form part of what is called “mestizo Latin America” as coined by Mörner (1967) and more recently employed by Sue and Golash-Boza (2009) where Afro-descendants do not form part of the national myth of the miscegenation, invisibility of African descendants exacerbates this problem. Despite advances in national discourse and policy, social perceptions have been slow to change. As such, discourses like mestizaje, blanqueamiento, and the existence of race (though now conceptualized differently) continue to permeate civil society. Whereas indigenous Peruvians can move into the category of “mestizo”—if they pass through the violent process of assimilation into mainstream mestizo culture—since their physical characteristics are not as crucial to their association with indigeneity as other traits, the same cannot be said for black Afro-Peruvians who cannot escape as easily, if at all, into the nebulous category because of their physical appearance (Valdivia 2014; Golash-Boza 2009; Telles 2014).

Insight through Method

Methods for research are crucial to formulating sound projects, but also to generating responses to the questions set out to be answered. Over the course of my
research I undoubtedly spent the majority of my time with admisionistas. I was privy to their struggles to complete tasks under stressful circumstances that were notably different from those of their colleagues, particularly in that they were regarded differently in their capacity as workers. When they were assigned to ask the ethnicity question to women already in distress without clear instruction on how to do so, these workers often forewent outright asking in favor of observing usuarias. I found, to my surprise, that I had stumbled upon a new arena in which I could observe how popular thought about determining race and ethnicity operated articulated with new ethnicity-focused policy, and compare it to women’s views on why they considered themselves to be Afro-Peruvian.

Prior to, and even as I focused the bulk of my research efforts on CEM Callao, Ventanilla, and Pachacutec, I continued to frequent other CEMs periodically to follow leads on black women’s cases. During these visits I spoke to the admisionistas at these centers and in this chapter I include their comments on the matter at hand. In addition to the three CEMs mentioned above, the opinions and observations presented below also come from the Carmen de la Legua, Rimac, San Martín, Cercado de Lima, and La Victoria centers.

**Admisionista Work: A Balancing Act**

An understanding of how admisionistas work and what their job entails is central to understanding factors apart from cultural norms surrounding discussions of race that influence their approach to determining a response for each usuaria in regards to their ethnicity.

Admisionistas are the most accessible of CEM workers. Their office door, if they have one, remains open, they are almost always visible to the public from their desks,
and they are required to promptly attend to anyone who comes to seek help or enquire about offered services. As such, they do not operate in the same way that the psychologists, lawyers, outreach or social workers do since the latter are afforded a higher level of privacy. Intake workers must determine whether or not the matter presented to them fits into the scope of the CEM services. They are charged with filling out the basic information required on the first page of the intake form, including the name, address, and telephone numbers of the woman in question, the information of the aggressor, and the first language, place of birth, and as of late, the ethnicity of the woman seeking help. These tasks on their own are not cumbersome—the data they are required to record is standard for most government documents—rather, the challenges come from time constraints, balancing duties, and the pressures of working in an emergency institution. In the interest of protecting their identities all of the admisionistas have been assigned pseudonyms, and I have, in some cases changed their genders, CEM offices, and swapped their comments with those of other intake workers.

**Time Constraints**

The biggest source of pressure for admissions workers is the sanctioned order that they must register women and hand their file off to the *profesionales* (psychologists, lawyers, and social workers) as soon as possible. Ten minutes is the allotted time as per ministry regulations. Carla, the *admisionista* from the office in San Martín de Porres, told me that representatives from the headquarters would sit in the office to time her periodically. All of the admissions workers complained about being reprimanded for not completing their duties quickly enough, but they reasoned that it was difficult to offer quality attention and not appear to be rushing the *usuarias* in ten minutes. They
frequently expressed frustration with the official expectations that were not realistic for
given the nature of their job.

Ricardo: They told us to take down the person’s general information and then after
(they go to the other offices) fill out the form. But that’s in theory. It’s very
difficult to do that here. Why? Because we are not supposed to listen to
the person’s story, but when we are here (in the office) we have to…

They are also to attend to women as soon as possible after they arrive at the
CEM in order to cut down on the number of women who might be turned off by the wait
time and leave. On some days the flow of people might be light, but on many days it
seemed to never let up.

Elián: They [the MIMP and the profesionales don’t know what it is like for us on a
daily basis. Sometimes they just don’t stop coming and I can’t take a
break until the afternoon. Sometimes I don’t eat lunch or I eat at my desk
because I can’t leave. There is no one to relieve me, I’m the first desk in
front of the door, I can’t leave.

Elena: What I try to do is use all the time [I have], lunch hour, I leave for fifteen
minutes and then I go over the intake forms because I realized that you
have to be able to concentrate. It is a shame because if I don’t do this,
when the next person comes I keep thinking about the previous case.

Warring Responsibilities

As the keepers of the files, admisionistas are also expected compile and send
the required data regarding the cases they have seen to the MIMP every month to be
processed by the statistics team. These duties are attended to during the last few days
of every month, and when important meetings or special events are taking place, such
as International Women’s Day on March 8th and el Día de la No Violencia contra la
Mujer (the day of no violence against women) on November 25th. Ministers and high-
ranking officials rely on briefings based on CEM data to formulate speeches for the
press and the public. In order to comply with these requests, admisionistas often set
aside their regular duties, which leaves them scrambling to catch up later. The
beginning and ending of every month were the most difficult times to speak with
admisionistas for this reason.

Maintaining the files also means that intake workers must be available to assist
the profesionales when they need to access documents pertaining to cases. This
involves further interruptions to their own work in order to attend to the needs of the
other staff members while potentially keeping usuarias waiting as well. The backlog can
result in overtime. Lourdes told me that she stayed later to try to stay on top of her
workload:

Lourdes: A lot of people come to be looked after and I work against the clock
because the profesionales finish on time and they leave. With everything I
have left to do I stay, you know? Sometimes I really can’t afford to lose a
minute of time, so I’m trying to send women in to see the others
immediately.

Women in Distress

The outcome of admissions workers’ interpersonal interactions with the public is
paramount. They face considerable pressure to ensure that women seeking attention
do not decide not to continue with the process because of their experiences during the
initial processing, or complain about the quality of treatment they receive as it would
reflect poorly on the center. Since many women come to the CEMs at the
recommendation of others who have directly used the services, ensuring a positive
experience at the centers is thought to be important for the individual but also crucial to
ensuring that more women know of and view the CEMs—and by extension, the MIMP—
as dedicated and reliable facilitators for obtaining justice. Admisionistas must strive for
a balance between quality and speedy attention.

Hugo: When a person comes through the door, sometimes they are in shock.
They come because someone has told them ‘they can help you there,’ so
you have to welcome them kindly, kindly. At the beginning you have to
greet them warmly, ask them ‘how can I help you?’ It is important that that person feels at ease. We have to see to everyone. This is the place to listen to them, to familiarize them [with the system]…

All of the intake workers explained that as the first stop in the CEM, women often emotionally unload on them, telling them everything that has happened to them. Sometimes, by the time the women were seen by the _profesionales_ they did not want to revisit the events that brought them to the CEM because they had already confided in the _admisionistas_, which in turn resulted in important case details being left out of reports. Although some of the _admisionistas_ are social workers and lawyers, their current job title does not allow for them to engage in psychological work, however they are also required to make them feel that they are heard. They must determine the best way to curb talk about details about acts committed against them without offending _usuarias_. This can be difficult give that they must also tailor treatment to account for emotional duress that can manifest itself in a series of emotions, including anger and shock, and, at times, an underlying distrust of the authorities. In efforts to not upset already apprehensive _usuarias, admisionistas_ must tread lightly, handling sensitive subject matter with compassion.

Elián: …Those people who have faced violence are distrustful, they have doubts. One must have a lot of tact when asking the majority of the questions we have to ask, you have to know how to ask correctly.

Admissions workers are the most overlooked part of the CEM teams. Their time commitment, interpersonal interactions that are crucial to the centers’ function, and the additional emotional toll that their work exacts are not acknowledged by the MIMP. In the context of an already taxing job terrain, this particular question becomes even trickier to address given the nature of their jobs.
Job Training

The difference between admisionistas and profesionales was best demonstrated by the differences in training of the two groups.

Elián: We are not perceived to be on the same level. We are not ‘profesionales’ and the treatment is different. When it is time for workshops and training they take the profesionales for a whole day with lunch and everything. The few times that we had training it is just for the morning. They don’t train us, they send us documents but we need to be trained… They (the MIMP) don’t know what it means to work as an admissionista. If you can’t work with people, talk to them, calm them down, if you can’t deal with stress and other people—with the profesionales—that work in the office you can’t work here. But they don’t see that, they don’t understand that. They think it is easy to do what we do but it isn’t.”

The admisionistas I spoke to took it upon themselves to continue to educate themselves on the policies and procedures associated with their jobs, reviewing documents and notices, and asking the head office and the profesionales to clarify these processes. Many talked to other admisionistas from time to time, and relied on their own knowledge acquired at previous jobs or through schooling. Some, for instance, were lawyers and social workers, and others had relevant job experience in gender work or the social sciences. The two principle documents that outline their duties are: an instructive guide with instructions on how to fill out the registration form (PNVFS 2015), and another that dictates how workers are to attend to anyone seeking help in the centers.

