

Pushing Back the Boundaries: Social Policy, Domestic Violence and Women's Organisations in Peru*

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Abstract. This article looks at the extent to which Peruvian women have been able to use a legal and institutional framework designed to combat domestic violence, despite its significant defects, in order to transform the authoritarian forms of communication that prevail in their families, organisations, and communities. Using in-depth interviews with women in Lima, Huancavelica and Ayacucho, the article suggests that while democratisation from above may often result in limited transformations in many policy areas, we must be attentive to the way in which democratisation can be appropriated, transformed and reinvigorated from below.

Introduction

In Latin America the struggle against domestic violence has always been strongly linked to the struggle for democracy, for human rights and for women's rights. In the case of Chile, for example, Ann Mearns has argued that feminist advocacy on behalf of 'democracy in the country and at home' was a significant factor in placing violence against women on the political agenda during the democratisation process begun in 1990.¹ In Peru, however, policies aimed at combating domestic violence were implemented in a context of increasing authoritarianism under Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000) and used to ameliorate the image of the government following an *autogolpe* in 1992 rather than to provide effective protection and legal reparation to battered women. The resulting legal framework had significant defects. However, as I argue below, Peruvian women have learnt to use the new legal and institutional framework to push back the boundaries of the prevailing tolerance towards domestic violence.

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* I would like to thank Paulo Drinot for his readings and support, and the four anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions.

¹ Ann Mearns, 'Gender Relations, Authoritarianism and Democratisation in Chile,' *Democratization*, 1999, 6 (3), pp. 100–17.

The legal and institutional framework in question was implemented at a time when Peru was undergoing a process of pacification following twelve years of internal conflict that left almost 70,000 victims and brought the country to virtual collapse. Its implementation coincided with an increase in male violence towards women in areas that had been particularly affected by the political violence, as reported by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee.² According to a study carried out by the NGO Centro para la Promoción y Desarrollo Poblacional (Centre for the Advancement and Development of the People CEPRODEP), in Ayacucho domestic violence was higher than average during the years of ‘pacification’ (more or less between 1993 and 1997). CEPRODEP attributed this increase to the unstable mental health of many *ayacuchanos/as* and the rise in alcoholism among men and women alike as a consequence of war traumas.³ The war made a bad situation even worse. Available estimates suggest that Peru has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world. According to a conservative estimate of the Survey of Demography and Family Health (ENDES), held in 2000, 41 per cent of Peruvian women have been beaten at least once in their life by their partners.⁴ According to a study by the feminist organisation Flora Tristán, 51 per cent of women in Lima and 69 per cent in Cusco have suffered physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by their partners. Other studies estimate that at least 50 per cent of Peruvian women suffer domestic violence in both urban and rural areas.⁵ In comparison,

² This is consistent with studies that suggest that domestic violence increases in post-conflict situations: Anu Pillay, ‘Violence against Women in the Aftermath,’ in S. Meintjes, A. Pillay and M. Turshen, *The Aftermath. Women in Post-conflict Transformation* (London, 2001) pp. 35–45; Donna Pankhurst, ‘The “Sex War” and Other Wars: Towards a Feminist Approach to Peace Building,’ *Development In Practice* 2003, 13 (2 & 3), p. 160; Liz Kelly, ‘Wars Against Women: Sexual Violence, Sexual Politics and the Militarised State,’ in S. Jacobs, R. Jacobsen and J. Marchbank (eds.), *States of Conflict. Gender, Violence and Resistance* (London, 2000).

³ However, the study also concluded that by 1997 the situation had stabilised and that today domestic violence in Ayacucho is no longer above average. Centro para la Promoción y Desarrollo Poblacional (CEPRODEP), *Diagnóstico del desplazamiento en Ayacucho 1993–1997. Héroes sin nombre* (Lima, 1997).

⁴ Cited in: A. Guzmán Chaganaquí, ‘Para mejorar la salud reproductiva,’ in J. Arroyo (ed.), *La salud peruana en el siglo XXI. Retos y propuestas de política* (Lima, 2002), pp. 185–238, 217.

⁵ Ana Gúezmes, Nancy Palomino and Miguel Ramos, *Violencia sexual y física contra las mujeres en el Perú* (Lima, 2002); Movimiento Manuela Ramos, ‘La violencia contra la mujer en cifras,’ facsimile n.d., claims that seven out of ten women suffer domestic violence, based on a study carried out by PROMUDEH. A report prepared by the Peruvian Congress analysing the first Household Survey of Family Life in Lima and Callao notes that 88.2% of women personally know other women who are victims of domestic violence. Although the Peruvian Congress reaches the conclusion that this indicates a high incidence of violence in Lima and Callao, the figures clearly do not demonstrate as much. See María Jesús Espinoza Matos, *Violencia en la familia en Lima y el Callao* (Lima, 2000). The feminist organisation DEMUS appears to rely on the same survey when it reports that exactly 88% of women in

various studies carried out in the 1990s suggest that about a quarter of Canadian women have experienced physical assaults by intimate partners while the United States, the Netherlands and Belgium show comparable or slightly higher figures.⁶

The need to address pervasive domestic violence in Peru should be clear. As the statistics suggest, violence and abusive insults can become a form of daily communication between men and women. In this sense, the initiatives taken by the Fujimori government should be celebrated. But, as I suggest below, the policies aimed at combating domestic violence that were subsequently implemented were not only poorly enforced and under-resourced, but also largely failed to address the underlying causes of domestic violence, and in some cases contributed to reproducing the sexist and racist hierarchies that are at the root of much of the violence in Peruvian society. In particular, the attitude of police officers, judges, and *médicos legistas* (medical examiners) as observed by me, recounted by their colleagues, and denounced by NGOs, shows that fighting violence against women in a context of authoritarian patriarchy is not an easy task. In fact, as we will see, for some of the period under review (1997 to 2001), the policies were directed at preserving the structure of the family by making attempts at conciliation between partners compulsory instead of prioritising the protection of women from abuse.

Yet this sombre assessment needs to be balanced by the conclusions that arise from the various interviews I conducted with women in three different

metropolitan Lima *suffer* – which is different to 88% *knowing* of someone – some form of violence perpetrated by their partners. In DEMUS, 'Violence,' *Cinco Sentidos*, 15 June 2000.

