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Sexuality, Rights and Development:  
Peruvian Feminist Connections

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the ways in which the concept of sexuality changes in meaning over time and as it travels through different Peruvian feminist discursive fields and sites of action. Although academic research on Latin American feminists' politics of sexuality has been very limited to date, their own documents reveal a notable absence of debates on same-sex sexuality within the field of sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, when same-sex sexuality is incorporated into discourse, conceptualized as lesbian rights, it does not refer to low-income women. This paradox is mirrored in feminist connections with British international development agencies. Combining multi-sited ethnography with a variety of qualitative research methods, I examine the effects of the shifting meanings and normative assumptions in the deployment of 'sexuality' by key Peruvian feminist individuals and organizations in their work at local, national, regional and global levels.

In this thesis I show that feminist discourse on sexual rights is implicitly heteronormative with reference to women in Lima's low-income settlements and related national policy advocacy. This limitation is influenced by and reinforces the discursive and funding pressures emanating from international development agencies. Meanwhile, the same feminist actors' national and regional public policy advocacy on lesbian rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation does not connect sexuality with class, ethnic or national differences and inequalities. The consequence is the construction of a normative middle class, modern, global, urban lesbian subject in Peru that is considered of little relevance by UK-based international development agencies. At regional and global levels, feminist discourse on sexual and reproductive rights has very recently incorporated the notions of 'sexual and gender diversity', thus incorporating questions of same-sex sexuality. However, differences of social class, race, ethnicity and geo-political location remain unexamined. I argue that in future feminist cultural politics, the pre-theoretical commitments and normative assumptions of sexuality and related rights-based concepts, deployed in different discursive fields and sites of action, need be theorized on the basis of women's knowledge from different economic, ethnic, racial and national contexts.

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## List of Acronyms

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CLADEM</b>	Latin America/Caribbean Committee for Women's Human Rights
<b>DP</b>	District President of the Federation of <i>Comedores</i>
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>FCO</b>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<b>GAD</b>	Gender and Development
<b>GALF</b>	Lesbian Feminist Consciousness-Raising Group
<b>HP</b>	Health Promoter
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
<b>MHOL</b>	Homosexual Movement of Lima
<b>IDS</b>	Institute of Development Studies, Sussex
<b>IGLHRC</b>	International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Council
<b>ILGA</b>	International Gay and Lesbian Association
<b>IACHR</b>	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MIMDES</b>	Ministry of Women and Social Development, Peru
<b>MINSA</b>	Ministry of Health, Peru
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>SR/HC</b>	Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship
<b>SR/RR</b>	Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights
<b>TUC</b>	Trade Union Congress
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WSF</b>	World Social Forum
<b>ZL</b>	Zone Leader of the Federation of <i>Comedores</i>

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Research Aims and Methodological Considerations

Theories and discourses are constructed and travel differently. They are appropriated by social movements at different points in their development, in the context of shifting fields of action and contrasting sets of power relations between local political actors and global influences (Thayer 2000: 208).

What would happen if we not only recognize meaning-making as an important facet of social movement mobilizations, but privilege it as the central feature of such phenomena? (Kurzman 2008: 5).

This thesis is a study of how sexuality has been conceptualized in Peruvian feminist discourse and action, paying particular attention to the political effects of the ways in which meanings of sexuality change over time and across different sites of action. Since the late 1970s, the Latin American feminist movement has been addressing women's same-sex sexuality and a range of inequalities and discrimination created by heterosexual and gender norms, particularly in the fields of health and human rights (Alvarez et al. 2002). Feminist organizations and individuals in Peru, for example, have been at the forefront of the construction and promotion of women's rights with regard to sexuality, most notably sexual rights and lesbian rights. This rights-based work has become increasingly important in local community, national, regional and global feminist cultural politics and policy advocacy (Alvarez 2000). International development agencies, from small NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to the United Nations, have a long history of supporting Southern feminist NGOs and networks.<sup>1</sup> However, although a small minority of these agencies have engaged directly with Southern feminist discourse on sexuality

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'Southern' since this is the term that Latin American/Caribbean, African and Asian feminist movements have chosen for self-identification.



and related rights, they have not yet included those from the UK, either at governmental or non-governmental levels.<sup>2</sup>

In order to empirically ground my study, I have chosen to examine the case of Peruvian feminist NGO discourse and action on sexuality, and how this expression of cultural politics operates and interconnects in different sites of action, within the fields of women's health and human rights. The sites of feminist work on sexuality selected for my study include Lima's low-income settlements and their community-based women's organizations at the local level, and government-related public policy advocacy at the national level. Moving beyond national borders, I examine the case of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights, which feminists from Peru and the Latin America region launched globally at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Kenya in 2007. Also, at the global level, in the field of international development, I have limited my study to the connections between Peruvian feminist discourse on sexuality and that of the UK-based international development sector within which I worked for a period of 18 years.

In this chapter I outline the methodological considerations and approaches I have incorporated into my research, including the period of 15 months' fieldwork in Peru, the UK and at the World Social Forum in Kenya. I focus on exploring feminist and poststructuralist understandings of the situated and partial nature of knowledge production, connecting issues of the nature of knowledge claims with those of the location of the subjects of my research as well as my own.

### **1.1 Rationale, focus and aims of the study**

My decision to study sexuality within the framework of Peruvian feminism and development was inspired by my experience of living and working in Latin America and the Caribbean between 1987 and 2003. After living in Peru for six

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<sup>2</sup> As I have outlined in Chapter Two, the development agencies that have proved the exception to the general rule include the Ford Foundation in the United States, HIVOS and NOVIB in the Netherlands and Sida in Sweden.

years until 1993, as programme director for Progressio, I went on to work on Peru and ten other countries in the region between 1995 and 2003 as manager of the Latin America/Caribbean department of another UK development NGO, Christian Aid.<sup>3</sup> During these two periods, I developed professional and personal relationships with a wide range of feminist activists and organizations, in Peru and regionally, involved in promoting women's rights and empowerment, including sexual and reproductive rights and health at the level of urban and rural 'popular sectors' (*sectores populares*).<sup>4</sup> From the late 1990s I also began to work closely with two of Christian Aid's HIV/AIDS NGO 'partners' in Brazil and Jamaica that specifically named homophobia as a social and health problem for the popular sectors, especially for men and male to female transgender people living with HIV and AIDS.<sup>5</sup> They also addressed this form of discrimination in more general human rights terms for those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). During the 14 years of my experience of working on Latin America and the Caribbean, no other NGOs, networks or social movements, including the feminist movement, had articulated this connection between same-sex sexuality, poverty and development.

Therefore it was only in the last five years of my work in Christian Aid, by incorporating the HIV/AIDS experiences, that I began to make the connection between sexuality and poverty more clearly in my own mind, in discussion with the members of my team and in consultation with Christian Aid partners during regular visits to the region. However, during this period I was unable to convince the directorate of Christian Aid to begin to incorporate discrimination related to same-sex sexuality into its rights-based, anti-discrimination policies at a corporate level. This proved particularly frustrating since Christian Aid has clear corporate commitments to social justice, social inclusion, a rights-based

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<sup>3</sup> Until 2005 Progressio was known as the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis I employ the term 'popular sectors' as a translation of the Spanish term which is deployed by Peruvian social scientists and social movement activists as a political and agentic alternative to categories such as 'the poor', or 'the working class', terms which are respectively deemed paternalistic or which fail to describe the levels of unemployment and informal underemployment that characterize the lives of those on low or no incomes.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'partner' is most frequently used in UK development agencies to refer to organizations, networks or movements that receive any form of support from the donor, for example funding, people employed to provide training, or policy advocacy and campaigning.

approach to development, empowerment of the poor, and challenging discrimination on the basis of class, gender, race, ethnicity, caste and religion. Despite the occasional recognition of male same-sex sexuality within specific HIV/AIDS projects, Christian Aid's development policies and discourses continued to refer to, or simply assume, only heterosexual identity, practices and relationships. With no access to discourse or evidence of the connection between same-sex sexuality beyond the topic of men, trans and HIV/AIDS, I struggled to develop my own analysis or arguments in internal policy debates. After consultation with colleagues working on Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and with contacts in several other UK development NGOs, I realised that this phenomenon was indeed general to all rather than specific to Christian Aid or the Latin America region.

Consequently, my major concern with regard to the evolution of the connection between sexuality, poverty and development is the fact that the complexity and diversity of women's sexuality and gender identities remain unrecognized and undocumented in both feminist and more mainstream development discourse. These silences are problematic in that they reinforce assumptions that 'poor Third World women' are exclusively heterosexual (Jolly 2000, Lind and Share 2003). I have therefore chosen to examine the broad field of sexuality through the lens of women's same-sex sexuality. Through my contact with Peruvian feminists I was aware that they had been developing their cultural politics of sexuality within the national and regional feminist movements, and to a lesser extent within the more recently emerging LGBT movement. Despite their apparent silence on the connections between same-sex sexuality, poverty and development, I argue that UK-based development agencies can gain important insights from how feminists have incorporated perspectives of sexuality into their search for social transformation through the construction of alternative modernities, democracy and development.

In this study I therefore address the following central research questions. Who, collectively and individually, contributes to the construction of feminist conceptualizations of sexuality? How have these meanings changed over time and in relation to the sites in which the movement, organization or individual is located and why? How do conceptualizations of sexuality intersect with other categories of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity? What are the

political effects of the deployment of different meanings of sexuality in terms of hierarchies of knowledge and discourse production, representation, and participation in feminist politics of sexuality? What insights can be gained from these experiences and how could they contribute to debates on feminism, sexuality and international development in the future?

One of the policy-related aims of my research is to contribute to British international development organizations' incipient efforts to explore the relevance and meaning of incorporating sexuality into their policies and programmes. However, by carrying out a critical analysis of Latin American feminist contributions to the field of sexuality, I also hope to provide a constructive contribution to their ongoing reflections and debates about the meanings and effects of their work. Feminists' desire to eradicate socio-economic, gender and sexual inequalities has been channelled not only into translating their agendas into public policies, but also into cultural change based on feminist utopias that re-signify the meanings of human subjectivity and received notions of rights, citizenship and participatory development (Alvarez et al. 1998: 2). My interest in the cultural element of feminist politics adheres to Appadurai's (2004: 59) argument that culture is concerned with the dialogue between aspirations and sedimented traditions, and that the cultural aspirations for the future of the poor and marginalized have radical implications and potential for development and the eradication of poverty. Specifically, as Appadurai asserts, it is the 'capacity' to aspire in the context of poverty and exclusion - '...the capacity to debate, contest, inquire and participate critically' that should be valued and strengthened (ibid.:70). It is this capacity, in the case of the Peruvian feminist movement's discourse on sexuality at different levels and in different locations, that I am particularly interested in examining.

## **1.2. Local – global connections, multi-sited ethnography and travelling concepts**

In exploring the local and global connections of Peruvian feminist discourse on sexuality, my methodology has been informed by anthropological approaches to 'multi-sited ethnography'. Defined by Marcus (1995: 96) as a mode of research that is embedded in a world system, multi-sited ethnography moves out of

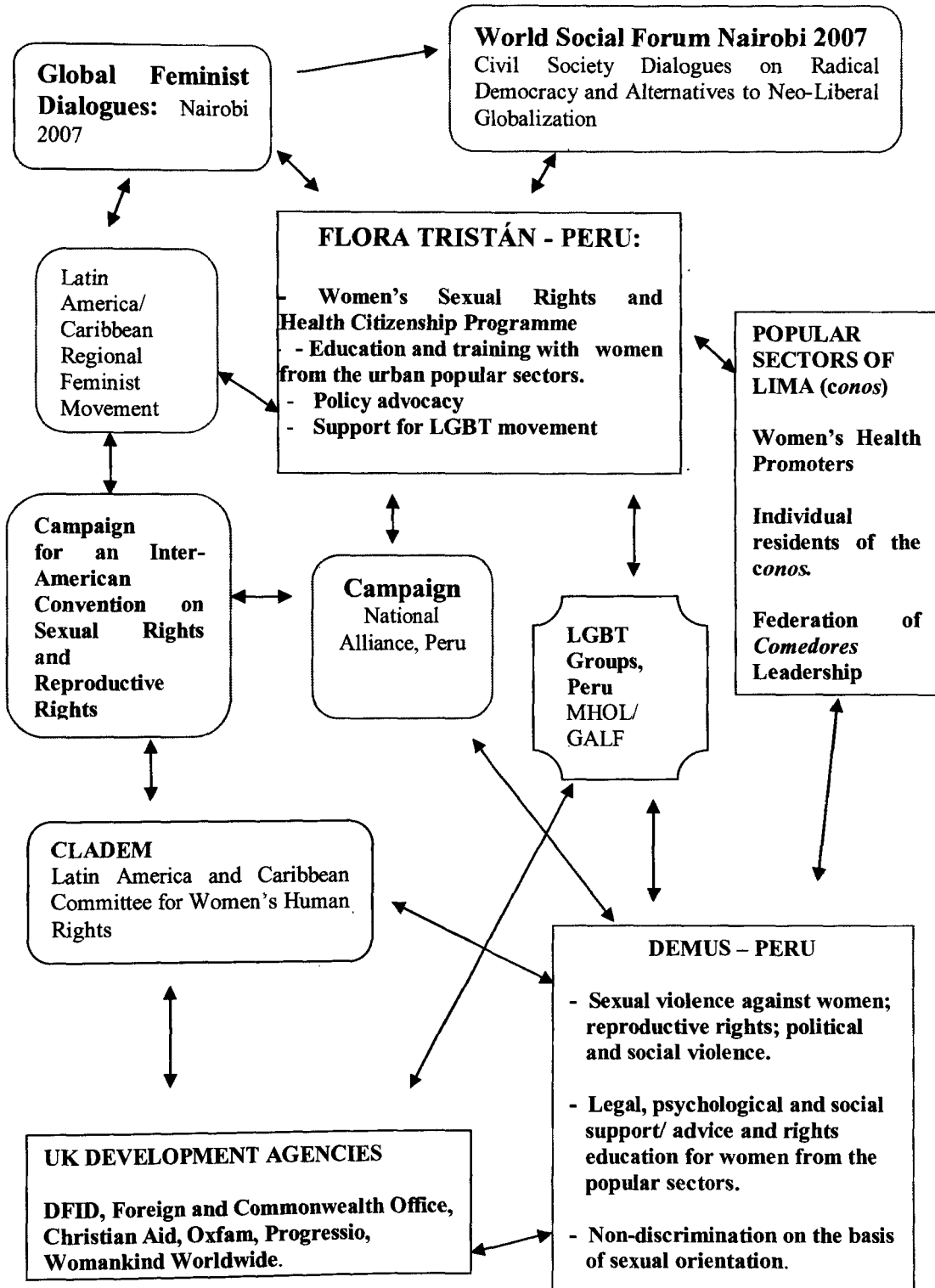
single, local sites of conventional ethnographic research to examine ‘..the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space’. Marcus proposes that in this mobile ethnography, the ethnographer has to ‘grope her way’, following connections, associations and putative relationships. This approach can produce unexpected trajectories of the thread of cultural production across and within multiple sites of activity, and requires the ethnographer to make connections through translations and tracing among different discourses from site to site (ibid.: 97). The power and value of this form of ethnography come to light when it is employed, for example, as a means of researching the social grounds that produce a particular discourse on policy, since this requires different practices and opportunities from those of fieldwork within a situated community that such policy affects (ibid.: 100).

In the case of my research, my fieldwork in Peru began in November 2005 by tracing different sites of feminist discourse within and emanating from two national feminist NGOs, Flora Tristán and Demus. They connected me with locations in Lima’s peripheral *conos* (low-income settlements), including the *comedores populares* (community kitchens), as well as individual women’s homes. I also moved around Lima’s middle class neighbourhoods, visiting the institutional infrastructure of feminist, LGBT and other civil society organizations, government ministries, political parties, universities and cultural centres. After nine months in Peru I followed the trail of Peruvian feminist international connections, returning first to the UK to visit the offices of development agencies in London and Oxford. Finally, in January 2007 I visited Nairobi, Kenya, where Peruvian feminists, together with others from the Latin America region, presented the regional Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights at the global Feminist Dialogues conference and the World Social Forum.

Following feminist discourse on sexuality also led me to travel thematically, predominantly through the domains of health, human rights, poverty, democracy and development. I also connected with different modes of feminist action, including women’s ‘popular’ (grassroots) education and organizational strengthening, government policy advocacy, as well as feminist movement debates and networking, including dialogues with the LGBT movement. For a summary of the principal sites of my research and their

connections, see Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The principal research sites, and their interconnections in Peru, the UK, the Latin America region and the World Social Forum:**



When I refer to feminist and development 'discourse', I do so from a Foucauldian understanding of the term, as the domain of all statements that have meanings and effects, and his concern with the conditions of emergence of statements, including the limits, gaps and exclusions '...that divide up their referential, validate only one series of modalities, enclose groups of co-existence, and prevent certain forms of use' (Foucault 2002: 124). In considering the emergence of this understanding of statements, Foucault emphasized the connection between power and knowledge in discourse, and that the world is not divided between accepted and excluded discourses, but comprises a multiplicity of discursive elements that represent complex and unstable processes, including things said and concealed (Foucault 1979: 100). Foucault was concerned with examining how discourse transmits and produces power, as well as how it undermines power and becomes a point of resistance. As he noted, this includes the gaps and exclusions, since he considered silence and secrecy '...a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its hold, and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance (ibid.: 101).

Taking account of such gaps and exclusions is clearly pertinent in my research, since I am concerned with understanding discursive processes that produce silences with regard to women's same-sex sexuality, particularly in the field of UK international development, but also within Latin American feminist discourse on sexual and reproductive rights and their connections with women's health, rights and gender-based violence, for example. Foucault's concern with the ways in which power and knowledge join in discourse has guided both my analysis of the relationship between Peruvian feminism and global contexts such as UK-based international development or the World Social Forum, as well as within each of these domains.

When carrying out multi-sited ethnography, Marcus suggests that if the object of study traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols and metaphors can guide the design of ethnography, requiring the researcher to 'follow the metaphor' (Marcus 1995:108). With respect to feminist and international development discourse, I am particularly interested in examining the concept-metaphors and categories they deploy, with their inherent ideas and values, and what happens to them when they travel. Similar to Marcus, Bal (2002) advocates a concept-based

methodology for interdisciplinary cultural analysis in response to the challenge of addressing the ways in which the meanings of concepts change as they 'travel' across fields of knowledge. Bal's approach of employing concepts as a tool for analysis has proved insightful for my research as I have explored the different meanings of sexuality constructed in the fields sexual health and rights, women's human rights, LGBT rights, democracy and international development.

When examining the effects of meanings as they travel, I have also given priority to considering the role of the concept-metaphors in maintaining ambiguity and a productive tension between universal claims and specific historical contexts (Moore 2004:71). This has entailed, for example, examining the meanings, representations and universal claims of sexual identity categories included in rights-based discourse, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, and those that I have encountered outside this discourse, such as the terms *machona* and *marimacha* referring to women's same-sex sexuality in Peru. I consider the deconstruction of concepts and identity categories as both a political and ethical tool, following Butler's argument that '...the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated (1990: 189). Moreover, deconstruction questions the privileging of identity as the site of bearers of the truth, and constantly looks into how truths are produced, rather than the exposure of an error (Spivak 1993: 27).

In this sense, my aim is not to examine feminist or international development knowledge and discourse in order to identify 'errors' or 'correct' approaches, but to understand how concepts and categories are deployed, who participates, who is represented and the political effects of these connections and disconnections. As Bal (2002: 11) notes, concepts are dynamic in themselves, and '... while groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may *mean*, we gain insight into what it can *do*. It is in the *groping* that the valuable work lies...not because they mean the same thing to everyone, but because they don't'.

When I refer to the meanings of a concept, I am therefore not only referring to the explicit definitions developed by groups and fields of study, but also their pre-theoretical commitments, their underlying normative assumptions



and principles (Moore 2004:74). With regard to the concept of sexuality, I have found this aspect of analysis particularly important, due to the complex relationship between sexuality and the associated concepts adopted by feminist cultural politics in different fields of activism, including, for example, sexual rights, lesbian rights, sexual diversity, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As these associated concepts have been adopted and adapted over time and deployed for political ends, their meanings have been constructed and defined through the interaction of theory and political action. Sexuality, however, acts as a foundational concept which is often only implicit or absent in discourse or referred to only in passing, often evading definitions and critical reflection. Consequently, underlying assumptions come to the fore, reinforcing exclusionary norms and leaving certain sexual meanings and subjectivities unintelligible in discourse (Butler 1997: 11). My major concern is that if subjects are unintelligible in discourse, they inevitably remain absent and excluded from resources provided by policies, programmes, advocacy and project or political activities on a daily basis.

### **1.3. Partial knowledge, inter-subjectivity and the role of the individual.**

In Burawoy's discussion of the methodological approaches he and his fellow researchers adopted for their collection of multi-sited global ethnography, he states that: 'Within any field, whether it had global reach or was bounded by community or nation, our fieldwork had to assemble a picture of the whole by recognizing diverse perspectives from the parts, from singular but connected sites' (Burawoy 2000: 5). Other scholars, however, have critiqued the notion of this global 'whole' because it represents an implicit image (as opposed to the assumed specificity of the 'local'), presupposing a 'totalized and totalizing vista just out of view, when what globalization has done is to break the whole down into parts but without us being able to tell how the parts could be fitted back together again' (Moore 2004: 76).

On this point, Strathern refers to those who aim to understand society as a whole as researchers who are troubled by the ethnographer's own categories deployed to dismantle that 'whole', and suggests that '.. rather than attempting

to dismantle holistic systems, we should strive for a holistic apprehension of the manner in which our subjects dismantle their own constructs' (1992: 91). This exemplifies the approach I have taken in my study of feminist and development politics and policies – to examine their own conceptualizations of sexuality, and how they construct and deconstruct them. This has, of course, included integrating my own interpretation, from my initial selection of the foci of my research (women's same-sex sexuality, Peruvian and Latin American feminisms and their relationship with UK development agencies, for example), to my reflections on my findings resulting from the connections of the different sites in my study. Thus I follow Marcus's (1995: 97) proposal to understand the global, or world system, not as the holistic frame that gives context to the in-depth study of peoples or local subjects, but as integral to and embedded in, in a piecemeal way, discontinuous multi-sited objects of study. As Strathern (2005: xxix) argues, the study of these parts leads to the concept of partial connections, as partiality only works as a connection, since a part by itself is a whole.

When considering how to approach the local and global knowledge practices in my study, I also have gained important insights from Riles' (2001) study of Fijian state and non-governmental networking and information exchange before and during the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. Taking up the methodological challenge of studying the relationship of the global to the local, and of dispersed and culturally diverse global phenomena, Riles emphasizes the impossibility of producing 'thick description', the familiar methodology of anthropological ethnography, since the global does not exist as a sphere or place of social action open to study, and there is no place 'outside' the subject matter from which to describe it. She therefore proposes that ethnographic description of global phenomena 'from the inside' take the form of demonstration of specific data (in her case the network actors' own artefacts) that serve as tools for bringing what is already known, and its subtle differences, into view. This approach requires a selective erasure of detail, rendering the description 'thin' with the intention of not fully describing the subject, but of 'channelling attention' (ibid.: 20).

Riles notes that at first the network knowledge practices and artefacts she studied appeared 'already known', similar to those of her own as a social science researcher, including writing funding proposals, collecting data, drafting

documents and organizing meetings. However, over time she encountered subtle differences between the universal practices of the networks and social science: 'The former takes too much care in matters of procedure, punctuation and formatting and too little in matters of substance – revealing the patterned quality of Network communication – its aesthetics' (2001: 17). This led Riles to conclude that the dominant mode of feminist analysis had shifted from critique to networking (ibid.:174). Although I applied a similar methodological framework to Riles, my study, however, produced a different set of tools for analysis – not the artefacts and aesthetics of feminist networking, but the 'matters of substance'. As Riles states of the findings of her study: 'The concern with questions such as "what it means to be female", and the possibilities for a utopian feminist project would seem utterly foreign to the document producers I know'. By contrast, as I demonstrate in Chapter 7, my research is concerned with Peruvian and Latin American feminist networking that has taken new, post-United Nations policy advocacy directions. Since the turn of the new millennium, they are seeking to develop a new cultural politics of the movement, articulate new meanings of democracy, and, through their work on sexual rights, question more than ever 'what it means to be female' in a utopian feminist radical democracy.

My choice of concepts as tools for analysis therefore reflects this current historical moment of Latin American feminism, and the movement's knowledge practices in the context of the surge of counter-hegemonic, anti-neoliberal globalization transnational interactions of social movements, NGOs and networks exemplified by the World Social Forum process. Similar to Riles's approach, it is not my intention to cover all Latin American or even Peruvian fields of feminist knowledge or sites of action on women's sexuality, but to 'channel attention' to different meanings of sexuality and their effects in different sites, and the consequent production of normative assumptions, inequalities and exclusions.

When examining what concepts do, and what effects their meanings produce, Bal highlights the importance considering their potential inter-subjectivity, which she considers '... a concern that connects procedure with power and empowerment, with pedagogy and the transmittability of knowledge, with inclusiveness and exclusion (2002: 11). In this sense, inter-subjective

communication is at the heart of concepts when they are understood as the sites of debate and awareness of difference (ibid.: 13). Exploring inter-subjectivity in my research has been central to understanding the ways in which an individual, institution, network or movement constructs different meanings of sexuality in different sites and at different moments in time. On my research travels I have found sexuality to be not only temporally contingent but also subject to pressures according to the audience, the object of advocacy or pedagogy, or the identities and interests of the other groups or movements engaged in dialogue, negotiation or direct conflict. Moreover, the subjectivity of the individual - her interests, why she raises certain questions, chooses particular methods, and arrives at specific conclusions also needs to be explored (Bal 2002: 12). Taking into account the individual can therefore help us to understand how different feminists, within the same field of knowledge, for example women's human rights or LGBT human rights, construct different meanings of sexuality, and consequently produce different political effects. This has been particularly important in my research due to the leadership and high profile within work on sexuality of some key feminist individuals. When considering the partial connections of knowledge, Strathern (2005: 199) argues that as components circulate, '...they are never equal to what makes them work, which is their centering in the person. It is people's perceptual faculty that grounds "meaning" and thus forms the circuit of communication between the disparate components'. Following the concept also therefore led me to 'follow the people' (Marcus 1995: 106), to examine how people themselves embody the interconnections between the local and the global within specific contexts, and how they deploy concepts in their imagined and engaged worlds (Moore 2004: 86).

#### **1.4 Situated knowledge production and questions of difference**

In addition to the anthropological and cultural studies approaches to methodology outlined above, my explorations of the production of feminist knowledge of sexuality have also been guided by feminist epistemology. Western feminist critiques of modern epistemology began, from the 1970s, by questioning general, universal, essentialist scientific accounts of 'man' and

society, and arguing that all knowledge is situated. (cf. Harding 1991; Code 1991; Haraway 1991). Far from being neutral, knowledge has traditionally been produced and authorized by people in dominant political, social and economic positions, revealing the hierarchies and political commitments of every epistemological position (Alcoff and Potter 1993: 3). Values, power, politics and knowledge are therefore understood as intrinsically connected, positing knowledge as neither given nor fixed, but the site of struggle and contestation.

While feminist critiques of modern epistemology were initially focused on bringing knowledge of male bias and women's subordination into scientific discourse, from the early 1980s they moved on to critique essentialist accounts of women and sisterhood, and explore how power relations, identities and differences between women the 'politics of location' (Rich 1987) are exercised in the production of feminist knowledge. As I examine further in Chapter 2, certain axes of difference took centre stage in these early debates, in particular social class, race and sexuality (cf. Jaggar 2004 [1983]; Hartsock 2004 [1983]; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Amos and Parmar 1984; hooks 1984; Lorde 1981; Rich 1987). Rather than proposing additive models, these epistemic debates have developed by exploring the need to understand the complexities posed by the intersecting and mutually constitutive axes of differentiation, defined by Brah and Phoenix (2004: 75) as '..simultaneously subjective, structural, and about social positioning and everyday practices'.

Particularly salient to my own field of research, and my own location within it, has been the globalization of feminist theories of epistemology and methodology. In the late 1980s, debates about difference, power and whose knowledge counts in feminist theory and politics began to incorporate transnational, 'Third World', anthropological and post-colonial feminisms. Mohanty (1988), for example, argued that much of the Western feminist discourse and representation of women in the Third World at that time was based on an ethnocentric and universalistic cross-cultural analysis of gender/sexual difference that relied on singular, monolithic notions of patriarchy. This discourse produced a First/Third world dichotomy and failed to take account of the complexities of third world women's lives as they are constituted through national and global structures. As a consequence, in the ensuing years feminist cross-cultural and transnational research has explored the

differences, inequalities and exclusions relating to women's lives and global feminism and has incorporated analyses of geo-politics, globalization, the post-colonial nation state, citizenship, economic status, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion, for example (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Lewin 2006).

In my study of Peruvian/Latin American feminist and international development discourse I have applied these epistemological considerations of difference, location or positionality to each of the sites of knowledge of sexuality that I studied. This entails critiquing not only dominant development discourse, but also that of Latin American feminism that has been clearly subjugated in international development theory and practice to date. Although I believe that Peruvian feminists' knowledge, or 'standpoint' is of important epistemic value, I do not assume that feminists in Peru are separate from or impervious to the complex inequalities that permeate all forms of social, political and economic life in Latin America and globally. As Haraway (1991: 191) argues, the standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent positions' and as such are not exempt from critical re-examination, deconstruction and interpretation. Thus, although feminist knowledge of sexuality may be subjugated within international development discourse, the hierarchies within feminist movements also produce inequalities and exclusions that need to be taken into account. My interest in exploring the intersections of difference has therefore been central to my approach to understanding how feminist and international development conceptualizations of sexuality connect (or not) with gendered, racial, ethnic, religious, generational and class subject positions and analyses.

### *Locating the self in research design and fieldwork*

The questions of power, difference and location in feminist knowledge production outlined above are equally pertinent to my own subjectivity and relationships with my research participants before, during and after my fieldwork in Peru, Kenya and the UK. As Code (1993: 20) argues, exploring the researcher's subjectivity helps the reader understand the political investment of the research, as well as the accountability, or epistemic responsibility, of the

researcher, not only to the evidence, but also to the people or communities being researched.

I am aware that my relationship with my research participants has been a continual process of exploration, negotiation and change since I first conceived the idea in 2001 while still working with Christian Aid. Until then, Peruvian and Latin American feminist activists and British NGO staff had known me principally for my work with Progressio and Christian Aid since 1987. In Peru, and later across the region, I was responsible for allocating and negotiating funding and other forms of support and participating in the planning monitoring and evaluation (PME) processes of NGOs and social movements, including those identifying as feminist. Over the years this professional relationship was marked by our combined efforts to overcome some of the negative effects of the unequal power relationship between 'donor' and 'recipient'. This included agreeing upon more secure long-term institutional funding commitments rather than occasional project-based support. In Christian Aid my team established a five-year strategic planning process for each country in the region, in dialogue with all the partners as well as specialists on different topics from the region. We also negotiated individual partnership contracts outlining the commitments and responsibilities of both parties, including a two or three year period of notice from Christian Aid for the cessation of funding. 'Partnership' also included a commitment from Christian Aid to support the partner in times of political or environmental emergencies, through extra resources for disaster relief or lobbying and protection in the case of human rights violations (the latter very common in Peru, Colombia and Haiti, for example). Over the years both Progressio and Christian Aid also increasingly disrupted the West/Other dichotomy by employing staff from the Latin America/Caribbean region to manage the national and regional programmes.

My relationship with feminist NGOs and networks while employed by Progressio and Christian Aid has had a direct influence on my academic research, in terms of both content and outcomes. In my efforts to overcome the West/Other dichotomy and create greater transnational feminist solidarity and accountability through my research, I have followed Alexander's and Mohanty's (1997: xix) suggestion that the researcher could employ a methodological strategy that makes visible and intelligible (to the West) the

organizational practices and writings of Third World women through a discrete case-study approach. In consultation with a variety of feminist and LGBT activists and academics in Peru, I selected specific case studies as a means of exploring feminist knowledge and discourse in context. I initiated this consultation before I left Christian Aid, with three women in Peru who have been involved in the Peruvian and regional feminist movements since their creation. The first, Virginia Vargas, is also one of the founders of one of the two NGOs in my study: Flora Tristán. We met when I arrived in Peru in the late 1980s, on a personal and social level in feminist spaces, rather than a work-related level. After my departure from Peru our friendship developed further when Virginia was employed to teach a course on new social movements on the Masters in Women and Development programme I was attending in the Netherlands in 1994. We then met again at the UN women's conference in Beijing in 1995, and the Beijing +5 conference in New York in 2000.

My second contact was Roxana Vásquez, who I met in 1997 when she was coordinator of CLADEM, a regional women's human rights network funded by Christian Aid. I was responsible for managing Christian Aid's relationship with the network, including visiting Roxana in the regional office in Lima. Previously Roxana had held the position of director of Demus, the other case study NGO in my research. My third key contact in Lima was Victoria Villanueva, a manager of another long-established feminist NGO, Movimiento Manuela Ramos, funded by Christian Aid. My choice of Peru as a key site for my research was therefore influenced by my history there, since it was the country in the region where feminist activists and I were most familiar with each other, both professionally and personally. After regular correspondence by e mail before my fieldwork, all three confirmed their interest in participating in my research and assisting me with my research design and contacts with others possible participants.

With regard to gaining access to different sites and case studies, when I arrived in Lima in November 2005 to begin my fieldwork, I met Virginia and Roxana to explore in more detail research options at local, national, regional and global levels. Wolf (1996) argues that reflexivity on the part of the researcher is crucial with regard to the concrete problems and ethical dilemmas of fieldwork for feminist researchers attempting to produce knowledge 'with'



women rather than 'on' women. The role that the researcher's own interventions and self representation play in defining the kind of knowledge that she produces is therefore important to consider (ibid.: 10). In my case, this included bringing them up to date with my experience of attempting to discuss sexuality within Christian Aid, and my reasons for choosing to leave the development sector and carry out in-depth research on Southern feminist knowledge of the topic.