The latter was released in 2013 and, although I was not permitted to access it, I was informed by both the head of the National Program against Familiar y Sexual Violence (PNCVFS) and by admisionistas that it did not contain any information about how to administer the ethnicity question. This is logical given that the new registration
form with the question was not finalized until 2014. The new guide was said to have been set for release in 2017. The *instructivo* was released in 2015 and does address it.

The question and instructions, according to the guide are as follows:

“*ethnia o grupo (indígena, nativo u otro)*” translating to: “ethnicity or group (indigenous, Amazonic, or other)”. Ethnicity is defined as:

A group of people that share cultural roots, language, religion, celebrate certain festivities, artistic expressions (like music), clothing, historical nexus, types of food, and in many cases, territory.

“Other” here refers to the other ethnicity options listed on a separate sheet to be read to the usuarias at the time of asking, those being: *Quechua, Aymara, Nativo/a o indígena de la Amazonía, Población afro descendiente (negro/a, mulato/a, zambo/a, afroperuano/a, Blanco/a, Mestizo/a, Otro/a (especifique), No sabe/No opina*. Usuarias are to be read the list and to subsequently self-identity with one of the groups (PNVFS 2015, 15).

**Training for the Ethnicity Question**

Until April 2015 when Lundu, an Afro-Peruvian NGO specializing in women’s stories and domestic violence, held workshops for MIMP workers in the PNCVFS, *admisionistas* claimed to have received no training from the MIMP about the ethnicity question and many still struggled to define the “ethnicity”. To my knowledge they have not repeated the session since.

**Obstacles in Asking**

Most *admisionistas* stated that they reviewed the ethnicity question when the new forms came in in January of 2015. They ran into difficulties almost immediately.
**Trouble with Definitions**

*Admisionistas* agreed that a question of ethnicity should be on the form. They viewed it as a question in the same vein as those about first language and place of birth that predate it and are also ethnicity markers. Workers said that they had strong feelings of discomfort in response to the ethnicity question because they felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge of the term “ethnicity” or how it differed from race. Some had used internet search engines for clarification, but remained weary about asking a question they felt they were not capable of explaining to the *usuarias*:

Claudio: How am I going to ask them something when I don’t know what it means myself?

Ethnicity, they said, seemed a slippery term and alien to the *limeño* lexicon. Intake workers understood it to be similar to race, a term that was easier to define but also one that they felt was unsuitable for social conversation with people they did not know. When I asked them to try to define race and ethnicity I was met with varying answers. A few backed away from the challenge:

Hugo: I don’t know what that is, I don’t understand it.

Others gave more elaborate responses. There was some questioning of whether or not ethnicity was just a new word for race that was not as inflammatory.

Elián: I understood that they replaced one with the other so that when you mention someone’s race you are talking about their ethnicity, if I’m not mistaken…

Christina, who had some background in the social sciences, had a response that pointed to some of the differences that anthropologists have highlighted between the two terms:

Cristina: …Here, when they talk about ethnicity that are talking about other characteristics, not just skin color, but they talk about culture, language,
the unique characteristics of that group, you know? Whereas race was about skin color, and according to some studies, it was more of a pejorative term, it wasn’t about valuing the people…

*Usuarias* had similar issues grappling with the new term. I was asked without fail what ethnicity was, or, when asking for clarification, some asked if I wanted to know about their race.

Eshe: …this year there is a new question on the CEM forms. It asks about the ethnicity of the *usuarias*. I’d like to ask you—

Clara: What is ethnicity?

Eshe: On the form there is a question about ethnicity. How did you identify?

Vanessa: What is my race…

These responses would indicate that the *admisionistas*’ concerns about being asked to define ethnicity were valid since the *usuarias* were themselves unfamiliar with the concept and asked for clarification.

Black women also had questions about what “Afro-descendant” or “Afro-Peruvian” meant, as the *admisionista* from the opening vignette mentioned. Recent comparative research on different Afro-Peruvian populations has shown an increase in familiarity with these new political terms in regions where NGOs have done continuous work, however they remain political terms to a much greater degree as they have not yet become rooted into colloquial Spanish (Golash-Boza 2010; Valdivia 2014). This also points to class and educational divides that persist between many activist communities and the broader Afro-descendant populations.

**Discussing Race as Racism**

There was a general feeling that it was not *atinado* or tactful to ask about someone’s ethnicity, which is a sentiment that reflects a broader cultural norm in Latin
America where discussing or asking about race can be interpreted as an act of racism in itself (Oboler 1996; Luciano 2012; CEDEMUNEP 2011). From a cultural and professional perspective _admisionistas_ were reluctant to ask the question for fear of upsetting the _usuarias_. Although they thought it was important to collect data on ethnicity, they was not convinced that asking so taboo a question did not constitute a discriminatory act.

Elena:…It could be seen as discriminatory. Why? Because people can feel offended. So I think that we either have to be cautious with the question or just use observation to determine what kind of… person they are, no? What group they belong to.

Lourdes recalled two instances where she had asked black women about their ethnicity and they had yelled at her and accused her of discriminating against them. For months after meeting her she would say “the people you are looking for” instead of _morena, negra, or afrodescendiente_, and when she did it took her a few more to say them without dropping her voice and looking nervous. Lourdes said she all but gave up on the question after that the bad experiences she had. The comments of the _admisionistas_ in the opening vignette echoes Lourdes’ sentiments that black women would react worse than women of other backgrounds upon being asked about their identities. Her comments align with mainstream notions about the stigma of blackness (and the term negro/a), which would explain her fear of offending _usuarias_, but also indicate a fear of inciting black anger (Telles 2014). The fact that aggression is already associated with blackness such that black women are stereotyped as the most aggressive seemed to be at play. Finally, it is important to note that in these instances, Lourdes had already recognized these women as black, which makes her dilemma one of talking about race with these women, and not necessarily identifying blackness.
This—the awareness of race and the inability to discuss it, as described by Vargas (2004)—was the underlying problem that admisionistas faced and the source of their discomfort.

After attending a seminar on Afro-descendants and ethnicity at the MIMP run by Lundu, an Afro-Peruvian NGO specializing in gender, some admisionistas were better able to understand the role of racial discrimination in black women’s aversion to talking about race.

Ricardo: They (Lundu) talked about that, the Afro-descendant population has problems with racial discrimination so they don’t want to identify themselves because they have low self-esteem, that affects their self-esteem.

Usuaria comments mirrored admisionista reluctance to talk about ethnicity because it seemed too close to race. When I asked how usuarias self-identified ethnically they frequently assumed that I was asking a question about their race and would quickly deny being racist.

Eshe: And how do you identify ethnically?
Claudia: Are you asking me if I am racist?

Eshe: What is your ethnicity?
Ysabel: What is my race?
Eshe: Well—
Ysabel: I am not a racist person to weigh in on those things.

I had more time to discuss ethnicity and answer subsequent questions in a comfortable and closed environment, unlike admisionistas who, battling the clock, are looking to quickly ask and gauge responses to this question. The usuaria responses reinforce the concerns of intake staff that they run the risk of offending those seeking
help, especially black women who already face a great deal of social stigma because they can easily be identified. To this end, questions about their race could be read as a kind of micro-aggression when they are not clear on why the question is being asked, in addition to simply being inappropriate.

Caught up in Culture

I talked a good deal with admisionistas about the challenges involved in recognizing people of African descent who phenotypically were not black but who had other social markers of African heritage or blackness, such as family and cultural associations, birthplace or residence. What happened when they asked women about their customs as the guide laid out in the definition of ethnicity? The fear of discrimination stretched beyond physical features and into cultural attributes, I was told.

Elena: Undoubtedly when you talk to them about ethnicity, they aren’t going to understand. And if you say it has to do with customs they can lie and say they have different ones, you know? This is the problem with discrimination. So people have certain customs, histories, many people from the Andes, from the jungle, from the coast, especially people of African ethnicities, they feel that they are being discriminated against, so when you ask them they will feel marginalized, you know? And they say ‘why are you asking me? Are you only attending to certain races here?’ Because when they hear ‘ethnicity’, even when I explain it to them, they are going to think that this is about race.”

Elena’s comment highlights the racialization of culture, an on-going process that has reinforced the subjugation of indigenous and Afro-descendant people (Wade 2010). There is a long history of demonizing cultural traits of ethno-racial groups and encouraging assimilation into mestizo culture through education that has been documented meticulously as it pertains to Andean populations but much less so for Afro-Peruvians (e.g., Portocarrero 2007; de la Cadena 2000, 2001; Garcia 2007; Manrique; Quijano 2000). For example, Andean accents, polleras and other well-
recognized articles of clothing associated with highland cultures are highly stigmatized as symbols of Andean Otherness that are indicative of backwards, inherited culture.