⁶ Canada, USA and Belgium: Laurel S. Weldon, *Protest, Policy and the Problem of Violence against Women. A Cross-National Comparison* (Pittsburgh, 2002), pp. 211–17; Netherlands: Ministerie van Justitie, *Privé geweld, publieke zaak* (2002) www.huiselijkgeweld.nl [cited 2 February 2003]. In Nicaragua a survey similar to the Peruvian ENDES-survey, carried out in 1998, concluded that 29% of women suffered physical or sexual abuse perpetrated by intimate partners. P. Sternberg, 'Challenging Machismo: Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health with Nicaraguan Men,' *Gender and Development*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2000), p. 91; Colombia produced higher survey results (but defined violence more broadly): a National Probability Sample estimated that approximately 60% of women were physically, psychologically or sexually abused by their husbands. In Costa Rica 51% of women in an Urban Probability Sample reported that they were beaten more than once a year and 35% claimed that they were hit regularly: Lori Heise, 'Violence, Sexuality, and Women's Lives,' in R. N. Lancaster and M. Di Leonarda (eds.), *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy* (New York, 1997), p. 416. None of these surveys can be completely accurate; most estimates suggest that only 10% of women report intimate abuse. In addition, comparison is made difficult by the fact that most surveys use different sampling techniques and statistical calculations. Both Heise and Weldon list figures for wife-abuse reported in different country studies alongside each other, but the different measurements, sample sizes and characteristics make these comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, it can be tentatively concluded that Peru ranks high on the score of domestic violence when compared to other countries, but that the degree of domestic violence is not unique to Peru.

locations in Peru.⁷ As these interviews revealed, women employed individual and collective strategies to oppose and resist violence, and thereby slowly transform the forms of communication in their families and communities. Women's personal stories and collective experience can give us an idea of how violence permeates women's relationships with men, with children, and with each other. Naturally, such stories are not representative of all women's experience. However, they do illustrate how these issues affect some women and help us to further our understanding of the possibilities and constraints in relation to combating domestic violence in Peru. By listening to women's personal narratives and the place of violence in their perceptions of past and present relationships, we can unveil a little of the complexity of how violence is reproduced and rejected on an every day basis.

Policies against domestic violence

The first law in Peru against domestic violence was introduced by the Fujimori regime (1990–2000). Fujimori used an internationally popular rhetoric of women's emancipation and development in an effort to ameliorate his democratic image after an autogolpe that made Peru a virtual dictatorship, albeit one that had considerable popular support.⁸ He started a dialogue with feminist organisations in order to improve the position of women, set up a Ministry for Women, issued a quota of 30 per cent compulsory inclusion of women on political party lists, and employed many women in important governmental positions. These measures could be interpreted as a genuine concern for the improvement of women's place in society. However, available evidence suggests that Fujimori was playing an intelligent game of satisfying the demands of national and international feminist movements, associating himself with international discourses

⁷ I conducted interviews with leaders of grass-roots women's organisations in the Andean departments of Huancavelica and Ayacucho, and in Lima. The interviews were initially directed at the relationship between grass-roots organisations and the state, but the women also pointed to the importance of the fight against domestic violence in their lives. In this article I also draw on a sample of twenty interviews with women's leaders in the department of Ayacucho, which I directed specifically at the issue of domestic violence. These short interviews generated some interesting insights, although they were constrained and held in difficult circumstances due to the setting: the police station for battered women. The interviews were mainly held in Spanish, transcribed by a Peruvian, and the translations into English are my own. Some of the interviews were held with the help of a Spanish-Quechua translator, Kelly Ortega, whom I thank for her help.

⁸ The popular support that Fujimori enjoyed throughout his rule, and even today, made the description of the regime as a 'dictatorship' contentious. However, the uncovering of the 'true' nature of the Fujimori regime after his flight to Japan in 2000 made clear that the level of control he and his cronies exercised over the state apparatus and over citizens, and justifies the use of the term.

concerning women's rights, population, and development, and using the image of women as honest, trustworthy, loyal and maternal, i.e., women as political '*supermadres*', in order to distract attention from his increasingly corrupt, authoritarian and violent regime.⁹ The law against domestic violence, issued in 1993, corresponded to this broader strategy of seeking democratic legitimacy.

Cecilia Blondet has observed that the governing party primarily used the law against domestic violence in its rhetoric to emphasise the 'modernity' of its policies and its governance, and only rarely deployed it as a tool to combat domestic violence. As the law had been the result of solid cooperation between feminists and congresswomen of all parties, the women belonging to the ruling party, the *fujimoristas*, pointed repeatedly to the unanimity with which the law had been designed and adopted, while stressing that its implementation was the result of 'women working together'. These women used the successful adoption of the law against domestic violence to underpin an essentialist image of women as morally superior to, and more democratic than, men.¹⁰ Independently of how we feel about how the law came about and about its architects, however, the fact remains that the law is there to be used. The question we need to ask is whether the passing of this 'democratic' measure – albeit under authoritarian circumstances – has had democratising effects.

In order to examine how the initiatives against domestic violence were received by their intended beneficiaries, battered women, we have to look at how programmes actually worked. In this section, I discuss the possibilities and constraints of the different aspects of policies against domestic violence related to protection, denunciation, and prosecution. Instead of separating these three pillars of the daily struggle against domestic violence into neat categories, I have chosen to present them in an interlinked narrative in order to show the complexity of the problem, and, in particular, to show the prevalence of an overarching constraint to all these solutions: persistent inequality. The study of policies against domestic violence in Peru shows that social relationships at all levels of society – the family, community, and the State – are dominated by structural inequality based on gender, ethnicity, and class. This pervasive inequality in Peru has to be addressed in order to

⁹ The term *supermadre* was coined by Elsa Chaney, in *Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America*, (Austin, 1979). In my doctoral dissertation I studied Fujimori's political relationship with women and his use of certain woman-friendly discourses: see Jelke Boesten, 'Negotiating Womanhood, Reproducing Inequality. Women and Social Policy in Peru,' unpub. Ph.D., University of Amsterdam, 2004; see also: Gregory D. Schmidt, 'All the President's Women: Fujimori and Gender Equity in Peruvian Politics,' paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association Conference, Dallas, Texas, 2003, and Cecilia Blondet, *El encanto del dictador* (Lima, 2002).

¹⁰ Blondet, *El encanto del dictador*, p. 48.

increase the effectiveness of policies against domestic violence. The main inadequacies of such policies, that is to say, are related to issues of inequality and authoritarianism.

Under increasing pressure from the feminist movement and grass roots organisations alike, the Peruvian government started to design and implement policies against domestic violence in 1988, when the first special police station for women was set up in Lima. This station was set up following Brazilian experiments with special police stations for battered women, staffed by female officers. The measure seemed to be a huge success: shortly after it opened, denunciations increased steadily and more such police stations and other services for battered women were opened throughout the country. In 1993 the Fujimori government passed the Law against Domestic Violence, and in 2001, a transition government formulated the National Programme to Combat Violence in the Family. The programme promised shelters for women and children, and the centralisation of social, medical and legal services in Centros de Emergencia Mujer (CEMs). In practice, however, these initiatives made little headway against existing problems of discrimination based on social and economic position, ethnicity, and gender.