In my approach to exploring my location and subjectivity with all my research participants, I chose not to represent myself by listing adjectives or assigning identity labels (Skeggs 2002: 356). I was aware, however, that, in discussing sexuality with my research participants, they would have questions and opinions about my sexuality that needed to be explored and made explicit (Markowitz 1999: 162; Kulick 1995: 4). However, instead of employing a specific sexual identity category to describe myself, I provided a brief account of the changing nature of my sexuality over time and my history of work in Peru and other countries in the region, and focused on the central rationale and aims of my research. As Skeggs notes, each researcher represents '...a position, an investment, a habitus, a history and a politics' (2002: 368), which, beyond the summaries I provided on introducing myself, were aspects of myself that I suggested my research participants could ask about further if they wished. Notably, the only people who assigned to me the identity 'lesbian' were women in the LGBT movement, based on their knowledge of my relationship with a Peruvian woman during the years I lived in Lima. Among staff of feminist NGOs, and leaders and members of low-income communities, however, the questions that emerged over the time I spent with them were less about any sexual identity category with which I could identify and more about my feelings, problems I had encountered and how I overcame them, family, the political aims of my research, and in particular, when would I return to Peru to share the results of my work with them.

Perhaps as significant as my methods for exploring self-representation, before and during my fieldwork, were the ways in which the three main gatekeepers, Virginia, Roxana and Vicky, (re)presented me to members of Flora Tristán, Demus, and the Campaign, as well as other members of the feminist and LGBT movement and women in the *conos*. They described me as a feminist, 'an old friend of Peruvian feminism', as someone who had stayed

working in Peru during the armed conflict until it ended in 1992, in solidarity with Peruvian NGOs and social movements. They also emphasized that I spoke 'very good Spanish' and that I was '*casi peruana*' (almost Peruvian). This recasting of my national identity in no way attempted to negate my identity as *blanca* (white) and *gringa* (Western), but there was an implicit message of a guarantee of their trust in me which was crucial to my access to different people and groups. Their status in the feminist movement and contacts with the LGBT movement, combined with their approval of my presence and my research topic, were key to the chain of connections that followed and the positive responses to my requests for documents, interviews and participant observation.

### **1.5 Fieldwork methods**

My specific choice of Flora Tristán and Demus as case studies was influenced by the fact that they were the only feminist organizations in Peru working on sexual rights with women from the popular sectors of Lima. Including women's knowledge from these areas was crucial to my study. My possibilities for gaining contact with potential research participants in this way, often described as network or snowball sampling, were therefore characterized by the relations between individuals and their patterns of social relations. This method is particularly appropriate when researching sensitive topics and stigmatized people (Lee 1993: 65), such as, in my study, the topic of women's same-sex sexuality. The network method proved very productive within the feminist movement. Over the period of my fieldwork in Lima, for example, I was invited to all the relevant national public policy advocacy events. I was also welcomed to relevant meetings in Flora Tristán, Demus and the national and regional alliance of the Campaign, as well as Flora and Demus' rights-based education workshops with women's community organizations in the *conos*.

However, I also encountered limitations in the effectiveness of the snowball approach. For example, in the early days of my fieldwork, I was advised by Flora Tristán and Demus staff that they did not know of any women from the *conos* who identified as 'lesbian', or who were known to have had a relationship with another woman. Nor did they know of any individuals from

these areas who could talk to me specifically about women's same-sex sexuality in that context. I then contacted some lesbian feminist activists in two LGBT organizations, the MHOL and GALF<sup>6</sup>, who I had also met socially in the 1980s, but they also had no female contacts living in the *conos*. Finally it was Vicky Villanueva in Manuela Ramos who provided me with my first contact with two women who had been living together for twenty years in one of the districts of the *conos* and who had been involved in Manuela Ramos during the 1980s. After Vicky contacted them, both women agreed to participate in my research. They were surprised and delighted to be asked to tell their story, inviting me to their house to interview them.

Several months later the director of Demus and a human rights lawyer in Flora Tristán, both involved in Peru's LGBT movement, also introduced me to two women they knew living in the *conos* who had talked to them about their relationships with women and how it had affected their lives. Again, the personal introductions and recommendations were key to each woman accepting my request for an interview. Overall, however, the lack of interaction between the feminist and LGBT movements' work on same-sex sexuality and women from the *conos* contributed to my own difficulty in locating and approaching women there who could bring this aspect of sexuality into the picture. In this sense, gaining contacts through networks is productive when tracing the connections between social actors, but simultaneously problematic in terms of the disconnections between actors (Lee 1993: 67). However, this method of tracing connections brought into clear view the specific disconnections between actors that I then attempted to explore in more detail.

In examining the case of the connections between feminist work on sexuality in Peru and British development agencies, my interviews with managers in Flora Tristán, Demus and the Campaign provided a picture of their funding sources. It soon became clear that support for work on sexuality and related rights from the UK was limited to Womankind Worldwide, for Demus, and the British Council, (with funds from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO) for MHOL. While in Lima I interviewed the representative of the

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<sup>6</sup> MHOL (the Homosexual Movement of Lima) and GALF (the Lesbian Feminist Consciousness-Raising Group) were the first Peruvian LGBT groups to be founded, in the mid-1980s.

British Council responsible for its relationship with MHOL, but I also chose to explore the lack of support from Oxfam GB and Progressio, which have Lima-based field offices. On my return to the UK I then traced these connections further, visiting Womankind Worldwide and the FCO, and exploring the disconnections further with Oxfam GB, Progressio, Christian Aid and DFID. In these cases, I took advantage of my own network of contacts in each of the agencies in order to overcome the potential difficulty of requesting meetings with staff to discuss a topic, sexuality, that was not an element of their work or development thinking.

Finally, in order to explore further the transnational, global connections of Peruvian feminism and sexuality, Roxana Vásquez agreed to my request to study the regional feminist campaign initiated by CLADEM that she had been coordinating since 1999, titled the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights, of which Flora Tristán and Demus are both members. During the period of my fieldwork in Lima, I interviewed Roxana and observed one Regional Alliance and One National Alliance Campaign meeting, at which stage the Campaign members decided to ‘go global’ for the first time at the World Social Forum in Nairobi the following year. These meetings also enabled me to gain a wider acceptance of my study of the Campaign among its leaders from different countries in the region, and of my future presence in Nairobi as an observer of their work.

Although I have referred to ‘multi-sited ethnography’ with regard to my methodology, my research does not adhere solely to the traditional anthropological method of participant observation, although it was one of the methods I employed. As Poster (2002: 132) notes, feminist scholars have often defined “ethnography” broadly to include a variety of qualitative methods including oral histories and interviews, in order to improve subject-researcher relations and minimize distances between the two. In this vein, I prioritized structured, semi-structured and open-ended interviews and focus group discussions with all of the main individuals or groups in my study. Due to the small number of feminists working on sexuality, especially same-sex sexuality, interviews and group discussions were more in-depth in nature and repeated over a period of several months with a relatively small number of informants. This approach provided time for my informants to explore the historical

contexts of their current work and knowledge and to reflect on their own assumptions and constraints with regard to sexuality as a political and social issue. I also introduced other qualitative research methods, such as the study of discourse produced in publications and internal organizational documents and web pages, in order to explore more formal discourse as well as the way in which it was interpreted by individuals.

### **1.6 Fieldwork dilemmas, ethics and accountability**

In my past work, between 1987 and 2003, my visits to Peruvian and regional feminist organizations and networks had been predominantly defined by my role as a manager of a UK development programme with its financial and other resources. Returning to Peru as a student and researcher, for the first time my visits were not integrated into local NGO work plans and staff or management time. No longer a 'partner' of any of the groups, I initially relied on the strongest personal and professional relationships I had developed in the past. In spite of these contacts and of returning to my 'second home' and my old friends from the 1980s and 90s, one of the problems I encountered during the first phase of my fieldwork in Peru was my own sense of isolation and lack of status or influence. Carrying out multi-sited ethnography entailed moving between many different sites of individual and collective discourse and action without being 'attached' to any of them in a full or even part-time capacity. I chose not to work for a particular group, or develop an especially intimate relationship (whether sexual or not) with any of the leading activists on sexuality, although different types and degrees of friendships did develop with all the central participants as I spent more time with them.

Each individual and institution within the Peruvian feminist and LGBT social movements had a specific position of power and knowledge and the relationships among them were sometimes tense and conflictive. I therefore usually arrived at and departed from interviews, events and meetings alone, and made a conscious decision to always converse with a variety of people in any location, even if I knew that some were in conflict with others. Always being located on the outside, in this sense, left me acutely aware of my dependence on each individual's and group's willingness to support my research goals and to

take time out of their very busy daily activities to be interviewed, particularly at lunchtimes, evenings and weekends when the majority of sexuality activists could take time out from their paid jobs. I was also dependent on their good will in order to gain information about and access to different public or private institutional events, debates and meetings, many of which were organized and advertised at short notice by e mail or through calls to my mobile phone.

Each time I began a relationship with a new participant or group, I provided them with an outline of the aims of my research and my own relationship to the central topics of development cooperation, feminism and sexuality. In particular I highlighted my interest in sharing Peruvian feminist knowledge of sexuality with British development agencies, with the ultimate aim of attempting to bring women's same-sex sexuality, and sexuality more broadly, onto their agendas and into their policies and programmes. I clarified, however, that I expected this to be a long and complicated process, even though I was well positioned in the UK to raise the issues and seek alliances with others attempting to do the same. Not only was I aware of the need to discuss my accountability to my research participants, but they also voiced their expectations of me. Flora Tristán, Demus and the Campaign, for example, all requested that at the end of my fieldwork I provide feedback to each of them on my initial thoughts about my research findings. We also agreed that on completion of my thesis, we would discuss different ways in which I could present my work to them in Spanish, verbally and in written form.

I was also clear to all from the outset that one of my central questions relating to feminist work on sexuality in Peru was: why are women from the popular sectors absent from feminist and LGBT discourse on same-sex sexuality, lesbian rights or non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation? I was aware that this question brought the sensitive issues of racial, ethnic and class or economic differences and inequalities directly into my discussions with both feminist and LGBT movements, issues that were rarely raised in their documents that I had read prior to my arrival in Peru. I therefore framed this question within a concern for exploring the difficulties and constraints of discussing same-sex sexuality with women from the popular sectors, rather than raising the idea of trying to identify racist and classist tendencies within the movements, organizations or individuals. All of my

informants responded well to this focus on constraints and problems, and to the rare opportunity to explore for themselves this particular question.

Consequently, over time, I began to feel less isolated and more involved and welcome in the different feminist sites of my research. However, if my representations of my sexuality and the aims and approaches of my research had proved productive, being a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed, female foreigner was a cause of constant anxiety for myself and for others. As Datta (2008: 191) has noted, despite researchers' in-depth analyses of the situated nature of their research and their relationships with the informants or participants, there has been limited analysis of how different places within the field influence the process of fieldwork and the product. My choice of Lima in particular as a central location raised old and very familiar problems of my own and others' personal safety, most notably when travelling to and around the areas of urban poverty, such as the *conos* and connecting sections of central Lima. Before I departed for Peru in 1987, my managers in Progressio in London requested that I take a course on self-defence (which I did) due to the high levels of political and criminal violence in Lima and the majority of rural areas of Peru. I was also informed that one of the previous female directors of the programme had been raped while visiting one of the partner organizations and had resigned and left Peru as a result. During my six-year stay in Peru I managed to avoid any direct experience of political or sexual violence, but after five years I and a close (Peruvian) friend were abducted at gunpoint by two men in a middle class district one evening, resulting in my friend being shot in the chest. Fortunately she survived and made a full recovery over time, and although I escaped physically unscathed, the event deepened my sense of insecurity in Lima's streets and caused friends and colleagues at the time to become naturally very protective and concerned about my safety.

When I returned to Lima twelve years later for my fieldwork, those who knew me still talked about this event and provided me with detailed advice on how to reduce the risk of another attack while out and about in the streets and public transport. Although the armed conflict had ended, criminal street violence was still a major problem. Travelling safely on my own around the middle class areas of Lima was possible due to 'safe taxi' services with special phone numbers that I kept in my mobile phone. Unfortunately, these taxi drivers

would not travel to the *conos* as they considered them too dangerous. Travelling by public transport (buses) was also considered very unsafe for foreigners and especially women. After consulting with staff in Demus and Flora Tristán, I therefore negotiated an agreement with one of their drivers, Cesar, to take me in his taxi each time I needed to visit an area of the *conos*. For four months we visited two different districts safely on average twice a week. Cesar's knowledge of the districts was crucial as addresses were obscure and the streets rarely had visible names or numbers.

However, two months before I left Lima, on the way to one of the districts, we were attacked in Cesar's taxi in central Lima by two men who launched a rock through my passenger window. Two young volunteers from Demus in the back of the taxi were left shocked but unhurt, while Cesar's arms were covered in cuts from the shattered glass, and the rock fractured a bone in my hand. Consequently, the director of Demus decided not to send those volunteers back to the *conos* for several weeks. Once again, I was left with the sensation that as a foreigner in Lima attracting the attention of criminals, I had placed my Peruvian companions in danger. However, I was also determined not to allow one bad experience to stop me continuing my interviews and observation in the *conos*. After a long discussion with Cesar, we agreed to resume our visits, albeit using a different route, and after I had dyed my hair dark brown in an effort to attract less attention in the streets.

The level of concern for my safety among participants in my research before and after this incident also contributed to breaking down any simplistic notions of the privileged and powerful Western researcher, as I was in many ways dependent on them for my personal protection in the *conos*, as well as for their willingness to take time out of their busy days and trust me enough to talk with me about very personal and often secret aspects of their lives.

Although travelling to and from the *conos* during my fieldwork was less dangerous than during the period of the armed conflict, the combination of high transport costs and risks to personal safety continues to present a challenge to any individual or group working with Lima's popular sectors. It was clear to me that these costs and risks of travelling in and out of the *conos* need to be taken into account when asking why women from the popular sectors' knowledge and experiences are so often absent from the discourse of the LGBT movement, at



least those groups such as GALF that rely heavily on volunteers and rarely receive any funding to cover their expenses.

Compared to my stay in Lima, my three-month period of fieldwork with the British development agencies was a very different experience in terms of the majority of my research methods, my personal safety and feeling very familiar with and more 'on the inside' of this field of work. In my presentation of my research topic and aims, and my subjectivity, I employed the same approach as in all the sites of study in Peru. Apart from two instances of participant observation in DIFD of debates on sexual rights and diversity in the workplace, I relied principally on one to two hours of semi-structured interviews with specific staff members I had selected in advance, according to their professional role in their institution. I targeted those working on sexuality, gender, rights, Peru and Latin America more broadly. Again, I contacted first individuals I had met through my previous work with Christian Aid and Progressio, and after initial interviews they recommended me to specific colleagues they considered important to include in my research.

Similar to my experience in Lima's *conos*, the major difficulty in identifying potential research informants in the UK development agencies arose when seeking to contact women who did not conform to heterosexual norms. Apart from one individual in DFID titled the 'sexual orientation champion', there was no institutional connection between women's same-sex sexuality and their work responsibilities or debates on development. I therefore had to rely on confidential and secret recommendations from members of staff who I knew to others who they thought may like to be interviewed by me. Given the time limitations on this element of my fieldwork (12 weeks) I was only able to contact and interview three women from the six agencies who could discuss their ideas and experiences of the agencies from a non-normative perspective.

It is important to note that although all of the informants in my research in Peru expressed regular concern for my safety, I did explore with them, and with those in the UK agencies, their own needs in terms of protection and anonymity. I always ensured that the locations of our interviews were of their choice, and was careful to avoid mentioning terms such as 'lesbian' with them with others present unless I was sure I was not calling attention to a particular individual whose sexuality was not public knowledge. I have also used

pseudonyms for all the informants except for the high-profile contacts in Lima who are easily identifiable due to their positions in feminist and LGBT organizations or networks and their public profile on sexual and/or LGBT rights. These are Virginia Vargas, Vicky Villanueva, Roxana Vásquez, Cecilia Olea, Paul Flores, and Susel Paredes.

By the time I had completed my fieldwork in Lima and the UK, I had strengthened my relationship with the two Peruvians leading the work of the Campaign at the World Social Forum in Nairobi – Roxana Vásquez, and Cecilia Olea from Flora Tristán. During my stay in Peru they had asked me to act as an interpreter for them in one of their meetings in Demus which included visitors from India, and in Nairobi I offered to continue this unpaid assistance. This included interpreting in two four-hour public debates of the Campaign Manifesto in the Forum, and many ad hoc moments of discussion between Roxana and English-speaking individuals during the three-day Feminist Dialogues prior to the Forum, and the Forum itself. At the end of this experience, in our final interview for my research, Roxana and Cecilia asked me to write a paper for their next Campaign publication on ‘sexuality and poverty’, based on my fieldwork in the *conos* of Lima. Rather than take a defensive stance on the lack of connection between these two concepts in Peruvian and Latin American feminist discourse, they highlighted it as a major challenge for the Campaign, and requested my input as a means of exploring the topic further. Gradually, over the period of my fieldwork, my location had shifted from an external researcher taking the Campaign as an object of study, to an occasional volunteer worker and contributor to the Campaign and its process of knowledge production. This shift in relationship connects with Marcus’s (1995: 113) notion of the ‘ethnographer as circumstantial activist’, since in conducting multi-sited research, one finds oneself with a range of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. The condition of my shifting personal positions in relation to my research subjects, located in different and overlapping discourses, generates a sense of doing more than just ethnography, and it is this quality that provides a sense of being an activist (ibid.: 114). This sense of activism is notably enhanced, however, when one of the sites of study is that of a programme of global production of knowledge and discourse. Led by feminists in the South, the Campaign is, however, a global programme within which

feminists researchers such as myself from the North have an integral role to play 'on the inside' that transforms more traditional practices of participant observation and other qualitative methods of studying the 'other'.

### **1.7 Organization of the thesis**

The next chapter outlines my explorations of feminist and post-structuralist theories of sexuality that contribute to my framework for my analysis of my ethnographic data. I introduce the key ideas and concepts that have emerged from social science analyses carried out principally in and about the West. I focus on the intersections of feminist thought and politics, and the important role of the critiques of norms initiated by Foucault and developed by queer theorists. I also outline the advantages of adopting the concept of heteronormativity in place of homophobia and introduce debates on the limitations of queer theory and the need to examine sexuality and gender through the lens of race, ethnicity, class and other axes of difference. I then outline the key elements of the role of global social movements in international politics of sexuality, introducing and exploring the problematic aspects of the concepts of sexual rights, LGBT rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. I conclude by introducing newly emerging critiques of the relationship between sexuality and international development policy and practice.

In Chapter Three I introduce transnational, cross cultural theories of sexuality that are important to incorporate into my ethnography of Peruvian feminist politics. I then explore a genealogy of race, class, culture, sexuality and gender in Peru from a post-colonial and political economy perspective. This represents the foundation of contemporary feminist and LGBT social movement discourse and practice which I summarize before focusing on the context of Lima's *conos* and the role of women's community organizations.

Chapter Four introduces the first element of my ethnography in Peru, located in Lima's *conos*. I start by providing a brief summary of the histories of the women I interviewed who transgressed sexual and gender norms and then explore their relationships to feminist and LGBT individuals and organizations. This included one community leader, who provided important insights into life

inside community organizations and their connections with the feminist and LGBT movements' discourse on sexuality. I explore this focus further with two groups of women leaders working directly with Flora Tristán and Demus, also bringing into the picture their own notions of sexuality in the context of their neighbourhoods and the *conos* as a whole.

In Chapter Five my ethnography focuses on the discourse and practice of Flora Tristán and Demus in the fields of sexuality, health and human rights, exploring further the points raised in Chapter Four by the leaders in their programmes. I investigate their development of discourse on sexuality in institutional priorities, specific sexual rights and human rights programmes and explore some of the internal constraints and opportunities that have been of influence. I contrast the discourse of health and human rights and connect the national context with the NGOs' relationships with international development policy-makers and the agencies that support their work.

In Chapter Six I explore in more depth the connections between Peruvian feminist and LGBT movements' meanings of sexuality and a selection of UK-based development agencies. These connections and disconnections, with particular reference to women's rights and sexuality, are located in the agencies' policies on human rights and governance, rights-based approaches to development and social exclusion, and gender and diversity.

Chapter Seven continues to examine the growing prominence of the concept of diversity within the recently established Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights. In this chapter I continue my transnational travels with Peruvian feminist discourse, commencing with the Latin American regional feminist movement that created the Campaign and concluding with the launch of the Campaign at the World Social Forum in 2007 in Kenya. In the final chapter I bring together the findings of my multi-sited ethnographies within the discursive fields of health and human rights, reflecting on their theoretical and methodological contributions to contemporary transnational sexuality studies. I conclude by exploring some of the opportunities and challenges facing the Latin American feminist movement's cultural politics of sexuality and their relationships to other actors at global and local levels.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Theoretical Debates and Frameworks for Analysis**

Theory is not a superfluous distraction, but a necessity. It is the problem-identifier and the information-interpreter in the research process (Parker and Gagnon 1995:3).

Struggles for sexual rights have not emerged fully armed from the heads of postmodern intellectuals. They have a grassroots energy behind them (Weeks 1998: 40).

In an international workshop on sexuality and the development industry I attended in April 2008, organized by the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, Sonia Correa from Brazil opened the event with a presentation that included an introduction to Western theories of sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Correa's emphasis on the need for social movement activists to address theories of sexuality, which have emerged predominantly from scholars located in Western academic institutions, provoked a lively debate among the participants. Some activists from the South articulated their doubts about the relevance of theory, and particularly Western theory, to their work on sexuality and related rights in their own contexts. They also emphasized their limited access to academia, and consequently their lack of familiarity with contemporary theoretical debates and academic language pertaining to concepts such as sexuality, despite an in-depth knowledge of the meanings of sexual rights they were deploying in their own work. After some debate there was an agreement that Western notions of sexuality are important to consider because they have had profound effects on countries in the South since the early days of colonialism, and that the wide-ranging and contradictory notions that circulate today in the West continue to have a global influence.

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<sup>7</sup> For further details of this workshop, see <http://ids.ac.uk/go/about-ids/news-and-commentary/april-2008-news/sexuality-and-the-development-industry/news-at-ids-sexuality-and-the-development-industry>. Accessed on 1/9/2008.

In this thesis I concur with Correa's argument. Specifically, I argue that it is important to incorporate a theoretical critique of 'sexuality' as a concept when considering local and global feminist discourse and action in the fields of sexual rights, LGBT rights and international development. With this focus I examine the shifting and fluid nature of the concept of sexuality deployed by feminists as it travels through different cultural and political contexts, and when it is associated with other concepts such as sexual rights, LGBT rights, non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and development.

By exploring sexuality from this perspective, I aim to contribute to the field of feminist, LGBT and queer theory which has focused to date (albeit minimally) on documenting the history, difficulties and progress of international lesbian rights activism, such as within the United Nations (Dorf and Careaga Pérez 1995; Bunch and Hinojosa 2000), or within feminist work on sexual rights at national, regional and global levels (Petchesky 2000; Correa 2002). Moving beyond this, however, I explore the silences, exclusions and norms pertaining to sexuality (connected with class, race and ethnicity, for example) that activists' discourse produces at these levels, as well as in local communities and projects. By examining the case of the Peruvian feminist movement, and its connections with women from the popular sectors, I also hope to contribute to the third body of literature which has begun to analyse the particular account of sexuality produced by international development discourse, in the context of health and the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Pigg and Adams 2005), and women's rights and empowerment within a framework of gender equality and mainstreaming (Jolly 2000; Bedford 2005).

In order to explore these fields of research further, in the first section of this chapter I examine feminist, lesbian and gay and queer theoretical debates on sexuality that have emerged in an Anglo-American context, with a focus on women's same-sex sexuality and the intersections with other aspects of subjectivity such as gender, race, ethnicity and class. These debates are important for my research as they reflect the context of the West that provides the backdrop for the UK-based international development agencies in my study. They also reflect Western feminist theories, with their lacunae and tensions, that have travelled 'South' and connected with Latin America, for example, through '... a variable network of communications crossing the boundaries of countries,

disciplines, theoretical paradigms and diverse fields of academic, political and professional practice' (Knapp 2005: 252). In the second half of this chapter, I outline the central elements of conceptualizations of sexual and LGBT rights, and international development discourse of sexuality. I also summarize the concerns raised by analyses of these fields of discourse, with regard to the norms, silences and exclusions they produce, and I complement them with my own suggestions of other points that require consideration and that also frame my analysis of my fieldwork data.

## **2.1 The foundations of contemporary social science theorization of sexuality**

The naming of specific sexual categories and the assumptions about the biological, essential nature of sexuality were introduced by European sexologists in the late-Victorian 1890s. Seeking to provide a distinctly scientific explanation for various sexual behaviours and practices, sexologists developed elaborate quantitative scientific surveys and reports creating and describing sexual types, such as homosexual and bisexual, and forms of sexual desire, disease and dysfunction (Bristow 1997). Gaining widespread popular attention (and controversy), sexologists claimed to have discovered natural truths about normal and abnormal sexual phenomena founded on their claims to unbiased, non-judgemental medical methods (ibid: 17). Most notably, the surveys carried out in the United States by Kinsey in the 1940s documented a wide variety of sexual behaviours, including almost 40 per cent of respondents' reporting of some form of homosexual experience, provided a stark challenge to the dominant notions that homosexuality was limited to a very small and diseased minority (Weeks et al. 2003: 4).

The term 'sexual orientation' emerged from the work of Kinsey in the late 1940s, when he and his colleagues argued that there were flaws in the dichotomous portrayal of sexuality as homosexual or heterosexual. They created the Kinsey scale of self-reported sexual orientation based on a seven-point continuum (6 equalled exclusive homosexuality and 0 equalled exclusive heterosexuality, with scores of 5 to 1 defining varying degrees of bisexuality or ambisexuality) (Kinsey et al. 1948). The surveys carried out using this scale led

Kinsey to suggest that people's self-defined position along the continuum may change over time. Moreover, survey respondents could score 0 on one question and 6 on another, leading Kinsey to conclude that the very notion of categories becomes meaningless (Bohan 1996: 13).

Coinciding with the birth of sexology, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Freud's psychoanalytic studies of sexuality created a separate and different field of sexuality research, centred on the notion of the unconscious, and psychic processes of sexual development founded on fantasy, desire, emotion and libidinal drives. Freud's theories include the notion of the Oedipus and castration complexes, that desire begins in infancy and that the desire and rivalry that flow between children and their parents is repressed from the conscious mind. Freud argued that in the process of sexual development, there is no natural, biological law that desire in adult life will be heterosexual and linked only to procreation (Thurschwell 2000). In his 1905 article, the *Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud (2001: 219) also developed the notion of sexual activity as masculine and passivity as feminine, and that both masculinity and femininity are present but not fixed in any individual. Freud argued that sexual desire from infancy onwards is structured along 'polysexual' lines, with possibilities of varied desires and objects of those desires. Homosexuality, or 'inversion', may occur at any stage of a person's life, be combined with desire for the opposite sex, or vary over time (ibid.: 136). Sexual development is therefore a process of multiple desires and masculine and feminine identifications that become disciplined and narrowed, channelled into the one socially acceptable, normal heterosexual direction, while the other instincts are considered perverse. Freud therefore argued that what is essential and constant is the existence of the sexual instinct, not the object choice (ibid. 149).

Scholars of psychoanalysis were concerned with the complex interconnections between the biological, the psychological, the social and the cultural, and how natural inner drives were expressed and repressed by society. Despite the work of Kinsey, sexological research was characterized overall by its belief that there was a tension between sexuality, which was assumed to be essential and natural, and the demands of society's laws, rigid norms and public opinion (Weeks et al. 2003: 4). It was the bio-medical and psychological foundations of these theories of sexuality that have been critiqued by the ever-



expanding sexuality research and politics since the 1960s. Influenced by the emerging social movements of second-wave feminism and gay liberation in Europe and the United States, social scientists such as Simon and Gagnon (1973) challenged the assumption of sexuality as natural biological desires or psychic drives. They introduced the notion that complex, historically specific, social forces had invented and shaped sexuality, introducing a new social constructionist paradigm for theorizing and researching sexuality (Weeks et al 2003: 6). Initial studies within this new paradigm explored the social and political history of homosexual oppression and resistance, and the social construction of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy (McIntosh 1998; Altman 1971; Katz 1976; Weeks 1977). These new theoretical perspectives were developed further by Foucault (1978), who analysed the history of modern understandings of sexuality that emerged from the nineteenth century onwards. Foucault argues that in this period sexuality was increasingly incited through a proliferation of predominantly medical and psychiatric discourses on 'truths' about sex. These discourses produced not only deviants, such as the 'homosexual', but also the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic of identities and practices, crystallized by the family with its multiple, fragmentary and mobile sexualities (Foucault 1978: 46). Foucault emphasizes the medicalization of female sexuality, in the 'bourgeois' family, where women were thought to be asexual in the sense of having no autonomous desire, but saturated with sexuality and intrinsically pathological (ibid.: 104).

Foucault's approach to the history of sexuality examined how diverse fields of knowledge of sexuality from the 19<sup>th</sup> century produced rules, norms and meanings (supported by religious, judicial, pedagogical and medical institutions) that led individuals to relate experience of sexual acts, desire and pleasure with forms of sexual subjectivity. Sexuality was consequently conceptualized for the first time in history as an inner truth, a secret essence of the individual (Foucault 1985: 4). Foucault therefore understood the history of the experience of sexuality to be the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity – the forms within which individuals are able, and obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality - in a particular Western culture and historical period (ibid.: 4).

Foucault's theories of power, norms and hierarchies provided an important contribution to debates about the social and cultural construction of sexuality, viewing sexuality as a social and political issue, and a dense transfer point for relations of power (Foucault 1978: 103). In his analysis, Foucault believed the power of the state, (in law, for example) unable to occupy the whole field of power relations, leaving it as 'superstructural' in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, the family, kinship, knowledge, science and technology (Faubian 2000: 123). He also introduced the concept of 'bio power', a strategy for deploying sexuality in which sex became a target of power organized around the management of life, disciplining the body and regulating populations (1978: 147). In short, for Foucault, sexuality is sustained by a regime of power-knowledge-pleasure, and sexuality research should therefore examine and define this regime, proposing a genealogy of sexuality to account for the way in which sexuality is "put into discourse" (which can also produce silences) at different times, to discover who does the speaking and the positions and viewpoints from which they speak (ibid.: 11-12). It is this particular concern that has guided my approach to examining feminist discourse in its Peruvian and global connections with different sites of knowledge and action.

## **2.2 Contemporary theories of sexuality in the Anglo-American context**

One of the deficiencies of Foucault's contributions to theories of sexuality, unlike Rich and Rubin, for example, is his limited attention to gender difference and relations in his discussions of sexuality and homosexuality. For this reason I also consider it important to incorporate feminist theories of sexuality as an important field of knowledge for reflection in my research. The development of Western feminist theories of sexuality as historically, socially and culturally constructed has been closely connected with and influenced by feminism as a political movement in the United States and Europe. Debates on sexuality in the 1970s and 80s arose from feminist critiques of patriarchy, gender as a social construction, and power relations between men and women. Within this framework, heterosexuality was seen as an institution that constructed female sexuality as subordinate and through which men exploited women's bodies and

labour. While feminist academics and activists have agreed that sexuality is a central political issue, it has also been a contested terrain and a source of divisions (Jackson and Scott 1996: 1). The key areas of contestation included the marginalization of lesbians in the feminist movements and particularly in feminist scholarship, the heterosexual assumptions of heterosexual women, and the exploration of different meanings of the category 'lesbian' and 'woman', connected with other axes of difference such as race and class.

Adrienne Rich, for example, was interested in challenging the 'heterocentricity' of, and the absence of lesbian existence in, the majority of feminist academic literature, a problem she understood as anti-feminist as well as anti-lesbian (Rich 1980: 632). But rather than reinforce an essentialist heterosexual/ lesbian dichotomy, Rich called for feminists to recognize that the idea that the majority of women are innately heterosexual was a theoretical and political stumbling block, and proposed the concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' as a patriarchal political institution that has been forcibly and subliminally forced on women. In an attempt to bridge the gap between 'lesbian' and 'feminist' Rich proposed the notion of 'lesbian existence' to refer to the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life (ibid.: 648). Her second term, 'lesbian continuum' included a range of woman-identified experience from sexual desire to other forms of 'primary intensity' among women, thus dislocating the category from a more narrow opposition to heterosexuality (ibid.). Rich concluded by calling for the examination of lesbian existence beyond the limits of white and middle class 'Western Women's Studies', to include women within every economic, racial, ethnic and political structure (ibid.: 659).

Writing at the same time as Rich, Clarke explored further these intersections of sexuality, gender, class and race from her location as a black lesbian. She highlighted how all women who were lesbian were resisting the 'male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture such as that of North America' (1981: 1) 'Coming out' and feminist solidarity in the recognition of multiple axes of oppression were at the heart of her argument. Clarke called for political lesbians to become more visible in order to resist culture's attempts to keep them invisible, which she equated with

being powerless. She included here the importance of challenging silences and promoting solidarity regarding relationships between black and white women.

From a similar location, Lorde (1984) also challenged the validity of a feminist theory and politics without an examination of differences, or without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women and lesbians. Lorde asserted that 'community' cannot be based on a shedding of differences or a pretence that they do not exist, and considered difference as a positive force for change and the source of a 'fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (ibid.: 111). For Amos and Parmar (1984), in the context of the UK, an understanding of imperialism and a critical engagement with challenging racism were intrinsic to Black feminism, as they should have been for all feminist theory and practice. With regard to sexuality, they questioned feminist analyses of the family solely as a source of oppression, when for Black women it is also crucial in the face of state harassment and the oppression of Black people (ibid.: 23).

As the debates about the connections between sexuality, gender, race and class, developed in the 1980s, Foucault's work began to influence feminist theories. Exploring a genealogy of sexuality in the United States, Rubin (1984) argued that feminist theories and politics of sexuality were misleading and often irrelevant as they were founded on two key limitations. First, feminist tools were developed to detect and analyse gender-based hierarchies, and as such lacked angles of vision which could fully encompass the social organization of sexuality (1984: 32). Second, lesbian feminist ideology had mostly analyzed the oppression of lesbians in terms of the oppression of women, even though they were often oppressed by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification (ibid.: 33). Rubin therefore proposed to separate the analysis of sexuality and gender, in order to develop an autonomous radical theory of sexuality into which a critique of gender hierarchy should be incorporated. In order to understand the political dimensions of erotic life, Rubin analysed the operation of a 'sex hierarchy' (ibid.: 14). In this hierarchy, Rubin argued that while heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive sex in marriage [in the West] was the norm and considered healthy, the areas of contest included heterosexuals as well as lesbians and gay men, if they were unmarried or promiscuous. Similarly, those considered the most abnormal and unacceptable were transvestites, transsexuals,

sex workers, fetishists, sadomasochists and adults who had sex with children (ibid.: 14).