When I asked Lourdes how she decided what to write when she did ask women about their ethnicities, she responded:

Lourdes: If they are willing to talk I ask about their parents. Where they are from, where they themselves were born, if they celebrate holidays that are from their tierras. If they dance huaynos [a highland dance] or festejo. If they are morenas I ask if their family is from Ica, from Chincha. I consider all of this. Then I write an answer. Because even if they were born in Lima, their parents still pass down the culture from where they are from. Even when you move it is hard to separate yourself from your homeland and customs, so that is important too. Sometimes, if they are already talking about their mothers, their families, I may ask about race, but you always have to ask in a very subtle way otherwise people get upset.

Admisionistas recognized that self-identification, though implemented into data collection policy in accordance with human rights mandates, offered the possibility for women to identify themselves as they so chose. While many selected a category after observing the usuarias, the intake workers were firm about recording any identity that women claimed should they do so. There is a tendency of self-identifying with a lighter skin tone or higher ranked social category (Telles 2014), and admissions workers suspected that women in the CEMs engaged in this practice to avoid discrimination.

Cristina: You cannot ask them [the question] because they don’t know what ethnicity is and if you say ‘race’ they think that you want to discriminate against them and they will say mestiza to end the conversation.

In mestizo Latin America (Mörner 1967; Golash-Boza 2011) where mestizo culture and identity is dominant, the category offers a degree of safety for those from non-mestizo groups who can manage to pass as mestizo. As previously mentioned, this is a process that can be easier for indigenous women than for Afro-Peruvians since major cultural indicators of indigeneity are most often language, place of birth, and
dress. However, if African descent is to be understood beyond skin color and to include those Peruvians who are from regions with strong a Afro-descendant presence, then these women could be rendered invisible by self-identifying as mestizas.

**Usuaria perspectives**

Tensions and complexities aside, when admisionistas asked usuarias about their backgrounds they were able to develop better insight into the factors that contributed to the responses they received. Upon delving into questions of identity in interviews I found that women’s responses revealed more than how they chose to classify themselves, but also the reason behind it. Although the principle reason for self-identifying as black was skin color, followed by heritage—both of which will be discussed in the following section—culture also factored into their decisions.

Inés: I am drawn to black culture, to the festejo.

Most proudly referenced dance and music when discussing black culture as Inés did. The popular equation of black culture with this short list of activities has been harmful to Afro-Peruvians and descendants as they have formed the basis of a reductionist view of black identity (Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; Muñoz 2014). Black women have been highly sexualized via their depictions as dance. My interviews did not reveal with great depth or clarity to what extent popular definitions of blackness affected these specific usuarias, however I do not want to discount their perspectives. Instead I want to draw attention back to earlier comments about black identity in urban contexts where Afro-descendants may exhibit much cultural difference from mestizo culture, and where examples of black culture as an autonomous entity are scarce at best (Hooker 2005; Valdivia, Benavides and Torero 2007). Though I feel it is important to contest the glaring issues of cultural essentialism and the racialization of black dance
and music, I am more interested in proposing that by engaging usuarias in order to understand their perspectives on blackness can reveal a fuller picture of what their identity means beyond phenotype alone. To what extent this is of interest to the MIMP or possible given the work constraints of admisionistas is another question entirely.

**Returning to Job Constraints**

Ultimately, time constraints and the nature of working in an emergency center was a central factor to admisionistas’ decisions to forego asking the ethnicity question. They were concerned about upholding their other responsibilities and how this particular question will impact their impression of the women’s centers and quality of service. Since their primary goal as intake workers is to process women’s cases and hand them off to the profesionales as fast as possible, such a sensitive question has the potential to slow the pace or negatively impact already distressed usuarias.

Cristina: …they arrive scared, agitated, abused, and they want to tell you everything, and what am I going to say? ‘Just a minute, ma’am, just a minute. What does your mother look like? What is your race?’ You can’t, she will get angry. She doesn’t understand the significance of the question.

Sometimes admisionistas must return to the forms at a later point in time or they skip over the question, jotting down their names, addresses, and contact information to ensure that they have the basic information before rushing through. Offering a good experience free from unnecessary repeating of details or further upsetting usuarias is important for admissions workers.

Lourdes: If someone complains and there is evidence that they have been revictimizada [made to recount their experiences] there will be problems. ‘They made me cry, they made me feel bad, they made me feel bad and I should not have had to.’
Observation: Surface-Deep Analysis

Observation figures into admisionista assessments of ethnicity for usuarias—either as the only tactic or one supplemented by dialogue. Most began to rely on observation when they first saw the question and felt too uncomfortable to ask, did not understand what “ethnicity” meant, or had usuarias react poorly to the question. Although the guide says that they are to ask women how they identify, some began to observe on their own, and others that called the head office to ask how best to determine a response they were told not to:

Cristina: Look… that question, as far as I understand, and based on what the head office told us, our bosses, is that we should not ask, but instead just go with what we perceive (their identity to be). As I said, it is considered a discriminatory act. And actually, they are right because if… it even bothers me to ask, then imagine what the other person could feel. And not just Afro-descendants but people from indigenous populations, no? Or people who come from the Quechua or Aymara sectors. They could feel uncomfortable, obviously…

It quickly became clear that classifying usuarias using observation had the potential to result in the collection of a different kind of information. Since the official protocol as stated in the guide calls for women to self-identify there are no guidelines for observation techniques, nor is there any set criteria for determining a person’s identity:

Lourdes: That’s the difficult part that I was telling you about. They haven’t taught us about that, how to recognize a white person, how to recognize someone who is indigenous. I mean, we are alone, why haven’t they trained us?…

Effectively, admisionistas are left to determine the ethnicity of the usuarias on their own, which ultimately means relying on socially, politically, and historically developed indicators to categorize women in the CEMs.

In order to identify a woman as a person belonging to ethnic groups from the highlands or jungle regions admissions workers relied on the language and place of
birth questions, and physical appearance, which can include dress. If the usuaria was not in a state of distress and did not seem uncomfortable about the line of questioning, some also inquired about family customs and history. These kinds of indicators are more readily recognized socially and by the state as characteristics that distinct ethnic groups would display (Greene 2007; Hooker 2005).

**Blackness in the CEMs**

This process of observation became much less about ethnic markers and more about racial characteristics for Afro-descendants. The language question made little difference given that Afro-Peruvians are native Spanish speakers regardless of their region of birth (Golash-Boza 2009). Skin color, hair texture, and facial features such as nose and lip shape and size were of paramount importance to identifying black women, meaning that women in CEMs were assigned an identity based on their perceived racial group, not on ethnicity. Furthermore, since only one answer is permitted, women who could be categorized racially as black but might belong to a different ethnic group are not able to be represented fully on the form in its current state.

I was told that hair texture was usually the easiest indicator but skin color was cited as the most telling marker of blackness.

**Hugo:** I don’t know if I would ask them. For me, if they wear their hair straight, hair is one of the characteristics most often used to recognize them. I think genetically Afro-descendants have hair that is obviously curly or wavy, you know?

**Elián:** I would primarily consider skin tone.

*Admisionistas* were constantly on the look out for *pelo crespado* or *ondulado*, coarse or wavy hair hat would indicate. African descent. Skin color was also another trait intake workers consistently listed as a marker. Some insisted that it was the sole
determinant claiming that black people are inherently dark skinned. I pointed out on various occasions that many Andean people have skin that is as dark, if not darker, than many Afro-descendants, often placing my hand beside theirs to show that my skin was almost the same color of some of the workers. This act frequently led to conversations about different terms used to describe Andeans with darker complexions called cobrizos, and zacalaguas, or black people with light skin and hair. Admisionistas said that they were able to tell the difference between these two groups because they considered all of the traits a woman had.

**Usuaria perspectives**

Primarily, usuarias identified themselves by race—literally saying that they were from the “raza negra” or “raza morena.” When I asked them why they did, the primary motive was skin color and facial features. Blackness to them was about physically being black.

Allegra: I think that we are called *morenas* because of the color of our skin. Because if my mother is white they are not going to call her *morena*. Or they will call her by her name.

Vanessa: They call me *negra, negra, negra*, and I take it as a compliment. I am always proud of my color.

In addition, usuarias—especially women with lighter skin and those who would have been classified as mestizas had they not been asked—said that they were black because of their genealogy.

Jasenia: I like that they call me *morena*. What’s more, I tell them “yes, I am *morena*, because I am a descendant of *morenos*. My father is *moreno*, and so I come from *morenos*.

Celia: I am *morena* on my mother’s side, because of my mother’s family…. My grandfather’s family is *moreno*. I am not sure about our history before my grandparents.
Celia, like three of the other usuarias, had one parent that she classified as mestizo or having white skin but self-identified as black because her other parent had been. Claudia’s case was the most memorable for me as an example of identifying as black because of ancestry. Hers was the only case I was made aware of that caused confusion among the CEM staff even though she had self-identified as black. I wrote about the conversation I had with Carla, a CEM lawyer, when I went into the center trying to get a hold of Claudia in my field notes:

“La señora Claudia?” Carla scrunched her face in question. “But she isn’t black, she’s white. Her skin is white…”

Carla rubs the back of her own hand, indicating that she shared the same skin tone as the usuaria. Hugo had already mentioned that Claudia did not have typically black features and that he had only marked her as afroperuana after asking her about her family, at which point Claudia self-identified as afrodescendiente because of her father.