In principle, the Peruvian state programme against domestic violence made no distinction on grounds of class or ethnic background among those it sought to benefit. Nevertheless, it is clear that the programme targeted the poorer classes, not the middle classes. Of the eight CEMs established in Lima, none was located in a middle-upper class neighbourhood. The government's not unreasonable argument for targeting lower-income social groups was not that there was more violence among the poor, but that less affluent sectors of the population have fewer means to find solutions for their problems, in that they have less access to the judicial system, to employment, to health care, and to education and information.¹¹ However, increasing access to facilities that deal with issues related to domestic violence does not necessarily change the mechanisms that have caused low access before, or, for that matter, the causes of domestic violence itself.

We can distinguish three types of problem in relation to these government initiatives to combat domestic violence: (1) lack of state support, i.e., lack of resources; (2) problems concerning law enforcement; and above all, (3) corruption and discrimination.

The lack of state support was evident from the absence of the basic infrastructure required to make a service function: the housing of the CEMs and police stations was often poor, insufficient furniture was supplied,

¹¹ Plan Nacional Contra la Violencia Hacia la Mujer, 2001 www.promudeh.gov.pe [Accessed: Oct. 2003]

computers were rarely available and often people had to take their own paper for the typing machines if they wanted their cases to be filed. Electricity and water were not always paid for. Social workers I interviewed in three different cities, including Lima, said that they had paid for several of those basic services themselves. The lack of equipment and the poor working conditions encouraged mistrust among women, who could interpret a police officer's request for paper and an accompanying soft drink as an act of corruption.¹² Instead of increasing support for these services, the present government is debating lowering the available budget. This is especially regrettable in the case of the CEMs, which, according to both service providers and users, represent a good initiative that has considerably improved support to victimised women, children, and some men.¹³ As we will see below, the special police stations for women have more pressing problems to solve.

Problems arose from the fact that the terms used in the 1993 law were too vague and poorly defined. Consequently, between 1993 and the present, several adjustments to the law have been made to define what constitutes domestic violence; what type of family and social relationships should be included under the category 'domestic'; how one defines and detects psychological violence; what sort of acts should be considered 'sexual violence'; what constitutes 'severe' or 'minor' physical harm; and to what extent it should determine the character of further legal proceedings. In practice, the law failed to provide sufficient judicial guidelines or intervention mechanisms for judges and the police to be able to protect women. The law was even less specific on how to prevent violence. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the different legal institutions and social services needed to be negotiated, and penalties established. To add to the confusion, the judicial system is often slow and victims have to be patient in seeing their cases go to court. The protection of victims is also a major problem as plans for refugee houses are poorly implemented and imprisonment of perpetrators is rare.

To problems of definition and protection, we can add problems of interpretation: justices of the peace, in general the authorities responsible for dealing with civil disputes including domestic violence, particularly in rural areas, have their own ideas about the legitimacy of violence against women.

¹² 'Aplicación de la ley de protección frente a la violencia familiar 26260,' Encuentro de redes y mesas interinstitucionales que trabajan en el tema de violencia familiar en Lima metropolitana, Villa El Salvador, Villa María del Triunfo, 2003–2004, facsimile.

¹³ Interview with Emma Espinoza, lawyer at the CEM of Pamplona Alta, Lima and Betsy Flores, social worker at the CEM of Tacna, and Movimiento Flora Tristán, *Violencia familiar y sexual. Diagnóstico sobre servicios de atención* (Lima, 2003). This study is based on interviews with users and service providers in twelve Peruvian cities regarding the quality of services in the CEMs and special police stations.

We can say the same of the *médicos legistas* who are responsible for confirming the veracity of denunciations of rape and determining whether the physical harm done falls under the category of ‘severe’ or ‘minor’ injury. This categorisation determines if an aggressor is charged and, thus, if the victim will be protected. The categorisation of an injury is often dependent on the individual interpretation that the responsible doctor, police officer, or justice of the peace makes with regard to the injury inflicted on a woman in her home, i.e., in private. In 2000, the Defensoría del Pueblo concluded that although the legislation had improved considerably, the verdicts had hardly changed because most male judges were of the opinion that ‘for the sake of the family, marriage and the children, women need to tolerate a certain amount of violence’.¹⁴ During a conversation I had with two justices of the peace in San Miguel, Ayacucho, a father and daughter, the father told me that in his district domestic violence was not a problem. Afterwards, the daughter told me that her father had always beaten and abused her mother and that in her family the word of her father was the law, enforced with violence if necessary. If a justice of the peace thinks that violence is a good means to solve family conflicts how can this same justice implement national laws against domestic violence?

Another short-lived but severe problem was the imposition of conciliation between victim and perpetrator in cases of domestic violence in the late 1990s. In 1996 Peru signed the Interamerican Treaty for the Prevention, Eradication, and Sanction of Violence against Women, issued in 1994 in Belem do Pará. Subsequently, the government set up a commission to study the existing law and possible modifications to it. This led to a legal reform in 1997 that not only emphasised conciliation after conflict, but made conciliation compulsory by linking the law against domestic violence to the law on conciliation issued in the same year.¹⁵ Compulsory, extra-judicial and institutionalised mediation by a third party, i.e., through a special conciliation office, a public prosecutor (*fiscal*) or justice of the peace, was intended to act

¹⁴ Louise Egan, *Rights and Renewal. Peru's Women Take Cases to the Courts, the Media and the Streets*, Ford Foundation Report, Winter 2000, at www.fordfound.org/publications/ff_report/view_ff_report_detail.cfm [accessed Nov. 2001]. In a similar way, Michiel Baud has observed how in the Dominican Republic, patriarchal control over women was sustained and reproduced by both politically powerful and less powerful men, i.e., by a class crossing male solidarity that legitimised the subordination of women. See Michiel Baud, ‘Patriarchy and Changing Family Strategies: Class and Gender in the Dominican Republic,’ *The History of the Family*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1997), pp. 355–78.

¹⁵ Espinoza Matos, *Violencia en la familia en Lima y el Callao*, 13. According to Deborah Poole, the law on conciliation was set up as part of a larger project of judicial reforms encouraged by the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank and USAID; see Deborah Poole, ‘Between Threat and Guarantee: Justice and Community on the Margins of the Peruvian State,’ in Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds.), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, 2004), p. 52.

as an 'alternative mechanism for the solution of conflicts'.¹⁶ According to Deborah Poole, all this 'decentralisation' of justice achieved was to relieve the judicial and legal system of the increasing load of domestic violence hearings while battered women 'were shuttled into a system where no legal sanctions could be brought against their attackers'.¹⁷

As Silvia Loli, an expert on domestic violence working for the feminist organisation Flora Tristán, suggests, the new provisions of the law were also supported by a conservative committee of female politicians and lawyers who intended to create protection for women against violence in the family while also preventing divorce. This implied that the principle behind conciliation in family matters, including violence, was the preservation – perhaps even the strengthening – of the family structure as the cornerstone of Peruvian society.¹⁸ Such a focus prioritises family unity over women's and, arguably children's, health and safety. Moreover, by not prosecuting acts of male domestic violence under the criminal law, conciliation can legitimise male dominance over women and to a certain extent even the use of violence. Similar criticisms emerged from feminist organisations, who argued that conciliation could only succeed between equal partners. Domestic violence is grounded in inherently unequal power relations, which means that conciliation should not be an option.¹⁹ The law was modified in 2001 to forbid a conciliation procedure in cases of domestic violence, although this change in legislation has not been clearly transmitted to local police officers and justices of the peace.²⁰