Similar to Rich, the value of Rubin's work lies in her efforts to explore new approaches to theorizing sexuality that could overcome the conflict between heterosexual and lesbian feminists, and build alliances with others within the sex hierarchy. However, problematically she did not critique the construction or effects of the identity categories such as heterosexual, lesbian and gay. Reviewing the work on sexuality of social construction theorists at the end of the 1980s, Vance noted that scholars writing on sexuality differed in their willingness to imagine *what* was constructed. The dilemma resided in the sense of stability and cohesiveness produced by essentialist assumptions of sexuality, as opposed to constructionist paradigms that considers sexual acts, identities and even desire as culturally and temporally contingent. In the latter, sexuality becomes evanescent and threatens to disappear (Vance 1992: 137). Feminist and lesbian and gay scholars and activists may have been keen to use social construction theory to critique heterosexuality as the only natural, normal and healthy expression of sexuality, but by defending the interests of 'lesbian and gay people' they also reified their essential nature and identities. Vance argued that this tension was irresolvable, but an awareness of it was crucial for exploring further the problems it raised (ibid.: 13). This critical issue in sexuality studies and politics was to enter a new phase with the advent of queer theory during the 1990s.

### *Queer theory and its limitations*

The tension between the deployment and critique of universal concepts such as gender, sexuality, lesbian and gay grew more intense as the debate shifted (particularly in the United States) in the 1990s to queer theory, incorporating poststructuralist and postmodernist theories of the fragmented self and deconstruction as a tool of critique. As Hall (1996: 1) notes, the deconstructive approach '..puts key concepts "under erasure", no longer of use in their originary form and paradigm, but still deployed in their deconstructed and de-totalized forms when there are no other entirely different concepts to replace them'. Sedgwick (1990), for example, proposes a shift in focus from

constructivist and essentialist views of sexuality to an understanding of the co-existence of a 'universalizing view' and a 'minoritizing view'. The universalizing view sees the homosexual/heterosexual binary as an issue of 'continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities' while the minoritizing view sees it as important for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (ibid.: 1). Her preference for the universalizing view is due to its capacity to respond to the question: 'In whose lives is the homo/heterosexual definition an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty?', without assuming that the answer corresponds only to gays and lesbians (ibid.: 40). In order to understand differences in gender and sexuality, Sedgwick proposes a deconstructive approach that repeatedly asks '..how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially mean..' (ibid.: 27).

Butler continued this approach to concepts and categories in her examination of the causal and structural links between sexuality and gender, while privileging gender as the basis of sexuality. She critiqued the pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist theory, founded on presumptions about the limits of 'gender' and the restriction of the concept's meaning to received notions of masculinity and femininity. Butler critiqued this normative deployment of gender within feminism, with its focus on sexual difference and its production of hierarchies and exclusions in the heterosexual matrix. She asked, to what extent does gender serve a more or less compulsory heterosexuality, and how often are gender norms policed in order to shore up heterosexual hegemony? How do presumptions about normative gender and sexuality determine in advance what will qualify as the 'human' and the 'liveable'? (1999: xii).

Queer theory thus developed as a critique of the normative notions of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, fixed sexual or gender identities, and the assumption of stable relations between sex, gender and sexual desire. Its focus on the complexity, fluidity and deconstruction of gender, as well as sexuality, has led to an analytical framework that has brought to the fore transgender topics such as cross-dressing, gender ambiguity, gender-corrective surgery, and hermaphroditism. Queer may also be used to refer to an open-ended constituency, whose shared characteristic is not identity but an anti-normative

positioning with regard to sexuality (Jagose 1996). According to Morland and Willox (2005: 3), queerness calls for a celebration of a diversity of identities, but also for a cultural diversity that surpasses the notion of identity. As Sullivan (2003: 44) points out, while queer is not an essential identity, for political activists it has become a provisional one, an umbrella term for a long list of categories including gay, lesbian, bisexuals, drag queens and transsexuals. However, the tensions of previous feminist and lesbian and gay theories and politics of sexuality have been not been resolved. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, for example:

Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences (1991: 250 cited in Sullivan 2003: 44).

In the context of the UK, similar critiques emerged from black women, who suggested that queer politics were more likely to engage black gay men first, and that their visibility in campaigns and representations would then attract black women (Smyth 1992: 59). Thus the deployment of a new, all-inclusive category such as queer cannot automatically resolve old categories' (such as lesbian or gay) problems of inequalities and exclusions based on gender, race, ethnicity, class and so on. In the context of the United States, where queer theory and politics are most established, Garber (2001: 1), for example, suggests that there is still an urgent need to displace the white, middle class dominance of both lesbian feminist and queer theory/politics by bringing to the fore and engaging with the writings and voices of women of colour and the working-class. Echoing that call in the UK, Richardson (1996: 3) notes that there is a need to examine further the ways in which a person's class position affects the formation of sexual identities and practices, as well as the need to interrogate traditional left discourse which portrays the working class as masculinized and implicitly heterosexualized, thus dismissing lesbian and gay political struggles as bourgeois. In this sense, Richardson (ibid.) argues that a critique of the

assumption of heterosexuality can also change how notions of class are constructed.

A feminist shift away from identity politics to the politics of difference in the 1990s and the emergence of queer theory provided for the first time a space for theorizing bisexuality, previously excluded from lesbian and gay theory and lesbian feminism. This has been problematic, however, as within feminist theory and politics, bisexuality has often been negatively cast by feminism as the 'pernicious glue maintaining heterosexist gendered and sexed complementarity', while, within queer theory bisexuality only represents 'the great escape' from, and a bridge between, rigid sexed, gendered and sexual oppositions (Hemmings 2002: 2). Storr (2003: 319) also critiques the 'malaise' of bisexuality theory within postmodern, queer theory, with its emphasis on the discursive over the material, and on postmodern consumer-oriented capitalism over class difference.

The incorporation of female masculinity and female-to-male transgender issues into sexuality research has also been limited and problematic. Until the early 1990s, and the early days of queer theory, the prevalent Anglo-American lesbian concept of 'butch' was one of the few terms available to refer to '...lesbians who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than feminine ones' and who have a broad range of investments in "masculinity" (Rubin 2006: 472). Writing in 1992, Rubin noted that despite their prevalence in lesbian communities, issues of gender variance are '...strangely out of focus in lesbian thought, analysis and terminology', since many lesbians are antagonistic towards transsexuals, treating male-to-female transsexuals as menacing intruders, and female-to-male transsexuals as 'treasonous deserters' (ibid.: 476). Rubin also noted that feminist scholars and activists were less accepting or even openly negative, especially with regard to the butch-femme roles adopted by some, and to trans issues and subjectivities across the spectrum (ibid.: 477; see also Califia 2003; Rubin 2003). More recently, Halberstam (1998: 9) has contrasted lesbian and feminist myths, fantasies and anxieties about female masculinity with male homosocial cultures that celebrate male femininity. Halberstam argues that female masculinity is generally received by hetero-and homo-normative (including feminist and lesbian) cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment,



and a longing to have power that is always just out of reach. As such, female masculinity ‘...has been situated at the place where patriarchy goes to work on the female psyche and reproduces misogyny within femaleness’ (ibid.). Consequently, the identification of masculinity with misogyny has reinforced masculinity and maleness as difficult to pry apart or study separately, leaving female masculinity as poorly researched and analyzed as female bisexuality, even within lesbian subjectivity and experiences, where they are presumed to reside.

The term ‘homo-normative’, mentioned by Halberstam above, provides an important reminder that sexuality and gender identity norms are also constructed by marginalized subjects and groups, as the critiques of lesbian, gay and queer theory outlined above have emphasized. In addition to examining the normative notions of sexuality within global and local feminist discourse, I am also concerned therefore with asking what norms are produced by LGBT discourse in the context of international development? After decades of struggle in the West, differences among women of race, ethnicity, class, masculinity and femininity, for example, continue to produce tensions and exclusions, even though the attention of many academics and activists continues to be framed by the problems and challenges posed by heterosexual norms. However, as I outline in the next section, problematizing heterosexuality has also experienced theoretical shifts in recent years which have produced new perspectives on understanding how discrimination and inequality operate.

#### *From homophobia to heteronormativity*

The more recent focus on theorizing norms of sexuality and gender has led to a shift from the deployment of the term homophobia to that of heteronormativity. The limitations of the concept of homophobia as an analytical category have been highlighted by Plummer (1998: 89), first for its referral to ‘homosexuality’, often assumed to be male only, thus perpetuating a male bias in research which ignores female experience and agency. The concept also fails to address how sexuality intersects with other vectors of power and oppression apart from gender, such as race, ethnicity and class. Moreover, it reinforces the notion of violence and hatred expressed by individuals due to psychological

problems, rather than addressing the underlying structural, social and cultural conditions and discourse on sexuality (ibid.: 90). Chambers also argues that the concept of homophobia is politically limited in that if we take homophobia as the political problem, then we imply that the solution depends solely upon changing individual attitudes (2007: 664). Chambers notes that a reliance on the concept of homophobia compresses the insights of feminist and queer critique within the framework of interest-group liberalism and pluralism within modern democratic politics. Specifically, sexuality is not thoroughly problematized (or theorized) but is instead reduced to a mere problem of 'sexual orientation', the solution to which is simply to make discrimination against homosexuals illegal (ibid.). In the following section I explore this aspect of sexual politics discourse, located within the frame of LGBT rights activism promoting campaigns to legislate against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Moving beyond homophobia, in an oppositional position to homosexuality, heterosexism is understood to refer to the belief and expectation that everyone is or should be heterosexual (Yep 2002: 167), whereas heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality is stable, universal and necessary as the bedrock of social relations, without which society would cease to function or exist (Richardson 1996: 3). Heteronormativity is a concept that is particularly useful when it is deployed to deconstruct the heterosexual/homosexual binary, by examining heterosexuality as a normative institution that constructs and regulates both homosexuality and heterosexuality, and sexuality and gender. This analysis requires a recognition that heterosexuality is not a homogenous, monolithic entity, and that heteronormativity, although contingent, tends to value traditional gender roles and identities and lifelong monogamy (Jackson 2006: 105). This idea facilitates a recognition that a heteronormative society discriminates against certain opposite-sex practices and identities as well as same-sex ones, providing an extension of Rubin's notion of the sex hierarchy mentioned above. This meaning of heteronormativity therefore provides the potential for uniting people across the heterosexual/ homosexual divide. In this sense, it is clear that heteronormativity and heterosexuality are not the same (Wiegman 2006: 90). Heteronormativity, therefore, emphasizes the extent to which people of any and

all sexualities and gender identities will be judged and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm (Chambers 2007: 666). Jackson (2006: 107) argues, moreover, that to enhance its utility as a critical concept, heteronormativity needs to be thought of as regulating normative ways of life that are not only explicitly sexual, since it also regulates norms relating to the family, parents, and domestic and extra-domestic divisions of labour and resources, for example.

Another advantage of heteronormativity as an analytical concept is that it draws attention to the political articulation of normative aspects of social and sexual life, thus making possible an analysis of political problems to which homophobia can only allude (Chambers 2007: 665). Chambers notes that normative practices are regulatory practices which can appear as a law or edict, but which usually function much more subtly through societal expectation, peer pressure, culture and institutions that reify and entrench the normativity of heterosexuality. Thus (certain expressions of) heterosexual desire and identity are not merely assumed, they are expected and demanded, rewarded and privileged (ibid.). Moreover, the optimal operation of a norm is as an invisible operation, most effective when it is never exposed, thus the naming, making known and critiquing of heterosexual norms can be a powerful political tool for subverting them and creating a radically different understanding of identity and practice of identity politics (ibid.: 667). This approach differs radically from one that conceptualizes LGBT people as minorities that need protection and their own rights in a heterosexual world, an approach adopted by the global LGBT movement that I explore further below.

While homophobia is a term associated with explicit acts of violence and hatred, heteronormativity is a concept that provides a means of analysing the power of norms in all aspects of society, including their silence and invisibility. It is therefore particularly useful for examining the assumptions, hierarchies and exclusions produced in spaces and discourses such as those of the global movements and development agencies outlined in the next section, since they are not characterized by 'homophobic' discriminatory policies or practices, and are themselves explicitly anti-discriminatory in their intentions.

### **2.3 Global social movements, sexual rights and LGBT rights**

It is only since the mid 1980s that sexuality has grown as a major issue of enquiry and debate for international policy, specifically within global feminist and gay and lesbian movements' campaigns for sexual and LGBT rights. Their input into the growing international debates on human rights, over-population, reproductive health and the HIV/AIDS pandemic have intersected closely with feminist and gay and lesbian academic research agendas (Parker et al. 2000: 3).

This intersection of academic research and activism has, however, been limited in terms of theoretical debates on sexuality and sexual identity categories in feminist contributions to developing 'sexual rights', a concept which consists of the little discussed and poorly understood combination of the concepts of 'sexuality' and 'rights' (Berer 2004: 6). To date the concept of sexual rights has been much more closely linked to the experiences of global feminist campaigns and grassroots work on women's human rights and women's reproductive rights which have slowly gained ground over the past 20 years. The global feminist movement first adopted 'reproductive rights and sexual rights' as the framework for their analysis and campaigning relating to women's sexuality and international development from the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 on to the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and all follow-up meetings (Germain, Nowrojee, and Pyne 1994, Petchesky 2000; Correa, 2002; Cornwall and Welbourn, 2002).

In 1994 two key feminist activists/academics, Sonia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky provided the initial thinking on the concept of sexual rights that has guided the following years' work by the global feminist movement. Correa and Petchesky highlight the multiple perspectives surrounding the conceptual territory of reproductive and sexual rights. They propose the need to understand these rights 'in terms of power and resources: power to make informed decisions about one's own fertility, childbearing, child rearing, gynaecologic health, and sexual activity; and resources to carry out such decisions' (1994: 107). They argue that human rights discourse needs to be reconstructed to go beyond considering people's private liberties and choices, as these are meaningless to the poorest and most marginalized if they do not enjoy basic

social conditions such as social welfare, personal security and political freedom. Therefore, the provision of reproductive and sexual rights 'is essential to the democratic transformation of societies and the abolition of gender, class, racial and ethnic injustice' (ibid.: 107). Correa and Petchesky propose that the ethical principle of 'bodily integrity', or the right to security in and control over one's body, lies at the core of reproductive and sexual freedom, and that women's bodies are not separate from the social networks and communities they inhabit. Bodily integrity connotes the body as an integral part of one's self, whose health and wellness, including sexual pleasure, are essential for active participation in social life (ibid.: 113). They consider reproductive and sexual rights as both personal and social, and that while they can never be realized without attention to economic development, political empowerment and cultural diversity, ultimately their site is in individual women's bodies (ibid.). Finally, Correa and Petchesky propose that sexual rights incorporate the meaning of the body's capacity for sexual pleasure and the right to express it in diverse ways in a supportive social and cultural environment. The principle of diversity requires respect for differences among women – such as their values, culture, religion, medical condition and sexual orientation (ibid.: 117).

The above conceptualizing of sexual rights clearly makes the link between human rights, poverty and development, and aims to understand the complexity and diversity of women's experience of their sexuality around the world, influenced by social class, culture, religion, race and ethnicity. Establishing this broad and inclusive concept of women's sexual rights in international human rights and development arenas and discourse has, however, been a long and difficult process. Most progress has been made in the field of health, since after a decade of feminist advocacy on sexual rights within UN processes and institutions, the World Health Organization now includes the concepts of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights in its website documents on sexual and reproductive health:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cited from the WHO website: <http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html#1>. Accessed on 18.09.2008.

## **Sexuality**

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

## **Sexual health**

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

## **Sexual rights**

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- sexuality education;
- respect for bodily integrity;
- choose their partner;
- decide to be sexually active or not;
- consensual sexual relations;
- consensual marriage;
- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others. *These definitions do not represent an official WHO position, and should not be used or quoted as WHO definitions.*

There are a variety of important elements to these definitions. Sexuality is included and defined as a preamble to sexual rights. Sexuality is understood to include both sexual orientation and gender identity, and psychic as well as social aspects. However, the document makes no mention of sexual norms, hierarchies, inequalities and exclusions. The reader is left with the impression that all sexual orientations and gender identities are equal and living in harmony, and that these two concepts are considered unproblematic and without need for definition or explanation. The definition of sexual rights, on the other hand, refers to sexuality, not sexual orientation, leaving the term open to a

heteronormative interpretation, unless the understanding of sexuality is specifically defined, as it is above.

It is also striking to note the WHO's own disclaimer at the end of the text, which states emphatically that the definitions do not represent the WHO's 'official' position. In practice, while concepts of sexual and reproductive rights have been debated in some of the UN conferences since Cairo and Beijing, none of the final documents or political declarations ratified by the member states have incorporated a specific reference to sexual orientation (Obando 2003: 1). Reflecting on how global discourse on sexual rights has evolved over years, Petchesky (2000: 97) expresses concern that as an umbrella category, attached to 'reproductive rights' and attempting to be inclusive and universal, the concept of 'sexual rights' can become a totalizing language that actually buries 'the sexual' in heterosexual and childbearing relations, thus rendering the specific rights and situations of lesbians, bisexual women, and a range of culturally specific sexual minorities invisible. Correa (2002: 5) takes this concern further, noting that gay communities and other 'sexual subjects' have not yet been able to participate fully and systematically in sexual rights and development debates, both reflecting and reproducing the very limited interaction between the feminist and lesbian/gay movements. Despite the open and inclusive language of feminist definitions of sexual rights, within the field of (particularly women's) health and reproductive rights, same-sex sexuality and non-normative gender identities have yet to gain any formal recognition among major international development institutions and policy-makers.

#### *Human rights/LGBT rights and sexual orientation*

Separate from the field of sexual rights and women's health, in the early 1990s feminists specializing in human rights established the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights, with a focus on lobbying the United Nations Human Rights Council. This Campaign specifically incorporated lesbian rights (but not sexual rights) into the broader feminist work on ending violence against women. The Campaign therefore brought a small number of feminist activists into contact with LGBT organizations attempting to work on LGBT rights at the United Nations (Bunch 1996).

Unlike their feminist counterparts, LGBT organizations have found it very difficult to gain official accreditation for international human rights arenas such as the United Nations. A majority of member states have systematically rejected debates on sexual orientation in the Human Rights Council since they were first raised in 1993, even though many individual states around the world have introduced protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in domestic law (Amnesty International 2003: 1). In recent years, Amnesty International has joined forces with global LGBT networks – including the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA), and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Council (IGLHRC) and Human Rights Watch - to put increasing pressure on the Human Rights Council to approve a resolution condemning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity initially proposed by the Brazilian delegation at the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in 2003 (Amnesty International 2004). In successive years, an alliance of Islamic States, the Vatican and United States, supported by other Catholic states, has led to the continued postponement of a discussion on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Human Rights Council.

Rather than outlining a list of LGBT rights, as the feminist movement has done with sexual rights, international advocates such as ILGA, IGLHRC and Amnesty International have focused on campaigning for laws that enforce ‘non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity’. In this work, sexual orientation refers to ‘a person’s sexual and emotional attraction to people of the same gender (homosexual orientation), another gender (heterosexual orientation) or both genders (bisexual orientation) (Amnesty International 2004: 5). Here we can see the explicit connection between the concept of sexual orientation and the identity categories lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual. However, while the essentialist assumptions and cross-cultural relevance of LGBT identity categories have been the subject of much academic critique, as I have outlined above, the deployment of the concept of sexual orientation in international human rights has yet to be examined in terms of its meanings and political effects. From a queer theory perspective, Sedgwick (1990: 8) briefly problematizes the concept of sexual orientation, criticizing it for limiting its conceptualization of sexuality to the dimension of the gender of the object choice. In her discussion of feminist politics of sexuality within the



UN system, Butler (2004: 183) recognizes that academic debates ‘..seem woefully out of synch’ with the contemporary political usage of terms such as gender, lesbian and gay. However, the term sexual orientation evades her interrogation, as she only mentions in passing ‘..its legal and medical strangeness as a term’ (ibid.). In the field of psychology, however, Bohan (1996: 13) has highlighted that:

The concept of sexual orientation is not as straightforward as everyday conversations, media accounts and political slogans would imply. Rather, the topic is fraught with vagaries, the terminology ambiguous and ill-defined, and the apparently exclusive and stable categories commonly employed actually disguise complex dimensionality and fluidity.

Bohan’s concern for the assumptions about sexuality articulated in definitions of sexual orientation is becoming increasingly important to consider when examining the work of feminist movements. Since the new millennium, the previous separation of feminist advocacy on sexual health and rights from LGBT advocacy on sexual orientation is changing, as sexual rights enters the discourse of LGBT institutions, and feminists support campaigns for the inclusion of sexual orientation in United Nations agreements. In 2004, for example, IGLHRC produced an article celebrating the fact that the discussion on sexual orientation and gender identity was not dropped altogether at the Human Rights Council, an achievement they associated with the ‘unprecedented level of global mobilization around sexual rights, with a diverse coalition of sexual rights and LGBT rights activists and organizations combining their advocacy efforts’ (IGLHRC 2004). This recent strengthening of alliances between global feminist and LGBT movements has therefore led IGLHRC to include the concept of sexual rights in their discourse for the first time. However, while the concept of sexual rights is beginning to be adopted by LGBT activists, the question I explore in this thesis is, has feminist work on sexual rights begun to incorporate notions of same-sex sexuality and gender identity? If so, has it adopted the LGBT movement’s concepts of LGBT rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly in work with women from the popular sectors, or has it explored alternative meanings and language?

As the global advocacy of these two social movements continues to contribute to the evolution of the concept of sexual rights, there are some other problematic areas that require attention. First, while the growing impact of LGBT activism in international arenas has strengthened earlier feminist efforts to promote lesbian rights, doing so only in the arena of human rights can result in reinforcing the understanding of rights related to sexuality in negative terms, linked only to violence and abuse. The LGBT movement has not yet been able to gain prominence in local, national and international development arenas beyond human rights arenas, where feminists have been active for many years, thus it has not been connected to more positive conceptualisations of sexual rights, such as the right to pleasure, outlined above by Correa and Petchesky. Finally, unlike feminist work on sexual rights, LGBT rights activism actively promotes specific sexual and gender identity categories without examining their meanings and effects in specific contexts. Consequently, discourse on global LGBT rights has yet to make clear links with questions of economic, racial, ethnic or cultural equality or justice, which are the realm of international development thought and action. Despite this disconnection, international development agencies are, as I outline below, recently beginning to support LGBT rights work globally and in the South.

#### **2.4 Sexuality and international development**

The new millennium has seen the emergence of critiques of international development policy and practice with regard to sexuality. These critiques have centred on the development agencies' failure to discuss and include same-sex sexuality and gender identity in development work in the South beyond HIV/AIDS and male or trans sexual practices. Sex is treated as a health issue linked to the prevention of disease and unwanted pregnancies, while the concept of sexuality rarely appears in development policies (Cornwall et al. 2008: 5). In their studies of sexuality and development, Jolly (2000) and Lind and Share

(2003) advocate the need to 'queer' development.<sup>9</sup> For Lind and Share, queering development means '...referring to how sexuality and gender can be rethought in development practices, theories and politics' (2003: 57). They consider a queer analysis of development to include an examination of '...how heterosexuality is institutionalized, naturalized and regulated both explicitly (by excluding LGBT people from the analysis) and implicitly (by assuming that all people are heterosexual, marriage is a given and all men and women fit more or less into traditional gender roles)' (ibid.). They argue that international development analysis therefore reinforces heterosexual norms for women in particular by linking them to their family positions, and leaves them devoid of sexual agency. Meanwhile, queer identities and alternative family paradigms are consequently rendered invisible in daily economic transactions and household life (ibid.: 62-63).

However, on occasions the problem of the absence of women's same-sex sexuality in development discourse, policies and programmes is exacerbated by gender equality programmes that actively promote the ideal of sharing, monogamous heterosexual partnerships as part of the solution to poverty and gender inequality. Bedford (2005) raises this concern with reference to her study of the World Bank's lending programmes that aim to secure the continued provision of privatized unpaid caring labour in the household in a neo-liberal economic contexts. In Ecuador, for example, the World Bank policy has been to restructure normative heterosexuality to promote a model of marriage and monogamous love and labour wherein women work more in paid employment and men carry out more unpaid care work in the home (Bedford 2005: 295). Bedford argues that this reinforcement of certain compulsory types of partnering as the central approach to women's empowerment is highly exclusionary of many forms of families and households in different cultures and difficult economic circumstances around the world (ibid.: 316).

While the case of the World Bank may be a unique and somewhat extreme example, the absence of a recognition of same-sex sexuality in gender equality policies is a more common problem. Jolly (2000: 81), for example,

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<sup>9</sup> The three authors cited here refer to non-governmental, governmental and international development organizations such as those belonging to the United Nations, as well as development studies centres in academic institutions.

highlights the reluctance of Gender and Development (GAD) policy-makers to address women's same-sex sexuality within international development institutions. Jolly suggests that this limitation can be attributed to fact that GAD policies do not challenge the assumption that basic human needs in the South do not include sex, love or the freedom to express sexuality. Moreover, the occasional efforts to challenge normative understandings of gender and sexuality in development have met with resistance and criticism from some political and religious leaders in developing countries. Those attempting to incorporate same-sex sexuality into development debates are often criticized for attempting to intervene in and tamper with local traditions and cultures, since homosexuality is often stereotyped as a non-traditional, Western and phenomenon (ibid.). Jolly believes that the legacy of the development industry is 'at best mixed' and asks: 'Do we really want to encourage the clumsy 'development machine' into even more intimate areas of people's lives? Do we trust it to approach sexualities with any level of awareness or sensitivity?' (2000: 82).

Since these questions were posed, however, debates and policy-making among a small number of international development agencies have changed at a rapid rate and begun to address the topic of sexuality in a more inclusive manner. In the past five years, three major donors, HIVOS (a Dutch NGO), the Ford Foundation (a US Foundation), and Sida (the Swedish Ministry of Development) have all created policies and provided funding for programmes pertaining to same-sex sexuality and gender identity.<sup>10</sup> In this short period HIVOS, for example, has become known as the principal international development donor for national and global LGBT rights groups, networks and events. HIVOS includes 'sexual minorities' within its thematic priority of Human Rights and Democratisation, but notably not within its theme of 'Gender, Women and Development'.<sup>11</sup> In HIVOS's Human Rights Policy created in 2002, 'GLBT People' are included among the specific groups whose

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike HIVOS and Sida, the Ford Foundation defines itself as an institution that aims to promote peace, human welfare and the sustainability of the environment, but not as a development agency seeking to eradicate poverty and empower the poor. However, many of the Ford Foundation's partners do work with the latter and are also funded by a wide range of development agencies.

<sup>11</sup> For details of the thematic priorities of HIVOS, see: [www.hivos.nl](http://www.hivos.nl).

human rights the NGO prioritizes. In this document the rights listed for GLBT people are the right to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, to health and other social services, to security of the person, to freedom of expression and association, and to participate/be represented in public affairs.<sup>12</sup>

The aim of HIVOS's LGBT rights funding is to strengthen LGBT organizations and increase LGBT debates and advocacy in national, regional and international arenas, including with the media and the UN Human Rights Council. HIVOS's annual report in 2006<sup>13</sup> provides examples of its initiatives in this area, including a joint programme with the Ford Foundation to support the strengthening of LGBT organisations in East Africa, and a similar initiative with a Dutch LGBT group for the Balkans.<sup>14</sup> HIVOS now funds ILGA's international work, and in 2007 funded the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya's 'Q spot' tent and activities at the World Social Forum in Nairobi. Staff members of HIVOS also participate in events or spaces they fund, such as this World Social Forum initiative. In 2005 HIVOS initiated a three-year funding commitment with the largest and oldest LGBT group in Peru, the MHOL (the 'Homosexual Movement of Lima'), and since then has also funded occasional feminist research and publications on sexual orientation by Demus. I comment further on these global and Peruvian initiatives in Chapters Five and Seven. It is interesting to note that HIVOS does not yet discuss 'gender identity' within its reports and policies, although it does fund LGBT groups and events that include trans participants and issues.

Similar to HIVOS, the Ford Foundation's Human Rights policy includes: 'Broadening recognition and fulfilment of the full range of human rights for racial, ethnic and sexual minorities...'.<sup>15</sup> However, historically the Ford Foundation's work on sexuality has been connected more to the thematic area it now names 'Sexuality and Reproductive Health'. Here it refers to 'sexual and gender diversity' and 'sexual rights' within health education and services, and

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<sup>12</sup> [www.hivos.nl/english/themes/human\\_rights\\_democratisation](http://www.hivos.nl/english/themes/human_rights_democratisation). Accessed 20/09/2006.

<sup>13</sup> This annual report is available at [www.hivos.nl](http://www.hivos.nl).

<sup>14</sup> This initiative is also supported by another Dutch NGO, Novib, a member of the Oxfam International Family. Although Novib's work on sexuality is very recent, low scale and low profile, it does mention 'gay men and lesbians' in its corporate documentation on 'rights-based approaches' and within that, on the 'right to an identity'. [www.oxfamnovib.nl/media/download/Jaerverslag/Annual-Report06\\_ENG\\_web.pdf](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/media/download/Jaerverslag/Annual-Report06_ENG_web.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fordfound.org/fields/humanrights/overview>. Accessed 5.01.2007.

the importance of research on the social and cultural influences of 'sexuality' to inform public policy making and promote widespread public understanding. This is an important step forward, given the previous critiques of the heteronormativity of feminist and international development discourse on women's sexual rights and health, and notably the term 'sexual diversity' (although not defined) is preferred to the human rights-related concept of 'sexual orientation'. In both cases, the NGOs' inclusion of sexual diversity or sexual orientation is limited to health and human rights, and does not yet connect with policies on other areas of their work, such as economic and community development, education or sustainable development.

Following a directive of the Swedish Government in 2002, Sida (located within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) became the first Northern governmental development agency to formally introduce 'sexual orientation, gender identity' and 'LGBT issues' into its corporate policies and plans. In 2006 a funding policy was developed on the basis of an 80-page study of 'Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues in Development' carried out by two Swedish consultants (Samelius and Wagberg 2005). This policy states that Sida's '...overall goal is to enable lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons to improve their living conditions in the countries where Sweden is engaged in development cooperation' (Sida 2006: 4). Unlike HIVOS and the Ford Foundation, Sida's policy makes a direct link with poverty, stating that: 'The perspectives of poor people are highly relevant to LGBT persons, as there is a strong correlation between marginalisation and poverty' (ibid.: 2). Moreover, the policy advocates the inclusion of these issues into '...the discourse on gender, gender equality and social justice' as well as human rights (ibid.). In a third divergence from HIVOS and the Ford Foundation, Sida's policy also notes (albeit in a footnote) that:

The designation LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons) is controversial in a non-Western context, but Sida has chosen to use it in the absence of a more widely accepted alternative. Many people do not identify themselves as LGBT. Note also that Sida's use of the term includes intersex persons (Sida 2006: 1).

While this recognition that the term LGBT is controversial and often meaningless to 'many people' in non-Western contexts is important, Sida's choice to continue using the terms without examining who the 'many people' are, or how LGBT rights work could include them, is highly problematic. On a more positive note, the more in-depth approach to the topic has led Sida to extend the debates on sexuality beyond the health and human rights focus of HIVOS or the Ford Foundation, although these debates have rarely been translated into specific activities beyond 'LGBT human rights'. Sida has produced a detailed inventory of its first year's funding of sexual orientation and gender identity initiatives and programmes, as a base-line study for future evaluations. According to this inventory, in 2006 Sida was funding 18 projects with a focus on LGBT rights, in Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Africa. Of these, 17 of the projects were implemented by local LGBT groups (with funding channelled mainly through Swedish NGOs).

The one exception to the focus on human rights and HIV/AIDS was in Nicaragua, where a Swedish NGO funded by Sida incorporated LGBT rights into its programme on gender equality from a rights-based approach with 25 Nicaraguan NGO counterparts. The report notes that: 'By questioning traditional gender roles, the LGBT dimension is said to have become a natural part of the gender equality work and since 2005 LGBT people are addressed as a specific target group' (Peck, 2007: 16-17). However, the strategy still relies on identifying 'LGBT groups' as participants and beneficiaries, without exploring the relationship between these identities and people living in poverty and in different cultural contexts, or examining the assumptions about sexuality inherent in the heterosexual/LGBT dichotomy. Moreover, as Lind and Share (2003: 67) note, the growing inclusion of gay male sexuality in grassroots HIV/AIDS policies and programmes has led to an increase in funding for Southern LGBT rights groups to work on HIV/AIDS which has consequently given gay men more power and visibility than their lesbian counterparts. Here we are reminded that the differences and inequalities within LGBT groups also need careful examination, in addition to the ways in which class or 'poverty', race, and ethnicity are addressed (or not) in LGBT rights discourse and activities. I am aware that carrying out such a critique is a politically sensitive undertaking, since, as Pigg and Adams (2005: 15) argue, the moral claims in

sexuality and development can also stifle critiques of efforts to include sexual and LGBT rights in health and human rights programmes, for example. This is because these initiatives are often articulated as “matters of life and death”, making it difficult to talk about unintended consequences of development projects targeting health and wellbeing, since health and sexuality are granted a quasi-sacred character. Thus efforts to safeguard them seem moral and unassailable (ibid.).

Similarly, critiques of women’s community based organizations’ understanding of and attitudes to same-sex sexuality are also very rare. However, those available have found that heteronormative notions of sexuality, gender, and family are reinforced and reproduced by women’s grassroots organizations in Ecuador (Lind and Share 2003: 61). In India, Swarr and Nagar (2004: 501) found that the problem of heteronormativity was compounded by attempts to eject members of the women’s organization if they were known to be in same-sex relationships. These critiques provide important concerns that I explore further in Chapters Four and Five, in the case of women from Lima’s popular sectors and their connection with women’s community-based organizations and feminist NGOs.

### ***Conclusions***

The studies and critiques of feminist and international development discourse on sexual, reproductive and LGBT rights outlined above provide a partial framework for my research into the understandings and inclusion of women’s same-sex sexuality into these fields. However, moving beyond the points raised by Jolly, Lind and Share, Correa and Petchesky, for example, but following one of the central tenets of theories of sexuality, I argue that it is also important to examine the meanings and effects of sexual identity categories, and concepts such as ‘sexual orientation, gender identity and LGBT rights’ employed in Southern or global development initiatives. This is particularly important at present since ‘LGBT rights’ and ‘non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation’ have become the foundation of recent efforts to include same-sex sexuality in both Southern feminist and international development policies and programmes.