“Hugo told me that she identified herself as morena, so I’m going to talk to her,” I explain, hoping that my response would move the process along. Susana isn’t giving up so easily.

“Look at her.”

She flips through Claudia’s file to a sheet of paper that is blank but for a grainy photocopy of Claudia’s national identification card. Her hair is worn short, and her skin appears very light. These are the only features I can make out. I looked up at Carla who is watching at me expectantly. I give her a lopsided grin and an “I’m just following
Carla’s aversion to calling Claudia black was because of her skin tone that was too light to gain Carla’s approval, however when I asked Claudia how she self-identified she responded as follows:

Claudia: I have black blood because my father was black like you [pointing at Eshe], he had the same hair and facial features, but me, what am I? Trigüeña (wheat-colored)? I am not black [touching her forearms].

Inés was only slightly darker in skin tone than Claudia and also identified as black because her grandparents were negros, as she said.

Recent studies on the Afro-descendant population have shown that Afro-Peruvians are largely viewed, even amongst themselves, as a racial group whereby phenotype, mainly darker skin, tightly coiled hair, and wide noses and mouths, is the primary defining feature that adheres individuals to blackness regardless of social standing and other traits (Valdivia 2014; Valdivia, Benavides and Torero 2007; Golash-Boza 2011; Telles 2014). That said, there is an important difference between the terms “Afro-descendant” and “negro”, and Claudia’s case is an excellent example of the potential for overlap between the two. “Afro-descendant” was collectively coined by activists of African descent to extend the parameters of their identity beyond physical features to talk about legacy, land, and culture, and discrimination (Dulitzky 2005). This allowed for unification among groups that prior to this process might have been divided because of hierarchies of skin tone. This created possibilities for those with more indigenous and European ancestry to self-identify as Afro-descendant because of political consciousness around the legacy of discrimination. To this effect, black and Afro-descendant become overlapping identities that are not mutually exclusive. This
allows Peruvians who may belong to other racial groups but who are from places where African Peruvian culture has greatly shaped their lives or have ancestors who were of African descent can be considered Afro-descendants. In a country where racial mixing has historically been very commonplace these advances are meaningful as they can include people who would be excluded on the basis of phenotype alone.

**Blackness, Geography, and Culture**

Observation leaves out people of African descent who may not be recognized as phenotypically black, but could be recognized as such because of cultural traits that are at times linked to specific geographical regions of the coast, namely the south, Lima, and lesser known communities to the North.

Patricia Ames (2011) describes the shift in approach to Peruvian geography from the colonial period into the advent of the Republic when the country was reimagined as a tripartite state constituting the coast, highlands, and jungle, that continues to be the official discourse. This new topography had implications for the population as different groups were assigned to these new regions and their cultures were believed to be found in their purest states in those home spaces (Ames 2011, 26). This reformatting of the national landscape was focused on the indigenous populations. For instance, in the opening field note excerpt when Lourdes mentioned that she knew the people she mentioned were not white because they were from the *sierra*, or highlands, she was discussing race by talking about geography. Indigeneity, not whiteness, and indigeneity bears a great deal of stigma that even those who have ascended the class hierarchy fear they might not escape. Afro-Peruvians and their culture were also affected by this new geographic layout. Feldman (2006) masterfully outlines the process of creating Chincha as the cradle of black culture in the cultural renaissance period. Blackness
was relegated to Chincha where it is still thought to belong, which in turn eclipses different Afro-Peruvian cultures that were created on the northern coast and in Lima. Local *limeño* and *chalaco* culture recognize that black Peruvians were integral to the formation of colonial culture, and due to activist efforts specific neighborhoods in metropolitan Lima and Callao have been identified as having sizeable black populations. This work aside, at the national level blackness is predominately associated with the Chincha in department of Ica, located just south of Lima (Golash-Boza 2011, Feldman 2006).

In the CEMs this link between blackness and the southern coast was strong enough to affect perceptions of ethnicity. For instance, I met with Cristina a few days after a black woman had come in to the office for help. She told me she was still confused about how she should identify the woman even though she had asked her about herself. When I asked Cristina to tell me about the woman so I might understand her confusion, she told me that the *usuaria* was black but from the northern coast. She had already decided that the woman could not, because of her place of birth, be black even though Cristina had said she had all of the physical characteristics of a black woman.

“Maybe she is a very dark-skinned chola,” she said, thinking out loud.

I told her that there are black communities up north and that they have a different culture than what we see in the south. She was shocked; she didn’t know that there were black people anywhere but Lima and in Ica.

Without consideration for the multiple ways that a person can be considered an Afro-Peruvian, an adequate understanding about Afro-descendant populations in Peru,
or time for questioning, there is a great possibility that women who are Afro-Peruvian but not black will not be marked as Afro-descendants and will more than likely be (mis)identified as mestizas. This can create the illusion that few Afro-Peruvian women report IPV when in fact the numbers only represent women who have been recognized as negras, or phenotypically black, instead of all women of African descent. In these instances ethnographic information becomes invaluable.

**External Influences: The Effect of the LUNDU Workshop**

In April 2016 Lundu conducted two workshops with MIMP staff on the subject of racial discrimination, black women, and domestic violence, subjects that had not previously been discussed with the admisionistas. I was not permitted to attend the meeting with the intake workers but I spoke to them after to find out what they had learned.

Cristina: It was a nice workshop, but we cannot ask the question the way they [Lundu] would like us to. They want us to ask. But I asked them “what happens if we ask and we can see that they are black or from the highlands but they say they are white or mestiza?” “You have to say that they are Afro-descendant,” they said. Even if they identify with another category. It doesn’t seem right that I would do that if she didn’t feel afro.

These instructions go against the guide instructions and those given by the staff at the MIMP. It was not clear whether or not the MIMPs position on the protocol for asking the question changed after the workshop but on paper they remain the same. I later asked the admisionistas whether it had changed the way they would approach the ethnicity question

Elián: After the workshop a group of us admisionistas got together to talk and we are going to continue to use the observation method to identify the usuarias. The message of the workshop was great but we [still] can’t ask.
Intake workers remained concerned about the implications of committing a social taboo.

**Moving Forward**

By way of conclusion, I recognize that under the circumstances, *admisionistas* were trying to find suitable options for collecting information with the resources and social savvy they possessed. Both race and ethnicity are nebulous concepts that scholars continue to grapple with. To try to pinpoint a single ethnicity, when in reality many women could claim multiple, without training and without any point of reference is a complicated task by any measure. Nonetheless, there are noted implications for Afro-Peruvian women for whom the ethnicity question and the approach to administering it present the threat of invisibility. This process points to the ongoing absence of culturally sensitive public policy regarding race data collection. The time constraints coupled with the strong social stigma around ethnicity and race, and the nature of working in CEMs constitute larger hindrances to more accurate data collection than the workers themselves. Several *admisionistas* suggested that since their work conditions are not likely to change the MIMP might do better to get psychologists to ask this question given that they have far more relaxed sessions with the *usuarias* and they are authorized and trained to ask sensitive questions.

It is important to implement policy that disrupts constricting and oppressive narratives about what it means to be black and of African descent that do not reflect the diversity of people who self-identify or could be labeled using these terms. I have discussed the limits of visibility as outlined by Scott (1998) at various points in this dissertation, and would like to clarify that I do recognize that it is unrealistic to expect every Peruvian of African descent to be represented as such in state records. What I
am suggesting is that it is necessary to train *admisionistas* so that their understandings of race and ethnicity can give Afro-descendant *usuarias* the opportunity to identify themselves as such regardless of their phenotype so that the records better reflect the Afro-Peruvian population rather than those who are readily identifiable as *negras*.

Over the course of my time in the field the *admisionistas* I most frequently visited changed noticeably in their approach to thinking about Afro-Peruvian women. After becoming more comfortable with talking about race and ethnicity, they began to reflect more on what those categories meant, how they affected the women who came to the CEMs, and how they as intake workers did their jobs. They also became more comfortable talking about their own family histories and how they self-identified. Towards the end of my work they would mention that since I began my research project they had made more of an effort to try to ask *usuarias* about how they would self-identify, and that they were paying more attention to how many black women they came into contact with. These changes indicate that there is potential for developing better methods and training for *admisionistas* to obtain more accurate data for government records, which could have important implications for public policy and CEM attention. It is also a step towards creating citizens that are more aware of and comfortable with ethnic and racial difference.
Early on in my research, I tracked cases by word of mouth. The staff at the last CEM I had gone to had called another center in another area of the city and had been told that there were a few cases of IPV involving Afro-descendant women there. Two days later I visited the center and I documented my interactions with the admisionista in my field notes when I returned home. What follows is an account of the visit.