The idea of conciliation in violent domestic conflicts not only suggests a political preference for the preservation of the family over the protection of women, but, according to some scholars, also serves a cultural logic. For example, the lawyer Julieta Estremadoyro, in her study of domestic violence and the law in the Peruvian Andes, focused her attention on the relevance of conciliatory practices as part of 'Andean culture'. According to Estremadoyro, community-based Andean women were not helped by 'Western feminist solutions' such as separation and punishment. They preferred conciliation by family members higher in the hierarchy such as

¹⁶ Ley de Conciliación, No 26872, www.leyes.congreso.gob.pe

¹⁷ Poole 'Between Threat and Guarantee,' p. 55.

¹⁸ Personal communication, Silvia Loli, October 2003.

¹⁹ Angela Teresa Hernandez Cajo, 'El procesamiento de las denuncias de violencia familiar en juzgados de paz letrados de Lima,' 2000, and Gina Yáñez, 'Violencia contra la mujer. Aplicación de la ley de violencia familiar desde una perspectiva de género: estudios de caso,' 1998, both cited in Bardales Mendoza, *Estado de la investigaciones en violencia familiar y sexual en el Perú* (Lima, 2003).

²⁰ Julieta Estremadoyro, 'Domestic Violence in Andean Communities of Peru,' *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal*, 2001, vol. 1, at <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2001-1/estremadoyro.html>

parents and godparents, or community leaders such as the justices of the peace who traditionally performed extra-judicial mediation in local disputes.²¹ Domestic violence, in this culturalist argument, is something that can be repaired and should benefit from conciliation, because it is supposed to be part of local practice. Estremadoyro fails to consider economic dependency on the family unit as a reason for conciliation, or the ‘tradition’ of excluding Andean people from the national judicial system as a reason why women did not previously resort to formal judicial institutions. Local gender, class and ethnic hierarchies that could play a role in conciliation practices, and may disadvantage women, are not considered either.

Although compulsory conciliation in the legal system is now dismissed as damaging, the question of existing local mediation networks versus women’s use of the formal judicial system is instructive. In Ayacucho I spoke with several women who had travelled from their villages to the city to go to the police. One of these women, Julia, 18 years of age, came from a nearby community called Antolinayocc, together with her father and her one-year-old baby. I met them at the police station, where they had gone to report Julia’s partner who had beaten her regularly ever since they started living together two years earlier. As Julia and her father explained to me, the father had tried everything to stop the violence against his daughter. Not only he, but, as he recounted, also the parents of the young man, the godfather, and finally the local deputy governor (*teniente gobernador*) had talked to the man. However, the man also became violent towards the mediators, and even towards his own parents. The family saw no other solution than to go to the police in order to report the aggressor, in the hope that the police could do something about it. Secondly, they hoped for an alimony agreement so that Julia could leave her partner without burdening her family.²² It is important to note that neither Julia nor her father asked the judicial system for additional conciliation, but instead, sought direct intervention. As such, Julia’s story appears to suggest that in the first instance people may be prepared to use local social structures to try to solve conflicts. However, once these mediations fail to reach an acceptable, non-violent reconciliation, people do not appeal to the judicial system to conciliate further. Rather, they ask the legal system for protection, separation and/or alimony at a moment when there is nothing left to conciliate. Julia’s story confirms that people may rely on mediation using local networks, but also expect the judiciary to offer other solutions. Emphasising conciliation in the formal process implies that after failed efforts at conciliation by kinship networks, women have no alternative but to tolerate the violence to which they are subjected.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Personal conversation with Julia and her father, Ayacucho, December 2002.

In Ayacucho, however, local social structures are increasingly subject to radical change. In the 1980s and 1990s displacement, disappearances and deaths caused by the war between Shining Path and the armed forces tore families apart. In addition, young couples increasingly left their parents' communities in search of a better life elsewhere. This has led to the loss of family ties that otherwise could provide women with social resources such as protection and support. As a result, when migrants in urban centres report their husbands without having gone through a process of family conciliation it may be a consequence of the absence of a supportive family network due to their changed social surroundings. Hence, it is difficult to know whether high indices of domestic violence in urban migrant centres mean that domestic violence is more frequent in migrant communities than in non-migrant communities. It could be that in migrant communities people use state services more often than elsewhere simply because they have access to previously unavailable services. It is also possible that women view state services as a substitute or replacement for the mediatory role of kinship networks they previously might have relied on. Such an analysis may explain the high visibility of domestic violence in urban settlements such as the *pueblos jóvenes*.

The third problem in the implementation of policies against domestic violence, apart from the lack of resources and difficulties with enforcement, is discrimination and corruption. Discrimination and corruption are huge problems in many of the institutions set up to combat domestic violence and their existence reveals the prejudices and inequalities that contribute to and sustain violence against women. Both problems also exacerbate slow enforcement. I will illustrate this observation with a striking example. In Ayacucho, I introduced myself to the local *comisaría de la mujer* with a request for information. The police station, opened in 1999 and a huge success if measured in terms of the number of women who come to report aggressions, was filled with women sitting on the two benches placed against the walls. Although the facilities were poor and the police officers could barely deal with the number of women they encountered on a daily basis, women patiently waited their turn. I had come with Kelly, a Quechua-speaking anthropology student at the local university. As the majority of women in Ayacucho speak Quechua, a language I do not speak, Kelly's help was vital. We talked to the waiting women in both Quechua and Spanish. In general, it seemed, these women were seeking compensation in the form of a divorce, alimony and money to pay the hospital bills that they had incurred as a result of the beatings that they had suffered. Some women sought protection. One of those women was Dori. Her left eye was bandaged and she sat on one buttock, as the other was too painful to put weight upon. Dori had a baby on her back and she was pregnant with the next. The local governor of her neighbourhood, also present at the scene, had taken her to

the police station. He told us that he had brought her because Dori could not take care of herself or her children any longer; she lived from the donations of her neighbours while the father of her children did nothing to help out. Kelly approached her to ask if she wanted to talk to us. Before she had the chance to answer, the police officer in charge intervened. He started to speak to her in Spanish in such a loud voice that the whole office – and probably people outside the office, where the aggressor was waiting – could hear him say that Dori had been beaten up very severely by her husband for many years and that she only had come to the police station because the local governor had brought her. We were all told that Dori had been stupid enough to have stayed with this abusive man and that he made her pregnant all the time but never helped out financially. We also learned that the husband was not her husband as he had a legal family with someone else.