I also take up Jolly's concern for the levels of awareness and sensitivity on the topic of sexuality internally within Northern development organizations, and expand this to include the Peruvian feminist NGOs and the women's community-based organizations in my study. In Chapters Four, Five and Six I therefore include an exploration of institutional norms and staff or membership discourse and anxieties with regard to same-sex sexuality and gender identity. My aim is to examine the connections between 'internal' staff and 'external' development contexts, policies and practices, to understand how heteronormativity and other norms operate and the effects they produce in these different but mutually constitutive spheres. Recognizing that the construction of the meanings and norms of sexuality and related concepts are historically and culturally constructed, in the next chapter I provide an overview of the context of feminist cultural politics of sexuality in Peru, both nationally and more specifically with reference to Lima's low income settlements.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Contextualizing Peruvian Feminist Politics of Sexuality at Local and National Levels**

When exploring meanings of sexuality in non-Western contexts, such as Peru in the case of my research, much can be learnt from contemporary anthropological literature. Analysis of sexuality in this discipline has focused on studying the cultural constructions and diversity of the practices and identities of transgressive and non-normative sexualities in non-Western locations, and their relationship to globalization. In particular, there has been a focus on studying the ways in which people (in the majority men) in different cultural contexts take up, resist or reconstruct Western sexual identity categories such as gay or bisexual, and the validity of these concepts for carrying out cross-cultural, international analysis and policy-making (Boellstorff 2007).

My research differs from previous anthropological studies of sexuality in cross-cultural contexts, by looking at how feminist meanings of sexuality shift across time, location and fields of discourse. However, anthropological theories and research findings have provided me with important elements for reflection and analysis. Until the late 1980s, they were characterized by studies of cultural variations of unexamined Western essentialist meanings and identities (Vance 1999: 46). Among the first to challenge this approach, Vance called for a social construction framework to cross-cultural research that would problematize and question Euro-American folk and scientific beliefs about sexuality. In particular she argued for a recognition that sexuality has a long history in which definitions and meanings change over time and within populations (*ibid.*: 47). This challenge has been taken up by researchers over the past 15 years, and has produced an exploration of sexuality globally in the context of uneven processes of modernization and of differences of gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and nation state, including in Latin America (Balderston and Guy 1997; French and Bliss 2007). Recent ethnographic research in particular has shown that vernacular cultures and individuals within them articulate very varied sexual and gendered practices, desires and identities which have often confounded Western assumptions about the relationship between sexual behaviour and

identity (Roberston 2005: 4). In Latin America and the Caribbean much of this research has addressed male same-sex and male-to-female transgender sexualities and has often connected directly with international policy concerns about health risks and care in the battle against HIV/AIDS. This research has consequently focused on documenting variations in erotic behaviour and associated social and kinship arrangements (Lewin 2002: 112). Research in Brazil and Mexico, for example, has explored male same-sex desire and practices among men who identify themselves and their relationships with other men as heterosexual, thus disrupting Western notions of heterosexuality that equate practice with identity (Parker 1998; Prieur 1996). Hemmings (2007: 17) complements this concern for nomenclature and its effects with a call for researchers to examine ‘...epistemologies and tropes that attend the privileging of Western sexual identity, such as “voice, visibility, and coming out”’.

To date in Latin America there have been very few studies of female non-normative genders or sexualities (Weston 1993; Boellstorff 2007). There is however, one study of women in the contemporary Caribbean by Wekker (1999) that provides important contributions to reflections on women’s sexual subjectivities and how sexuality, gender, race and class intersect in a specific cultural context. Wekker’s ethnography of working class Creole women in Paramaribo, the capital city of Suriname, explores how women construct their sexuality through the institution of ‘*mati*’ work. *Mati* refers to women who engage in sexual relationships with men and women, either simultaneously or consecutively, being a normative practice in working class communities (1999: 120). The women in Wekker’s study consider the middle-class Surinamese values of heterosexual sexuality, marriage and monogamy, irrelevant to their reality. They value, instead, their sexual autonomy (active not passive), motherhood, self-respect, dignity and the ability to take care of themselves and their children (ibid.: 123). Wekker notes that these values are based on beliefs of the Afro-Surinamese *Winti* religion that constructs notions of the self as malleable, dynamic and multiple. Women ‘do *mati* work’ rather than claim ‘to be *mati*’. Moreover, men’s and women’s gender or sexual identities are not dichotomized, each individual being composed of male and female *Winti*, or gods, and sexual fulfilment is considered important, healthy and joyous for all (ibid.: 125). However, women’s relationships with men are particularly defined

by women's desire to be mothers, in a system where the epitome of womanhood is motherhood, and often only maintained if the man provides financial contributions to keep their households afloat (ibid.: 126). In relationships between women, however, financial support for each other is only one element of a wider flow of reciprocal obligations, such as raising children, emotional support and sexual pleasure (ibid.: 127).

Wekker's study in Suriname enables the reader to consider the way in which women's sexual choices are influenced by economic circumstance and need, and by cultural understandings of the gendered and sexual self. It also leads one to consider the difficulties and possible effects of deploying terms such as 'lesbian', 'bisexual' or 'queer', which are so alien to the people in Wekker's study, and which could lead to misconceptions about the constructions of women's sexuality in this context. As Blackwood (2002: 70) has pointed out, it is in anthropological research, particularly outside the West, that the term 'lesbian' has been critiqued for falling far short of expressing the diversities of female sexual and gender identities and transgressions around the globe.

To date there are no ethnographic studies of cultural constructions of women's same-sex sexuality in Peru, or how they intersect with questions of class, race, ethnicity or national difference. In the next section I therefore provide an outline of the context of Peruvian feminist work on sexuality by drawing on studies of historical and contemporary research and debates about class, race, and culture, and the making of the post-colonial nation state. I then examine gendered constructions of sexuality and sexual identities from the early colonial period to the present day, and the central elements of the feminist and LGBT cultural politics of sexuality. In the second half of the chapter I introduce the context of low-income and racially marginalized urban settlements in Lima. These settlements are an important element of my ethnographic study of feminist discourse on sexuality at the local level, providing important insights into understanding the intersections of women's sexuality with race, ethnicity, social class and survival strategies that I explore further in Chapter Four.

### 3.1 Race, class and the making of post-colonial Peru

Lima and Cuzco are, in the nature of things, the two opposing hubs of our nationality. Lima is the yearning for adaptation to European culture; Cuzco represents the millenary cultural heritage of the Incas; Lima is foreign-inclined, Hispanophile, Europeanized; Cuzco instead is vernacular... (de la Cadena 2001: 6).

This stark contradiction and source of constant tension between metropolitan Lima and the Andean highlands in contemporary Peruvian society dates back almost five hundred years. The Spanish invasion of the region known today as Peru began in 1532, and is symbolized by the capture of the Inca ruler Atahualpa and the slaughter of thousands of his warriors. After four decades of war with Inca resistors, Spanish colonial rule slowly took hold of the entire country and lasted almost 300 years. The violent nature of the colonization of the Andean people, labelled '*indios*' by the Spanish, was all too evident, as their population collapsed from 9 million to only 600,000 in the first century after the conquest (Starn et al. 2005: 94). Away from Cuzco and the Andean heart of Inca and Indian culture, the Spanish rulers created their capital, Lima, on the coast, where by the mid-seventeenth century more than a third of the population comprised African slaves (ibid.: 95). Here the Spanish concentrated the colony's wealth, administration and trade, eventually converting the city into the centre of colonial power for Hispanic South America. Consequently, Peru was the last bastion of Spanish rule in South America, and was characterized by a highly stratified, hierarchical and unequal society. Difference was based predominantly on race, gender, ancestry (Spanish or not) and land ownership, and the elite's belief that social categories were fixed and inherited (Klaren 2000: 134).

Over the centuries of colonial rule, racial hierarchies became increasingly influenced by the incorporation of new racial subjectivities, including those produced by the mixing of Europeans, Andean *indios* and African slaves. *Criollos*, the tiny minority who were born in Peru of European descent, inherited the political and economic power of their Spanish forefathers. *Mestizos*, a mix of Europeans and Indians, and *mulattos*, a mix of Europeans

and African slaves were all considered inferior to the *criollos* but superior to the Indians and blacks (*negros*) (Applebaum et al. 2003).

### *Race and class in the new republic*

Independence was finally declared in 1821 following the war waged by *criollo* elites from Argentina and Bolivia, rather than as the result of any internal indigenous uprising or campaign for an independent nation-state. These *criollo* leaders based their successful challenge to Spain on the new ideas of popular sovereignty derived from the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. The new republic was therefore founded on liberal principles of private property and democracy, as well as citizenship and individual rights which were written into various constitutions from 1824 onwards (Klaren 2000: 134). In this context the wealthy, conservative 'white' oligarchy of European descent continued to control land ownership, natural resources, the military and trade (Starn et al 2005: 175). Colonial racial discourse and hierarchies based on European values continued to dominate Peruvian society, creating a nation state without any shared sense of national identity (Laurie and Bonnett 2002: 37). *Indios*, the vast majority of the population, for example, were labelled uncivilized, anachronistic and barbaric, while *mestizos* were identified with illegitimacy, the rape of *india* women and deviance (Chambers 2003: 32). Often absent from any colonial or post-colonial discourse, Amazonian Indians continued to live in geographical isolation and outside state control. When occasionally mentioned, however, they were located below even *indios* in the racial hierarchy, labelled '*chunchos*', and considered savage tribes that were devoid of culture and civilization (de la Cadena 2001: 6).

In such an aristocratic, patriarchal, and paternalistic order, the ruling *criollo* men believed it was their responsibility to protect the vast majority of the population (*indios*, *mestizos* and women) whom they considered 'minors' and naturally inferior (Klaren 2000: 134). Under the tutelage of the elites, the majority of the population were therefore excluded from citizenship rights in state laws and policies. By the early twentieth century, however, the oligarchy's previous rejection of 'racial degeneration' or mixing began to shift to a rejection of the biological conceptualization of race and to the belief that education could

improve Peru's impoverished, traditional and inferior Indians and thus racially homogenize the nation (de la Cadena 2000: 19). This change was influenced in part by intellectuals who embraced an anti-imperialist position rejecting North American assertions of the inferiority of hybrid Latin American populations (Applebaum et al. 2003: 7). In addition to the transformative power of education, while *indio* subsistence farmers in the rural Andes were seen as 'traditional', those who were gradually incorporated into the urban market economy, dominated by *mestizos*, became *mestizos* themselves (Wade 1997: 41). Consequently racial hierarchies became forged along increasingly geographical lines and according to the location of 'modern' economic and educational activity. Oil production and plantation agriculture, for example, technologically modernized the coastal strip and Lima in particular, where the *criollo* elite considered itself modern and continued to look to Europe for its cultural references (de la Cadena 2000: 20).

Gradually, as the working class labour force grew in response to economic diversification, expansion and urbanization during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, social class thus became an identifiable social category and a growing factor in racial identification. In the Andean mines, the coastal oil fields and plantations, and the urban (mainly Lima) factories, mills, shops, construction sites and docks, the militant and unionized employees (predominantly men) identified as '*trabajadores*' (workers). They were also given a new racial identity, '*cholo*', a pejorative term to describe the combination of low-income or working class and of Indian descent by those who considered themselves superior to them, including the *mestizos* (Wade 1997: 38).

### *From race to culture*

The development of class as a more coherent social category in the early 1900s coincided with the emergence of a new *indigenista* (pro-indigenous) discourse of 'culture' in the Andes, inspired by *mestizo* intellectuals in Cusco. *Indigenistas* attacked the widespread racist assumptions of Indian inferiority and degradation, claiming instead that the future of national renewal lay in 'indigenous culture' and principles of reciprocity and cooperation (Starn et al. 2005: 228). They took a strategic decision to drop the identity '*indio*', and

replace it with the concept of indigenous culture and a new idea of *mestizaje*, different from the coast, to identify literate and economically successful people in the Andes who shared and celebrated indigenous culture (de la Cadena 2001: 10). It was the growth of the labour movement, however, that represented the first expression of a challenge to the oligarchy by the masses. By rejecting orthodox Soviet Marxism and committing to building on Peru's Andean traditions, the first Socialist Party chose to develop close ties with *indigenista* intellectuals, but their hopes of a mass popular uprising and victory over the oligarchy were dashed by the collapse of export markets in 1929, and military dictatorial governments until the early 1960s (Roberts 1996: 71).

Unlike the dictatorships in the rest of the Latin America region, however, the military regime from 1968 to 1975 led a process of state-directed national development that included an agrarian reform of 60 per cent of agricultural lands that marked the end of the oligarchy's control (Starn et al. 2005: 279). The term *campesino* (peasant farmer) was introduced into government legislation, reinforcing the trend towards the loss of the identity 'indio' in political discourse, and the increasing conflation of race with notions of class. 'Race as biology' in this period was being rejected internationally, further influencing the shift of Peruvian political discourses from race to culture and class. As Peruvian anthropologist de la Cadena (2001: 3) argues, until the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies in 1990, the widespread rejection of the concept of 'race' and the denial of racist practices in the modern era was the product of this adoption of *indigenista* 'culturalist' and classed interpretations of difference that in fact continued to reify social hierarchies and legitimate discrimination and exclusion. Unlike race, with its unavoidable associations with colonialism and slavery, culture and class have worked to remove from view the historical specificity of racial oppression in the context of Peru (Weismantel and Eisenman 1998: 122).

In 1993 the (re)conceptualization of race and ethnicity as culture and class was cemented in the newly reformed Peruvian Constitution. For the first time in Peruvian history, indigenous customary law was formally recognized, together with a special jurisdiction for its exercise by Andean *campesinos* and native (Amazonian) peoples. With this change, the nineteenth century constitutional ideal of the culturally homogenous nation was abandoned, and in



its place the new legal pluralism established the right of all cultures in Peru to exist (Yrigoyen Fajardo 2002: 157). Notably, however, the inhabitants of Lima's settlements from the Andes, Amazon and rural coastal regions remained outside these new formal cultural categories, reinforcing their identity of '*cholo*' with its negative connotations.

It was not until 1999 that the Peruvian state first introduced a law to sanction racial discrimination. However, this major shift in analysis and discourse was not the result of popular demand. In contrast to some of its neighbours (Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Brazil), Peru has no strong unified indigenous movement, and the groups that exist (and the population in general) have not identified racial discrimination as relevant to their lives (Laurie and Bonnett 2002: 44). The indigenous groups that have become organized have been concentrated in the Amazon, and have elected to campaign for rights to their 'cultural' identity, bilingual education and health services (Starn et al. 2005: 553; Degregori and Sandoval 2008: 162). The concept of race has only been adopted by and about Afro-Peruvians, only an estimated 5 per cent of the population, who have historically raised the issue of racism but have had little impact on state policies (Laurie and Bonnett 2002: 44). De la Cadena (2001) argues that due to the limited social movement discourse and action on race, and the focus on class among the Andean *campesino* population and the political Left, the recent introduction of anti-racist laws have been initiated instead by the state, as an integral element of donor-led neo-liberal economic policies. As a government representative from the sanctioning Institute (INDECOPI) in 1999 explained to her:

People believe that the free market has no laws. But let me tell you, the free market has one law, and that law is that as consumers we are all equal. The free market does not tolerate any form of discrimination against consumers. Every individual, regardless of gender, religion, ethnic or racial identity, has the right to participate in the free market (cited in de la Cadena 2001: 13).

It is important to recognize therefore that the Peruvian government's new interest in introducing anti-discrimination laws falls within, and is motivated by, the latest trend in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to

promote 'neoliberalism with a human face' (Green 1995: 10). This approach, introduced in the mid-1990s, has attempted to overcome the serious increase in poverty levels and social inequalities resulting from previous structural adjustment policies. It centres on a commitment to 'development with equity', democratization, decentralization of state power and citizen participation in state policy-making at national and local levels (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 24). In Peru this has translated into the development of programmes in equity education, for example, which have been designed to 'facilitate the harmonious coexistence and geographical and social mobility of the multi-racial population' by focusing on 'multicultural', 'intercultural' and 'antiracist' education (Laurie and Bonnett 2002: 32).

While World Bank, IMF and national government discourse highlights the concepts of multiculturalism and anti-racism, it is the term '*interculturalidad*' or interculturality that has emerged from Latin American, including Peruvian, social scientists, originally within the field of bilingual indigenous education. Degregori and Sandoval (2008: 164) argue that these pedagogical origins of the term have influenced ensuing academic and NGO conceptualizations of *interculturalidad* in Peru. Specifically they emphasize the long history of the contacts, exchanges and bridges that exist among different cultures in the country, despite inequalities of wealth and power, that produce the idea of another possibility: the elimination of inequality but not of the exchanges themselves. The idea, yet to be put into practice politically, is to bring Peru's many different cultures into conversation (ibid.).

In recent years the changing discourse on race and culture has produced a renewed attention to racism and cultural difference that has not lost its connection to questions of social class and economic status. How does sexuality connect with these ongoing debates on inequality, discrimination and cultural difference today, and how has it changed over time?

### **3.2 Sexuality, gender and colonial legacies in contemporary Peru**

Research on sexuality in Latin America has expanded notably since the late 1980s, predominantly within the fields of Latin American historical and literary studies, anthropology and HIV/AIDS, and by scholars located mainly in the

United States and Europe. The paradigms of previous research on sexuality in the West presented in Chapter Two have ensured an examination of the connection between sexuality and gender in Latin America as well as a critique of the historical and cultural variations and the cultural biases and universal assumptions of Anglo-American theories of sexuality.

In Hispanic Latin America, from as early as 1492, the Spanish colonizers introduced and enforced Catholic discourse of sexual restraint, in contrast to the brutality of the soldiers' sexual relations with Indian women, which left women denigrated and despised (Chant with Craske 2003: 132). The first generation of *mestizo* and *mulatto* children born of Indian, and later African slave women, were illegitimate and therefore consigned to a legal vacuum and commonly disowned by their Spanish fathers who were married to Spanish noblewomen (Harris 2008: 280). In order to maintain racial purity and hierarchy, the sexuality of Spanish women arriving from Europe, or born into colonial families, was strictly defined in relation to reproduction, and embodied chastity, virtue, morality and respectability (Chant with Craske 2003: 133).

The Catholic doctrine of sexuality that arrived with the Spanish over 500 years ago enforced monogamous heterosexual marriage and procreative sex as the norm throughout the Luso-Hispanic region, including in Peru after the arrival of Francisco Pizarro in 1532. Colonial discourse on sexuality provided the foundation of contemporary popular stereotypes of male sexuality and masculinity as powerful – conceptualized by the term '*machismo*'. Meanwhile, female sexuality is dichotomized as honourable or shameful, either constructed through the veneration of the Virgin Mother, the ideal of motherhood and suffering, or through the image of the whore, symbolized by La Malinche, the Indian woman in Mexico given to the Spanish colonial leader, Hernán Cortes (Melhuus 1996: 232).

In addition to documenting and promoting the strict rules of heterosexual marriage, the Spanish colonial chronicles in Peru denounced the prevalence of male-male and male-female sodomy and men attired in female dress among indigenous populations, which they considered 'abominable' or 'nefarious' (Stavig 2003:134). Sexual values were one of the main elements of Spanish cultural challenges and efforts to Europeanize Indian subjects in the Andean and coastal regions of Peru. Catholic priests played a central role, using confession

as a means of instructing sexual norms and vilifying transgressions that included incest, sodomy, bestiality, sex out of wedlock, adultery and masturbation, all punishable by God in the form of social and political decline, natural disasters, disease, mental illness and eternal damnation (ibid.: 144).

While colonial chronicles made regular references to the sexual lives of Indian and, later, *mestizo* men, unusually, a seventeenth century manual for priests also included questions to be asked of women in confession, for example:

“Have you sinned with another woman, like yourself? When you engaged in this abominable sin, were you thinking about married men? unmarried men? the priest? the friars? your male kinfolk? those kin of your husband?” (Perez Bocanegra 1631, quoted in Harrison 1994: 146).

References to colonial concerns for women’s same-sex sexuality, however, are few and far between in academic studies of the region. In her research on the archives of the Spanish Inquisition in Lima, Silverblatt (2004: 172) mentions only one example, the case of a ‘renowned witch’ from Portugal named Maria Martínez, daughter of a Portuguese priest and a slave from Guinea. Imprisoned by the inquisitors for being a ‘*zahori*’ (a witch of African descent), the divining gifts of Martínez caused a stir due to the numbers of Spanish, slave and freed women who visited her, including when she was being held in the tribunal cells. At her trial in Lima, a Spanish female client of Martínez accused her of wanting to “visit because she had fallen in love with her”, and of not having had sex with men for over seven years because she had been “dealing with the devil” (ibid.: 173). Silverblatt notes that Martínez’s sexual activities were never investigated directly by the Inquisition, but that this accusation left her vulnerable to the most serious charge she was facing as a *zahori*: that she had entered into a pact with the devil by becoming his paramour (ibid.). Having no husband or known male partner, Martínez’s failure to prove her heterosexuality was connected with evil and thus provided further proof of her practice of witchcraft. As Silverblatt’s study of the records confirms, although Martínez denied all the charges, she was found guilty, paraded through Lima’s streets, whipped 200

times and exiled from Peru for ten years as part of the attempt to stop the “plague of women” that seemed so threatening to colonial order (ibid.: 174).

Although Silverblatt does not explore further questions of women’s sexuality, this case provides an example of colonial anxieties about women who remained outside relations with men and marriage. This did not translate, however, into a serious investigation of Martinez’s alleged interest in her client, or any explicit punishment for transgressing sexual norms. As Stavig (2003: 145) notes, studies of specific cases in colonial archives reveal that it was only male same-sex sexual behaviour and indiscretion in public that led to direct censure. As long as community values were not threatened and behaviour remained discreet, intimate lives could remain the private concern of individuals. Moreover, some priests considered sexual offences to be serious, while others did not (ibid.: 147).

Ugarteche (1997: 53) connects this colonial and Catholic ambivalence towards sexuality with contemporary double standards in Peru, characterized by a conservative discourse, including *machista* attitudes towards women and homosexuals, combined with a range of non-normative sexual practices and attitudes. Within this framework, a woman is symbolized by her potential to become a prostitute, while a homosexual (assumed to be a man) or a *travesti* (male-to-female transgendered) is conceptualized as effeminate and perverted. Attempts to inculcate colonial Catholic attitudes towards sexuality over the centuries have not resulted in the disappearance of sexual practices considered immoral, but they have produced a culture of resistance that has been characterized by silence; everything is possible as long as nothing is openly revealed or verbally expressed (ibid.). Ugarteche argues that in this culture of ambivalence and silent resistance or transgression, having children is considered good and important, and ‘bisexuality is cultural and atavistic’, contradicting the European vision of the rigidity of the categories heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual (ibid.: 54). Beneath the surface of spoken and visible heterosexual relationships, marriage, monogamy and parenthood, for the vast majority non-normative sexual practices and desires inhabit the realm of concealment and secrecy.

The term ‘bisexual’ is deployed by Ugarteche to contrast it with European notions of bisexuality, but only briefly, without further exploration of

the different meanings the term produces in Peru. Bisexuality has been the subject of only one academic study in Peru, and only in its relationship to HIV/AIDS prevention and male same-sex sexuality. In this study, Cáceres (1996) claims that in Latin America the terms 'bisexual' and 'bisexuality' are not commonly taken up and do not have normative meanings. In contrast, men's sexual relations with other men are conceived of more in terms of the social status and acceptability granted to the 'who is the man there' (1996: 142). Cáceres's study of the most common sexual taxonomies in the Spanish language used by men in Peru found that the meanings associated with each varied widely according to social class, age, and involvement in homosexual subcultures (ibid.: 144). Notably, at the time of this study, the term '*bisexual*' in Spanish was found by Cáceres to be occasionally and recently taken up as a form of self-identification, among middle class men influenced by contact with Western discourses. There were, however, several Peruvian terms in Spanish referring to men combining same-sex and opposite-sex practices, such as *activo*, *mostacero*, *cacanero* and *entendido*, the first three being specific to working class men (ibid.: 143).

The focus on men in popular discourse and research on same-sex sexuality in Peru is also reproduced in studies of constructions of masculinity and machismo in the Latin America region and Peru in recent years (Cornwall 1993; Gutmann 2003). This field of research on men falls within feminist studies of gender inequality, '*machismo*' and the high incidence of male violence against women. It also reflects the growth of men's groups interested in transforming gender relations they consider oppressive to themselves as well as women (Vigoya 2003). In addition, masculinity studies have also often connected with explorations of femininity in men and popular discourses about male homosexuality that have traditionally emphasized effeminacy and a loss of manhood (Carrillo, 2003; Parker 1998; 2003). In Peru, for example, among the working and middle class men in Cáceres's study of bisexuality, normative masculinity for men is bound up with notions of being sexually virile and 'active' (penetrating men or women but never being 'passive'), rather than with having sex only with women (Cáceres 1996: 139). Thus men's notions of normative meanings of masculinity can encompass both same and opposite-sex sexual practices, but are inextricably bound up with the identity 'heterosexual'.

Men considered not masculine enough are therefore always assumed to be 'passive' and to only practise and desire sex with other men.

In addition to Ugarteche's suggestion noted above that homosexuality is often associated only with men, bisexuality (or other related Peruvian terms) and masculinity reflect similar assumptions. Notably, although no studies of sexual categories and their meanings exist with regard to women in Peru, during the years I worked there until 1993 and the period of my fieldwork more recently, I encountered three widely known terms: '*lesbiana*', '*machona*', '*marimacha*'. These terms are all connected with the notion of a separate and fixed same-sex identity, in opposition to '*heterosexual*'. Female equivalents of the terms for men combining same and opposite sex practices researched by Cáceres have not been created for or by women, apart from the occasional reference to '*bisexual*' more recently in the urban middle and upper classes and among LGBT activists. I explore the meanings of these concepts in women's lives further in Chapters Four, Five and Seven in the context of Lima's popular sectors and the feminist movements of Peru and the Latin America and Caribbean region.

### **3.3 Contemporary feminist and LGBT politics of sexuality**

Although academic research on sexuality in contemporary Peru has been very limited to date, national political debates on sexuality in Peru have grown notably since the 1980s, led by the national feminist and LGBT movements' challenges to successive Peruvian governments and the Catholic Church. The political and economic context of these debates has been difficult for social movements. In the 1990s they coincided with a period of aggressive neo-liberal economic policies and authoritarian politics of the Fujimori government. Moreover, Peruvian political and economic elites continue to be influenced predominantly by the conservative discourse and policies of the Catholic Church's leadership, in particular on issues of abortion, birth control, marriage and homosexuality. This influence is due to the Catholic Church's historic and continuing close ties with the state, which provides approximately £1 million in annual funding to the Church from the Ministries of Justice, Education and

Health, according to the Law 28427 of the state's General Budget (Merino Rosas 2005: 1).

The Catholic Church has, however, been far from homogenous. From the late 1960s, for two decades, Liberation Theology and 'the option for the poor' (led, among others, by Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez) posed a serious challenge to the conservative hierarchies of the Vatican and the Latin American Catholic leaders. Writing in 1971, Gutiérrez (2005: 309) emphasized the need for grassroots church groups to take action for social justice and speak out about '...their sufferings, their camaraderie, their plans, their hopes'. However, although this era of the Church produced a shift to the left among Latin American and Peruvian bishops, the focus on poverty and exclusion did not incorporate a critique of conservative discourse on sexuality or women's reproductive rights in Church or state policies. By the late 1980s, the Vatican intervened, appointing the Peruvian section of the Opus Dei in charge of liturgical events, and the equally conservative Sodalitium Christianae in charge of the press office (Fleet and Smith 1997: 233). Within a year, conservative bishops had assumed formal control of the Episcopal Conference, ushering in a sharp swing to the right that continues to dominate to date. Since the early 1990s, the Catholic Church, with its professional lawyers, has invested time and resources to actively challenge social movements' campaigns for reproductive, sexual and LGBT rights. In 1993, during Fujimori's presidency, they achieved the introduction into the Constitution of the rights of the unborn child, making it difficult to decriminalize abortion, even for cases of rape.

After Alejandro Toledo took over from Fujimori in 2000, his re-democratization process was paradoxically combined with appointing far-right conservative Catholics to leadership positions in the Ministry of Health, in return for the Church's support for his candidacy (Cáceres et al. 2006: 24). On the topic of same-sex sexuality, in June 2000, for example, the Archbishop of Lima gave a sermon, transmitted to the nation by a national television channel, on homosexuality, naming homosexuals as 'sons of the devil' and 'outside God's plans' (Ugartheche 2001: 308). Meanwhile, in 2002 the psychological counselling centre of the elite Catholic University in Lima distributed to students a pamphlet stating that homosexuality was an illness that could be cured. The pamphlet, titled "Sexual Identity: Is It Possible to Choose?", also



stated that in difficult cases, when a person refused to change his or her sexual orientation, celibacy was the only health option (Chauvin 2002: 1). Catholic discourse of homosexuality as a sin and a disease therefore continues to dominate despite the fact that homosexuality is not illegal in Peru.

For feminists in Peru, sexual and reproductive rights have been the central issue of contention with the state and the Catholic Church. Since the 1970s, the feminist movement has campaigned nationally on violence against women and for women's sexual rights pertaining to protection from rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and violence perpetrated by the police and staff of public health services. This has been intricately connected with campaigns on women's reproductive rights for access to adequate health care, contraception and safe, legal abortion (CRLP 1998, Madalengoitia 2000). This work has been pioneered by feminist NGOs such as Flora Tristán, Demus and Movimiento Manuela Ramos, which with their strong socialist feminist commitments, have worked closely with women in the popular sectors (Henríquez 2004: 219). In spite of this relationship with women from the popular sectors, however, the problem of racism in Peru has been omitted from the discourse of the feminist movement, just as feminism has gained a minimal presence in the ethnic/racial movements in Peru (Vargas 2004: 23). This disconnection between feminism and questions of race and ethnicity is exacerbated by the geographical location of the leaders of the feminist movement in Lima's NGOs and universities. Thus the ancestral values and the socioeconomic, racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics the Andean, Amazonian and coastal 'provinces' or 'regions' have not been consolidated in the feminist movement (Gómez 2004: 96).

National public awareness-raising and advocacy on homosexuality commenced in the mid-1980s, with the creation of the gay and lesbian group MHOL (Homosexual Movement of Lima) and the lesbian-only GALF (The Lesbian Feminist Self Awareness Group). In the early years these groups were characterized by the powerful influence of the gay and lesbian movements in the West, adopting Western universal sexual categories and political demands (Bracamonte Allain 2001: 21). As homosexuality had been decriminalized in Peru in the 1920s, the focus of the early years of gay and lesbian groups was on social discrimination and 'homophobia' and efforts to change public and cultural attitudes towards homosexuality (Ugarteche 2001: 304). The Western

influence on this gay and lesbian activism was briefly interrupted in the early 1990s when the MHOL began to study cultural difference and specific homoerotic histories and cultures in the Andes, based on the research of the MHOL's director, Oscar Ugarteche (1997). However, this exploration of cultural difference was limited to male and male-to-female trans subjectivities, omitting women's sexuality from any reflection or study. This brief interest in exploring cultural difference soon shifted to questions of class difference in urban areas with the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. HIV/AIDS dominated the agenda of men and trans in the mixed LGBT groups such as the MHOL in the 1990s, leading them into the realms of the 'right to health', again with a focus on male same-sex sexuality including in the popular sectors (Bracamonte Allain 2001: 21).

In the new millennium, however, the LGBT groups have distanced themselves from high profile HIV/AIDS and health advocacy. Instead they have taken on the challenge of incorporating LGBT rights into the field of human rights, building dialogue and alliances with human rights NGOs to strengthen their advocacy on state human rights policies (Bracamonte Allain and Chávez 2005: 7). The LGBT movement has also dedicated much of its time and energy in the past ten years to campaigning for new laws to criminalize discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. After a long struggle, and despite strong Catholic opposition, in 2005 the Peruvian Congress approved a new Code of Constitutional Procedures, which included a provision protecting citizens from discrimination based on sexual orientation. In addition, the Constitutional Tribunal declared unconstitutional the Military Code which defined homosexual activity while on duty as a crime (Cáceres 2006: 25). What is noticeably absent, however, from the publications available on this most recent aspect of LGBT activism is any discussion of racial, ethnic, cultural or class difference, and the very limited attention given to women's sexuality in general or lesbian rights in particular.

In this context, lesbian feminists, outnumbered by their male counterparts in the LGBT movement, have prioritized building a lesbian identity and community predominantly within GALF, the 'lesbian unit' of the MHOL, and other lesbian-specific groups, although still located within the LGBT movement. Their choice to work separately from the feminist movement has

been the consequence of the high levels of anxiety within the feminist movement in response to the rumours and accusations circulating in Peruvian society that all feminists were lesbians (Moromisato 2004: 74). Despite these anxieties, and the absence of 'lesbian rights' in the discourse of the feminist movement, as my research in Peru will demonstrate, lesbian feminist and the mixed LGBT groups have enjoyed the solidarity of some feminist NGOs and individuals within them over the years, some of whom have defined themselves as lesbian or bisexual. By sharp contrast, the left wing political parties in the 1980s and 1990s expelled women who identified as lesbian, accusing them of having a 'bourgeois disease' that had to be cured if they wanted to stay with the party (ibid.: 76). Thus lesbian feminist groups, representing Lima's middle classes, have developed a discourse of 'double oppression' as women and as lesbians that has been disconnected from leftist politics and feminist NGO work on sexual and reproductive rights with women in Peru's popular sectors. Consequently questions of race, ethnicity, culture, poverty and social class have also been absent from public debates on women's same-sex sexuality. In order to examine further the (dis)connections between feminist and LGBT work on sexuality, gender, class, race and ethnicity, I have chosen the case of Lima's popular sectors, located in low-income settlements. These settlements have a unique and recent history, having existed only since the second half of the twentieth century. Before exploring in detail in Chapter Four women's experiences and knowledge in the settlements, in the following section I outline the context in which settlement dwellers live and the key factors that have framed and influenced feminist and LGBT discourse on sexuality.