If you aren’t paying close attention you’ll miss the unsuspecting side street leading into a quaint district in Callao. It’s easy to do. The industrial district is bleak. Large, rectangular buildings puff smoke out of chimneys and a string of pasta factory silos push the sweet scent of wheat into the air. The tiny street shrinks amidst its gargantuan surroundings.

“Baja!” I shout.

The combi comes to a screeching halt on the corner with enough drag to cause the hanging clear plastic tubes of plantain and camote chips to swing in unison like pendulums from the overhang of the vendor stall roof. Past the men in the hard hats and sleeping guards in watch booths is a small doorway that leads to a narrow hall lined with market vendors where shoppers inch by one another to make their purchases. Further down the road the houses start. A colorful neighborhood sits between the stoic buildings in this mechanical district like a daisy peeking through cracked cement. A playground surrounded by benches sits in the center of the plaza, and behind it is a large four-story building covered with the signs of the offices housed within. The bright red CEM sign sits high on the building like a beacon, escaping the reach of the
maintenance staff members who, even with ladders, extended arms, and brooms covered with rags, cannot reach it to clean off the dust.

The austere building feels like a hospital; the scent of bleach wafts upwards from the pristine white tiles illuminated by unblinking fluorescent overhead lights. Public service posters hang sparsely on the walls. The harsh lighting reveals their wear. I gingerly scale the stairs trying not to ruin the cleaning staff’s hard work but end up leaving a dusty trail of sneaker prints to the third floor where another red sign hangs over the open door leading to the emergency center. Here, there are no doors, just bookshelves dividing the space into separate areas for psychology, social work, legal council, and the admissions area. The harsh lighting and sterile floors wait for me here too. The psychologist, a willowy woman with bone straight waist-length black hair leans against the window talking on the office cellphone. She’s been expecting me, and she waves to me before furrowing her brow and listening intently to the words of the caller. She turns to look out the window, absently pulling her hair over her shoulder revealing the wording on the back of her boxy emergency center vest, the mark of an impending house visit.

I take a seat in one of four vinyl covered chairs that neatly line the wall across from the admissions desk. The young admisionista’s appearance mirrors the frazzled state of her desk. Long coils of hair are piled hastily on her head and harpooned with a pencil. Her large bifocal glasses hover parallel to the desk surface. She is engrossed in one of the many documents littering her space. Her fingers hover and stroke the file she is reading, guiding her eyes to the words on the page, seeking answers. She glances up, first with unfocused eyes, and then does a double take, surprised to see me
waiting, and motions for me to approach her desk with one hand. The other continues to play with the corners of the papers. I hurry over.

“Hello, good morning,” I smile. “The ministry called to say that I would be visiting. I’m the researcher looking for Afro-Peruvian women’s cases.”

“Afroperuanas?” Her fingers slow as she tastes the foreign syllables haltingly.

“Mujeres negras,” I quickly respond, supplying a more common word.

“¿Negras?” Her fingers still as her eyes widen and shift like sand.

“Morenas,” I offer up the safe word, common but less taboo than the last.

“Ah, morenas,” her fingers resume their rhythm as the brief bout of tension dissipates.

“Mmm…,” she reclines in her chair. “I don’t think we have any morenas.”

I bristle. A social worker had called from another CEM in the center on my behalf just yesterday and was told that there were cases of black women here.

“Could you please check?” I soften my insistence with a smile.

She gets up and leans over the partition to whisper to the lawyer on the other side. I watch as a game of telephone ensues; one worker receives the message with a doubtful expression, then leans to their right to ask the person beside them. After watching the interplay for a few minutes, the admisionista lets out an exasperated sigh and motions for a group huddle. The workers leave their desks to meet in the center of the room where the fervent whispering and brow furrowing continue. They break and return to their stations as the young lady sits back in her chair and I brace myself for the news.

“Well, we do have one or two morenas—maybe—but they aren’t like you.”
I quickly look down at my clothing. White sweater, dark jeans, dusty black sneakers, brown cross body purse. I am disappointed; I had really tried to find something in my closet that didn’t look so North American today. Still, I didn’t see anything glaringly obvious. I look back at the admisionista for guidance. Discomfort creeps back across her face.

She leans over he desk and drops her voice. “I mean, not negra like you.”

I blink.

“What do you mean? What kind of negra am I?”

She hesitates, eyeing me nervously, then fires off a list of my physical attributes in a hushed tone.

“Cabello apretado, nariz tosca, bembã grande, piel oscura, tu cuerpo/ tightly curled hair, wide nose, large mouth, dark skin, body type.”

“So when you say I am negra but they are morenas, what are they like?” I ask.

“Piel color canela, cabello ondulado, nariz fina, bembã chiquita/ cinammon-colored skin, wavy hair, narrow nose, small mouth. They’re not like you, you see, they’re less black. So if you ask us if there are black women here, we would say ‘no.’”

In 2015, preliminary national CEM data showed that 41 Afro-Peruvian women reported cases of domestic violence out of a total of 58,429 claims across the country. These numbers have been long awaited by activists who had advocated for disaggregated data collection along the lines of ethnicity in domestic violence for years. For Afro-Peruvian feminists these cases are an affirmation of what they knew was happening to black women but had not previously been able to show official data.
(Carrillo and Carrillo 2011; Carrillo 2014; Muñoz 2014). Afro-descendant activists and others dedicated to issues affecting this population have been desperate for accurate numerical data to be able to better understand its distribution, and how and where to concentrate resources, but also as a crucial step to dismantling systemic invisibility.

By the time I received the data for 2015 I had seen firsthand that they are neither, but had also been convinced of the importance of representation by numbers for this specific subset of the population. In the last chapter I showed that colloquial understandings of race and ethnicity register black, but not necessarily Afro-descendant, women in the MIMP records. In this final chapter, I present ethnographic depictions of experiences that took place amidst my pursuit of cases. By way of these events, I examine what lies behind the numbers to demonstrate how ethnographic data reveals issues that affect quantitative results. I use Merry’s (2016) “indicator culture” to explain the reliance and systemic favoring of numerical data and show that this alone cannot reflect the nuances of IPV for black women. Without ethnographic data we risk missing crucial facets of black Peruvians’ experiences, and particularly those of black women facing violence, that give more contextual meaning to the numbers than the numerical values that they represent. Most importantly, we lose sight of the process through which Afro-Peruvian women’s stories are made invisible because the numbers represent women who could be phenotypically identified as black.

A Yearning for Numbers

In Peru, there has been a long-standing desire for visibility in the eyes of the state and society, the former being measured first and foremost via quantitative data about the Africans and their descendants. To attain state legibility is to be officially recorded and monitored (Scott 1998). Recognition by way of state registries represents
a break from a bleak legacy of invisibility, and a beginning of insertion into the political sphere, and the creation of much needed public policy and resource allocation (CEDET 2005; Ministerio de la Cultura 2015). For the descendants of Africans who have been until relatively recently excluded from their nation’s history even as they have contributed tirelessly to the cultural and economic growth of the colony and the republic (see Chapter 1), official recognition is vindicating.

The 1940 national census was the last to feature a question about race or ethnicity, and the size of the Afro-descendant population in the country is unknown (Valdivia 2011; Arrelucea Barrantes and Cosamalón Aguilar 2015). CEDET (2005) estimated that Afro-Peruvians comprise between 2 and 10% of the national population of approximately 30 million people (CEDET 2005). Understandably, the prospect of sound quantitative data on the Afro-Peruvian population has been met with excitement. In anticipation of the upcoming census in 2017, a special committee has been created within the National Statistics and Information Institute (INEI), which is responsible for preparing a question about ethnicity that will be administered to citizens (INEI 2013). The committee is comprised of Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian organization members who alongside statisticians have assumed the task of designing the ethnicity questions for the nation. For a population that has historically been miscounted and rendered invisible, the data will guide new projects and will later support demands for public services and policy for Afro-Peruvians. However, much more information is still needed about other aspects of life for Afro-descendants.

For Afro-Peruvian women these numbers are important as “concrete” evidence of their existence, which was even more invisible than that of men who were counted,
though only in piecemeal, while women were excluded entirely (Mori 2005). Their labor, first as slaves then as servants, supported all classes of society and has been ignored as seen in similar fashion throughout Latin America (e.g., Caldwell 2007; Carneiro 2003; CEDET 2008; Muñoz 2014; Arrelucea 2015). This makes the prospect of quantitative data about Afro-descendant women even more exciting.

Numerical values and quantitative data are trusted implicitly as indicators of unbiased representations of complex realities, and are frequently valued over other forms of data. Scott (1998) and Merry (2016) both point to the implications of relying on this kind of data, specifically how the (over)simplification of complex social phenomena that is an inevitable part of the process of quantification. What Merry (2016) calls the “seduction of quantification”—the clearcut and concrete data presented numerically that embody the idea of “scientific authority (2016, 2), is perilous. Simplification can be beneficial in so much as it may allow the observer to hone in on particular aspects of a problem: “The great advantage of such tunnel vision is that it brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality…” (Scott 1998, 11). The categories and questions formed for data collection offer fascinating insight into themes of political relevance at any given moment (Merry 2016). This is true for the resurfacing of the ethnicity question amidst impressive domestic, regional, and global action in the interest of recognizing diversity and addressing inequality, however, the reliance on one kind of data alone risks impeding an understanding of all the factors that interlock to create the conditions for quantitative results to exist.