Dori, who could not defend herself in Spanish against the officer, sobbed quietly in her corner. As Kelly and I went out of the office in the hope that the public humiliation of Dori would then stop, the policeman drew up Dori's accusations in Quechua and went to talk to the aggressor who was waiting outside. There, around the corner of the police station, Dori's misfortune continued. The aggressor bribed the police officer so the consequences of Dori's denunciation would be minimal for him. This may explain why she would never have gone to the police by herself: it is fair to speculate that Dori expected little from such a visit. To make matters worse, her partner could now beat her again on the grounds that she had betrayed him.

There are several layers to this observation. First, there is the issue of language. The police officer spoke in Spanish to me because I do not understand Quechua. The fact that I had come with a Quechua-speaking student did not alter this. I was the one who needed to be informed and as the *gringa* I was probably of more interest to him than Dori was. The fragile and humiliating position of Dori was of no importance to him. Although she probably understood very well what was going on, her Spanish was not good enough to respond and the officer exploited this fact to give his own version of Dori's misfortune. Related to the language issue is Dori's status as an illiterate indigenous woman. Her status not only explains the power the officer has over her, but also explains why Dori could not simply walk away. It had impeded her from going to the police on her own or from fleeing the region to another city. Not only did the officer find Dori less important than others, but she also probably felt herself less important. She had been severely beaten, had nothing to feed herself and her children with, and had no place to go to. And her abusive lover – Dori could not claim marital status – was waiting outside, which cannot have been a comforting thought for her either. The abuse she received at home was thus continued at the police station. This brings us to the third factor: the status of the police

officer. The officer was male, spoke Spanish, was literate and had an office of authority. As Marisol de la Cadena would say, these factors had 'mestized' him, and his education and position placed him in 'another social class' than Dori.²³ As such, he did not feel an obligation to show respect to Dori. The officer put particular emphasis on the fact that Dori had allowed herself not only to be beaten, but also raped and deceived.

Besides the ethnic and class bias in the relation between Dori and the police officer, there is obviously a gender bias. According to the police officer, Dori had 'allowed' herself to be abused. She was not a legal wife, a fact that made her claims to protection even feebler. The police officer identified more with the aggressor than with the victim. 'Male solidarity' made the police officer see Dori not as a victim of male violence, but as an accessory to her own miserable situation. As members of the community, police officers are local men who take part in the construction of masculinity and, more often than not, identify with fellow male community members. The officer is not trained to change his outlook on the role of women and men, or to redefine masculinities. He is trained to fight crime and violence. However, if domestic violence against women is predominantly seen as a private matter in which male authority is established, the police officer will rarely understand this form of violence as a crime.

Arguably, this 'male' bias and gender discrimination on the part of police officers who have to deal with denunciations of domestic violence could be solved with an all-female staff. However, research conducted in Brazilian police stations (which were the model on which the Peruvian services were based) suggests that prevailing discriminatory gender ideologies are as much a part of the world vision of women as of men. According to Sarah Nelson, the police stations established in Brazil in 1985 and solely staffed by women had similar problems in relation to law enforcement, resources and discrimination to the Peruvian ones. The female police officers often undermined victims' denunciations by blaming them for their situation and by suggesting they should tolerate a certain amount of violence in their homes.²⁴ A study of the quality of Peruvian state services against domestic violence published in late 2003 by the feminist organisation Flora Tristán came to similar conclusions to those outlined above. Some of the women interviewed in the study do mention a preference for female attendants, but this does not appear to be a generalised observation. The study also confirms the suspicion that police stations function poorly compared to the CEMs. Twenty five per cent of the women interviewed approved of the police stations, whereas 80

²³ Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, 1919–1991* (Durham, NC, 2000).

²⁴ Sara Nelson, 'Constructing and Negotiating Gender in Women's Police Stations in Brazil,' *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1996), pp. 131–48.

per cent approved of the CEMs. The study's interviewees complained about the police officers' indifference, prejudice, rudeness, corruption and, indeed, about the complicity between aggressor and officer. The study also observed a language problem, as, according to its data, a third of the women who attend the police stations speak a native language as their first language, whereas the attendants in general only speak Spanish. Both the users and providers interviewed in the study denied the availability of adequate protection.²⁵ Thus, to make a special police station for battered women a safe and just place, changes in thinking about gender relations among both men and women are necessary, in addition to adequate funding, training, legislation and possibilities for the protection of victimised women.

Women, their organisations, and violence

The leaders of grass-roots organisations whom I interviewed in Lima, Huancavelica and Ayacucho pointed to the centrality of violence in their personal relationships and indicated a growing collective awareness of women's rights. At the same time, as we will see, women's public activities and growing self-esteem sometimes provoked increased violence on the part of their male partners.²⁶ Yet, instead of being discouraged from participating in public activities, women used their awareness and the growing support of

²⁵ Movimiento Flora Tristán, *Violencia familiar y sexual*.

²⁶ Grass-roots organisations encountered resistance from organised political factions as well, and were a target for *Sendero Luminoso*; see for example Maruja Barrig, 'The Difficult Equilibrium between Bread and Roses: Women's Organizations and Democracy in Peru,' in Jane S. Jaquette (ed.), *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Participation and Democracy* (Boulder, 1994), pp. 151–76. Cecilia Blondet, 'In No-Man's Land: Poor Women's Organizations and Political Violence in Lima's Neighbourhoods,' in R. Abers, J. Friedmann and L. Autler (eds.), *Emergences: Women's Struggles for Livelihood in Latin America* (Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 79–90. In addition, the TRC has unveiled the more horrific facts as well as the resistance offered by organised women in the face of *Sendero Luminoso*: Narda Henriquez and Julissa Mantilla, 'Contra viento y marea: cuestiones de género y poder en la memoria colectiva, Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación' (ms., Lima, 2003). There is a plentiful literature on grass-roots women's organisations in Peru. See, for example, Maruja Barrig, 'Democracia emergente: Movimientos de mujeres,' in Eduardo Ballón Echegaray (ed.), *Movimientos sociales y democracia: la fundación de un nuevo orden* (Lima, 1986), pp. 147–83; Cecilia Blondet, *Muchas vidas construyendo una identidad: las mujeres pobladoras de un barrio limeño* (Lima, 1986); Blondet, 'El movimiento de mujeres en el Perú,' in *Peru 1964–1994: economía, sociedad y política* (Lima, 1995), pp. 103–34. The idea that husbands were often hostile to women's organising is found in the personal stories of women used in these texts. A lively account of the dynamics of organising in urban slums can be found in testimonies such as Francesca Denegri, *Soy señora: testimonio de Irene Jara* (Lima, 2000). However, the phenomenon of men who beat their wives as a response to women's public activities is not unique to Peru. See, for example, Nikki Craske, 'Women's Political Participation in Colonias Populares in Guadalajara, Mexico,' in S. Radcliffe and S. Westwood (eds.), 'Viva': *Women and Popular Protest in Latin America* (London, 1993), pp. 112–35, 128.

women's networks, NGOs and other civil organisations to develop strategies to reject violence in their homes and change their own habits of communication. The rejection of violence in grass-roots women's organisations influenced the political agenda in the 1990s and encouraged the further involvement of NGOs in the struggle against domestic violence. Women are also accentuating the relevance of the state policies by using available services on an increasing scale, even if the services themselves are perceived to be poor. The individual stories of women who experienced violence in their homes, some of which I analyse in this section, show how women have gained the skills to reject violence, and provide a sense of the possible incentives encouraging them to denounce or leave an aggressive husband and of the strategies they employ to minimise violence. These stories also suggest the difficulty of a struggle against such a widespread problem if society at large does not change with the women at the forefront of this struggle, and thus, the necessity of good, well-embedded and institutionalised policies that support them in this process.