### **3.5. Gender, race and survival strategies in Lima's low-income settlements**

On one side lies Monterico, one of Lima's most affluent suburbs; on the other, Pamplona, a city of the poor. A high wall separates the two.. a frontier between two worlds, a symbol of social separation and division. Constructed as a line of defence against land invasions, for the citizens of Monterico it acts like a dike stemming the rising tide of poverty; for those in Pamplona it is a physical reminder of the seemingly insurmountable barriers to social advancement (Crabtree 2002: 10).

Between 1960 and 1981, Lima's population exploded in a phenomenon that Jose Maria Arguedas described as the Andean re-conquest of the Spanish conquerors' capital.<sup>16</sup> The new arrivals carried out illegal land invasions on Lima's periphery, building from scratch to establish new *pueblos jóvenes* ('young towns' or settlements) (Starn et al. 2003: 293). The spectacular growth of the peripheral settlements shaped the growth of Lima and gave rise to the concept of the south, east and north '*conos*' or '*cones*'. In 1957 the inhabitants of Lima's 56 low-income settlements accounted for less than ten per cent of the metropolitan population of around 1,375,000, but by 1981 Lima's population had grown to around six million, with 32 percent of its population living in 408 settlements. By 2004 the estimated population of Lima was over 8,500,000, of which five million, 62 per cent, were living in the *conos* (Kruijt and Degregori 2007: 104). Today Lima is Peru's only metropolis, with a population now estimated to be approximately ten times greater than the country's second city, Arequipa, in the Southern Andean highlands (Gilbert 1998: 34).

During this first major phase of migration to Lima, until the late 1960s, those who migrated were among the most dynamic and educated, and not from the poorest or least developed areas of the provinces. The migrants left their provincial towns to seek work and better opportunities, particularly in the factories established near the city centre, creating the north and east *conos*. The expansion of Peru's state bureaucracy in this period, which went hand in hand with economic growth, provided another source of employment for the new arrivals. Apart from finding formal employment, the migrants also participated for the first time in other modern structures such as trade unions, political parties, educational institutions and urban services. Migrants considered their move to the city as a search for education, an act of modernity, a rational assessment of opportunities, and a process of creating a different modernity (Joseph A. 2005: 158).

Many of the early migrants were men and boys, who often began their new life in Lima renting a room in the old city centre slums. Once they had found employment and married, or arranged for family members from their

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<sup>16</sup> Peruvian writer and anthropologist (1911–1969), who based his novels and stories on the life and 'cosmivision' of the Quechua-speaking Indians of the Andean region of Peru.

place of origin to join them, they would often choose to move to a settlement, invading land in order to build their own home (Dietz 1980: 73). However, the phenomenon of mass migration only began in the late 1960s, sparked by the land reform carried out by the Velasco military government. The agrarian reform had failed to live up to its promise, with less than half of the landless rural labourers and smallholding owners actually receiving any land (Starn et al. 2003: 285). Moreover, those that did receive land had insufficient support or resources from the State to cultivate it productively. Notably, although land invasions in Lima were illegal, they were carried out in desert regions on the periphery of Lima, too desolate to be of any commercial value. The land invasions were also tacitly encouraged by the Velasco government, to reduce the risk of social unrest following the limitations of the agrarian reform (Gilbert 1998: 84). Migration for rural families therefore signified the transition from serfs to urban citizens, and the conquest of a space in the city and in the political community. By invading land and creating settlements, they brought a process of social democratization to the very heart of the oligarchic and bourgeois domination of Peru and Lima (Joseph A. 2005: 159).

### *The internal war and forced displacement*

A third wave of migration from the early 1980s until the mid-1990s was the product of the internal armed conflict, reinforcing the rural exodus to urban areas, and in particular to Lima. The conflict between the Peruvian military and the Shining Path resulted in a reign of terror and violence for the civilian Andean population, at its most violent in the rural areas and smaller towns (Kruijt and Degregori 2007: 102). Although many displaced by the war were peasant farmers, others were artisans, shopkeepers and professionals from small towns. Local government leaders and officials also fled Shining Path threats, as did many young men and women who were targeted for recruitment by the Shining Path and who were also targeted as potential guerrillas by the military. Members of the legal left, community organization and union leaders and journalists were also forced to escape both guerrilla and military aggression. Traumatized and often without any belongings, the displaced received some assistance from traditional networks set up in the Lima settlements by the

previous economic migrants, but the latter soon became overwhelmed by the numbers of migrants. The war also sowed distrust between the two groups, due to suspicions that the displaced had ties with the Shining Path (Kirk 2005: 371).

Most of the displaced arrived in San Juan de Lurigancho, Pamplona, Villa El Salvador and Ate-Vitarte, in the east and south *conos* during the 1980s. Often the displaced were Quechua-speakers with little knowledge of Spanish. They found Lima a hostile environment where they endured malnutrition, disease, the psychological effects of violence, bereavement and loss of home and identity, racism, and lack of income. They also lived with the ongoing fear of being located by the Shining Path or government security forces (Kirk 2005: 375-378). This fear was well founded, as in the mid-1980s the Shining Path decided to mount attacks on urban areas, particularly Lima. It focused its efforts on terrorizing the city's population by carrying out periodic, unannounced bombings of middle and upper class commercial districts, assassinations of military and government officials, and the infiltration of the settlements, trade unions and teachers' organizations (Klaren 2000: 392).

The second half of the 1980s was marked by the Shining Path's attempts to sabotage community organizations in the *conos*, threatening and assassinating the leaders and members who refused to join its armed struggle (Gilbert 1998: 164). In 1986 the government declared Lima an emergency zone, giving power to the security forces to carry out sweeps of the *conos* in search of Shining Path sympathizers. Once again, this time in Lima, the displaced civilian population was caught in a web of violence created by the armed actors. The tide turned, however, when in 1992 in Villa El Salvador, the Shining Path assassinated Maria Elena Moyano, a high profile and strong community leader and defender of women's rights, who had denounced the Shining Path's attempts to sabotage community and women's organizations. After Moyano was shot and her body blown up with dynamite, there was a popular wave of defiance against the Shining Path, symbolized by the three hundred thousand people who attended her funeral (Miloslavich 1993: 13). Later in 1992 the Shining Path's campaign of terror rapidly collapsed with the capture in Lima of its leader Abimael Guzman and other members of its elite leadership committee. However, although the inhabitants of the *conos* finally entered a period of freedom from

political violence that continues to date, their neighbourhoods and homes have been far from safe and peaceful, especially for women and children.

*The persistence of insecurity in public and private spaces*

As Kruijt and Degregori (2007) note in their recent study of Lima's *conos*, in terms of security and violence, Lima today is not as overtly contested by armed actors and organized crime as many other Latin American cities. They attribute this phenomenon to the creation of community security organizations during the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to the internal war and as a form of resistance to the Shining Path. Some were known as the *comités de parachoque*, neighbourhood security committees, that liaised with the local police. The war also led to the reinforcement of another key security institution, the *serenazgos*, armed nightwatch committees of concerned citizens, a kind of voluntary neighbourhood police force, under the command of the local police commissioner. Today these local security committees continue to keep a close watch on the irregular activities of petty criminals in close cooperation with the local police (Kruijt and Degregori 2007: 109).

However, while the *conos* are free from control by armed political or organized criminal actors, there are serious security concerns relating to muggings and robberies in streets, houses and small-businesses. Adolescent gang violence is also an increasing concern for residents. In San Juan de Lurigancho and Pamplona Alta, for example, each neighbourhood has a gang that disputes its territory with others. Their members are forced to show they can kill, using easily obtained knives and handguns, and are associated with the distribution and consumption of drugs such as crack cocaine. Street crime and violence are most prevalent in the poorest sectors on the outskirts of the *conos* that are often home to more recent migrants who are consequently the least organized (Crabtree 2002: 59). In a recent study of women's security in San Juan de Lurigancho, the NGO Flora Tristán found that delinquency was the second most important problem facing women after low levels of employment and income, with 73 per cent of the two hundred women interviewed confirming that they felt unsafe when alone on the streets, even in their own neighbourhood (Centro Flora Tristán 2004: 9). Insecurity in the streets is of

major concern to women whose main sources of income include domestic service in the middle class areas of Lima or garment factory work, often an hour's bus ride away from home, and selling on the streets and in local markets (Gilbert 1998: 74).

Domestic violence against women represents the other major element of insecurity in the *conos*, although a study of available national data by Flake (2005) confirms that the incidence of this form of violence is high in all social classes, not just in the popular sectors. In metropolitan Lima, for example, research in the late 1990s revealed that 85 per cent of women had suffered psychological violence, 31 per cent had been physically abused, and 49 per cent had been sexually coerced (ibid.: 354). Flake argues that the high incidence of domestic violence can be associated with a combination of *machismo* and the excessive political and social violence that has marred Peru's history for centuries, desensitizing people to aggression, and becoming a common way for men to obtain what they want (ibid.). Moreover, the problems of gender norms and inequalities faced by women in the *conos* have been compounded by differences of race, ethnicity and culture.

#### *Race and culture on the move.*

Over a period of forty years the processes of voluntary migration and forced displacement from the Andes to Lima's *conos* brought to the capital people from rural areas and market towns with diverse racial, ethnic, economic, education and health status. Consequently the population of the settlements in Lima's north, south and eastern *conos* is characterized by socio-economic diversity and hybridity, being mainly formed by the first and second generation of provincial *mestizo* and *indio* migrants, with a small presence of Afro-Peruvians who mainly migrated from central Lima's urban slums (Blondet 2005: 289). Demographically, the *conos* are microcosms of the racial, ethnic, linguistic and regional diversity of the country, with the notable absence of people from the middle or upper classes. By 1970 four fifths of the inhabitants of the settlements were born outside Lima, and more than half were under forty years old. Many were bilingual speakers of Spanish and Quechua or Aymara, bringing Andean culture to the *criollo* and Westernized capital. As Weismantel



(2001: 19) observes: 'White (*criollo* and *mestizo*) *Limeños* lament the enormous *pueblos jóvenes* that have sprung up on its outskirts, populated by immigrants from the highlands who have invigorated and Andeanized a city smug about its cultural and spatial distance from the impoverished highlands'. This process of rural to urban migration led to the labelling of the inhabitants of the *conos* with the pejorative term '*cholos*' or '*cholas*' (Klaren 2000: 350). However, apart from being deployed as a pejorative term, the term *cholo*, or *chola* when referring to women and girls, exemplifies Peruvian understandings of racial categories as hybrid, fluid and relational, and connected more to notions of culture, geographical location and levels of education, income and modernity. While whiteness is associated with Western civilization, modernity, upward mobility and participation in the formal economy and urban cash market, *cholos* are moving towards, but never fully attaining, whiteness by moving from rural to urban cultural and economic activities and locations (Weismantel 2001: 92).

Indeed, far from 'becoming white', migrants transfer their Andean traditions to Lima's settlements, where they are changed and developed, but not forgotten. As a consequence they provide a way of reasserting community and ethnic pride that reinforces the connections between settlement inhabitants. Many neighbourhoods, for example, have developed by attracting people from the same place of origin, helping to reproduce in Lima the diverse cultures of the 'interior' or provinces of Peru (Crabtree 2002:18). This cultural migration can be seen, for example, in the demand for healthcare from traditional healers due to the high cost of Western medical care and a preference among settlement inhabitants for natural treatments. Household or popular medicine refers to a set of concepts about health and illness that is controlled primarily by the housewives or the older women in the family group. This series of practices and therapeutic knowledge is applied in the case of mild illness, before the initiation or manifestation of an illness, and as the first response to an emergency. Some of the principal diagnostic techniques include reading messages with *cuy* (guinea pigs), passing an egg over the body, reading Coca leaves, through *psycoactivas*, (psychoactive plants) and *mesadas*, (baths with flowers). There are at least 25 medicinal plants from the Andes and the Amazon used regularly in urban traditional healing (WHO 1999: 38-41).

*Economic survival, informality and community/kinship ties*

Although hopes of overcoming urban poverty in the *conos* were raised with the industrialization process and economic growth in Lima during the early 1970s, the foreign lending this depended upon was frozen in 1975, leading to austerity measures and economic crisis (Klaren 2000: 358). The political turbulence of the armed conflict in the 1980s exacerbated the continuing external debt crisis, hyperinflation, corruption, crime and a dive in productivity and real wages. With no social security, poverty indicators escalated, while roads, hospitals and communications systems fell into ruin (Starn 2005: 443). The centrist, clientelist government of Alan García in the 1980s resisted the pressure from the International Monetary Fund to retreat from the state-centred development model and introduce structural adjustment programmes, but with the election of a new president, Alberto Fujimori, in 1990 and inflation out of control at 7,650 per cent, the return to orthodoxy began dramatically with the ‘Fujishock’ of August 1990. This massive price adjustment was combined with the introduction of wide ranging neo-liberal policies including the privatization of state-owned companies and the adoption of policies to encourage free trade and attract foreign investment (Gwynne and Kay 1999: 18). Although these extreme measures solved the problem of hyperinflation and enabled incomes to recover their purchasing power, by the late 1990s wages for blue-collar workers had slumped. As cheap imports flooded the market, formal sector employment levels suffered and new labour laws reduced workers’ rights (Crabtree 2002: 43). The effects were acutely felt in the settlements, which were characterized by a lack of basic infrastructure, high rates of infant mortality and high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Barrig 1994: 165).

Consequently, much of the Peruvian economy from the 1980s became driven by the rise of the informal sector, comprising mainly street sellers and small businesspeople. Until the early 1980s, 65 per cent of Peru’s economically active urban population received a formal wage or salary. By 2001, however, this percentage had dropped dramatically, with 60 per cent of the economically active population involved in the informal economy, particularly those from the *conos* (Crabtree 2002: 44). Although often unskilled with very little cash income, those arriving in the *conos* after the economic crisis of the mid-1970s

slowly built up their own commercial ventures, using their former Andean family networks and ethos of communal engagement. Many inhabitants of the *conos* are still self-employed today in informal enterprises and artisan production in home-based workshops and commercial activities.

Amid the precariousness and high levels of poverty, a local 'popular' middle class is slowly growing, comprising an estimated 10 per cent of the *conos*, with new commercial establishments and industrial parks emerging financed by local investors (Kruijt and Degregori 2007: 103). In the *conos*, commerce employs a workforce that has always been mostly composed of 'informal labour' - occasional employees, family members, neighbours, acquaintances and migrants from the same place of origin as the entrepreneurs. Real and symbolic kinship relations predominate; most remuneration is provided in the form of food and accommodation with no intervention by authorities, registration of the workers, employment contracts, membership of trade unions or established working hours (ibid.: 108). Notably, women's involvement in the informal sector increased nationally from 37 per cent in 1984 to 52 per cent in 1993 (Crabtree 2002: 10). Many employers in the service industries, for example, have replaced male employees with women as they believe them less likely to attempt to form or join trade unions and because they can legally pay them lower wages. This process is reflected in recent figures that estimate that Peruvian women earn on average 46 per cent less than men (ibid.).

The problems created by the informality of economic activity in Latin America urban settlements has been compounded over the past forty years by the difficulty in gaining state registration of settlement inhabitants' illegal land holdings. However, as Varley (1998: 178) argues, gaining legal ownership of land can be problematic, as it empowers the state to impose conditions on the land and housing use and to further its own political interests. In the case of Mexico, for example, the state has used the regularization of land ownership to create an individual relationship between the settlers and the state, and thus weakening popular urban movements campaigning for more progressive urban reform. In Lima, in 1961, the military government established the Marginal Settlements Law, known as the 13517 Law, which has been modified and implemented over the decades by different governments with varied and

problematic results. By 1999, for example, only half the properties and plots of land officially registered with the government received a supply of running water, as did half the illegal properties and land occupations. Meanwhile almost all but the most recent and precarious occupations receive electricity, whether they are registered or not (Calderon 2005: 221).

Over the years both central and local governments have been greatly influenced by the formation and action of the associations of the *pobladores* (settlement dwellers) in the 1970s, the association of micro-entrepreneurs and the self-employed in the 1980s and 1990s, and the security committees of the 1990s and 2000s. The military central government and the leftist local governments of the 1970s and early 1980s, pressured by community associations, contributed to an improvement in the living conditions of the settlements. However, since 1985, clientelism by successive governments, the economic crisis and the internal war have resulted in a proliferation of community organizations that lack coordination, are dominated by personal and clientelist relations and address only their own specific and pragmatic aims. In his recent study of the *conos*, Calderón (2005) argues that one key consequence of the fragmentation of the community movements is their inability to develop their own political discourse and self-representation, coordinated urban development programmes or the power to contribute as citizens to the cultural and political management of the country. Gifts have proved more potent than citizenship demands, weakening rights-based and democratic processes (2005: 288). In this context, despite economic and political difficulties, it has been the women's community organizations, with support from feminist and other NGOs, that have taken the lead in working to improve on rights-based community development and public policy advocacy, particularly in the realms of health and human rights.

#### *Women's community organizations, leadership and rights-based training*

The expansion of Lima's *conos*, combined with the economic crisis since the 1970s and a weak state characterized by poor administration and reach, led to the creation of a range of community organizations at neighbourhood and district levels. In this context, three important women's membership

organizations were established in the 1970s: the *Clubes de Madres*, (Mothers' Clubs) providing adult literacy training, the *Comites de Vaso de Leche*, (Glass of Milk Committees) providing milk to children, and the *Comedores Populares* (Community or 'Soup' Kitchens) preparing a hot meal a day for low-income families. Together with other mixed or male-dominated associations, they formed an overlapping network of community support organizations throughout the settlements (Blondet 1995: 256). The *Comedores*, for example, were first organized by women on a voluntary cooperative basis in the 1970s, expanding rapidly in the 1980s in response to deepening economic crisis and the armed conflict (Molyneux 2007: 32). The Catholic and Adventist Churches and their associated NGOs played a central role in the process of expansion, combined with a United States food aid programme and the Peruvian state. The wide expansion of the *Comedores* led to a total of 6,300 in Lima by 2003, where female membership surpassed 100,000 and where 25 per cent of the women members occupied a leadership position at some time (Blondet and Trivelli 2004: 14).

From the outset, secular NGOs, and particularly feminist NGOs committed to women's rights and gender equality, have played an important role in providing rights-based education and training for women members of the *Comedores*. Feminist involvement transformed women's community-based organizations into important political and social bases for their members to debate community level and national issues beyond the basic survival strategies. The focus has been on leadership and public policy advocacy training, organizational strengthening, women's health and reproductive rights and education, legal advice, and workshops on domestic violence (Molyneux 2007: 33). For the first time in Peru, women's participation in grassroots social movement leadership became a regular experience, and one that continues today. Members of the *Comedores* have also highlighted the positive psychological benefits provided by their local neighbourhood groups, where they make friends and have a safe space to speak out about their problems and gain support from fellow group members. However, it is important to note that the role of the *Comedores* and other women's community organizations in alleviating some of the survival and emotional necessities of the women members has also had negative effects, increasing the emphasis on women's

provision of voluntary (unpaid) social services to the community, and reinforcing women's identity as mothers and carers of the family (Barrig 1994: 169; Anderson 1998: 87; Hays-Mitchell 2002: 76). Given the basic needs characteristics of women's community organizations, highlighting women's normative sexuality and gender roles, it is perhaps not surprising therefore that these organizations have not connected with any public debates or studies of sexual orientation or LGBT rights.

### *Conclusions*

Questions of race, ethnicity, culture and class have a long, complex and evolving history in Peru. The early colonial dichotomy of the 'white' European and wealthy minority settled predominantly in Lima (with its slaves of African descent) and the vast Indian majority in the rest of the country has been transformed over the centuries. Today the hybrid racial and ethnic identities in urban areas, symbolized by the categories of the '*mestizo*' and the '*cholo*', are inextricably bound up with notions of social class, economic status and geographical location. However, some central elements of colonial racial hierarchies are still discerned in contemporary Peru. The *mestizo*, as the modern, urban, middle or upper class Peruvian, for example, is often labelled as *blanco* by those who are labelled '*cholo*', in the urban areas, and by those still known as peasants and indigenous people in the rural areas of the coast, the Andes and the Amazon. Therefore, although the concepts of race and racial discrimination disappeared from state discourse and policy-making on inequality and social exclusion in Peru until very recently, notions of racial difference symbolized by the *blanco/cholo* dichotomy have persisted in popular discourse and culture.

Most notably, however, questions of race and ethnicity have not yet entered into feminist and LGBT academic and social movement discourse and politics of sexuality. Feminist sexual and reproductive rights discourse, founded on Peruvian socialist principles, prioritizes the needs of women from the 'popular sectors' or 'peasant' communities, terms imbued with meanings of social class, economic activities and urban or rural poverty rather than racial or ethnic difference. Meanwhile, the LGBT movement's focus over the past

decade on advocating legal change has been informed by the international LGBT movement rather than by dialogue with people living in diverse contexts in Peru. This focus has moved the movement away from its early HIV/AIDS-related considerations of class difference and Peruvian cultural constructions of (particularly male) sexuality, and reinforced an unexamined reliance on and investment in Western sexual identity categories. The absence of discourse and analysis on race, gender or sexuality among the peasant and indigenous social movements in Peru has also resulted in an absence of pressure on the feminist and LGBT movements to question the national relevance of their politics of sexuality or explore how each movement could incorporate knowledge from the other.

In the case of the inhabitants of the *conos*, however, their proximity to and contact with Lima's middle and upper classes (including those working in NGOs), combined with their greater access to the state, the commercial sector, communications and the media, produce greater chances than are available to their rural counterparts for coming into contact with feminist and LGBT discourse on same-sex sexuality. To date this contact has not yet been the subject of any research or documentation in Peru, leading me to prioritize it during my period of fieldwork in Lima. In doing so, as discussed in the next chapter, I chose to connect with women's community organizations in the *conos* through the work of feminist NGOs on sexuality within programmes on sexual and reproductive rights, combined with the few contacts I could find with women living 'non-normative' sexual subjectivities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Women in the *Conos* of Lima: Encounters with Sexual and LGBT Rights**

What is important is to be able to cut across the cultural boundaries that have been constructed to separate us. This is only possible if there are horizontal and democratic relations. To speak of crossing cultures is to speak of social systems, power relations and cosmovisions. It also implies speaking about ourselves and in this manner restoring the individual, interpersonal and subjective dimension that can make crossing cultures a construction and a social relation between different peers.

*Campaign for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights*  
Manifiesto, Second Version (2006:19).<sup>17</sup>

This excerpt from the Manifiesto of the Latin American feminist Campaign for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights sets out a challenge to all around the world committed to promoting people's rights pertaining to sexuality and gender. In the context of Lima, as I have argued in the previous chapter, moving across cultural, racial and ethnic borders is often inextricably connected with moving across the borders of social class and economic status. It entails crossing the invisible or sometimes very visual lines drawn between neighbourhoods of the popular sectors that are home to those facing economic hardship, and of those whose basic needs and much more are met and guaranteed on a daily basis. In this chapter I foreground the voices of women living in Lima's popular sectors in terms of their knowledge, agency and analysis of the work on sexuality of Peru's feminist and LGBT movements. On the basis of these accounts, I examine the meanings constructed and the effects of feminist sexual and LGBT rights discourse on the women involved in this study, their own conceptualizations of sexuality, and their ideas for strategies to overcome the problems they have identified.

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<sup>17</sup> For a full text of the Campaign manifesto, see [www.convencion.org.uy](http://www.convencion.org.uy).



In the first half of this chapter, I explore the lives of women living in the *conos* who were known by my feminist contacts in Lima to have been involved in same-sex relationships. Although I focus on their connection with feminist and LGBT discourse on sexuality, I start by providing a summary of the key aspects of their family histories that they had narrated to me over many hours and in great detail as they had a major and ongoing effect on the lives of the women, both emotionally and in terms of coping with poverty and the limited opportunities for economic independence.<sup>18</sup> I then go on to explore their connections with women's and LGBT organizations based in and outside the *conos*. The central questions I explored with them were: with which organizations have they had contact? What sexuality-related discourse have they encountered? In what ways has this contact influenced their lives and their ability to resist discrimination or exclusion and to create viable lives for themselves? Has the contact produced any negative effects or problems for themselves or others?

Before and during my fieldwork I was unable to locate any ethnographic or empirical studies or publications on women's same-sex sexuality in the popular sectors in Lima or elsewhere in Peru. I therefore had no previous research findings or contacts to guide my own study. As I have noted in Chapter One, it was difficult for me to locate women with direct experience of these issues due to their very limited connections with the feminist or LGBT movements in the mid-2000s. In spite of the difficulty of locating possible informants, during the nine-month period of fieldwork in 2006 I carried out visits, interviews, phone and email communication with five women living in two different districts of the *conos*: San Juan de Lurigancho and Pamplona Alta.

Three of the women, Julia, Maria and Carmen, were aged between 48 and 50, and the fourth, Charo, had turned 18 just before I met her. Charo also introduced me to Ceci, who was a taxi driver living in central Lima and her partner when I made contact with her. Even though they had never met me, the three older women were all very positive about my research topic and very keen to talk to me about their lives and histories. Consequently some of my visits

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<sup>18</sup> The findings from this aspect of my fieldwork will be published in more detail in a chapter of the forthcoming volume: Chant, Sylvia (ed.) 2010: *The International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing.

lasted half or an entire day and included lunch at their home, watching world cup football, drinking coffee and attending a late-night birthday party. Ceci also spoke to me about her life, although she was more cautious than the older women and did not want to be formally interviewed. Charo, the youngest, was the most nervous and the least communicative of the five. We only carried out one interview before her relationship with her family entered into crisis when her family learnt of her relationship with Ceci. For the rest of my stay in Lima, Charo chose to keep her distance from me and only communicated with me by chatting on-line. Of the five women, Carmen was the only one to have dedicated her life to working in women's community organizations and had held leadership positions in the Federations of *Comedores* at the level of her own district and Metropolitan Lima as a whole.

In the second half of the chapter, I concentrate on the case of other women community leaders of a Federation of *Comedores*, working on women's human rights, as well as a group of women's health promoters from a range of settlements in the *conos* working more specifically on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In this context I asked the women leaders about their experience of feminist and LGBT discourse on sexuality, sexual rights and LGBT rights. What discourses of sexuality circulate within their community organizations and their neighbourhoods, especially with reference to women's same-sex sexuality? How important do they think these issues are in the context of people's daily lives in the *conos* generally and in their work as community leaders in particular? Finally, with all the women I met and interviewed I explored their own ideas and opinions about sexuality and identities in the context of the *conos* and beyond.

#### **4.1 Family life on the margins**

As Julia, Maria, Carmen, Charo and Ceci talked about their lives during our interviews and more informal encounters, they provided me with a picture of how they had coped with problems of discrimination and violence due to their relationships with women. Their experiences with family members, for example, were marked by a complex combination of love, acceptance and support from some, rejection and violence from others, and changing attitudes

over time among those most resistant at first. The eldest, Julia and Maria, struggled particularly with their siblings during childhood and as adults. Julia was born and spent her childhood living in a working class district of central Lima. She recalled that when she informed her family she was *lesbiana*, as a teenager in the 1970s, her father quietly followed her mother's response, which was both supportive and protective. Julia noted that she has always been '*como un hombrecito*' (like a boy) when she was a child, to such an extent that she felt obliged to leave school when she was fourteen because she could no longer bear the 'shame' of wearing a skirt. She became an apprentice tailor in her local neighbourhood and was soon earning a small income. She spent her spare time playing football and socialising with other girls and women involved in same-sex relationships, some of whom identified as '*chitos*', an identity adopted only by the most masculine women in the *conos*. Julia explained to me that she didn't feel comfortable introducing me to any of her *chito* friends because they lived very marginal lives and might not respond well to me asking them questions:

There are quite a lot of them, *chitos*, who cut their hair and dress like men. They can't find work so they get involved in things that harm them. They drink a lot, with their homosexual friends, and when they are drunk the men take advantage of them. So they end up having children, sometimes one, two or three. Without work they fight and end up in delinquency (Julia, 50).

When Julia was young and spent her spare time with her *chito* friends away from her family, her siblings' negativity towards her sexuality was limited, as long as she did not present a partner to her family. However, when she and Maria decided to live together, when they were both in their late-twenties, she was forced to face up to much more serious aggression:

My brother wanted to report me to the police, until one day I said: 'I'm sick of you, do you want to fight with me? Do it once and for all, but I'm not going to let you hit me'. When I challenged him to a fight, he stopped. But I said to Maria that we should leave my family home – I loved her very much and couldn't let my brother humiliate her (Julia, 50).

Despite Julia's strength in facing up to her brother, she and Maria felt they could not stay, despite her mother's support. Maria had no home to offer as an alternative. Having been abused and rejected as a child by her father and step-mother after her mother died, and without any support from her siblings, Maria left home as a teenager to marry a man who would continue the pattern of violence:

He used to hit me, he was like a beast, hitting me, then he raped me, and I got pregnant. I used to say, 'I don't want any more children' – I cried and suffered, it was one pregnancy after another. Having children and still working, it was hard. I said to myself, how can I separate? I had children and was pregnant with the fifth child. I was afraid, because he always said to me: 'If you leave me, or if I see you with anyone else, I'll kill you' (Maria, 48).

After having her fifth child in the space of six years, Maria met Julia. Maria recounted how she had felt attracted to a woman for the first time in her life, and that she fell in love even though she had never previously considered or desired a relationship with a woman. Unable to cope any longer with the cycle of rape and unwanted pregnancies, with Julia she found the courage to leave her husband:

I told him directly: 'You know what? I'm with a woman', and he was furious, he hit me, he shouted 'How is it possible you're with a woman'? I went to live with my brother and my sister in law, I took the children, but he came and said: 'Your children or your life', so I had to give him the children. I cried, I suffered, it was a terrible blow. Then my brother said that if the children were with their father, his wife didn't want me in the house any more (Maria, 48).

The aggression from both brothers and Maria's husband, and Maria's loss of access to her children, forced Julia and Maria move to a new neighbourhood where they were not known. By then Julia was a skilled tailor and Maria was offered work as a cook and cleaner in the NGO Manuela Ramos, where the two had met. They rented a room and a year later participated in a land invasion nearby in order to take over a small plot of land. Over a period of twenty years they built their two-storey house, which was still unfinished when I visited them

in 2006. During most of this time, Maria's husband had refused her access to their children, until the eldest reached 18 and was legally allowed to choose to see her. Gradually Maria regained her relationship with each of her children, who as adults defied their father and severely criticized his cruelty in keeping them apart for so many years. By the time I met Julia and Maria, all Maria's five children had moved to Spain to seek work. They had slowly come to accept Julia as their mother's partner, to such an extent that one of Maria's daughters left her one-year old daughter Milagros with both of them when she migrated to Spain. Maria's children and Julia's niece, who had moved to Berlin to work, all sent remittances back to Lima so that Julia and Maria could slowly build their house and bring up Milagros.

When I asked Julia and Maria how they had managed to stay together for twenty years, despite all the problems they had encountered, they both agreed that of central importance for them over the years was the love and support of Julia's mother, and eventually of Maria's children, who, at the time of my fieldwork, were attempting to convince Julia, Maria and Milagros to go and live with them in Spain, to 'be a family again'.

Of a similar age to Julia and Maria, Carmen spent her childhood in central Lima, living with her parents and younger brother. Carmen recalled how her mother, a teacher, worked hard and endured constant aggression from Carmen's father, until after nine years of marriage her mother demanded a divorce and her father left their home. Before she was a teenager, Carmen's preference for boys' activities had already created difficulties with her father:

I never played with dolls, I liked books and drawing, football and cycling. I always played with my brother and we used to fight and hit each other as if we were both boys. I remember once my father wanted to take me to see a doctor, he thought it was atrocious what I was like at home. He said: 'I don't know what I'm going to do with this girl, it's like two boys fighting, playing football' (Carmen, 48).

Carmen talked of how she resisted the pressure she felt with her family to have a boyfriend and get married, and of the first time she fell in love, at 17, with Teresa, a girl at her local Catholic Church group. Their relationship didn't last,

however, as members of the group began to suspect them and reported them to the priest, who challenged Teresa and threatened to reject her and Carmen's application to go to the Amazon region to work as missionaries, and to publicly denounce their relationship. Teresa capitulated and went alone, while paradoxically, Carmen's ensuing despair and depression led her father to visit her and offer her his support:

When I had one crisis I ended up in the emergency room. My father came to see me. He was always a bit more tolerant with me than my mother, and I think he realised what was happening with me. He said: 'your mother is very rigid, but you have to choose to live the life that you want. Be free and choose what you want to do. Sometimes she's not right, nor am I, so you have to be free. Whatever you decide, I will support you'. He didn't say I was lesbian, homosexual, that I liked women, he just said that (Carmen, 48).

Carmen believed that her father's words of support and acceptance gave her a lot of confidence to face her anxieties concerning how to live outside the heterosexual norms of her family and community, but her troubles were far from over:

My mother found out about us and reacted very badly. She threw me out of the house, shouting: 'I can't believe I have a child like that, who is lost like that!', but I wasn't lost, I was quiet and loved to study. But for my mother, so Catholic, it was a great sin. She said: 'Here God's word says that the person that practises those things brings damnation onto the family. I don't want that type of person in my house'. It hurt all the more because it was my mother who said this to me, the one who had given me life. As far as she was concerned, I had physically died (Carmen, 48).

Carmen's mother here reproduces the more intolerant, fundamentalist beliefs that dominate the contemporary Catholic leadership's discourse in Peru, described in Chapter Three, exemplified by the Archbishop of Lima's labelling of homosexuals as 'sons of the devil' and invoking the Spanish colonial discourse of the Inquisition in Lima in the early 1600s (Ugarteche 2001: 308; Silverblatt 2004: 173). With no family to turn to for help, Carmen went to one

of the *Comedores* in the eastern *cono* where she had been doing voluntary work with her church group. One of the women there who she knew well gave her a room and Carmen began to make a new life for herself. Having graduated from secondary school, she was qualified to teach the children of the women in the *Comedores* and Glass of Milk organizations, giving her some income and a regular meal at lunchtime. When we met, thirty years later, Carmen was living in the same neighbourhood, in her own house, with her ten year old son. She confirmed that she had dedicated her life to community activism and leadership, in the *Comedores* and local government, but had never been part of the local informal networks of *chitos* or *lesbianas*.

Although Charo was an 18 year-old in 2006, three decades after Carmen, Julia and Maria, her relationship with her family was proving equally problematic. When we met, she was living with her mother and two sisters in the same settlement as Carmen, although they had never met. Charo was passionate about playing football and first encountered problems with her family when she began to spend more time with one of her team-mates, Ceci, who was 10 years older than her:

My family didn't find out at first. First we were friends. Ceci used to go to my house, pick me up and we'd go to the cinema, because she has a car, she drives. Then, well, I fell in love with her. My sister was away on a trip, and she came back and as she was coming to my house, my sister thought she looked a bit weird. She said to me: 'why are you hanging out with her?' and I said she was my friend. 'But I don't want to see you with her' she said, and I asked why not, but she just said that, nothing else, without any explanation (Charo, 18).