The problem of the presumed “scientific authority” of numbers has caused some activists’ feelings of excitement to turn to trepidation as the census date looms nearer.
Afro-Peruvians have never been well-represented in colonial or state records. Mori (2005) and Gootenberg (1995 in Sue and Golash-Boza 2009) concluded that slavery era records were fraught with errors that reflected underreporting of Africans and their descendants on the whole, and the exclusion of women in particular (see Chapter 1). Nonetheless, these numbers were part of the official record. In the absence of a more precise estimate of the size of the Afro-Peruvian population that has been corroborated by the state (the estimate that the population is between 2 and 10% is based on smaller studies), activists have had more leeway to speculate that the percentage of Afro-descendants might be towards the higher end or even surpass it depending on the criteria used to determine African descent. Activists have used this uncertainty to demand more resources be put into programs for Afro-Peruvians, and that the state gather data on what might be a larger population than imagined.

Once the census data has been collected and the numbers of people self-identified as Afro-Peruvian is revealed, they will form the basis for future proposals for research and development for Afro-descendants. The concern stems from the fact that there have not been any nation-wide campaigns to introduce the ethnicity question and inform the public about the significance of ethnicity, and encourage citizens to learn how they self-identify so they may answer the question to the best of their ability. Organizations like CEDET (the Center for Ethnic Development), CEDEMUNEP (the Center for the Development of the Black Peruvian Woman) have created smaller campaigns in the the areas where they run projects to encourage Afro-Peruvians to self-identify on the census, but their resources and reach are not enough to cover more ground. Towards the end of my long research period, during follow up work in
November 2016, and most recently on my last trip in April and May of 2017, I heard more concern about what might happen if the numbers came back lower than anticipated given the strong racial discrimination that still causes an aversion to being associated with blackness in addition to the widespread belief that to be of African descent one must be black. I was privy to the ever-present skepticism—and sometimes downright resistance—displayed by government workers and the general Peruvian public when the subject of Afro-descendants arose. Although the Afro-Peruvian activists I spoke to seemed to understand that census numbers, especially around sensitive topics, were likely not going to reflect every person who could be considered Afro-descendant, they dreaded having to defend their demands for the communities against official and “authoritative” numbers that would be used against them.

**Ethnographic Data as Balance**

Ethnographic data can balance out indicator-based, aggregate data, like the census results, and they have already provided much-needed insight to intimate partner violence and its effect on the lives of women. Women’s relationships with the government, their safety networks, and other sources of formal support have been brought to light through ethnography, as have cultural understandings of what constitutes violence, and the impact of neo-liberal policy, race, ethnicity, and gender on their experiences (e.g., Hautzinger 2007; Santos 2010; McClusky 2000; Wies and Haldane 2011; Davis 2005; Ritchie 1996; Alcalde 2007, 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). Unfortunately, this kind of data collection does not always hold the same status as its numerical counterpart, precisely, in part, because it shows a complex reality, which can be less easily generalized digested.
Ethnographic data collection have also been central to the creation of modern-day Afro-Peruvian culture. According to Feldman (2006), key figures including José Durand, artists, actors, and musicians conducted important archival and ethnographic research in order to learn about long-standing traditional cultural practices in their communities. The creation of dance, song, and instrumental music were greatly aided by information collected via interviews with elders and participant observation. A dependence on numbers alone would not have yielded what was needed for the cultural renaissance or the social activism that was born from it in objection to the collective lived experiences of social exclusion.

What ensues, then, is the search for balance between the desire for aggregate, indicator based, statistical data, and a qualitative broadening of scope for a population that is in dire need of descriptive context in order to decipher what the numbers mean. This is true to a greater extent given that data is only just beginning to be collected by ethnicity and this particular population faces numerous forms of discrimination. The MIMP data instead reveal the particular processes of and goals for data collection that are political, bureaucratic, and social processes of conceptualizing and classifying violence survivors. I reflect on three moments that profoundly impacted my thoughts about the data collection methods that created official record in which Afro-Peruvians represent less than half a percent of the total population. I present them as I wrote them in my field notes, with pseudonyms and without aspects of the accounts that could reveal the identities of the CEM workers, and with the intention of highlighting the driving forces that determine which black women state numbers represent.
The Meaning of 41

Nationally, 41 cases of domestic violence against Afro-Peruvian women were recorded through the CEMs in 2015. If it is assumed that Afro-descendants constitute 10% of the total population of Peru (CEDET 2005), around 30 million people, then by any measure this shows a gross underreporting for this ethno-racial group. Since this project focused on women who reported to CEMs and not to other institutions, such as the police, the palace of justice, legal clinics, or those who sought private legal aid, there is a possibility that more cases could be found via the afore-mentioned avenues even though they do not currently collect disaggregated data on ethnicity. Instead of fixating on the numbers and why they were small, I think it more productive—and informative—to consider the construction and context of the numbers on record.

41 Negras

Chapter 4 showed the strong socio-political undercurrent that has lead to the aspiration to self-identify as mestiza as a way of escaping blackness, in addition to the social taboos and working conditions that collectively create the means for black women to be rendered invisible in the system. Ultimately, in order to be registered as Afro-Peruvian or a euphemism for this political term, women must either be easy to identify phenotypically, or talk about themselves, their family histories, and/or cultural practices in ways that admisionistas can readily identify. In cases where the latter is necessary it is far less likely that these women will be classified as black because of job and strong social pressures. Without ethnographic data, these factors would be invisible.

The vignette at the beginning of this chapter amplifies obstacles involved in registering blackness by demonstrating the way that nuances of racial classification influence decisions that affect official records. I went to the CEM in the field not excerpt
when I had just begun my research. Unaware that the MIMP collected monthly data on usuarias including the responses to the ethnicity question, I had solicited and been granted access to the CEMs in San Martin de Porres, La Victoria, and Lima Cercado—districts identified as having a historic black presence. In those days I would go to the CEM and ask if they had any cases. Failing that, I would ask if the workers had any idea where else I could check, which usually resulted in phone calls to other CEMs. After my trip to La Victoria proved fruitless, the lawyer made a call to another CEM, then wrote down the address on a piece of paper and told me to go there as he had been told that there were cases. What appears at the beginning of the chapter is my account of my interaction with the admisionita.

My experience that morning gave way to the question of degrees of blackness, one of them being: at what point is blackness worthy of recording? Within the Afro-Peruvian activist circle, and indeed, in Presencia y Palabra discussions, activists acknowledge phenotypic differences among members of the communities but black identity is not discussed as a gradient. As an example, a friend of mine, Raquel, who was part of Lundu as young woman recounted the following conversation she had with her mother who is indigenous about her father, a black man, after she came to terms with her own blackness: “When I told my mother that my father was black she said ‘no, your father isn’t negro, he is moreno.’ But there are no morenos, we are all negros!” she laughed.

Activists and even usuarias recognized that ‘morena’ is often colloquially used instead of ‘negra’ since the latter can be construed as an insult (Sheriff 2003). Morenas were also described as having the same physical features that the admisionista listed—
lighter skin, looser curls, a narrow nose, and thinner lips—but these descriptors are always relative, in this case, they were *morenas* when I was the reference point. Unlike the intake worker in question, activists and *admisionistas* acknowledged the difference in terms ‘*morena*’ and ‘*negra*’ as physical descriptors that refer to a color gradient but ultimately used them interchangeably. This has been shown to be true in other studies on Afro-Peruvians (Golash-Boza 2010b; Valdivia 2014). Social ascension through assuming different caste markers ended with the abolition of slavery (Arrelucea and Barrantes 2015, 139), and as such these categories do not necessarily refer to different racial sub-categories. While this did not affect aspirations for lighter skin as a by-product of racism, it equalized previous degrees of blackness (Arrelucea and Barrantes 2015, 139).

For this CEM team, *negra*, included in the list among other euphemisms for African descent, was the tipping point; only women who were considered black as I am would be worth registering. This was the most extreme case in regards to identifying a woman’s blackness since most of the *usuarias* I interviewed would have fit into the social category of *morena* but in this case *morena* was treated as a separate category from ‘*negra*’ such that women were rendered invisible. The team’s conception of *morena* was similar to what Carl Degler (1971) called the ‘mulatto escape hatch’ in the Brazilian context whereby “mulatto” held a space between the categories of “black” and “white”, and allowed the possibility for situational whitening.

Without having recorded them as black these women were untraceable through system searches since they had been marked as *mestiza* or ‘other’, and I was never able to speak with them. There is no record of the experiences of these ‘*morenas*’ or
the reasoning that led them to go unmarked, a clear example of the complexity of a social phenomena simplified by the state categories (Scott 1998, 46; Merry 2016). In this way, admisionistas have been appointed to make women legible ethnically but they can also be complicit in their erasure, as can other CEM workers as demonstrated by the profesionales who also denied the blackness of usuarias because of their criteria for blackness that is noteworthy. As was to be expected, the end of year data do not show a single case of Afro-descendant women registered in the district CEM.