One case in particular, the case of Teodomira, illustrates the 'normality' of violence against women within their own homes and husbands' opposition to women's public activities.²⁷ I met Teodomira in the Andean city of Ayacucho, where she has lived all her life. Ayacucho was at the epicentre of the war between *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and the government's armed forces between 1980 and around 1995. Since the 1960s, Teodomira had been involved in organising young mothers in *clubes de madres*, whose main function was to bring women together to carry out certain domestic tasks collectively. In addition, as Teodomira implied in her narrative, all-women's organisations were intended to create spaces in which women could freely speak up. When war started in 1980, the women's organisations took a leading role in providing a support network for the victims of violence. Teodomira and her *compañeras* searched for the disappeared, negotiated with military authorities, and created an information and support network throughout the department of Ayacucho, as well as with other such organisations in bordering departments. This was an extremely dangerous period in which civil organisations were constantly attacked from both warring sides. Nevertheless, the *clubes de madres* were active in all possible ways of protest and defended themselves fiercely against infiltration from *Sendero Luminoso*.²⁸

²⁷ I have changed the names of all interviewees.

²⁸ For an early discussion of these Ayacucho *clubes de madres*, see Isabel Coral, 'Women in War: Impact and Responses,' in Steve Stern (ed.), *Shining and Other Paths. War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham, NC, and London, 1998), pp. 345–74. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has documented the attacks on civil organisations, including the *clubes de madres*: see Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 'Informe Final,' Vol. III, Chapter 3.2.2, 2003, at www.cverdad.org.pe [Accessed: 25 September 2003].

In December 2002, I spoke with Teodomira about the activities of her organisation in the past and present.²⁹ While her story pointed to great hardship and, especially, personal and collective courage in the persistent negotiation with the armed forces, she never considered ceasing her resistance to the political violence that was destroying her community. As her narrative suggests, submission to the armed forces would have destroyed her dignity as a person. However, she did consider resigning her position in the women's organisation after her husband beat her so badly that she had to go to the hospital. He had done so, according to Teodomira, because he feared for her life if she continued her activities against political violence in the *clubes de madres*. He especially disliked the fact that she went out after the curfew to carry out her activities and meet with other activists. Teodomira's husband told her that she could not leave the house to defend others because she had first to take care of her own family. And, if she was killed, 'who would then take care of his children?' Instead of helping her in her activities, Teodomira's husband used domestic violence to 'protect' her from political violence.

Teodomira suggested that there was more to her husband's aggressive behaviour. From the beginning of her participation in the *clubes de madres*, her husband had tried to stop her because he thought she went to meet other men or otherwise undermined his authority.

We had already started to organise, but my husband told me, 'Where are you going? Where will you be going?', he was jealous, 'You are going out with another man! Where are you going out every time?', and so he hit me. I let him when he hit me, [as a result] I stopped participating [in activities] for a long time.

Although she suggests she gave in to her husband's demands, she later rejoined the organisations. She was aware of her role in the community and was sure that 'she was not doing anything wrong' in her organisation, but rather, was 'simply defending our rights, everyone's rights'. In our conversation she said that as no legitimate authority existed in the city any longer, not even to bury the dead or provide for basic needs, there was no other option but for them, the women, to take up such responsibilities. For her the choice that her husband wanted her to make between activities did not exist. In the case of Teodomira, defying *Sendero Luminoso* or the military was not the most dangerous activity, as the greatest danger to her physical wellbeing was living in her own home.

For Teodomira, there existed a direct relationship between her participation in women's organisations and the aggression of her husband. Her husband's idea of womanhood, of what constituted being a wife and mother, did not include a woman's right to engage in public activities or political

²⁹ Interview with Teodomira, Ayacucho, December 2002.

resistance. The aggression of her husband was an important threat to Teodomira's public activities and she did everything to negotiate with him – or avoid his disapproval by lying. Besides such individual 'weapons of the weak' women seem to have used in order to avoid male opposition to their public activities, Teodomira and her colleagues emphasised that their organisations were mothers' clubs, i.e., organisations whose existence was oriented towards taking care of their children and their households. Women confirmed their traditional female images in such a way that no man or institution could easily object to the bulk of their activities. Women's collective representation as mothers consisted of two facets: women organised in grass-roots organisations as mothers not only to provide communally for domestic necessities, but also as a domestic justification for acting in public. Although the term *club de madres* obviously has a particular history, the stories of the women interviewed clearly indicate that seeking legitimate ways to organise among women and to act in public despite male resistance has been an important reason for maintaining this terminology.

A study carried out by Efraín Gonzales de Olarte and Pilar Gavilano Llosa confirms the relation between high levels of wife-beating and participation in grass-roots women's organisations in Peru. The researchers looked for distinctive factors that could influence the occurrence of domestic violence in different socio-economic sectors in order to link poverty and violent behaviour. Their study concluded that poverty could be a determining factor, but did not provide any conclusive data on this issue. Interestingly, however, their data indicated that women who are active in grass roots women's organisations experience higher levels of domestic violence. The authors suggest that this could be indeed a consequence of male resistance towards women's participation in the public sphere and the related fear of changing gender roles. Another suggestion is that women's participation in community organisations has not only generated a growing visibility of women in public – and thus growing visibility of their personal stories – but also their increased use of networks to speak up about their family lives.³⁰

Grass roots organisations can often count on the support of national, international, and feminist non-governmental organisations. Such NGOs provide information about violence and human rights, about legislation and existing governmental programmes and policies, and about forms of leadership and organisation. In this way, some groups of the poorest women, who are situated at the bottom of a very hierarchical social ladder, learn different ways to combat violence. Even if official government measures seem inadequate, it appears that the presence of specific legislation to protect

³⁰ Efraín Gonzales de Olarte and Pilar Gavilano Llosa, *Pobreza y violencia doméstica contra la mujer en Lima Metropolitana* (Lima, 1998), p. 38.