Charo recounted how her sisters watched over her after she began to spend time with Ceci. They forbade her to go to football training in the evenings, and sometimes Charo would lie to them and tell them she was going elsewhere. This strategy helped to reduce her sisters' efforts to control her, but although Charo had created some opportunities to see Ceci, they were based on secrecy and concealment at home, leaving her feeling anxious and insecure. When I asked Charo what plans she had for the future, she immediately replied:

Well, we want to live together. Work and study, she'll work and help me, we'll help each other. But not here, where I live, or in the centre of Lima. Ceci said I should move to her house, but maybe there will be problems with her family, I don't know (Charo, 18).

A month after my interview with Charo, Ceci informed me that Charo's sisters and mother had discovered their relationship and had threatened to send Charo away to stay with an aunt outside Lima unless she stopped seeing Ceci. They also stopped her from working at the internet shop and took her mobile phone away from her. After these events Charo did not want to meet me again. She stayed with her family and distanced herself from Ceci, who was in no position to offer any alternative. Ceci lived in central Lima with her own parents who were both elderly with health problems, relying on her income as a taxi driver to get by and cover medical bills. Ceci commented to me that although her parents and brother '*saben de mí*' (knew about her [sexuality]) and tacitly accepted her, she could not invite a partner to live with her in their house. Soon after, on my return to the UK, both Ceci and Charo wrote to me separately via MSN messenger to say that they had been arguing, drinking heavily, and going through a painful break-up. With no income to rent her own room, Charo had chosen to stay and comply with her family's demands rather than lose her relationship with her family and be forced to leave Lima and live with distant relatives.

The family histories recounted by Julia, Maria, Carmen, Charo and Ceci reveal just some of the difficulties faced by women who attempt to resist heterosexual norms in the *conos*. As teenagers and younger women they all encountered conflict and attempts at parental or sibling control over their sexuality when cohabiting with them. However, by their late forties, Julia, Maria and Carmen were all well established in their own (modest) homes, having worked all their lives to guarantee their economic independence and basic needs, and the consequent personal freedom to live with a female partner. Over the years, Julia and Maria had changed the attitudes of Maria's children, to such an extent that they recognized that Julia was a positive and central element of Maria's life and as such, Julia too should be a 'mother' to Milagros and join them in Spain. Carmen commented to me that although she had not restored her



relationship with her mother, it was crucial to her that her son knew about her sexuality: *‘El sabe de mí, no tiene problemas, es como mi mejor amigo’* – ‘He knows about me [my sexuality], he’s fine about it, he’s like my best friend’. They all emphasized the great importance they attached to their relationships with family members, both emotionally and as the central strategy for survival by helping each other through difficult times. However, I was also interested to explore with them, when these relationships broke down, where did they find support? Did any feminist or LGBT group or organization help them address questions of sexuality or gender identity? In the following section I explore the role of feminist and LGBT discourse on sexuality and lesbian issues in the *conos*, how it changed over time, and the different effects it produced.

#### **4.2 The rise and fall of lesbian feminist activism in the *conos***

The youngest women, Charo and Ceci, had had almost no contact with any type of feminist or LGBT organization from within or outside the *conos*. As a teenager in 2006, Charo’s connections with the world outside the *conos* and central Lima revolved around playing football and chatting with a wide range of Spanish-speaking women on the internet at *latinchat.com*:

I’ve only had contact with *Comedores* and youth groups, but not about lesbian things. I don’t know the websites of lesbian and gay groups either. There are other lesbians in my neighbourhood but I don’t know of any specific lesbian groups here (Charo, 18).

On one occasion I commented to Charo via the internet that there was going to be a demonstration against homophobia (*‘homofobia’*) in central Lima that evening, and she responded: “sorry, but what is homophobia?” She was quite aware of discrimination against lesbians, but had not had any contact with the relevant rights-based or political language. Although Charo had heard of the MHOL, she had not searched for them on the internet or considered the idea of making contact with them. However, Ceci had developed a regular communication with Spanish-speaking women from around the world via the website *latinchat.com* that had led her to a specific aspect of global lesbian

culture connected with football. The website is for people to seek potential friends and partners through chatting on-line, and includes gay, lesbian and bisexual options. Ceci confirmed to me that it was in the world of women's football that she had first heard of and adopted the identity 'lesbian'. The identity for Ceci related to a social and leisure context, rather than to a political identity, organization or strategy.

Ceci's only contact with a feminist NGO was by chance, through her sister's work as a maid with the parents of a staff member of Flora Tristán, Susel Paredes. As part of her approach to campaigning for the national elections, as a Socialist Party parliamentary candidate, in early 2006 Susel identified publicly as lesbian feminist to the national television and radio stations and the press. When Charo heard about this, she phoned Susel and for the first time initiated a process of personal and professional dialogue and support concerning her sexuality that had previously been absent in her life. This contact was particularly important as it provided both Charo and Ceci with the opportunity to talk about their problems and ask for advice when Charo's family discovered her relationship with Ceci and insisted that they separate. This contact remained personal, however, and did not lead to any involvement in either Flora Tristán or the LGBT movement where Susel was one of the leaders.

In contrast to Charo and Ceci, Julia and Maria spoke of the importance of the role of certain feminist and lesbian organizations in their lives when they were younger, as a source of protection, friendship and moral and practical support. Julia had first encountered the feminist NGO Movimiento Manuela Ramos in the early 1980s, when it was established in her central Lima neighbourhood. As a footballer she and her local neighbourhood team soon started to play in matches against the Manuela Ramos staff and their friends, some of whom were part of the newly formed lesbian feminist group GALF. Although Julia was very positive about this connection, initially she found the cultural differences of sexuality difficult to cope with:

I started to play football with the women from GALF, and started to learn more there. They were lesbian feminists, and when the local *chitos* wanted to approach the group, they looked badly on them, because they dressed

like men. So when I was with them I used to pretend, I tried to dress like they did, like a woman, with a T shirt, but it wasn't in me because from when I was little I've always played football (Julia, 50).

Julia's experience of identifying as *chito* with lesbian feminist activists highlights the area where the difference in attitudes, ideology and cultural practices were particularly difficult to overcome. The problem was not connected with issue of same-sex sexuality, but with different expressions of gender identity, femininity and masculinity. However, as Julia spent more time with her lesbian feminist friends, she decided to change her identity from *chito* to lesbian:

*Chito* no! How to be lesbian, to be modern, I began to learn more about the life of lesbianism, and I liked it more. The lesbian feminist group helped me a lot, to change everything, including how I dressed, that I didn't need to dress like a man. I was very *machista* before, especially with the *mujercitas* [feminine girls] who watched us play football and wanted to be with us. I learnt a lot. I said to myself, I didn't like the *chito* ways (Julia, 50).

Here Julia highlights the understanding of the meaning of lesbian as 'modern', as opposed to the term *chito*, implicitly connected with traditional culture. Julia clearly articulates the problem of lesbian feminist ideology in the 1980s in Peru that conflated dressing and looking like a man with being anti-feminist, *machista*. In order to overcome *machista* behaviour among *chitos*, it was therefore considered necessary for women to change their gender identity and their dress codes, limiting excessive corporeal expressions of masculinity. However, although Julia adopted these changes when she was with GALF, there were areas of her intimate life that she was not prepared to change:

For the women in GALF, when I was there, there were no [gender] roles in relationships. I used to talk about that with them, because for me there are roles. In my intimate life I keep to the roles but that doesn't mean I tell people about it. But in the house, with the chores, no, because I help with everything I can. I cook, iron, clean, I do lots of things in the house (Julia, 50).

Here Julia clarifies how she separated her expressions of masculinity from *machista* behaviour and attitudes within her own life. She created a way of living within her own home which did not force her to be more feminine or to identify as a woman on an intimate or sexual level with her partner, but she took on an equal share of the responsibility and workload associated with managing the home and raising Maria's granddaughter, Milagros. Indeed, during my visits to their house, Milagros explained to me that she had three mothers, the first was Julia, the second Maria, and the third was her mother in Spain. Even though she was only five, she stated clearly that she would only go to live in Spain if Julia went with her, as Julia was the one who spent the most time caring for her. While Julia said she liked to live and dress '*como un hombre*' (like a man), she did not identify as a man, or transgender, and proudly described herself as a mother to Milagros.

Encountering lesbian feminism in the 1980s clearly marked a turning point in Julia's life, and one she considers positive. Through GALF she often came into contact with Manuela Ramos, and attended some of their community-based workshops:

Ten, fifteen, twenty years ago the Manuelas used to come and give talks to women who didn't know their rights – they were abused, raped by their husbands, and they didn't know how to defend themselves. The Manuelas taught them to respect and value themselves, at home, at work. I participated, and I saw that many women began to like themselves, feel attractive and accept themselves as they were (Julia, 50).

In addition to participating in the early feminist workshops on women's rights, Julia attended the first national women's conference organized in 1983:

I went to the women's conference with GALF. That's where I came out into the open in front of my mother's friends – they said 'look, there's Delfina's daughter, she's *machona*'! They gave a workshop to explain what is lesbianism, what is bisexuality, and women from the *conos* went (Julia, 50).

Julia's mother and friends had also been involved in local community women's groups in central Lima when Julia met Maria. This, combined with Julia telling

her mother that she was lesbian several years earlier, may have influenced her supportive attitude towards Maria when Julia introduced her as her '*pareja*' (partner). While lesbian and feminist groups were raising awareness about feminism, lesbianism and bisexuality with Julia and other women from the popular sectors, Manuela Ramos was also involved in providing support to Maria when she was still married to her husband and pregnant with her fifth child:

I've worked with all of them [in Manuela Ramos], I was a feminist '*promotora*' (community educator) in my neighbourhood, and they gave me a lot of support, warmth and affection at a very difficult moment of my life – they were my closest friends. I had the chance to talk with them a lot. They really helped me. They knew my history with the father of my children, that he used to beat me, a bad life and all that (Maria, 48).

Apart from providing Maria with emotional support and advice before and after her separation from her husband, Manuela Ramos staff also tried to negotiate with her husband for custody of the children:

One of the Manuela leaders went to speak to the father of my children, but he said he was going to report them to the police, because it was their fault I'd left him. In the Mother's Club where I was a member, three members' husbands also got together to report the Manuelas to the police. But the Manuelas said: 'Let them try it, we'll face up to them'. The men didn't try anything. I tried to get legal aid to get my children back but the Manuelas and the Floras [from Flora Tristán] told me it would be very difficult because he knew of my relationship with Julia (Maria, 48).

Although the trained lawyers in Manuela Ramos and Flora Tristán were unable to help Maria gain custody of her children due to the fact that she was known to be in a relationship with Julia, they ensured that the violence against her stopped by demonstrating to her husband and others in the community that Maria had a lot of institutional and legal support and advice. In order to help her cope with the financial problems of leaving her husband, Manuela Ramos staff employed Maria as a cook and cleaner for their office and some of their homes. This

provided her with economic and emotional support while she and Julia dealt with the problems they faced with their families.

It is important to note that although Maria had been with Julia for twenty years, she did not refer to herself as lesbian, nor had she been involved in GALF or any other LGBT group. During one of my visits to their house, when Maria was out collecting Milagros from school, Julia mentioned that she always live in fear that: 'one day Maria's heterosexuality might return and then she will leave me for a man'. It did not occur to her, however, that Maria would ever leave her for another woman. Julia also commented that since they had been living together, they had spent most of their time working, building the house, looking after Milagros and socialising with the family members and neighbours that accepted their relationship. Sometimes she missed playing football, drinking and dancing with her lesbian and *chito* friends, an experience she had never invited Maria to share with her. Although Maria had been with Julia for so long, she was not identified as lesbian by Julia or her friends. Maria's sexuality occupied the realms of no known identity, apart from being 'heterosexual in the past'. The heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, even with its culturally specific terms such as *chito*, has been the basis of understandings of women's sexuality in the *conos* before and after the arrival of lesbian feminist discourse, while different terms have not been introduced to conceptualize women's subjectivities and practices that fall outside this dichotomy.

While Julia and Maria cherished their connections with feminist and lesbian groups in the 1980s, they noted that after the mid-1990s, feminist NGO work on women's rights and sexuality in the *conos* began to wane:

So why can't they do that now, in the neighbourhoods, the organizations like the *Comedores*? The lesbians here are very overlooked now. There is nobody to bring them together. They don't leave their world, there's so much they don't know about and they live a bad life. They don't know about their rights (Julia, 50).

Concerned for the lack of support for the women in the settlements, Julia had her own ideas about how to improve the situation:

I could lend them my house, invite several women I know by sight, I know they're lesbians but they don't come out of the closet. I could invite my *chito* friends from football, organize them bit-by-bit, advise them. We need to deal with the ignorance here, because a cultivated person doesn't insult us or call us *marimachas* or *machonas*. There are so many ignorant people, they don't even know what 'heterosexual' is, we have to explain it to them (Julia, 50).

Based on her own experience, Julia believes that lesbians and *chitos* in the *conos* need their own spaces to learn about their rights, and to explore ways in which they can overcome the problems they face and their daily lives. However, she also believes that feminist organizations have an important role to play in addressing sexuality-related rights with local women's community organizations, as part of a strategy for addressing 'ignorance' in the community as a whole. Notably absent from her analysis, however, is how to identify and work with women like Maria, who are married or divorced, mothers and disconnected from lesbian and *chito* cultural expressions in spaces such as football teams and their social activities.

#### **4.3 Combining resistance to norms with community leadership**

Among all the women I interviewed in the *conos*, Carmen provided a unique perspective on the experience of combining the transgression of sexual norms with a life dedicated to working in women's community-based organizations. When Carmen moved to her settlement in her late teens, at the end of the 1970s, she became involved in her local *Comedor* and Glass of Milk (*Vaso de Leche*) group, working her way up from being a volunteer kitchen hand and teacher for the women members' children, to eventually becoming one of the leaders of the Metropolitan Lima Federation of *Comedores* during the 1990s. Carmen compared the Federation to a university, as it requires a long process of training and constant commitment in order to attain one of the highest leadership positions. The *Comedores* also provide a sense of female community and solidarity that she valued a great deal:

In the *Comedores* we are used to doing things together as women; we dance together, we have fun together, we share our family problems in the group, and when there are serious problems that need help, we organize a fundraising event or we help each other keep our morale up. There is a lot of solidarity, we pass the word around all the women members. Many of the leaders have been abandoned by their husbands and there are few who have an understanding husband, one who really stands by her (Carmen, 48).

Carmen noted that women's community organizations such as the *Comedores* provided her with invaluable practical, economic, educational and emotional support that helped her overcome the bouts of depression and psychological crises of her late teens and twenties. However, there were limitations, since they did not provide her with the freedom to openly discuss and explore the topic of same-sex sexuality, her own experiences of heteronormative discrimination and exclusion, or ways of coping and resisting them. Carmen noted that the *Comedores* have chosen to work on issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights, nutrition, health, income generation schemes and how to deal with young people involved in gangs and illegal drug use. Sexuality and related rights rarely appeared on the agenda while she was a leader:

Among the issues we worked on, sexuality was never taken on because that hadn't been part of our work and it was a taboo topic that was never mentioned. Women would say: 'How can you speak about that? How shameful!' Only once a few years ago, Demus came and talked about women and sexual relations. They asked: 'do you know about your reproductive organs? Your ovaries, your fallopian tubes, the external parts no? Simply, which are a woman's sexual organs?' The women were there blushing, ashamed, they were dying of shame! We have to talk about this, it is a serious issue, women's happiness often depends on the happiness of the couple. That doesn't mean they all have homosexual tendencies – I don't think so many have opted for this. Perhaps one day if we have some training on this, the women will have the chance to talk about their experiences – maybe they would feel more self confident about saying what is going on (Carmen, 48).



The silence and shame Carmen described within the *Comedores* related to discussing sexuality has been most acute in relation to same-sex sexualities. However, the closeness among the women in the *Comedores* also leads to a level of awareness of desire or relationships between women, even if nothing is openly spoken or named. Carmen, for example, never spoke with her colleagues about her relationships with women, nor did she use the identity ‘lesbian’ or ‘homosexual’ to describe herself. However, she informed me that while she was still a Federation leader, in the late 1990s, she had fallen in love with another leader, Camila, and that their relationship had lasted for four years. Camila was married at the time to a man but struggling to cope with his violence, and Carmen commented that the other leaders had noticed their feelings for one another, even though they did not comment about their relationship to them or behave in a negative manner. On the contrary, underneath the silence there was a tacit acceptance of Carmen’s sexuality:

Once in a Federation meeting, they had some photos of some cute men, and one of them said: ‘But why are you showing cute men to Carmencita if she doesn’t like them? She’s a specialist in *tortillas!*’ We all laughed, and they started teasing me, and I said: ‘How do you know I like *tortillas?* Have you seen me?’ They sometimes make jokes like that but with a lot of respect, I don’t mind, I have fun with them (Carmen, 48).

Here Carmen is referring to the term ‘*tortillera*’ (a woman who sells tortillas – maize pancakes), a Central American colloquial term for lesbian, less common in Peru and less pejorative than the terms *marimacha* or *machona*.<sup>19</sup> Despite her colleagues’ obvious knowledge of same-sex sexuality and terms such as ‘*tortillera*’, and their respectful assumptions about her sexuality, Carmen noted that she had never been involved in any formal debates on same-sex sexuality in the *Comedores* or other women’s groups. However, once she had become a leader with the Federation of *Comedores* in the 1990s, her work led her to make greater contact with feminist NGOs in Lima, including staff who identified as

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<sup>19</sup> I explore the meanings of these terms in the context of the *conos* in my discussion with the community leaders in the next section.

lesbian, and through them for the first time she encountered an LGBT group in Lima. As she recounts, her experiences were mixed:

I used to go to the LGBT group for a while, not as an activist because I'm not one, but as a guest, and I realised that there are two types – some who are very libertine, and others who think more seriously, who are more mature. When women fought at a party the police came to take them away. What image does that create for groups that work on sexual diversity? Some behaved aggressively towards me at feminist and LGBT parties – ordering me around, or getting drunk and getting me mixed up in their fights over women, as if they were men. I've no problem with sexual diversity but they made me feel really uncomfortable because on occasions they were so *machista* – even more than some men I know! So at that time I didn't see the LGBT group as mature yet, they were a bit irresponsible and I didn't think they had the necessary strength to claim what they wanted. I also saw that society and the authorities weren't going to take them seriously because really the group wasn't very responsible (Carmen, 48).

Here Carmen highlights her rejection of *machista* behaviour and attitudes, especially if they were expressed by women. Ironically, Carmen identified *machista* behaviour as a problem in this mixed LGBT group just as the members of GALF had rejected the *machismo* of the *chitos* in the *conos*. Carmen's expectation of the LGBT group as a political organization was that it should command the respect of society and the authorities. She identified these limitations as her reasons for not wanting to become an LGBT activist, but this choice may also have been influenced by her not openly identifying herself as lesbian, bisexual, homosexual or any other term used locally to describe her connection with same-sex sexuality. To be an activist with an LGBT group includes publicly identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, which Carmen wanted to avoid over her years of living and working in the *conos*. She emphasized how important it had been for her not to be identified as lesbian, as a community leader. This was a central element of her strategy for coping with conflict and discrimination and maintaining legitimacy in her personal and working world.

Not taking up the identity 'lesbian' did not mean, however, that Carmen made any attempt to pass as heterosexual or that she could not defend herself and seek help if the need arose. For example, on one occasion Carmen confronted Camila's husband when he was threatening them both, and accusing Carmen of being '*machona*'. Carmen defended them both on that occasion, but he continued to cause trouble. Eventually it was to the feminist NGO Demus that Carmen turned for help:

Later the coward reported me to the police, saying I hit him, even though I never touched him. So I called Demus and they gave me legal advice. He had no proof and the police dropped the case. In the Federation they asked me what happened, and I said to my colleagues: 'I don't care if any man calls me lesbian or *machona* but no imbecile is going to disrespect me, because if defending myself, or defending a woman, is to be a *machona* or lesbian, then I prefer to be *machona* or lesbian than to live with this shit... I'm not going to let any man lay a finger on me.. think what you want'. They didn't say anything but they spoke to the director of Demus, who understood me and said that instead of being intimidated by the man, they should support me (Carmen, 46).

Carmen was not 'passing' as heterosexual with Demus or the Federation, rather she was refusing to label herself, challenging her colleagues instead to respond to her in terms of her feminist ethics and commitment to women's rights. Carmen knew, when she faced up to her colleague's husband, that she could call on a feminist NGO for support. Demus's legal advice to Carmen and recommendation to the Federation leaders to support her were key here, protecting her from the threats of Camila's husband, and encouraging the Federation leaders to respect and support her.

Notably, at the end of my stay in Lima, Carmen asked me to mention to the feminist NGOs in Lima that she was interested in helping them with any future work on sexual diversity and women's rights in the *conos*. She expressed a change in her thoughts and feelings about public perceptions of her sexuality: 'In the Federation I never confessed to them that 'I am'. Now I feel prepared, I'm not afraid'. During the thirty years after being forced to leave home,

Carmen sought ways of educating herself and learnt from her experiences of the problems others had created for her due to her sexuality to such an extent that she finally felt more prepared to discuss the issue openly. She was more prepared to become visible as a subject of rights, and to help others facing the sort of problems she had experienced earlier in her life. However, notably, her choice was to stay within her feminist networks, rather than connect with the LGBT movement.

#### **4.4 Women leaders' perceptions of sexuality and heteronormativity**

The insights into Carmen's relationship with her *Comedor* colleagues reveal that Carmen has created the possibility of combining community leadership with a resistance to heterosexual norms in her personal life. In order to explore further the knowledge and attitudes of women community leaders in the *conos*, I contacted staff of Demus and Flora Tristán to ask if I could interview leaders involved in their programmes in the *conos*. The Demus staff member, Romy Garcia, arranged for me to meet the Management Committee of a Federation of *Comedores*, comprising the District President (DP) and six Zone Leaders (ZL).<sup>20</sup> They were responsible for coordinating the work of the Federation and running women's rights workshops with the *Comedores* (over 400 in total) located in the different neighbourhoods or 'zones' of their District. I observed these leaders' workshops on women's rights with *Comedor* members twice a week for a period of three months during 2006. This gave me the opportunity to get to know the leaders, members, and their work in the district (and for them to get to know me) before organizing interviews and two group discussions with them. The first group discussion was held in Demus's office, introduced by Romy, and the second was held in the district (without any Demus staff) in the home of one of the Zone Leaders.

In Flora Tristán, Paul Flores introduced me to seven health promoters (HP) from a wide range of districts throughout Lima's *conos*. They invited me to observe their meetings with Paul from March to July 2006. I therefore took a

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<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, in addition to specifying the age of individuals, I allocate the acronyms DP and ZL to the citations from interviews with the leaders, to clarify their position in the hierarchy.

similar approach to my research with the *Comedor* leaders, carrying out participant observation in the health promoters' meetings and workshops for three months before organizing interviews and two group discussions during the last two months of my stay in Peru. Unlike the *Comedor* leaders, the health promoters did not represent one specific community organization or one district. Their role was to provide women's health education and advice to a wide range of organizations throughout the *conos*, including *Comedores*, Glass of Milk Groups, Women's Federations and Mothers' Clubs. This gave me the opportunity to explore their knowledge and experience from more than one district, and from the context of different community organizations, rather than focusing only on the district of the *Comedor* leaders and that specific organization.

During our group discussions, the leaders also spoke at length of sexuality in the context of the *conos* more generally. During the group discussions, we explored their understandings of the different sexual identity categories associated with women's sexuality. There was considerable confusion within the two different groups about the meanings of terms such as *lesbiana*, *machona*, and *marimacha*, for example. Isabel, the coordinator of the group of health promoters working with Flora Tristán, was the most confident in expressing her ideas and knowledge on this topic, summing up the reflections of her health promoter colleagues in one of our group discussions:

In general all lesbians, whether they are the man or the woman, can be *marimachas*, or *machonas*, but one can be the man and the other the woman. Both are commonly catalogued as *marimachas* and *machonas*, but now the idea is that we don't express ourselves like that. Instead we should call them by a new name, lesbian. But lesbian is also used to describe a woman who is feminine but who has a double role – that is, she looks for a man and a woman, because there are girls and women who are very attractive but despite this they have their male partner and their girlfriend. There are married women where everything is normal at home and then they have a woman lover too. One of my neighbours is like that. But you almost never hear the term bisexual (Isabel HP, 50).

The health promoters' understandings of the meanings of the three terms differs somewhat from those of Julia, for example. For the health promoters, the term *chito* is unknown, since it is an identity taken up by women 'who are men' within their own social circles, but not a term known or used as an insult by the public in general, as in the case of *machona* and *marimacha*. Similar to Julia they believe that the new term they 'should' use, politically, is lesbian. However, in the case of the health promoters, lesbian is a term that can also refer to women who are married and who have a 'woman lover', in the absence of the term bisexual. Similar to Julia, the health promoters describe and reproduce the persistent construction of the masculine/feminine dichotomy in women's same-sex relationships, thus in a couple, 'one can be the man and the other a woman', while women who are 'attractive' (understood as feminine) may have a husband as well as female partners, but they provide no example of a woman 'who is the man' having a husband and a woman lover. These are the 'gender roles' Julia grappled with in her discussions with lesbian feminists in the 1980s, but not topics that the health promoters had debated before our discussions.

Despite the wide range of ideas and encounters aired by the different women leaders during our discussions on the topic of women's same-sex sexuality, the leaders affirmed that people in the *conos* prefer to avoid seeing or discussing the topic in public spaces, reinforcing instead the pressure for women to be married:

I think that lesbians are more hidden in our areas than men, because you don't see them often. You see the men more, because for us women, 'sexuality' is that you are with your husband (Dionisia HP, 54).

Another leader took this point further, noting that it is often mothers themselves that enforce this role:

And we often tell our daughters: 'When you grow up you have to marry, you'll not leave this house till you're married', when really that shouldn't matter to us, we should be worried about their happiness (Nelly ZL, 46).

They also all agreed that they considered homosexual men and boys to be more visible than women, who are associated with greater secrecy:

Discrimination against homosexual women isn't mentioned much at all yet. You realize, because, well, they're affectionate with you, but it stops there. It's not like people say: 'Hey, do you know what, there's that one, and the other one'. Among women it's often hidden – a secret. Not like with the male homosexuals, because they show their orientation, by the way they dress and talk (Isabel HP, 50).

In the case of women, for example, they are often only identified by others when they 'make themselves obvious', dressing in men's clothes and take on the man's role with their partner:

There may be homosexual women, I'm not saying there aren't, but it's hard to find them, they don't show themselves, and in the few cases when you realize it, it's because the woman looks like a man. They go out and work, and they support their 'spare rib' – partner. (Luz Marina HP, 45).

For those who participate in football teams and tournaments, however, it is far from difficult to 'find them'. Flora's experience of organizing a women's football tournament in 2004 in her zone describes well the world of football that Julia and Charo had highlighted as the central aspect of their social world:

Some of the women players were *machonas*, they were like men. Wow! Lesbians began to appear from all around – they're women but they have men's bodies and they fall in love with women. Their team became the champions. In my team we also had two *machonas*. During the tournament, the neighbours complained to me: 'Hey Flora, it's your fault, you had the idea of playing women's teams. Now look how all the girls are becoming lesbians'. Because they had been chatting up the normal girls, my neighbours' daughters, no? We even saw cases in the park, girls kissing each other. So they accused me: 'Look, it's your fault for inviting them'. In the end, some of the mothers complained to the management committee, saying: 'No, too many *machonas* are invading our neighbourhood and seducing our daughters'. So the committee announced that there would be no more

women's tournaments in the future – how crazy no?! Because in other areas of the district there are always women's tournaments! (Flora ZL, 48).

This case of public demonstrations of desire between women clearly went beyond community norms of silence or concealment, and was duly prohibited by the local authorities. Notably, although Flora considers herself a good friend of her *machona* football colleagues, she still refers to the daughters of her neighbours as 'normal' – presumed to be heterosexual until seduced by the invading *machonas* with their 'active' and assertive sexuality normally associated with men.

Exploring further the lives of women or girls in the *conos* who do not conform to sexual and gender norms, the leaders noted that while a few are fortunate to find support from their families, others are subject to a range of negative comments, actions and pressure:

I know women in my neighbourhood who are lesbians, and most of them have problems at home. Two are accepted by their family, what luck! They're happy with their family. But I know two lesbian couples and when the families found out they threw them out. They're from different areas, but the problem is the same - they weren't understood by their families, who say things like: 'How is it possible that you bring shame on us here, how can you fall in love with a woman? (Isabel HP, 50).

While some families respond with acceptance or shame, others have contradictory attitudes to their expectations of girls, such as the case of the niece of one of the *Comedor* leaders:

My brother said to her: 'you are the boy that I never had', because he had three daughters. When he died, she was the strongest, she didn't cry, and then she took on the role of her father and head of the family and left her girlfriend. So I say, how far is it really her sexual choice or is it that she's fulfilling the wishes of her father, to take on that responsibility? (Ana ZL, 47).

On the one hand, therefore, Ana's niece was expected and allowed to take on the role of the man and head of the household, but on the other hand she was



expected to have a male partner. Similar to the case of Charo's partner, Ceci, being the head of the household may create a lot of responsibility for a young woman within the family but it does not necessarily lead to the power or freedom to choose a same-sex partner. For Alejandra's niece, this left little space for the option of leaving home and living with her girlfriend:

Her mother and sister pressured her to leave the girl. Once she even left home and went to live with the girl, but only for a few days. After that she returned home saying she didn't want to have any more to do with her. Maybe she felt obliged to leave her by her family. You know, in my niece's house I haven't spoken openly about this. We all avoid talking about it. We don't recognize openly that all of us know what her preference is (Ana ZL, 47).

Once again, a common strategy for dealing with non-normative sexuality, such as the girl's choice of partner, is that of silence and keeping a '*secreto a voces*' (a secret that everybody knows about but that is not discussed in public). In another case, a family attempted to conceal their children from the neighbours, especially during daylight hours when their non-normative masculinities and femininities are more visible:

I have a neighbour who has three sons and a daughter. One of the sons, well, people say he is normal, because he is a man, but the daughter is more like a man, and one of the sons is more like a woman. They don't go out during the day because the neighbours began to gossip and criticize. So they only go out at night. Their mother was ashamed and she said to me: 'Well, for me they are no longer my children' (Luz Marina HP, 45).

While some parents express shame and conceal and disown their own children, sometimes it is children who react in the same way against their parents, as one of the health promoters noted in the case of the son of her neighbour, Luz:

One day Luz's son told me that all his friends were harassing him: 'Your mum's living with a *marimacha*' and he was ashamed of her, he was about ten years old. He came crying to the *Comedor* to ask for food because he

didn't want to go home. I took him home and said to Luz: 'Talk to your son, because if he's going to stay away and sleep in the street with who knows who, he'd be better off with your mother, until he can understand' (Isabel HP, 50).

In this case, the boy's experience of his friends' aggression led him to prefer to stay away from his mother rather than tell her what had happened. In her efforts to help, Isabel also thought it was preferable for the boy to leave his mother, and therefore she did not explain to him about his mother's relationship with her partner Daniela or help him learn how to cope with the inevitable discrimination he would face in the neighbourhood and at school. As one of the leaders commented:

The central problem is with the family, because we are always thinking, 'what will the neighbours say'? (Juana ZL, 44).

During our discussions, the leaders agreed for many women in the *conos* marriage was their 'role', what society expected of them, but it was also a strategy for survival:

I think that very often we fulfil our role and have a husband in order to have someone to back us up, support us (Luz Marina HP, 45).

However, they also recognized that marital relations were often the site of domestic violence, and as such, economic factors influences women's choices of how to defend themselves:

If you are economically independent, and you can say, well, I'm going out to work and I'm leaving him. But the vast majority depend on their husbands, and have more than one child to look after (Isabel HP, 50).

Isabel noted that for the same-sex couple in her street, economic factors had also played an important role in their choice to be together:

Luz said to me: 'Isabel, I got involved with Daniela because she offers me a better future and I was sick of suffering and depending on the *Comedor* and Glass of Milk donations because my husband was a drunkard' (Isabel HP, 50).

In this case some of the neighbours also recognized the benefits of choosing a partner who can improve one's economic situation, even if that means facing the widespread negative attitudes associated with being in a same-sex relationship :

'Oh', my neighbour said to me, 'but Isabel, it's incredible, look at Luz, she's separated from two husbands and now she's involved with her and she's doing very well. She has two vans, imagine! Overnight she's turned her life around'. So I said to her, 'what, are you saying, that we should do the same, to get ourselves out of poverty?!' We were laughing about it. They've opened a corner shop – it's really well stocked, very presentable, the first shop on our street. Wow! Daniela also changed the house overnight – I've seen the parquet floor and tiles (Isabel HP, 50).

While some women can recognize that having a same-sex partner can bring benefits, family members may also put economic need above disapproval or rejection of female relatives who choose a same-sex relationship:

I have a good friend who has a daughter, and she never imagined it but her daughter has got involved with another woman. She's 22 and the other woman she brought to live with her is about 28. For convenience my friend hasn't said anything, because the woman has her own business and contributes well. That's why economic interest can take priority over attitudes and feelings (Isabel HP, 50).

In cases such as this, families can reduce the risk of community rejection by concealing the nature of their relationship, especially if the women involved are not too masculine and if they participate in the concealment. Due to overcrowding and poor housing, family matters are rarely private in the context of the *conos*, and families consider their relationships with their neighbours to be of prime importance for survival. These relationships spill over into the wide

range of community organizations that provide an important source of food, milk, local employment or income-generating possibilities, health care and support in times of crisis, as well as opportunities to attend training courses and learn about rights and entitlements.

Several of the leaders had stories to tell of the discriminatory attitudes of neighbours against women who choose to live together as couples, and women who are friends or in any way supportive of them:

There were people who discriminated against a couple I know, they insulted them, so they moved lower down in San Juan and rented a room. Nobody bothers them until they find out they are together (Flora ZL, 48).