The number 41 excludes women who were not phenotypically black or asked about their racial and cultural backgrounds, as well as those not black enough by admisionista standards to merit being recorded as such even as they might have been easily recognized as such in their own communities. Ethnographic data reveals the fluidity in approaches to understandings of race that factor into the use of indicators, and can offer up reasons as to why it would appear that so few Afro-Peruvian women reported even though they still may be disproportionately underrepresented. It makes visible those who were not counted and why, and this information can help to generate better indicators and protocol for administrating questions, but also offer crucial information about how phenotypically diverse women of African descent are seen in their societies.

Checks and Balances

One hot afternoon, I trekked to a district in the south of Lima, this time following a lead from government data. I had found out about the monthly data collection at the MIMP and had asked to be sent the data on cases involving Afro-Peruvian women until the end of my field work. I had also requested the data from the three months prior to look for women who might have reported recently. I was shocked to see that twelve
cases had been reported to one CEM alone, and immediately made arrangements to visit to begin the process of contacting women. What follows is a narrative that recounts the events from my perspective based on the field note entry I wrote after returning home from the CEM that day.

The psychologist’s office is in a long, narrow rectangular room. It feels different than any other office I’ve sat in. The high window in the far way lets rays of summer sunlight illuminate the blue walls. Here it is quiet and calm, and my eyes are thankful for a break from the harsh fluorescent lighting of the admissions office. I sit at a white table with my back facing the door. Carmen, the psychologist, is brushing her fingers against the files stacked on a shelf behind her. Alberto sits patiently on my right. Carmen turns to us and smiles apologetically before sidestepping the table and turning down the dark hallway. I inhale deeply, calming my nerves, steadying myself. We are finally here.

Carmen comes back into the room, her arms straining under the weight of a tall stack of files. I know how many there are before she sets them down. Twelve. Twelve on the spreadsheet, twelve confirmed over the phone. After finding out from an intern at an NGO that the MIMP collected monthly data on CEM usuarias, a fact that had never been mentioned to me since I began my work, I requested the numbers and CEM branches that had reported them. They had finally come through while I was on a short break. I had found four cases at that point, and I almost dropped my phone when I groggily opened the spreadsheet on my phone first thing in the morning. Twelve. And all at one CEM. I had stumbled upon the motherlode. Once the anger subsided—I was furious that I had been spinning my wheels needlessly when the information I needed
was just sitting there in the system—I went about making arrangements to access the center and the women who had reported.

When we arrived, we sat in the dusty hall inside a one-story building at the foot of a hill on a nameless sand road. The *admisionista*, a warm young woman, welcomed us and soon Carmen, the psychologist I had spoken to over the phone was ushering us back to her office. As they had with the files on the shelves, her hands flutter over the files; opening one and leafing through the pages before setting it down gently and turning to another. She purses her lips then peers over her glasses at us as she delivers the news.

“These are children’s files.”

Taking in our silent disbelief, she starts again, opening the folders, thumbing through pages and pages of pain, then sorting them into two piles. One towers, leaning slightly, the other barely matches the thickness of the table. Resting a hand on top of the tower, she looks at us again.

“These are children’s cases. They are Afro-Peruvian, according to the front page, but they are minors. Those in the other pile are women’s cases—two to be exact.”

“How did they all end up registered as women’s cases?” I ask.

“I’m not sure. There could have been a mix up in the ministry…,” she trails off.

“I wouldn’t like to admit to my staff messing up either,” Alberto murmurs when we are alone. Carmen has gone back out to the front office to double check that she hasn’t left any files behind.
“But even if they did, how would the ministry know to ask? How would they check?” I wonder aloud as Carmen’s heels announce her reentry to the room.

“I’ve talked to Ernesto, the social worker. He remembers another woman who came in before the ethnicity question was implemented. He’ll try to contact her as well as the other two women so you can speak to them.”

A week later I receive a call from Carmen. The three women could not be found.

I became curious about questions of accountability and data collection monitoring early on in my research. Though CEMs continue to use hard copy files, data is now uploaded to a database and sent to the MIMP on a monthly basis and upon request. Other information gathered by admisionistas can be verified against state registries, but there is no way to verify the ethnic identity of an usuaria apart from double-checking data in the system against what was written on the paper file. This means that once the number corresponding with an ethnicity is written on the page in the admissions process, a woman’s ethnicity has been formalized in the eyes of the state and is not subject to change. (Strathern 2000? Does this fit into audit culture in some way?).

Augmenting or diminishing numbers also presents a problem for this small population. The majority of women attended in the CEMs are identified as mestiza or Quechua, which is unsurprising given that these are the two most populous groups at the national level; mestiza is the largest ethnic group, followed by Quechua, both of which are represented in the thousands. A difference of women in either group would have a much more subtle impact on the population overall; however, an error of this nature is much more drastic when that number constitutes a quarter of the total of another. Whatever the cause of the error, the yearly tallies of Afro-Peruvian usuarias
may not change significantly; it is entirely possible that reporting levels will stay the same for this ethnic group for reasons already made clear. This makes depending solely on numbers to grasp the scope and impact of intimate partner violence on these women very risky.

**Women who Hit Children whose Fathers Hit Women**

I received a call from Claudio towards the end of my stay in Lima saying that there were two new cases. I went into the office to find out more and get in touch with the women through the admisionista, and while I was there I learned about another way that abused women can be left out of state numbers. The narrative below is based on my field note entry that described the day. It details my discussion with Claudio and reveals the basis for the exclusion of women from the data.

I walk through the CEM doors and take a seat on the bench outside the admisionista office. I hear the soft rumbling of Claudio’s voice as he speaks to a small woman trying to hold onto a round faced, rambunctious toddler with wind burnt cheeks. I fan myself absently, with a MIMP pamphlet and shuffle sideways on the wooden slats away from the spreading rays of sun. The woman stands and turns to shuffle out the door. Mischievous black eyes peer at me over her shoulder as she wanders out into the street.

Claudio leans back in his chair and into my line of vision, motioning me into his office. As I sit, the ambulante who sells marcianos sticks her head through the open door, searching for her loyal customer. Claudio grins and peers into her white bucket at the frozen tubes of fruit juice.

“How many today, señor?” she asks with a knowing smile.
The office jokes that Claudio’s sweet tooth is single-handedly funding the señorita’s grandchildren’s education. Claudio looks at me, expectantly.

“No, gracias, amigo, I’d had my sugar fix for the day,” I say, urging him to order alone.

He raises an eyebrow and I sigh, turning to point to the last maracuyá before he smugly selects aguaje and hands some coins to the vendor before she leaves. Fighting against time, the conversation is punctuated by abrupt silences as we tear holes in top corners of the plastic and savor the icy sweetness that offers respite from the summer heat even as it melts in our hands.

“A ver,” Claudio says, looking for napkins in his drawer. “There’s a new case. She came in right after you left the last time. She’ll be coming back on Tuesday at nine-thirty, so come at nine and wait.”

I mumble a thank you in between bites of ice.

“Claudio, weren’t there two cases? I thought Nancy said there was another one.”

Claudio pauses, swapping out dry napkins for the wet ones now stuck to the tail end of his marciano.

“Yes, there were two. But the other one isn’t our case anymore.”

“What do you mean by that?” I ask.

“Well, she came saying that both she and her child had been abused by her partner, the child’s father. Then we found out that she had also beat her child, and we prioritize child abuse. So, since she’s the aggressor in her child’s case we can’t offer her services here because we will be placing charges against her. So, she’s not here anymore.”
“Even though she’s also been abused as well?”

“Yes, even so. We will also bring charges against the child’s father since he was abusive as well, but we can’t help her.”

I was privy to a handful of cases where black women had been denied service as survivors of violence in the CEMs because it had come to light that they had abused their children. There are some restrictions on who CEMs can help. According to CEM staff, protocol demands that they attend to the child and not the woman. Although supposedly very uncommon, women with reports filed against them for partner abuse would also not be able to attended in emergency centers. Admisionistas and profesionales were all aware that some usuarias had engaged in what they called ‘defenderse’ (see Chapter 4), but without a formal report from their partner CEM workers helped their cases advance as though they solely consisted of violent acts directed towards the usuaria. Protocol for violence against children is far more strict.