women against forms of violence often justified with arguments based on inequality can give women the feeling that, in the end, they are valued as individuals. It proves that they are not ‘illiterate indigenous women’ or ‘uneducated *cholas*,’ but Peruvians with rights and obligations, i.e. citizens in their own right. In their organisations, women talk about their private lives and discuss domestic violence. By speaking up among themselves, women push back the boundaries of what is accepted as ‘legitimate’ violence. Whereas in the past they may well have accepted male violence, endured it as an unavoidable evil, or even thought they deserved it under certain circumstances, they have now developed a critical self-consciousness and self-esteem that does not allow for thoughts permissive of violence against their own bodies.³¹

Women challenge each other’s ideas about conjugal violence. Several of the women I interviewed had separated from violent partners after their peers had found out and challenged their authority as women’s leaders. Gloria, a young woman raising three children in San Miguel, a small town in the department of Ayacucho, claimed that her husband had beaten her since she was fifteen. She said that she was confused about the violence, that she did not know how to stop it, that she used to think that it was part of married life. Gloria claimed that she was afraid of her husband. Despite this fear, she secretly participated in the local mothers’ club and was even elected its president. Like many of the women I spoke to, Gloria lied to her husband about her whereabouts because he was jealous, suspicious and often violently angry about her meetings with other women. One day, however, her husband – who, despite Gloria’s attempts to deceive him, knew that she was active in the mothers clubs – made a gesture to her and invited her *socias*, her peers in the organisation, to their home to celebrate New Year’s Day. Then, in front of the other women, he beat her up so badly that she had to be taken to hospital. In the hospital, the doctor immediately sent her to the *capitán*, the chief of the police, in order to report the abuse. According to Gloria, the *capitán* received her with amazement, asking her how it was possible that a strong woman, a leader like Gloria who worked with other women to raise their consciousness, had lived all those years with a violent husband. Gloria found her position as a leader undeniably jeopardised by her husband’s violence because it affected her position in relation to her *socias*. But what made her particularly angry about her husband’s conduct was his physical aggression in front of her *socias*: ‘So, he beat me up in front of them and he dishonoured me, that’s when I started thinking and I said to

³¹ Various studies speak about the permissiveness among women towards male violence, for example: INEI and Comisión de la Mujer del Congreso, Encuesta de hogares sobre Vida Familiar en Lima Metropolitana, 1999, cited in Bardales Mendoza, *Estado de las investigaciones en violencia familiar*.

myself: that's enough [emphasis added].’ She felt that this event had undermined the authority she possessed as the president of the mothers’ club. Although the public humiliation of Gloria was probably a calculated move by the husband in order to teach her a lesson, for Gloria, a crucial boundary had been crossed. She stated that she became stronger through this event and was able to defend herself better by not taking notice of him (*no hacerle caso*), ignoring his violence, walking away and physically fighting back.³²

Another women’s leader in Ayacucho, Emma, was not prevented from being active in the organisations. However, her husband disapproved of the fact that she discussed her experiences with people and often beat her. Emma identified his aggression towards her as machismo:

More than anything because of machismo, he did not want me to stand out above other people, he did not want me to be superior to him, because he is a person with a profession so he says that a woman who is not a professional should not excel more than the man. So sometimes we would discuss social problems, sometimes the people or national problems. But he never agreed with me, he said, ‘it is not like that, it’s like this’, so from this, fights sometimes followed, I mean, well, mostly from machismo.

Emma endured the beatings. She did not stop participating in the *clubes de madres*, but was not able to stand up to her husband either. However, during the 1990s something triggered a change of mind:

Despite the fact that I went to all courses [offered by NGOs] from more or less 1990, I knew my rights very well, very well, but despite this, I was battered. That is why my *compañeras* said to me, ‘Listen Emma, you give courses, you are training us about women’s rights, about self esteem, but in the meanwhile you are the most abused of all, you are fucked up, your marriage is a disaster. So which rights are you talking about if you do not use them yourself?’ That’s when I decided; I thought, thanks to my *compañeras* and thanks to some institutions that talked to me, I finally decided to leave him.

Emma used the knowledge she had obtained from various institutions about rights and self-esteem – both typical contemporary feminist concepts – to organise workshops for the women in the federation. But this knowledge did not in itself give Emma the means to divorce her violent husband. Only when her *socias* addressed the issue did she decide that she could not go on with her life as it was. Emma’s story – in a similar way to Gloria’s story – shows how empowerment can occur through a combination of factors: the judiciary that recognises women’s rights, even if the law is not always implemented; the NGO that gives information and training to women; and most importantly, the peers who look after each other and push back the

³² Interview with Gloria, San Miguel, La Mar, January 2003.

boundaries of what is acceptable. After her divorce, Emma went to court to get alimony from her ex-partner, ‘with a lawsuit and everything’.³³

Gloria and Emma, like many others, needed the mirror that their *socias* held up to realise that the violence of their husbands was not legitimate or inevitable. Although such a conclusion does not solve the problem of domestic violence – Gloria’s husband, for example, did not change but ended up in prison for drug trafficking – and although we should not put the responsibility for solving such an endemic social problem onto the shoulders of women, we can still recognise this as an important development.

The importance of women’s organisations in reducing the acceptance of violence against women and increasing awareness of women’s rights should not, however, be overestimated. Women are also capable of reproducing the violent authoritarianism of their husbands in their organisations and in their families. We have to consider that women are as much a part of the existing stratifications as men are. The story of Teófila shows how difficult it is for an individual to shift the boundaries of accepted forms of communication if other social actors and institutions do not change their attitudes as well. She was born in 1960 in San Miguel, Ayacucho. Her story is a sad one of war, political violence and forced migration. She started to participate in the mothers’ clubs in the 1980s when political violence dominated the region. In the years she became a good organiser, a mother of three girls, she lost three brothers in war and a husband in divorce. Teófila did not divorce because of domestic violence, but because her partner had built a new life – with a new family – during his time as a refugee in Lima. Besides the violence of war that Teófila’s family lived personally, she grew up with domestic violence as well, particularly from her father – who beat her mother – and an aunt, who raised Teófila: ‘Although she [the aunt] was a teacher, she never knew how to explain things or tell me why this or that was bad ... everything was beatings.’

Teófila admitted that she was similarly authoritarian and violent with her first daughter, born in 1982. As we have already seen in Emma’s story, in the 1990s NGOs increasingly started to target women in Ayacucho with capacity-building courses. As a quick and interested learner, Teófila participated in all courses that became available. According to her, this new information helped her to change her vision of the world and her attitude towards her daughters:

Two NGOs came to give a workshop about women’s rights and the rights of children and adolescents. Well, that was the workshop that made me think. It made me think a lot about how to educate the children. I thought, how should I do that? From that moment onwards I tried to change my attitude towards the children.

³³ Interview with Emma, Ayacucho, January 2003.

Slowly the workshops [...], I participated in all of them, the workshops have made me a more mature person, I see myself as a woman with rights, I found my self-esteem, [but] because of that I now have seen how things should be.