Moving away from the family and the neighbourhood of their childhood is a strategy some employ to reduce the levels of discrimination, but there are no guarantees that they will not be excluded or face verbal abuse in a new area. Others, such as Isabel's neighbours, chose to stay where they had grown up, but were forced to withdraw from the community and stay at home as much as possible:

Well, my neighbour Luz is separated from her second husband, he was a drunkard, and her third partner is a woman, Daniela – it's a scandal in the street because she is living with her. It was about ten years ago – nobody would speak to Luz so she used to stay at home a lot. They rent a room and live a normal life but they're not really accepted, it's like it's too strange for people, seeing two women living together (Isabel HP, 50).

One of the health promoters noted that for some, same-sex sexuality is connected with disease and shame:

Other women say things like: 'Hey sister, that's a contagious disease, that's leprosy she's going to pass on to you, how can you be her friend? Aren't you ashamed to be seen walking around in public with her?' (Nancy HP, 53).

In our group discussions, the leaders all agreed that religious discourse has made a major contribution to negative attitudes towards same-sex sexuality:

There are some in the *Comedores* who have been more averse to these issues. In my opinion, it's because of religion. Those who are close to the church maybe refuse to accept change, even among their own friends, no? They say: 'No, things can't be like that, because my religion says that it shouldn't be'. Catholicism says that homosexuality is a sin, no? (Claudia ZL, 47).

Apart from the belief that homosexuality is a sin, others are influenced by threats of punishment from God:

I think that being cursed plays a big role. From what I've experienced with the Baptists and the Israelites, when I tried to talk to them about sexual diversity, no!!! They said: 'God punished sodomy in the bible'. So I didn't go any further with the topic. What can you say to them? People from the provinces are very religious. Our ancestors worshipped all the saints. You hear things like, 'no, that's a sin', when it's with someone of the same-sex. These ideas they're very powerful (Ana HP, 47).

Here Ana highlights the strong Catholic beliefs of the Andean migrants to the *conos* which are often reinforced by the increasing presence of Protestant evangelical discourses. Isabel also noted that she had found Catholic discourse particularly difficult to deal with, citing one example of attitudes she had encountered:

One of my [female] colleagues in our organization said: 'I only know that God has created two beings, man and woman, and that's all that counts, so this is a bad thing, like when you get a tumour, something malignant in society, it has to end because God won't allow it, and if it happens he will send us a punishment' (Isabel HP, 50).

The individual homosexual sinner is imagined to be capable of making the whole of society diseased, and to make matters worse, God will punish society for not stopping them. It is not surprising therefore that the leaders believe that this apocalyptic spectre has such a powerful influence on attitudes in the *conos*, including among the members of their women's community organizations.

#### 4.5 Women's community organizations on the inside

People say I'm *marimacha*, a man, that I like women. But I don't take them seriously, because if you do, it makes your liver bitter (Flora, ZL, 48).

As we have seen from the testimonies of Julia, Maria and Carmen, they believe that feminist and women's community organizations could and should contribute to raising awareness about same-sex sexuality and address the related discrimination and exclusion that women in particular experience in the context of urban poverty.

When I explored this idea further with the *Comedor* leaders and the health promoters they agreed that within women's community organizations in the *conos* there are wide ranging and contradictory attitudes towards same-sex sexuality. When I asked them if it was difficult to raise this topic within the *Comedores*, the President of the Federation responded that the leaders, particularly those at the highest levels, were much more open to discussing and accepting homosexuality than the members who had not been through the leadership training programmes:

Yes, because homosexuality is a taboo topic. We leaders are a bit more open-minded. We have three types of public in the *Comedores* – the District Leaders, the Zone Leaders some of whom are still quite conservative and closed, and then we have the members. Uuy! My god, there are some who are shocked! Sometimes they say: 'How can it be?!' They're appalled! Each of us thinks differently on the topic. But so far no [same-sex] couples have come to talk us about it (Rocio DP, 52).

It is important to note here that although homosexuality is considered taboo in the *conos*, and is not being formally debated within women's rights workshops in the *Comedores*, it is clear that the topic is familiar to the members, and there are different attitudes among them. It is not surprising, therefore, that women living in the different Zones of the district have not yet approached the Federation for support or to discuss their problems concerning heteronormativity and same-sex sexuality. Another leader noted that

homosexuality had not yet been a topic of discussion or even speculation in her Zone:

In the *Comedores* in my Zone I could say there are no homosexual women, because we've never looked at sexuality from that perspective: 'Is she or isn't she', or 'it seems like she is' no? We've always met up as a group of women, mothers, we've never been down that path of homosexuality (Chela ZL, 54).

Here Chela is assuming that because the members of the *Comedores* are mothers and do not discuss same-sex sexuality, they are also exclusively heterosexual. However, in the opinion of another Zone leader, the lack of formal discussions and work on sexual diversity should not be confused with its absence among *Comedor* members:

In our district almost nobody is working on the topic of homosexuals and lesbians. But we know what conflicts there are, what issues there must be among us. Among the members of the *Comedores* there must be some who have had this experience, or those that know of others. But at least for me to work on this topic is quite new (Flora ZL, 48).

Indeed, Flora went on to note that occasionally women who were known to be in a same-sex relationship had become 'visible' in women's organizations and sparked reactions from the other members:

In the Glass of Milk group they said to me: 'Look! Rosa is with Maria! How much do they do together, what do they get up to? They say they have fallen in love, and one of them has a husband, but she has a man's body and she likes to drive, a bit like a man'. Rosa had fallen in love but didn't tell her husband. Then she became a leader, and when Maria left her, she fell in love with Paty, who also had a husband and an 11 year-old daughter. Her husband caught them one day and it was chaotic – the whole hillside found out, and now she's separated from him. Rosa and Paty are still together. People have found out, but they don't comment any more, they leave them alone (Flora ZL, 48).

In this case, in the Glass of Milk group, Flora highlights the members' interest in what the couple 'got up to', and their comments about the masculinity of one of the women even though she was married. Despite this, the women have not been rejected or excluded by the group, and they are no longer a topic of criticism or discussion. However, one of the health promoters noted more negative experiences in her *Comedor*, with mixed reactions from the members:

Luz used to come to my *Comedor*, but they marginalized her there, and especially her [female] partner. People commented 'Hey, don't get too near or it might stick, watch out or she might fall in love with you'. People are closed, so I think it is difficult for society to assimilate this yet and admit that things are as they are (Isabel HP, 50).

Like many of the *Comedor* leaders and health promoters, Isabel had been involved with a variety of women's organizations in different districts of the North *cono* for many years, including the Glass of Milk programme, where she also encountered women she identified as lesbians:

There was one in my neighbourhood who always wore a dress, just like a girl, when she was at secondary school, but when she finished she transformed herself. She cut her long wavy hair and started wearing a baseball cap. There is a moment when they let themselves be seen, they become obvious. When she got a girlfriend, she brought her to me to register her with the Glass of Milk group, which I did. They used to come to the meetings to listen, but they never spoke so sometimes I would chat with them (Isabel HP, 50).

The examples of the presence of couples in the women's organizations highlight the nature of the mixed reactions of the members, ranging from acceptance, to questions about what 'they do', to clear disapproval. For some, there is a fear based on the belief that lesbian sexuality is so strong it will stick to them, that it is hard to shake off, while others fear being the object of a woman's sexual desire, which is imagined as dangerous, a threat to their well-being. Again, the expressions of female masculinity are described and connected with the way in which lesbians become visible, identifiable. The strategy of silence, but not



necessarily concealment, is sometimes employed as a means of avoiding the risk of being criticized or excluded:

In our fundraising events I've encountered lesbians – women with husbands. Sometimes they try to get together with other women, and they've even tried with me. How many could there be? Many don't show who they are (Isabel HP, 50).

Isabel's comment raises the difficulty of quantifying the number of women who have same-sex relationships, or who would like to, due to the levels of secrecy they employ within their organizations and the fact that they have husbands and are thus assumed to be heterosexual. However it is important to note that in the case of women who did reveal their lesbian sexuality in some way, the leaders did not know of any who were refused membership or forced to leave the organization. Nor were they treated with direct aggression, either verbal or physical. One of the leaders even went as far as taking direct action to involve her neighbour in the local women's group that was trying to improve the condition of their streets:

I said to Daniela, why don't you work with us on paving our street, and she said, 'no, the neighbours won't want me', so I said to her: 'Because you're lesbian? Don't be afraid, you're going to teach us, you're a hard worker. You can join our management committee'. So she did and now she's our president. She's really got things moving, dealing with the local council and researching on the internet (Isabel HP, 50).

While lesbians may be reticent about joining community organizations, if there is someone with authority to encourage and defend them, their participation can go beyond keeping quietly in the background to taking on a successful leadership role, although not on the topic of 'lesbian rights'.

One of the health promoters also noted a similar lack of attention or debate within health-related sexual rights work in the *conos*:

We've been dealing with sexual and reproductive rights, but when we talk about sex we generalize. Sexual orientation, as a sexual right in health work, is never discussed in the *conos* (Maria Delia HP, 46).

Here 'generalizing' while not discussing sexual orientation can be understood as connecting sexual and reproductive rights only with heterosexuality and assuming that all the women conformed with that identity. In Chapter Five I examine in more depth Maria Delia's point with the staff of Flora Tristán and Demus.

### *Possible future roles of women's community organizations*

Despite the wide-ranging and contradictory knowledge and discourse of women in community organizations about same-sex sexuality in the *conos* and beyond, the leaders all agreed that it was important for them to take on these debates in a less individual and ad-hoc way that they had been doing in the past. Principles of ethics, solidarity and compassion influence the leaders' attitudes towards expressions of same-sex sexuality and female masculinity in the *conos*. However the leaders also expressed their interest in debating issues of sexuality and gender identity in much more depth. They recognized that in the future they themselves could be directly affected by the kind of problems Ana had articulated in the case of her niece. They wondered whether their sense of solidarity would be the same if one of their own children or grandchildren encountered themselves in a similar position and recognized their own role in reproducing heteronormativity with them:

When we grant ourselves the freedom to put our children's happiness before marriage, then we won't worry if they are with a man or a woman, we'll only be concerned with their happiness. But if it's in our heads that they have to get married, we'll always see homosexuality as a problem (Maria Delia HP, 46).

The leaders were particularly concerned with helping young people, since they perceived a growing public visibility of same-sex sexuality among them, compared with older generations:

We shouldn't spit in the wind, because this is becoming more visible now. The young generation are telling us, and giving us a slap on the cheek! That's why we need education, so that we can evaluate, analyze, and share with this type of person, not discriminate against them (Isabel HP, 50).

The suggested starting point, therefore, was to promote education and awareness among the women's community organizations, including the leaders who felt responsible for guiding their colleagues, as well as their family members. They considered the first step would be to establish communication and dialogue with lesbians in order to improve their respect for other expressions of sexuality and relationships of which most of them had little understanding:

Well, before dealing with the problems raised by this sexual topic about other types of partners, we have to understand first, that is, talk with them, no? Because it is difficult to accept lesbians and their partners. So we have to understand them first, and then afterwards we can begin to talk about what sex is about. It's an unknown for us. I myself would say, how do lesbians make love? Where do they feel pleasure? Who can I ask about that? I have to talk with a couple, and they can say to me, yes, there's affection and tenderness (Rocio DP,52).

Some of the health promoters had already begun to take this step before I completed my fieldwork. One evening Flora Tristán hosted a debate on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in their office, led by lesbian, gay and trans members of different LGBT groups from Lima and two cities in the provinces (notably there were no lesbian speakers from the provinces). Isabel and four of her health promoter colleagues involved in Flora Tristán's sexual rights programme were the only members in the audience from Lima's popular sectors. After the event, the health promoters commented to me that they had appreciated the courage of the speakers, but found that it was difficult to understand some of the language and terms they were using. They also noted that, with the exception of the trans speaker from a city in the Amazon, the lesbian and gay speakers only referred to their own

middle class lives and experiences which seemed of little relevance to the leaders' communities in the *conos*. When I asked the leaders in the different group discussions in what ways did they think they could take these issues forward, they all agreed that they needed to open up debates in their own neighbourhoods, starting with their own women's community organizations:

What could be done is to work on this topic in the *Comedores* and Glass of Milk groups, it's easier to gain access. Not to try and discuss it with the Catholic Church, like when they meet in the evening to talk about the bible. The problem is that the doctors and others talk about these topics in Miraflores [middle class district] hotels, where people already have a more developed knowledge of the topic. They should organize this type of discussion in all the *conos* – we could invite the women from our organizations. They would go and listen and I know that they would say: 'Wow, there are doctors who think this is important, even in relation to women' (Maria Delia HP, 46).

In addition to Maria Delia's concern that discussions should avoid starting by attempting to connect with local church groups' beliefs and discourse, the President of the Federation of *Comedores* raised the problem of *machista* attitudes among the men in their communities, who she felt were more intolerant than their middle class counterparts. However, in this case she believed it was important to challenge them and construct dialogue:

It's much easier for the middle class to take it as normal compared with the popular sectors, where the majority of men are *machista*. So forget it, as much as I am a mother and want to understand that my daughter has that preference, I have my husband, no? He'll never allow this, however liberal he is. And he's a community leader, an open-minded person. It makes an impression on the children. So I think we have to work with the men as well. It's going to be years until we manage to understand (Rocio DP, 52).

### ***Conclusions***

The experiences, knowledge and actions of women in the *conos* reveal some of the complexity of the lives of those who do not conform to sexual and

gender norms in the context of Peru's urban popular sectors. Their stories point to some of the varied and contradictory manifestations and levels of discrimination in families and neighbourhoods. These spaces combine responses to women's same-sex sexuality ranging from violence, threats and expulsion to tacit acceptance when expressions are concealed or prove economically productive. On occasions they are also sites of support, solidarity and respect which women such as Julia, Maria and Carmen have identified as central to their ability over the years to gain their sexual freedom and overcome the problems of depression, alcoholism, social exclusion and poverty they experienced as young women. Their stories also reveal how levels of abuse, exclusion and attempts to control expressions of same-sex sexuality in the *conos* are influenced by and often inextricably connected with normative attitudes towards women's sexuality and female masculinity. In addition, the younger and less economically independent the woman, the greater the pressure to conform.

Conforming to heterosexual norms in these contexts provides some girls and women with the space to reduce the risk of being subject to abuse or exclusion, but the emotional and psychological price is often one of concealment, anxiety and fear of discovery. It also forces individuals to operate in dominant heterosexual cultures that deny and silence different expressions of sexual desire and practices, as well as the need of individuals to seek help in order to solve the problems that discrimination creates for them. However, while this has been a common phenomenon within women's community organizations, in our interviews and group discussions, the leaders expressed their sense of ethical respect for difference and solidarity with women and girls adversely affected. This was reflected in their past efforts to provide support to them in their neighbourhoods, families and organizations, although on a personal, private basis; as opposed to a more public, organizational commitment. On reflection, the leaders expressed their difficulties in understanding 'lesbian' issues, women's same-sex sexuality and expressions of female masculinity, due to the silence on these topics in their dialogue with other social and political actors. However, they also expressed their desire to debate these issues and learn more in the future. In this sense, the women's community organizations in my research differ from those

studied by Lind and Share (2003) and Swarr and Nagar (2004), that were silent on the issues or openly rejected same-sex sexuality and relationships. The knowledge, experience and agency of women like Julia, Maria, Carmen, Charo, Ceci and the women leaders could provide a valuable input into future feminist efforts to overcome the heteronormative assumptions of sexual rights and reproductive rights discourse, as well as that of the women's community organizations they continue to support.

Lesbian feminist activist discourse in the *conos* in the early 1980s produced positive effects for women such as Julia and Maria in their struggle to stay together and cope with economic hardship. It also emphasized the belief that women could adopt 'lesbian' as a same-sex sexual identity that could also connect with political and social debates on inequality and difference, transforming lesbians into subjects of rights and offering a replacement to the commonly pejorative terms *machona* and *marimacha*. The introduction of the term lesbian in feminist discourse has also been important for the women community leaders, providing them with at least occasional opportunities to consider phenomena in their lives in political terms rather than exclusively personal and private.

However, the lesbian feminist notion of a 'modern lesbian' that should replace the identity *chito*, popular among many in the *conos*, has proved problematic as well as liberating for women such as Julia, limiting her freedom to express aspects of her masculinity beyond the privacy of her own home. Moreover, for *chitos* unwilling to modify their sense and expressions of masculinity, feminist meanings of lesbianism were non-negotiable and exclusionary, resulting in the absence of *chitos* from lesbian feminist discourse and activism in the 1980s. Lesbian feminists' later absence from the *conos* from the 1990s onwards unfortunately left a void in terms of the possible development of feminist debates and explorations of women's sexuality, sexual identities and female masculinity at the grassroots. This disconnection also reinforced the sense among women I interviewed in the *conos* that the LGBT movement was distant and not of interest or relevance to the context of their lives and struggles.

For the leaders of women's community organizations, the term *chito* is unknown, although they mentioned the notable masculinity of 'homosexual

women' or *machonas* (as a descriptive term more than an insult). Similar to Julia they also believe that the new term they 'should' use, politically, is lesbian. However, in the case of the health promoters, lesbian is a term that can also refer to women who have male partners and who also have a 'woman lover'. This is an expression of women's same-sex sexuality that is often most visible to the leaders, as they are so involved in their organizations where women members are usually mothers and often married or living with a man. In these contexts the leaders occasionally learn of (or in the case of Carmen, for example, are involved in) relationships between women that are often hidden from family members, neighbours and the majority of the women's organization members. Since the term bisexual has not been introduced with reference to women in the *conos*, and there is no local term to describe the combination of women's relationships with men (public) and women (usually secret), the leaders choose to employ the term lesbian, but with a very different construction from that of lesbian feminists, Julia or Ceci, who all employ the term in a more fixed, dichotomous sense, in opposition to heterosexuality. Also in contrast to lesbian feminist discourse, the women leaders describe and reproduce the persistent construction of the masculine/feminine dichotomy in women's same-sex relationships. They provided only examples of couples where, 'one can be the man and the other a woman', or where women who are 'attractive' (understood as feminine) may have a husband as well as female partners. Finally, economic circumstance and survival strategies featured prominently in the examples of same-sex relationships provided by all my informants. A commitment to hard work in order to maintain and care for the family unit and support community schemes was often sufficient for women in same-sex relationships to overcome rejection by some family members and neighbours, and even understood as a reason for a woman to leave her husband and opt for a female partner.

In short, women's knowledge and experience of same-sex sexuality in the *conos*, including that of women leaders, highlight the shifting meanings and deployment of sexual identity categories, the varied, sometimes contradictory understandings and often concealed nature of female same-sex sexuality and masculinity, and how the two may be separate but interconnected. They have the potential to provide important contributions to

reflections within the feminist movement on their cultural politics of sexuality and gender identity, including their intersections with questions class and survival strategies. Most notable by its absence, however, was any reference to questions of racial, ethnic or cultural difference, reflecting the broader, national discourse on and within urban settlements such as the *conos* that address only questions of class and poverty. However, the women's reflections could also address the exclusionary effects of feminists' reliance on the terms 'lesbian' and 'lesbian rights' and the heteronormative notions of sexuality within their sexual and reproductive rights discourse and practice. In the following chapter I explore in more depth the shifting meanings of feminist discourse on sexuality in the *conos* with two NGOs, Flora Tristán and Demus, and the extent to which they connect and coincide with broader national and regional contexts.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Feminist NGOs in Peru: Sexuality at Local and National Levels**

In the local and regional feminist movements we abandoned the topic of sexuality a long time ago. We have been working on state sexual and reproductive health policies, but not sexuality itself. Exploring sexuality enables you to ask questions, open up the topic, so then people can tell you what they know about it and what they see and don't see in their neighbourhood. If you don't think about sexuality, you can't think about sexual health (Cecilia Olea, Peru).<sup>21</sup>

On my arrival in Lima to carry out fieldwork, I encountered very few examples of feminist NGO work on any sexuality-related topics. As we can see from Chapter Four, the women in the *conos* I interviewed mentioned only three NGOs that had made this connection with them: Movimiento Manuela Ramos, Flora Tristán and Demus. In the 1980s, Movimiento Manuela Ramos, with its close relationship to GALF, initiated debates on sexuality with women from Lima's popular sectors, particularly in Pamplona Alta, the district where Julia and Maria were living. During this initial phase, the programme was titled 'Sexuality and Self Esteem' (Stromquist 2007: 91). However, this focus on feminism and sexuality in the *conos* came to an end in the mid-1990s when Manuela Ramos launched a new national programme on women's reproductive health funded by USAID, and GALF shifted its focus away from the *conos* and towards national, legal advocacy.<sup>22</sup>

Flora Tristán was the only feminist NGO in Peru at the time of my fieldwork to have an established programme with the term 'sexual rights' in its

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Cecilia Olea at the World Social Forum, Nairobi, January 2007. Cecilia Olea is a long-standing member of Flora Tristán in Peru, Coordinator of the 28 September Latin American and Caribbean campaign to legalize abortion, and, with Roxana Vasquez, one of the three Coordinators of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights.

<sup>22</sup> For more details of the Manuela Ramos programme, see:  
<http://www.manuela.org.pe/reprosalud.asp>

title.<sup>23</sup> Demus was also unique, being the only feminist NGO to include the concepts 'sexual orientation and gender identity' in their institutional profile outlined on the home page of their website. In this chapter I therefore concentrate on these two cases. On the basis of the accounts of the women in the *conos*, I explore in more detail some key questions with reference to the discourse of Flora Tristán on sexual rights in the field of women's health, and of Demus in the field of women's human rights. Why is Flora Tristán not exploring the question of same-sex sexuality in its work on sexual rights with health promoters living in the *conos*? Why has Demus introduced some initial connection with the issue, but not incorporated it into their training and advice work in the *conos* with the *Comedor* Federation leaders? Do the staff think that their institution's notions of sexuality in the context of the *conos* is a problem that needs to be addressed, and if so why, how and by whom? How is sexuality conceptualized in the discourse of Flora Tristán and Demus beyond their work with the popular sectors? What constraints, pressures, relationships and opportunities have influenced any shifts in meanings of sexuality in their rights-based work across time, place or discursive field, and what are the effects of these shifts?

In order to build up a picture of the development of ideas about sexuality over time, and to identify discursive shifts, I employed a variety of qualitative methods, including the analysis of institutional documents available on the NGOs' websites and donated to me by different staff members. My initial contact with each NGO occurred during the first month of my fieldwork. In Flora Tristán, Virginia Vargas provided me with a brief overview of the Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship Programme that had been functioning for about five years. She then introduced me to the Director, and two staff members working on the programme, who agreed to my proposal to carry out participant observation of their work with women from the *conos*, and other institutional activities connected with the topic of sexuality. The two staff members, Silvia and Paul, also agreed to participating in interviews with me at the beginning of my study, and again at the end. During the middle phase of four months, I spent

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<sup>23</sup> A year later a new NGO, Promsex, was created, representing the first NGO in Peru to focus exclusively on sexual rights and reproductive rights, but at the time of my fieldwork they had not yet established any work with women from the popular sectors.

time with the health promoters in their meetings and workshops with Paul and other Flora Tristán staff, which enabled me to gradually talk about my research and establish a relationship with them. After this period, the health promoters were keen to have some group discussions with me to discuss sexuality in the context of the *conos* and their work with Flora Tristán, and to explore their own knowledge of the topic. A similar process emerged from my initial contact with the Director of Demus, who then recommended me to the two main staff members connected with work in the *conos*, in this case the leaders of the Federation of *Comedores* in San Juan de Lurigancho. The majority of the contact between Demus staff and the women leaders occurred in this district, although there were also occasional meetings in Demus's office that I also attended. Again, towards the end of my fieldwork, I carried out individual interviews during visits to leaders' neighbourhoods, and two focus group discussions in the house of one of the leaders which often served as a meeting place. Towards the end of my stay Demus staff also asked me to present a summary of my fieldwork and some initial findings. This meeting also served as a source of more data, as the staff members responded to my presentation and reflected further on the opportunities and constraints they were experiencing in their work on sexuality and human rights. Both NGOs, and their colleagues from the *conos*, have asked me to return to Lima and present my research more formally on completion of this thesis.

In the first section of this chapter I provided a brief overview of the institutional histories and priorities of Flora Tristán and Demus that have provided a framework for their specific initiatives to introduce sexuality into their rights-based work. In the next section I examine these initiatives and discourse with women from Lima's *conos* in the provision of training and advice on women's health and human rights. I then move on to outline national-level activities of both institutions and their connection with other social movements such as those of LGBT rights and human rights. On the basis of these examples, I then explore the staff members' own ideas and reflections on the nature of their engagement with sexuality and related concepts, and the constraints and opportunities for developing this field of work further. In the last section of the chapter I introduce some key influential elements raised by the NGO staff with reference to sexuality and their experiences of and discussions

with international funding agencies, including those from which they receive direct support.

### **5.1 The institutional contexts of Flora Tristán and Demus**

In my experience we in Flora have done very little on sexual orientation. It isn't a stated objective, just more of a cross-cutting idea because Flora has always supported the LGBT movement, with both resources and political solidarity (Paul).

Flora Tristán (often referred to just as 'Flora') was registered as a non-profit NGO in Peru in 1984 by a group of women who chose to separate from Peru's leftist political parties. In 2007 the institutional website ([www.flora.org.pe](http://www.flora.org.pe)) stated that its mission was to influence the expansion of women's citizenship and the development of policies and processes in order to achieve gender equality and justice. The more specific institutional aims included:

- formulate and negotiate government policies and initiatives for legal reform;
- strengthen women's political participation, action and voice;
- train key agents in the implementation of actions aimed at empowering women and achieving gender equality and justice;
- produce specialist knowledge to enrich women's political vision and proposals
- influence public opinion through education and communication.<sup>24</sup>

The three central targets for both political and cultural transformation, therefore, were the Peruvian state, women themselves and the general public. In order to achieve the stated aims, Flora Tristán's work was organized into five core programmes: Women's Human Rights; Feminist Studies and Debates; Rural Development; Public Policy and Decentralization; and Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship. It regularly published research by staff and other feminist activists and academics on topics related to the institutional priorities. Combined with their work in the different programmes, staff also led Peruvian, regional and international campaigns to decriminalize abortion, and participated in campaigns to monitor the implementation of UN agreements on women's

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<sup>24</sup> [www.flora.org.pe](http://www.flora.org.pe). Accessed 24.7.07. Further details of Flora Tristán's work can be found on this website.

reproductive rights established in the Population and Development Conference in Cairo in 1994. Flora Tristán was also actively involved in the Latin American regional feminist campaign to eradicate fundamentalisms and promote a secular state, and the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights, which I examine in detail in Chapter Seven.

In order to gain an understanding of the nature of Flora Tristán's current organizational priorities, culture and work on sexuality and sexual rights, it is useful to examine how the institution has evolved since its inception in 1984. Stromquist (2007: 135) notes that the socialist feminist commitments of its founders led to the initial emphasis, until the early 1990s, being placed on working directly with women in low-income communities and addressing class inequality and the feminization of poverty. In these early years, this work was influenced by the commitment of the Peruvian feminist movement in general to politicizing the private sphere, bringing into public discourse for the first time questions of domestic violence, marital rape and sexual harassment (Vargas 2004: 18).

Initially Flora Tristán's methodology was based on popular education, training and counselling with women's community organizations in Lima's *conos* and with women in trade unions, combined with national research on patriarchy and women's rights (Stromquist 2007: 135). From 1989 the geographical scope of the work was expanded beyond Lima by establishing a Rural Women's Network and training rural women's rights educators. In Lima's South *cono* Flora Tristán prioritized providing women's rights and leadership training to the Popular Federation of Women in Villa el Salvador (FEPOMUVES), as well as the Glass of Milk Federation covering all Metropolitan Lima (ibid.: 136). However, this work visibly diminished during the late 1980s and early 1990s due in part to the security problems created by the internal conflict. The Shining Path attempted to infiltrate women's groups in Villa el Salvador, assassinated the ex-President of FEPOMUVES, Maria Elena Moyano, and issued death threats to other women community leaders, as well as Flora Tristán staff working directly with them. At the same time the staff were also accused of terrorism by the National Security System (SIN) due to their defence of the autonomy of Glass of Milk groups that the government was attempting to control (ibid.: 238).

The Shining Path's demise in late 1992 and the end of these political constraints could have facilitated Flora Tristán's return to working directly with women's groups in the *conos*. However, at this time the director, Virginia Vargas, was elected to coordinate and represent the Latin America and Caribbean feminist movement in preparation for the Fourth International Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995 (Alvarez 2000: 3). This challenge marked a new focus on global work for the Flora Tristán leadership, resulting in even less resources for work at the national or local community levels. The work that did continue in Peru, moreover, reflected changing relations with the Peruvian state. After the end of the internal armed conflict and State of Emergency, Flora Tristán, and the feminist movement in general, identified the strengthening of democracy and public policy advocacy as essential components of national feminist goals. This connected well with growing feminist attention to advocating state fulfilment and implementation of its commitments with the UN following the global conferences on human rights, population, and women and development in Vienna, Cairo and Beijing respectively.

The national historical context of Flora Tristán's work on women's rights has been similar for Demus, the Counselling Centre for the Defence of Women's Rights. Demus was registered as an NGO in the 1987, three years after Flora Tristán. In 2007 Demus's website homepage ([www.demus.org.uk](http://www.demus.org.uk)) stated that its vision of development was based on a democratic society that should respect human rights, and particularly those of women, and be free from violence and gender, racial/ethnic, cultural and social discrimination. Demus's position regarding the state was that it should be secular with inclusive policies constructed with a strong and autonomous civil society, capable of self-expression and the monitoring of public spaces where difference should be respected. Demus's 2007–2011 mission statement also confirmed its commitment to the vision of a life for women free from violence, and the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights that should construct a new cultural paradigm for women and for sexuality. Demus has attempted to achieve these aims through national and international litigation and legal monitoring and advocacy, by influencing Peruvian public opinion and by strengthening local women's community organizations in both urban and rural areas.

The website home page in 2007 also presented a series of links to further information about Demus's work on sexual and reproductive rights, including sexual violence during the armed conflict and its effects on women, laws governing adolescent sexuality and marriage, abortion, and the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights.<sup>25</sup> The website named the areas of Demus's work as Legal, Psychological, and Social, but did not provide any further information about programme content or locations. Moreover, Demus had not published any documents that systematize the history of its work. However, during the period of my fieldwork with Demus, between January and July 2006, the director informed me that historically Demus had prioritized working with women from the popular sectors on violence (including femicide and sexual and domestic violence), the legalization of abortion and the promotion of other reproductive rights such as the morning after pill.

During the period of my fieldwork, Demus employed approximately 20 staff, divided into two teams. Demus's work was also often supported by volunteers, comprising mainly law and psychology graduate and post-graduate students from Lima's universities. The 'service' team provided legal advice and psychological support to women who were victims of violence in Lima and areas of the Andes particularly affected by the armed conflict. The 'communication and citizenship' team focused on influencing public opinion and the State judicial system in favour of women's human rights, as well as promoting debates within the feminist movement. In addition, over the years Demus's lawyers have also taken on individual legal cases for women related to forced sterilization, therapeutic abortion, femicide, and the rape of a female patient by her male doctor.<sup>26</sup> Demus has therefore employed litigation as a strategy for gaining redress for violations of women's sexual and reproductive rights, setting legal precedents in order to produce legal and policy reform.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.demus.org.pe/Menu/somos.htm](http://www.demus.org.pe/Menu/somos.htm). Accessed on the 28 August 2007.

<sup>26</sup> For details of these cases, see <http://demus.org.pe/Menu/casos.htm>.

## **5.2 Health and human rights training with women from the popular sectors**

Flora Tristán has highlighted sexual rights and reproductive rights as central to its goal of attaining genuine citizenship for women. In 2007 its website stated that sexual and reproductive rights guarantee the cohabitation and sexual harmony between men and women, since they ensure that sexuality and reproduction are exercised with freedom and respect for people's dignity. Sexual and reproductive rights allow human beings to enjoy a safe and pleasurable sexuality with the least possible risk of suffering health complications. The website also listed the sexual rights that guide Flora Tristán's work:

*Sexual rights are the rights of all couples and individuals to:*

- decide freely and responsibly on all aspects of their sexuality, including the protection and promotion of sexual and reproductive health.
- be free from coercion, discrimination or violence in their sexual lives and in all decisions concerning their sexuality.
- rely on and demand equality, full consent, mutual respect and shared responsibility in their sexual relations.<sup>27</sup>

The web page then outlined the Peruvian government's commitments to the 1994 United Nations Cairo Population and Development Conference and the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference Action Plans relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights. A variety of statistics referring to Peru were quoted, including maternal mortality rates, the daily number of clandestine abortions; the percentage of women with no access to contraceptives; the percentage of parents aged 15 to 19, and the number of adults and children living with the final stages of AIDS. Flora Tristán's proposal was that the government should recognize and protect citizens' sexual and reproductive rights at the highest level and translate them into the Peruvian constitution, laws, and public policies.

Within this framework the Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship (SR/HC) programme was established in 1999 with the following aims:

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.flora.org.pe/agenda.htm> , accessed 19.10.06



- Encourage activities that recognize women in the national agenda as subjects of sexual and reproductive rights and of their own health.
- Monitor and influence the formulation of public policy on health and the implementation of the UN International Conference on Population and Development Cairo action plan.
  - Support campaigns for population policies to incorporate women's needs and rights in the field of sexuality and reproduction, such as the Emergency Oral Contraceptive (the 'morning after pill').
  - Carry out training and promote debate on policy proposals in the fields of public health and violence, with a human rights perspective.
- Develop research in the field of public health, particularly that which involves exercising human rights and gender equality'.<sup>28</sup>

One strategy for achieving these aims was for the SR/HC Programme staff to provide training and advice for twelve health promoters (featured in Chapter Four) with leadership roles from a variety of women's community organizations in Lima's *conos*. The key role of the health promoters was to provide information and advice for the members of their women's organizations on sexual and reproductive health, including state health and population policies and practices. The health promoters also gathered information from the women members concerning the sexual and reproductive health problems they were facing, in order to include them in local and central government advocacy initiatives. To facilitate the process of lobbying government, the twelve health promoters together comprised the 'Women's Community Organizations' Monitoring Committee on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights' for Metropolitan Lima, commonly referred to as the 'SR/RR *Mesa*'.<sup>29</sup>

As part of Peru's political decentralization processes since 2000, a range of *Mesas* (monitoring committees or roundtables) were created at local district, regional and national levels in Peru. Their aim was to reach consensus between the state and civil society on the design and implementation of public policies and strategies, as well as to monitor their implementation (Monge Salgado 2006: 55). The main role of the SR/RR *Mesa* was to represent the rights and needs of women living in urban poverty in Lima in its advocacy and monitoring work with the Peruvian government, focusing on the Ministry of Health's National Health Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health, created in 2004.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.flora.org.pe/prog\\_dsex\\_y\\_ciud.htm](http://www.flora.org.pe/prog_dsex_y_ciud.htm) Accessed 19.10.2006

<sup>29</sup> In Spanish it is named the '*Mesa de Vigilancia de Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos de Organizaciones Sociales de Base de las Mujeres*'.