I gave a wide berth to questions of child abuse since my project nor my IRB clearance permitted me to look further into violence against minors. As such, I did not ask nor was I told about how the CEM workers learned of the child abuse or what kinds of acts disqualified women from being assisted. ENDES (2015) questions and results do not indicate whether or not women who experience partner violence also hit their children, but they do show that women are the primary enforcers of physically discipline (relevant?). Criteria aside, the exclusion of women who have abused their children and have themselves been abused by intimate partners also means that these women are not present in violence records.
Ethnographic data reveals a very different picture about Afro-descendant women and intimate partner violence. The 2015 total remains 41 and without considering cultural perspectives on race and an understanding of CEM protocols that shape official accounts one might assume that black women report in low numbers only because they experience lower levels of IPV. This kind of insight reveals that 41 may better represent women who were identified as black, those who were black enough to warrant comment, those who did not or were not discovered to have abused their children or have other charges brought against themselves. The 2017 census will give an official number of Afro-descendants in Peru, although activists involved in the creation of the question are expecting certain levels of underreporting already. Given that they already constitute a minority population in size, it may be unrealistic to assume that whatever the number, it will be enough to convey the importance of the need for specific policy dedicated to this particular group. Similarly, Afro-descendant women’s experiences as expressed through ethnography can reveal the nuances of the violence they suffer and indicate how to offer help and support, and how to improve data collection. Numerical data is, of course, important for state recognition in all aspects of social and political life, but to only consider the number is to lose vital perspective on the process of shaping a narrative about race, gender and violence.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has offered insight into intimate partner violence among women of African descent in Peru in a moment when state legibility is increasing for Afro-descendants but continues to elude them in many ways. It is a first foray into a complex aspect of women’s lives that has left me with many more questions than answers. The project was of interest to activists, the government, the CEM workers, and the women who shared their stories, which gives me hope that I or someone else will be able to continue this work in order to provide further insight into the way violence affects women of African descent, and how current resources can best be used to their benefit. I have framed this work as one that is fundamentally about increasing visibility around Afro-descendant women’s experiences and attempts to protect themselves, the state’s attempt to facilitate this process, and the workers in between who have been asked to register the ethnicity of Afro-Peruvian usuarias in a society that is continues to struggle to understand African descent beyond blackness.

Throughout the chapters that constitute this dissertation I have used black feminist theory to highlight the intersection of gender, class, and race to provide a nuanced view of black and Afro-Peruvian women’s experiences with violence and visibility, and the stereotypes about their aggressive nature and hyper sexuality that continue to inhibit this process. I have also addressed the way racial violence affects Afro-Peruvian women and figures into the abuse they receive. This finding broadens the discussion about race and IPV for Andean women as presented by Cristina Alcalde (2007, 2010), and serves as encouragement to continue to examine the differences between ethno-racial groups with regards to racism in intimate violence. I have
reflected on the state’s attempt to make violence along ethnic lines visible by using Scott’s (1998) work, and highlighted how Vargas’ (2004) analysis of race as an ever-present feature of social interactions figures into admissionistas’ attempts to grapple with the new ethnicity question, even as the subject of ethno-racial difference remains taboo, affects this process. I have shown that they rely on popular methods of determining usuarias’ identities. This has largely resulted in phenotype being the main indicator of blackness as social taboo dictates that inquiring about ethnicity is frowned upon, and given that work conditions and women’s distress do not favor methods that require more time and conversation.

In considering women’s tactics for avoiding violence without relying on the state by seeking out familial support and engaging in acts that constitute “defenderse” or self-defense, Simone’s (2004) “people as infrastructure” has helped to conceptualize family and fighting back as a useful resources that offer what the state does not. Finally, I have called for more ethnographic data collection about Afro-descendant women’s experiences with violence and have drawn on Merry’s (2016) “indicator culture” and my experiences in the field to draw attention to what is left out of numerical data and by extension, what the numbers actually represent. I stress the importance of ethnography and other qualitative forms of data collection to providing a more wholistic picture of violence in as it affects women of African descent.

Suggestions for Policy

Sally Engle Merry has pointed out that “indicators…solidify over time. It is easier to contest the names of the indicators, the categories of measurement, and the underlying data early in the process of indicator creation than it is once it has achieved widespread acceptance” (2016, 31). The findings of this study have pointed to some
simple changes that could help improve the current policy, especially since the ethnicity question is a new addition to the intake forms and workers are still in the process of getting accustomed to administering it. Since the question is only in its second year, we are still in an opportune period to implement effective training, and improve data collection and results.

The Ethnicity Question

The most practical and urgent matter to address is the boundaries of the question itself. It remains unclear what the question is asking and what the determining characteristics for identification are in regards to African descendants. In the case of black women or others who might be identified by phenotype it is crucial to clarify whether this is a question of race or ethnicity, what the difference between the two are, and how they are operationalized so that the worker asking the question has a clear understanding of what information they are trying to obtain and how to convey it on the form.

It is also important to determine whether admisionistas will continue to ask this question, and if so, to make adjustments so that their other obligations do not hinder their ability to pay attention to this matter to the degree that they do now.

A number of admisionistas suggested that the CEM psychologist might be better positioned to ask this potentially inflammatory question given that they spend a good deal more time with usuarias talking about other personal matters and that they are trained to foster discussion about sensitive topics. Were the admisionistas and psychologists both responsible for the question they might be better able to ensure that does not go unanswered due to lack of time on the admisionistas part or in case of an emergency. Regardless of who is tasked with asking the question, adequate culturally-
sensitive training about ethnicity and how to talk about it will be crucial to ensuring the best conditions possible for collecting valid data.

**Alternative Interventions**

Although more research would need to be done to confirm it, the lack of trust in judicial system and reliance on extra-judicial methods for conflict resolution and justice suggest that successful options for moving towards eradicating violence should include effective alternative methods. Familial ties have proven to have been important for the women in my study. Family and relatives were first responders who offered protection and mediation, and helped women with transitioning to life away from their partners. If this trend is reflected in larger populations, the state would do well to recognize them and create policies that weave social networks in with state action to reduce violence and protect women.

**Future Research**

The most exciting aspect of my research has been finding new inroads for future study. There are many avenues and further study is sure to reveal more that I am unaware of as yet, but I conclude with the ones that I see as most important and interesting to me. Here I present four that I find compelling.

First, we need more information about CEM and justice workers, and potential prejudice that could lower the quality of service for women of African descent. I was unable to address this issue with workers outside of the CEMs, but this topic should be explored in the context of police stations, the legal field, and the justice system. This issue merits future research to determine whether or not interventions need to be made at this level.
Second, comparative research has the potential to reveal fascinating convergences and divergences in experiences with violence, the importance of social networks for protection, reporting, and the justice system. The work on Andean women’s experiences would be useful for these kinds of projects, but women of other backgrounds should be included as well. The results of these kinds of studies can provide important theoretical and practical insight about how violence shapes women’s lives, and indicate how to expand and improve efforts to reduce violence.

Third, we need a larger volume of quality studies that can add to the work I have done. These should include different research methods and sample sizes, to provide more in-depth insight and answer the many questions that remain unanswered about Afro-Peruvian women, the state, and IPV. These include: dynamics in both interracial relationships and those in which both partners of African descent, urban and rural settings, and along class lines. This study only addressed the dynamics of IPV in heterosexual relationships. It is important to consider IPV in LGBTQIA relationships in future research in order to develop a broader perspective on the experiences of queer Afro-descendant women. Furthermore, the women I spoke to had already reported and been identified as Afro-descendants. What would research among women who had not reported yield about tactics for avoiding violence and identity? What do women who do not identify as Afro-descendants but are recognized as such by others have to say about their journeys through the legal system and with violence? These stories will greatly enrich and broaden conversations about violence against Afro-Peruvian women.

Fourth, there is great need for more ethnographic research and writing. It is crucial to strongly encourage methods of data collection that can complement statistical
data. My findings have shown that race continues to be an important field of study even in the wake of a shift to multiculturalism. It is useful for examining inequality and discrimination, and without meaningful acknowledgement of the role of race and racism, and the need to eradicate it, inequality that exists along racial lines will continue uncontested. The interviews I conducted revealed that racism figures into intimate violence for Afro-Peruvian women. Since I ended my research the MIMP has included a question about racial violence on the questionnaire administered by the psychologists. This will help ensure that the onus is not on usuarias to disclose racial violence, and will also help illuminate the nature of racial violence on a larger scale. Nevertheless, I believe that this topic should be further researched via ethnography and other qualitative methods in order to provide more insight into women’s lived experiences with violence. It will enhance statistical data on racial violence and deepen our understanding of how violence manifests in the context of gender and race. This will offer us a richer body of information and better perspectives on Afro-descendant women’s lives and will be central to the development of solutions to guarantee them lives free of violence.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eshe Lewis was born and raised in Toronto, Canada to Trinidadian parents, and has always felt that she belonged to both countries. As a child, Eshe enjoyed outdoor adventures, reading, and music.

After spending her adolescent years in leotards and putting on musical theater productions at a high school for the arts, Eshe attended the University of Toronto, convinced that she would become a medical doctor. She stumbled upon the Latin American Studies department and found that the course offerings paired nicely with the Caribbean studies classes she was taking to learn more about her culture and history. She graduated with a BA in Latin American Studies, and minors in Caribbean Studies and Spanish and Portuguese.

At the recommendation of a professor who noticed her keen interest in the African diaspora in the Americas, she applied and was accepted to the University of Florida’s Masters in Latin American Studies where she built on previous work on Peru and continued to learn about the region through reading and travel. Eshe continued on to a doctoral program at UF and received her PhD in cultural anthropology in 2017 on intimate partner violence against women of African-descent in Peru. She is looking forward to conducting more research on Afro-Latin Americans in the future.