As Teófila indicated, having learned that imposing domestic rules by force was not always the best way to run her home made her aware of her own mistakes:

I don't know, but it seems to me that among women we just say anything and we maltreat each other that way; we talk about violence, but we abuse each other. I don't know, but I think I assimilated a lot of all this but now it seems that I am becoming very emotional.

Teófila's rejection of violence as a form of accepted communication made her vulnerable in front of her peers in her organisation. The fact that she experienced problems with one of her daughters made her have doubts about how to educate them:

Perhaps it is a sin that I make it easy on you [the daughter] or maybe I should be like parents used to be, hit you; yes, I treated my oldest daughter, well, I hit her a lot; I am not complaining, she is a very responsible person while I raised the other daughter through dialogue, but she is not responsible. Or maybe adolescence is very heavy on her, I don't know [sigh].

Teófila's words give us an idea of the troubles women have with their own education, their doubts and the world around them. Women in grass-roots organisations are changing their worlds. They use the support that NGOs give them to expand their knowledge; they use the courts and other state services to denounce husbands and to demand alimony. But, most of all, women inform and support each other through their organisations, they share the information they receive from workshops with other women and they help each other reflect about their lives, even if that process is not without difficulties and doubts. After all, if women change, then the world has to change with them or they come to stand very alone in a painful struggle, or they become 'very emotional' as Teófila said.³⁴

Concluding remarks

In this article I have shown how male authority over women is often reinforced through violence. Men tell their wives 'where their place is' and especially, where it is not. Above all, husbands fear their wives' participation in activities outside the home, probably because such activities are seen to affect their 'natural' authority over women. The idea of women's responsibility for the family's wellbeing is often used against those who want to

³⁴ Interview with Teófila, Ayacucho, January 2003.

perform other tasks as well. Men often view their wives' participation in women's organisations as a direct threat to the established power relations in the household and a motivation for severe domestic conflicts.³⁵ For men, women's organisations are the embodiment of changing gender relations; it is there, in the organisations, that women learn to read and write, to speak up, to defend themselves, and to negotiate on a political level. Gloria, for example, explained her husband's resentment towards her participation as follows:

The woman has to be in a corner of the house, the woman shouldn't talk like that, with other women; when they talk among women, they [the husbands] will say, 'what are they telling each other?'

After listening to the stories of leaders of grassroots organisations, such as Teodomira, Gloria, Teófila or Emma, it is evident that women's collective representation as organised mothers in order to legitimise their public activities to their partners was a necessary strategy.

The emphasis placed on women's responsibility for the family is also found in state policies against domestic violence. Although the measures discussed followed (inter)national trends that highlight women's right to a life without violence as a basic first principle, the Peruvian state sought to protect the structure of the family before individuals. By seeking conciliation as a first, compulsory step following violent domestic conflicts, women were supposed to solve their problems within the existing violent, authoritarian, and unequal family structures. Implicitly, this suggested that women's rights were indeed subordinated to family unity, and thus to the authority of men. Moreover, the emphasis on the unity of the family suggested that violence against women was not pervasive, but rather, occasional and restricted to certain families perceived to be of a lower class, economically poor and ethnically belonging to the 'lower' strata. Such a focus glosses over the relationship between an authoritarian, racist and sexist culture and the violence with which authority is often enforced.

³⁵ Jane S. Jaquette, 'Conclusion: Women's Political Participation and Prospects for Democracy,' in Jane S. Jaquette, *The Women's Movement in Latin America*, p. 225; Emma Cervone, 'Engendering Leadership: Indigenous Women Leaders in the Ecuadorian Andes,' in Leslie Jo Frazier, Rosario Montoya and Janise Hurtig (eds.), *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America* (New York and Basingstoke, 2002), p. 184. The idea of changing gender roles embedded in larger social changes that change – but do not necessarily increase – motivations for violent spousal conflict is argued by Henrietta Moore, 'The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences,' in Peter Gow and Penelope Harvey (eds.), *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 138–55; see also Heidi Tinsman, 'Household Patrones: Wife-Beating and Sexual Control in Rural Chile, 1964–1988,' in John D. French and Daniel James (eds.), *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers* (Durham, NC, and London, 1997), pp. 264–95.

As Peru was ruled by an authoritarian regime when the first laws were passed, this lack of adequate protection against violence should not surprise us. Fujimori was interested in sending the message to the world that he was guiding Peru into 'modernity'. Women-friendly policies and legislation were part of this carefully constructed image. His policies were less concerned, however, with the actual transformation of social relations. Indeed, measures against domestic violence – like the struggle for women's rights in general – are linked to broader measures of democratisation. As the slogan of *Mujeres por la Democracia* (Women for Democracy), an association of independent feminists, scholars and politicians organised against Fujimori's regime, stated: 'What is not good for democracy, is not good for women.'³⁶ There must be a political will to combat authoritarianism and violence, not only at home, but also in the country at large. Legislative improvements against domestic violence the re-establishment of democracy after the fall of the Fujimori regime in late 2000, suggest that such a political will now exists. Since 2001 conciliation has been withdrawn from the law against domestic violence and attempts are being made to enforce women's rights through the legal system. It appears that the development of adequate policies to combat violence against women does indeed go hand in hand with democratisation in society at large. At the same time, after five years of democracy, there seems to be a diminishing necessity for investments in visible 'democratising' measures such as Fujimori needed. This might help to explain the reduction in the budget available for centres and shelters for battered women.³⁷

Existing patterns of gendered authoritarianism and inequality are important components of the persistence of domestic violence. I have shown how some authorities whose task it is to protect women interpret women's rights through the lens of prejudiced ideas about class and ethnicity. They actually seem to reinforce images of women as complicit in their own misfortune or as responsible for the cohesion of the family, which leads to a silent confirmation of men's right to dominate women. As such, the police officers, judges and doctors are still overwhelmingly a part of this gendered authoritarianism and sometimes even confirm male dominance by their own behaviour towards battered women. As a consequence, women have to rely on themselves and each other in order to change violent family situations. More than actual enforcement, the legislation against domestic violence helps women in their conviction that they are within their rights. The law – the contents of which are actively disseminated by both NGOs and the

³⁶ Vargas, 'The Struggle by Latin American Feminisms for Rights and Autonomy,' in Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux (eds.), *Gender and the Politics of Rights in Latin America* (Durham, NC, 2002) p. 217.

³⁷ During my last visit to Lima, in August 2005, the government was discussing a reduction of the funds available, against which NGOs were protesting.

state – shows women that they have a place in society without a husband, that they are citizens in their own right. As such, the legislation, and the training offered by NGOs, support women in a process of empowerment that has its roots in women's own networks. These grass-roots organisations form the basis of women's empowerment and their efforts to break through the cycle of violence in which so many seem to live. However, women's personal struggles against violent authoritarianism also represent a tremendous challenge: because women are responsible for the children, they are also held responsible for changing forms of communication in the family. As we saw in Teófila's thoughtful reflections, this is neither an easy nor an automatic process.