Although the twelve members of the SR/RR *Mesa* were connected with an informal consortium of five Lima-based NGOs that worked on sexual and reproductive rights, Flora Tristán had the responsibility to lead this consortium's training work with the *Mesa*. Consequently, the twelve leaders would meet once or twice a month with Flora Tristán staff in their office to discuss and analyse government actions and local contexts in the *conos*, prepare letters to government ministries, and plan and monitor the *Mesa*'s annual activities.

Between April and July 2006 I observed six half-day meetings between the SR/HC Programme officer, Paul Flores, and the twelve health promoters involved in the Programme. My participation provided me with a summary of the issues they were prioritizing and the content of their training and advocacy work. In one meeting the health promoters outlined the history of the SR/RR *Mesa*, which began in 2004 with a workshop for Lima's health promoters on sexual and reproductive health in Lima run by the consortium of NGOs, including Flora Tristán. During this workshop the *Mesa* was created and its twelve representatives elected. From 2004 to 2006 the *Mesa*'s main activities included writing letters, petitions and reports to the Ministry of Health (MINSA), the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES), and the Directorate of Health for Metropolitan Lima. The members of the *Mesa* participated in street demonstrations and meetings with health officials, together with Flora Tristán and other feminist NGOs in Lima. The main advocacy topics were the availability of the 'morning after pill' and MINSA's Family Planning Methods Programme. Other activities carried out by the *Mesa* with Flora Tristán's support included publishing a 4-page bi-monthly bulletin called 'Sumando Voces' (*Bringing Voices Together*). The three editions I was given from 2005 were titled 'Millennium Development Goals', 'Violence Against Women' and 'The Secular State and Fundamentalisms'. In these three editions the members of the *Mesa* provided their analysis of the topics through the lens of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Similar to Flora Tristán's stated aims of the SR/HC Programme, the health promoters' discourse in the bulletin's excluded any reference to same-sex sexuality.

As I later discovered, however, the overtly heteronormative approach to sexual and reproductive rights in the SR/HC Programme with women in the *conos* was combined with the occasional mention of the term sexual orientation.

In one of the meetings, Paul presented the *Mesa* members with a draft letter addressed to the President of the Peruvian Congress, outlining their support for a draft law on reproductive health due to be discussed and approved by Congress. The *Mesa* members discussed and agreed with Paul the content of the letter, which included the proposal that the draft law on reproductive health should take into consideration:

Respect for the human rights of individuals, regardless of their beliefs, religion, marital status, age, sexual orientation, or whether they are part of a family or not.

The importance of the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, in particular their right to sex education free from prejudice and discrimination, in order to guarantee their full development, with autonomy, integrity and respect for their human rights.<sup>30</sup>

The terms ‘sexual orientation’, and ‘sex education free from prejudice and discrimination’ included in Paul’s draft of the letter was not questioned or rejected by any of the *Mesa* members. However, nor was it the topic of any discussion. The health promoters’ tacit acceptance of a reference to same-sex sexuality connected with their advocacy work with the Peruvian government was particularly striking since it was the first time in my fieldwork that I had encountered the combination of sexual orientation and reproductive rights in either feminist or LGBT rights discourse. However, during the months I had been attending the meetings between Paul and the health promoters, it had become clear that the women knew that Paul identified as a gay man, they had met his partner, and were very supportive of, and affectionate with, both of them. A rejection or questioning of the appropriateness of including the term ‘sexual orientation’ in their letter would therefore have been contradictory to their respect for Paul. Thus while the health promoters did not produce this connection in their own discourse, neither would they reject its inclusion by Paul. Solidarity with Paul, however, was not enough to provide the women with a sense of how sexual orientation and reproductive rights were connected with

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<sup>30</sup> This letter was addressed to Marcial Ayaipoma Alvarado, President of the Peruvian Congress, and dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 2006. It was signed by all twelve members of the SR/RR *Mesa*.

the lives of women in the *conos*, and therefore produce a topic for examination and debate in their work.

In addition to the meetings with Paul, the members of the SR/RR *Mesa* participated in occasional training workshops on a variety of sexual and reproductive health and rights topics run by above-mentioned NGO consortium including Flora Tristán, CESIP, Manuela Ramos, Cendipp and CIES. These workshops were attended by an average of 80 health promoters from the different women's organizations from the *conos*. One half-day training session I observed in early April 2006 was dedicated to analysing the topic of sexual and reproductive health in the election manifestos of the sixteen strongest political parties campaigning for the general elections to be held in Peru in May 2006. Before the participants formed groups to analyse different party manifestos, a feminist health researcher from CIES gave an overview of the definitions of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and questions for the groups to consider. Here the concept of sexual orientation was included in the section outlining the position of challenging all forms of discrimination. However, once again, the concept did not spark any debate or reaction from the women participants from the *conos* when the groups presented their analysis at the end of the workshop or in the ensuing plenary questions and discussion. After observing this workshop, I asked Paul whether the concept of sexual orientation had been mentioned in previous health promoter workshops, and he confirmed that it had, on one occasion in 2005:

In the last all-day workshop we held, we were debating fundamentalisms. The second group discussed religious beliefs and public policy, and more than one health promoter raised the issue of sexual orientation, even though we hadn't chosen it as a topic for discussion. They spoke confidently, their opinions were well-considered and they made some very constructive political statements about the need to be respectful. I was impressed, as usually they speak up about things like the day after pill or abortion. I think it was because the topic of the debate was the oppressive religious attitudes and action of the Catholic Church hierarchy (Paul, 30).

This connection between same-sex sexuality and religious discourse coincides with the comments on the Catholic Church made to me by the *Comedor* leaders and members of the SR/RR *Mesa* outlined in Chapter Four. However, Paul confirmed that although some women had commented on the need to respect people of different sexual orientations in this workshop, it had not led them or the NGO staff present to explore how to discuss and take forward this issue in more depth, either in relation to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in the *conos*, or to related state policies and service provision.

In contrast to the work with adult women, Paul recounted that the SR/HC Programme's incipient and occasional contact with young people in the *conos* had included the introduction of the terms sexual orientation, sexual diversity and gender identity in very systematic and overt ways. In December 2005 Flora Tristán participated in the First National Youth Conference, organized by a wide range of Peruvian NGOs, networks and youth groups from a variety of Peruvian cities, including Lima. Subsequently Flora Tristán produced a short publication entitled 'Political Agenda: Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights from the Perspective of Young People'.<sup>31</sup> This document outlined the demands of the Youth Conference participants towards the Peruvian government, and was presented in a Congress Public Debate. The document contained four sections, with a list of points, and one point in each section included the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity:

- i. The Full Exercise of Young People's Citizenship for a Participatory and Inclusive Democracy:*
  - Promote gender equality in order to not be discriminated against or ill-treated physically or psychologically by society due to having a different sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ii. The Exercise of a Full and Responsible Sexual Citizenship:*
  - We demand the freedom to take control of our bodies as a principle of freedom, respect and responsibility in all aspects of our lives, without tutelary intervention. We advocate explicitly for the right to be respected on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- iii. The Eradication of all Forms of Discrimination:*
  - Eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and sexual identity, race, culture, religion, social class, age, disability and/or employment.

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<sup>31</sup> Available at [www.flora.org.pe/agendajuven/index.htm](http://www.flora.org.pe/agendajuven/index.htm).

- Incorporate into the National Human Rights Programme and in all laws the respect for sexual rights and reproductive rights, sexual diversity and gender identity.
- iv. *Pluralist and Non-Sexist Media:*  
We demand that the media be clear, democratic and egalitarian, eradicating stereotypes and discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, among others.

It is interesting to note here that for the first time in its discourse on sexual and reproductive rights, Flora Tristán introduced the concept of gender identity as well as sexual diversity and orientation. Race is also included, together with culture and ethnicity. Notably, however, the inclusion of these concepts coincided with moving away from adult women to address for the first time young people's sexual health, opening up the possibility to include 'trans' experiences and needs. Significantly, in the first section, the goal of 'gender equality' is considered key to ending discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, rather than the goal of 'eradicating all forms of discrimination' which is where sexual orientation had previously appeared in Flora Tristán and the *Mesa*'s letter to the Ministry of Health discussed above. Paul confirmed that the issues included in Flora Tristán's sexual rights workshops with youth organizations were broader and more inclusive than those covered with the adult women health promoters:

In the national youth conference we debated widely the different dimensions of sexuality and reproduction, including sexual orientation, gender, abortion, it was really good. The agenda of sexual orientation is much more palpable with young people than with adult women. Women need to have time to talk about all the obstacles they face just to get to the workshop – the lack of spare time, if their husbands allow them to go, the violence they experience. They talk about things bit by bit, and they talk about their worst problems first. Only after all of that can they start to talk about other things like love, pleasure, affection. We work more on what they call '*complicidad*' among women, the question of solidarity, affection between women. But with young men at least you can immediately start to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity (Paul).

Paul noted that in his experience of working with women from community organizations, none of them had identified themselves as anything other than

heterosexual, while there was greater diversity ‘with young men at least’ in the mixed youth groups:

With the young people there are those of diverse sexualities. There is a trans (male to female) *compañera*, there are young gay men, but there are no young lesbians in the groups. We always face this absence, and if the topic of sexual diversity is present in a group, it’s because the gay or trans youths are members of that group. In our debates about sexuality, people begin by talking about their own experiences, and the others listen and learn. But there are no girls to talk about lesbian subjectivity so we haven’t reflected on this yet (Paul).

The one factor the participants of each section of the SR/HC Programme participants had in common therefore was the absence of women of any age from the *conos* identifying as lesbian or requesting to explore the topic of women’s sexual or gender diversity in any depth. Paul considered this a serious limitation to Flora Tristán’s discourse and action on sexual rights and health with the popular sectors.

#### *Women’s human rights leadership training in Lima’s conos*

While sexual orientation, or sexual diversity, and gender identity are referred to only briefly and occasionally in Flora Tristán’s work on women’s health in the *conos*, Demus’s focus on human rights had enabled some staff members to take the initiative to incorporate same-sex sexuality more overtly in their workshops with women in the *Comedores*. In my first interview with two Demus staff members, Romy and Tesania, they informed me that there were two moments when Demus had incorporated the topic of sexual orientation and lesbian identity into their work on sexuality and women’s rights in San Juan de Lurigancho. In 2001 Romy and Tesania initiated a ‘Gender and Self-Esteem’ training programme for the Leadership School of the Federation of *Comedores*. The course was divided into basic, intermediate and advanced cycles, with the advanced cycle providing the basis for introducing the topic of sexual orientation. Romy noted that it produced a wide range of reactions:

The participants were older women leaders of *Comedores* and many of them discussed the topic of sexual orientation for the first time. Like the majority of Peruvians, they are full of prejudice about it. They react immediately because the first thing they think is that their own children could become gay or lesbian, and this terrifies them. There was a long discussion, for example, about earrings, and why boys like wearing them or having long hair. There is a lot of diversity in the popular sectors, and in the workshop too, with some scandalized and others saying: “Well, if they don’t have equality, I’ll defend them” (Romy).

Notably, the women seemed to relate sexual orientation more with young people, and male expressions of femininity, usually associated with male homosexuality, than with lesbians or female masculinity. In order to move beyond the initial reactions of fear and prejudice and explore further the expressions of solidarity, in the workshop Romy and Tesania introduced more positive ideas relating to sexual orientation:

We included looking at the situation of young people, and love and affection. We raised questions: Don’t they have the right to love? Don’t they have the right to choose? Don’t they have the right to pleasure? In that way the tension was reduced, the conversation was freer and the women were more open to the topic. Many of the women are still lost in their own world, but they’ve taken a step forward in their understanding, and at least now they talk about it. At least that much I think we have been able to contribute to date (Romy).

Tesania noted that they also employed a methodology that created the possibility to overcome initial reactions of shame, anxiety or rejection:

We worked with women on their internal worlds, their self-esteem and their sexuality, on understanding identities from a feminist perspective, and what all these issues meant for them. At first they were a bit ashamed, but after some time they didn’t want to stop talking. We used a methodology to create knowledge and a bond between the facilitators and the groups, which generated a form of friendship and openness. Demus gained a lot of recognition among the women for this work. I think that the women in the



*conos* are interested in talking about homosexuality, but they often talk about others rather than about themselves (Tesania).

Although the women had not raised the issue themselves, in the workshop with Demus they were clearly interested in discussing same-sex sexuality after their initial anxieties were overcome. They understood homosexuality as separate from their own sexuality, something relating to 'others', and thus less difficult to discuss with each other than if it had been about themselves. The safe space of their own Leadership School was another factor Romy considered important to consider:

The women's organizations have produced something fundamental beyond food security and daily survival, and that is organization and spaces for women. They enable women to go out and meet others, and when they prepare and cook food they talk about their lives, creating deep bonds of solidarity. Of course there is competition and rivalry too, but above all I think they give women a space they didn't have inside home or outside the home. They are spaces for fun, pleasure and get-togethers for women that generate deep friendships and mutual need. Before this, I think women kept a lot inside themselves, and what I've seen is that for some of them these relationships are the closest they have. They need intimate spaces of trust to talk about sexuality, and maybe it helps that we're all women together (Romy).

The Leadership School therefore provides a space potentially conducive to discussing intimate issues concerned with same-sex sexuality, although to date the discussions have centred on 'others' rather than any experiences or desires among the participants themselves. The workshops run by Romy and Tesania were well received by the *Comedor* leader participants. However, after this one training day, debates on sexual orientation did not continue in Demus's work in the *conos*. In addition to the constraints mentioned above, Romy noted that Demus was also limited by its commitment to respond to community-based requests for workshops:

I think our introduction of sexual orientation at the School was a small contribution. Unfortunately it hasn't been developed since then, because the Federation leaders prioritize the topics, and sadly sexuality is almost always seen as secondary, when I believe it is fundamental (Romy).

Reflecting further on the challenge of introducing the concept of sexuality with women in the popular sectors, similar to Paul, Romy noted that the legacy of sexual violence from the armed conflict and the high levels of domestic violence experienced by women in the *conos* also need to be taken into consideration:

With so much violence against women there is a lot of sacrifice and torture. How much can a woman's body take? In the context of the *conos*, women's health is very damaged, and of course their self-esteem too. Illnesses are more serious because of what their bodies have to put up with. The lack of joy and autonomy definitely affects women's health. That's why sexuality, pleasure and displeasure are difficult topics, because of the histories women carry with them (Romy).

Based on her experience of working with the Leadership School, Tesania agreed with Romy's assessment:

At the beginning, pleasure, eroticism, and freedom sound like clichés in the *conos*. They are such distant concepts in that context that the women find it difficult to grasp them (Tesania).

However, although notions of sexual pleasure, freedom and same-sex sexuality are less familiar to the leaders and members of the community organizations, they are no strangers to intimacy and affection between women. Romy concurred with the experiences recounted by Carmen and other leaders I interviewed that ties of solidarity and mutual support are key to participating in women-only community organizations. Romy believed that these spaces often provide the only opportunity for women to express themselves freely and give and receive love and affection, including with NGO staff and other visitors who work with them:

When I meet them they're always full of hugs, kisses, and affection for me. I think this is because they are giving me a little of what they want so much to receive. But we haven't explored this yet in our work on sexuality (Romy).

In an effort to overcome the limited understandings of same-sex sexuality in particular, in 2004 Demus decided to redress the situation by creating the opportunity for women in the *conos* to dialogue with women identifying as lesbian. Demus's director invited a lesbian writer, Doris Moromisato, a Peruvian of Japanese descent, to join a panel to debate feminism in San Juan de Lurigancho, in the East *cono*:

About 200 women attended – they were dying to find out what feminism was about. Doris Moromisato talked about her life and being lesbian and she was very funny – she had all the women in her pocket. They said things to her like: 'But *señorita*, you're a professional, so beautiful and intelligent – why are you lesbian?'. It was as if they felt that women are only lesbians if they have no work, if they're ugly, if they can't get a man (Tesania).

Notably, the woman that Demus invited to talk about lesbian subjectivity was from Lima's educated middle class, and although she was mixed race, she shared no cultural, ethnic or class-based history or experiences with the women she was addressing. Demus staff did know of some women leaders in the *conos* who were in same-sex relationships, including Carmen featured in Chapter Four, but this event introduced the notion of a specific 'lesbian' subjectivity that Carmen had chosen not to adopt for herself. They therefore felt that to ask Carmen to stand up and 'come out' in front of her *Comedor compañeras* in this context would have been both inappropriate and insensitive. This initiative recalls the work on awareness-raising about lesbian sexuality in the *conos* in the 1980s by members of Manuela Ramos and GALF.

### **5.3 National public policy advocacy, campaigning and alliances**

The above accounts of the occasional mention of the term sexual orientation in

women's health-related sexual and reproductive rights discourse, and of Demus's recent initial efforts to promote debate on lesbian sexuality with women in the *Comedores*, contrast notably with the NGOs' connections with national sexuality-related discourse and advocacy. At this level both institutions have been, at different times, much more active and vocal on the topic of same-sex sexuality.

In areas of Flora Tristán's work not connected directly with the popular sectors, LGBT rights have received occasional albeit continued attention since the mid-1980s. At this time Flora Tristán provided a meeting place for and supported the creation of MHOL, the first Peruvian lesbian and gay organization. The individuals involved at the time, including Virginia Vargas in Flora Tristán and Oscar Ugarteche and Kique Bossio in MHOL, shared a socialist party history and formed a strong alliance that was not possible within leftist party politics at the time. During my fieldwork I participated in a social evening with all three, when they reminisced about how closely they worked together in those early days.

On a more limited basis, Flora Tristán has continued its solidarity role with the LGBT movement into the new millennium, with occasional public events held in its office, such as the one I attended, mentioned in Chapter Three. In this instance, the Feminist Studies and Debates Programme organized a public event in Flora Tristán's office in June 2006 called the '*Lilac Mesa: Sexual Orientation and the Contradictions of Democracy*'. The event was in support of the 'National Day of Lesbian, Gay, Trans and Bisexual Pride' and the three speakers invited were all members of LGBT groups. There was, however, no contribution to the debates by any staff from Flora Tristán, and those who made presentations made no connection between their LGBT activism and Flora Tristán's work. The aim of the event was to create a space for people connected with Flora Tristán to listen to LGBT activists' accounts of their work and their sexual and transgender subjectivities, but it did not result in a dialogue about Flora Tristán's possible role and work in relation to sexual diversity. The event was therefore limited to continuing its role as an ally of the LGBT movement.

The only other connection I encountered between Flora Tristán and national debates on sexuality was its membership of the '*Mesa para la No-Discriminación LGBT*', (the LGBT Non-Discrimination Round Table),

established in 2004 by 13 Peruvian LGBT, feminist and human rights groups in order to propose a Peruvian Law Against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation.<sup>32</sup> Notably there were no members of community organizations from the popular sectors in this NGO *Mesa*. Concerning this national aspect of Flora's advocacy work, I interviewed Susel Paredes, the only Flora Tristán staff member at the time who openly identified as lesbian. Susel recounted how she had requested to be Flora Tristán's representative on the Mesa, but her request was turned down:

A colleague in the Feminist Studies and Debates Programme who is heterosexual participates for us in the *Mesa*. I asked to go, but they [the managers] said: 'No, the other woman has been doing it for a while'. I said: 'But it's not the same, it's better if I go!' They refused. Well, I'll just have to participate as an Independent! (Susel).

Susel here reveals her belief that, being lesbian, she would have given a different and more effective contribution for Flora to the debates in the *Mesa*. Instead, her alternative was to apply to participate as a member of LIF (Independent Lesbian Feminists), a Lima-based lesbian activist group. Susel's frustration at not being able to represent Flora Tristán in an important advocacy space on sexual orientation and LGBT rights highlights one of the difficulties faced by the few staff in feminist NGOs who identify as lesbian or gay.<sup>33</sup> They are not employed to work specifically in the field of LGBT rights or on sexuality, and consequently do not have a clear mandate to represent their NGOs in the LGBT movement's work. Lesbian or gay staff such as Susel and Paul choose instead to participate in LGBT groups to work on sexuality, therefore separating their feminist and sexuality activism and analysis into two separate spheres, while seeking occasional opportunities or moments to bring the two together. For example, Susel's role in Flora Tristán, as a lawyer in the Women's Human Rights Programme, was to focus on Amazonian indigenous women's rights. In 2005 she wrote a report published by Flora Tristán entitled

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.nodiscriminalgbt.com/mesa.htm> Accessed 1.11.2006

<sup>33</sup> None of the staff I met or heard about in Flora Tristán identified, or were identified by others, as bisexual. However, their founder, Virginia Vargas, did take up this identity at a public meeting on LGBT rights in Lima organized by the Socialist Party.

'Invisible Among Their Trees' (Paredes 2005) on women's human rights issues in different indigenous groups, which, as she noted, included a mention of communal indigenous laws that punish same-sex practices:

Here in this report, on page 46, there's a bit that I put, that I smuggled in as contraband as it wasn't the issue, about punishment of people of different sexual orientations: *'The woman who practises sexual relations among women, whether under-age or adult, will be sanctioned with two months in prison'*. Do you see how they punish? It's in the statutes. This should be abolished but I don't feel ready to deal with this yet...it's something for the future (Susel).

Susel's belief that she had to incorporate issues of same-sex sexuality into her indigenous women's rights work in a clandestine manner reveals Flora Tristán's institutional ambiguity about its position on sexuality and related discrimination. This leaves staff without a corporate mandate to question heterosexual norms in their programmes and related communities or groups. However, employing staff who make public their lesbian or gay identity can result in the need for an organization to clarify this ambiguity. For example, towards the end of my fieldwork in 2006, Susel encountered tensions with a long-standing indigenous women's leader from the Amazon. Susel recounted how the leader had accused her of trying to convert women in the Amazon into lesbians, citing media articles about her candidature for the Socialist Party during the general election campaign in the same year. Notably the leader's campaign against Susel received no support from other indigenous women and she also received a letter of solidarity from some male indigenous leaders. Flora Tristán's directorate consequently defended her in a formal letter to the indigenous organizations they were supporting, and encouraged her to continue to work with them. This did not lead, however, to any further discussions in Flora Tristán about how to address sexuality-based rights in the context of their work with women in the Amazon region.

*Sexual orientation and women's human rights at a national level:*

On reflection, I would say that on sexual orientation Demus has worked mainly on the state and regional legal institutions and systems, much more than the social and cultural aspects here or in spaces such as the World Social Forum. I think this is because of tradition more than a policy choice in Demus. We need to debate this, and really see how we can prepare ourselves to be doing more social and cultural work (Maria Ysabel).

This reflection by the Director of Demus at the time of my fieldwork highlights Demus's focus on jurisprudence. Demus operates specifically within the field of human rights, from a feminist perspective. During the 1990s, it focused on addressing the problem of violence against women and the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights from a more formal legal perspective than Flora Tristán. For example, in 1998, Demus joined forces with the Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy in New York, and CLADEM Peru, to produce a study of the situation of women's sexual and reproductive rights in Peru, following the same format as the Articles in a document on these rights produced by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).<sup>34</sup> The study reported on sexual violence, domestic violence, violence and discrimination against women in public health services, access to sex education, family planning information and counselling, and the right to make decisions on issues related to sexuality and reproduction (CRLP 1998). However, a close reading of the 26-page report reveals no mention of concepts such as sexual orientation or lesbian rights, resulting in a heteronormative representation of women's sexual and reproductive rights from a human rights perspective similar to that of Flora Tristán from a health perspective.

By contrast, nine years later, a phrase that appeared on Demus' 2007 website homepage stated: "*Love between women is love. Don't discriminate against it*". While this phrase was not accompanied by any further discussion on women's same-sex sexuality, the website links which mentioned discrimination

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<sup>34</sup> CLADEM Peru is the Peruvian national arm of the Latin American and Caribbean Committee of Women's Rights Network, which also focuses on legal aspects of rights-based work with women. The IACHR is the human rights section of the Organization of American States.

and legal cases did lead the reader to information about Demus's national work on sexual orientation and human rights. For example, the headings "*Mesa Against Discrimination*" and "Other Campaigns" both led to information about the Campaign for a Law Against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation in Peru. Moreover, under the title 'Cases', one of the legal cases listed was titled '*Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation*'. Here Demus outlined its latest legal case initiated in 2004, in defence of one of its staff members, Crissthian Olivera (also a member of MHOL) against the discriminatory practices of a supermarket chain in Lima, a case that was still ongoing when I left Peru in July 2006.

Romy, one of Demus' most experienced social workers, confirmed that sexual rights and sexual orientation had only become key themes for Demus in 2003, when they initiated a series of activities at a national level:

We began by connecting with LGBT groups that work on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The first thing we did institutionally was to become members of the *Mesa Against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation*, led by MHOL in 2004. We've been very active in the *Mesa*, providing legal and communications contributions, and organizing petitions. The strategy is to get a member of parliament to propose a bill prepared by the *Mesa*. We're doing less with the *Mesa* now, not through lack of interest, but because our legal contribution is complete and the Socialist Party has taken up the role of pushing this with Congress. Now we just respond to urgent actions when necessary (Romy).

Apart from this previous work with the *Mesa*, led by Demus's Director, Romy confirmed that she had been directly involved with another one-off initiative in alliance with women in the LGBT movement:

We've also been involved in supporting the Lesbian Feminist Collective. I ran some training courses with them on the body, sexuality and rights. It was the first time I'd been to a lesbian group and the first time they had asked Demus for a dialogue. We didn't continue with the workshops because they became promoters themselves and now train their own leaders (Romy).



Romy commented that identifying as heterosexual, and as a married woman with children, at first she was unsure about how much she could contribute to lesbian group debates on sexuality, but the response was positive and she confirmed that listening to the participants' ideas and experiences had been an important learning process for her too. Following on from this, Demus's Director and some staff members began to focus on building a closer relationship with the lesbian and bisexual women's section of MHOL:

Now we're promoting feminist debates with lesbian feminists, since 2005. Within the LGBT groups there is little lesbian leadership, and even less feminist leadership, so in 2005 we began to see that it was strategic to help to strengthen leadership skills and lesbian collectives, and create spaces for debates. This week we're going to MHOL to talk about feminism, politics and democracy – it's the fourth topic in our 'lesbian feminist dialogue' series with them (Romy).

In addition to working directly with the LGBT movement, and in particular MHOL, Demus' Director, Maria Ysabel Cedano, also highlighted Demus's involvement in national advocacy work on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 2002, which included a National Tribunal in June 2005, attended by representatives of the Ministry of Health. Here Demus presented a document titled: *'The situation of lesbian women discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation: impunity'* with input from two members of MHOL. The document calls for reforms to the Peruvian Constitution and the Penal Code that should include: the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the legal recognition of different forms of families, of same-sex partnerships, and the right to adoption and reproductive technologies, legal protection against discrimination in employment, the modification of the education curriculum, measures to protect lesbians from medical treatment to enforce heterosexuality, and the modification of legal Acts which refer to concepts such as 'morality', 'good habits' and other subjective phrases that have led to the exclusion in practice of the category 'lesbian' as a subject of rights (Demus 2005a). For the first time here Demus and MHOL make a direct

connection between lesbians and reproductive rights, such as the right to adoption and access to reproductive technologies. They also mention health rights, in the form of protection from psychiatric treatment to 'cure' homosexuality.

Maria Ysabel also presented me with two 20-page booklets published by Demus in 2005 that referred to 'sexual orientation'. The first was The National Survey on Exclusion and Discrimination, carried out in 2004 by Demus staff with input from, among others, the ex-director of MHOL, Oscar Ugarteche. The survey covered discrimination based on social class, gender, race and ethnicity, and a final section on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation that included the following points:

Homosexuals are considered by the survey respondents to be one of the groups with the greatest limitations in terms of demanding their rights in Peru. In general there is a 75% condemnation of homosexual sexual relations, either between homosexual men or lesbian women... About half the respondents were not prepared to accept homosexual or lesbian friends, and about 40% said they would try and make them consider changing. A worrying 30% believed that homosexuality is a mental disease.... The profile of those most in favour is the same as for gender equality: young people, those with higher education, less interest in religion and from urban areas. Even respondents who qualified as 'tolerant' of homosexuality were among the vast majority that rejected the right to civil partnerships or families formed by same-sex couples (Demus 2005b: 23-25).

While this survey focused on public attitudes towards discrimination and the different attitudes of certain social sectors, such as class, education level, geographical location or level of religious belief, these social differences are not explored with reference to homosexual men or lesbian women. Moreover, race, ethnicity, culture, bisexuality and gender identity are concepts that do not feature in the study.

Eight months later in 2005 Demus published the second booklet titled 'Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation: There is no Equality Without Visibility', which enters into greater detail about the

legal aspects of discrimination and protection. The introduction to this document states that:

To talk about 'women' and not 'woman' implies breaking with the idea that biological sex leads to a homogenous experience of life for all women. Recognizing that class, ethnicity and other characteristics are important elements in the construction of identity enables us to understand the diverse aspirations and needs that arise from an experience that does not necessarily respond to established stereotypes. It is therefore important to recognize that women's lives are also determined by their sexual orientation (Demus 2005c: 2).

This recognition of the heterogeneity of the women's lives, and the importance of class and ethnicity as well as sexual orientation in the construction of the category 'women' does not extend however to the category 'lesbian', which Demus employs throughout the document. Questions of ethnic difference therefore do not intersect with the category lesbian. In the remaining pages, only gender inequality is taken into consideration when discussing sexual orientation, as the continuation of the introductory section outlines:

For this reason it is important to make visible the experience of lesbian women who, apart from being discriminated against because of their gender, are stigmatized for practising a 'non-conventional' sexuality. These identities are related to and create specific forms of exclusion; lesbians are relegated by heterosexual women and also by their gay and bisexual *compañeros*. Our society controls women's sexuality (heterosexual and lesbian) through moral attitudes that have an impact on legal norms or the daily workings of jurisprudence. It is necessary to establish legal criteria to protect their rights (Demus 2005c: 3).

Demus highlight two key strategies for challenging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation: making visible lesbian women's experiences, and constructing legal criteria for the protection of their rights. This first of these two strategies is addressed in section II, where three female guest

writers from MHOL presented a brief summary of the situation of lesbians in Peru, starting by noting that Peru's racial mixing (*mestizaje*) has 'made socio-economic differences and social exclusion more complex'. They mention the differences between the capital, Lima, and the cities of the coastal, Andean and Amazon regions of the country, although rural areas are not included. The influence of the Catholic Church in society, state institutions and conservative sectors of the political sector is also highlighted. They note that lesbians are invisible as subjects and citizens, that discrimination against homosexuality is not criminalized but it is culturally permitted, and that the law does not provide mechanisms for an adequate protection of their rights. However, despite the introduction of the concept of *mestizaje*, the next section begins with the statement that lesbians face a double discrimination of segregation for being women as well as having 'homosexual orientations', leaving out the class, ethnicity and capital city/provincial city differences mentioned previously. Also notably absent is any exploration of the concept of women's 'gender identity' or experiences of women who do not conform to dominant norms of femininity. In section IV, Demus provide a summary of findings on sexual orientation from their national survey on discrimination (discussed above), and section V enters into detail about the status of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and LGBT rights in Peruvian jurisprudence and international law, drawing on their work with the Non-LGBT Discrimination *Mesa*.

In addition to predominantly legal analysis and proposals relating to discrimination, Demus has also begun to explore the concept of the 'right to pleasure'. In 2006, for example, Demus organized a small public event at their office to celebrate '14<sup>th</sup> February – the day of love and friendship'. One of Peru's leading women writers, Carmen Ollé, edited a booklet titled 'Equal in Pleasure', containing three erotic short stories related in the form of comic strips. While the first two stories portray desire between women and men, the third, titled "Initiation", is based on a short story by an anonymous member of MHOL titled 'On the Lesbos seashore': It relates a young woman's first experience of desire for another woman, while out horse-riding and swimming in the ocean. The drawings depict middle

class locations and activities and stereotypically feminine women. Demus's presentation of the stories notes that Initiation 'is curiously the most innocent of the three, and it asserts the fact that 'erotic attraction and love are not lacking among couples of the same sex' (Demus 2006a: 12). On the first page of the publication, Demus introduces the topic of pleasure by exploring the concept of 'eroticism', noting that:

Eroticism is the furthest from sex understood only as serving reproduction, a standard which guides human sexual relations. When we talk about eroticism in a woman, we would like our readers to think that a woman is not only an object of pleasure – something that feminism completely rejects – but she is also a subject, capable of seeking eroticism for her own pleasure. A woman has the right to pleasure, satisfaction and joy. The limit of pleasure is the violation of another's human rights, something we do not support even in the free and apparently unlimited terrain of the imagination (Demus 2006a: 1).

After the presentation of the three short stories, three well-known Lima-based women writers gave their opinions of the stories. One of them, Doris Moromisato, was asked to comment on 'Initiation', which she critiqued for its excessive romanticism. Members of the panel and the audience congratulated Demus's initiative to include a story about pleasure and eroticism between women, and to include lesbians as subjects of women's human rights debates. However, women from Lima's *conos* were not present at this event, the audience of about 50 people comprising mainly women from the middle class elements of the feminist and LGBT movements. Neither the panel nor the audience questioned the representations of class, ethnicity and femininity in the lesbian story, or the reference to Lesbos rather than a Peruvian location.

#### **5.4 Constraints and opportunities for work on same-sex sexuality**

As the only feminist NGO in Peru institutionally and publicly committed to challenging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation during my

period of fieldwork, I was particularly interested in exploring with Demus staff members their knowledge and analysis of the reasons for this shift from a heteronormative discourse on sexual rights to a focus on sexual orientation and human rights, at least in their national work. What effects had this shift had on Demus's staff and programmes, and why was this inclusion of sexual orientation not integrated into its promotion of human rights with women from the popular sectors?

Romy also raised an initial concern, relating to Demus's conceptualization of sexuality, which she felt produced serious limitations in the context of women from the popular sectors:

I think that in Demus our understanding of sexuality has evolved over time. We started with anatomical and biological explanations and more recently included eroticism and pleasure, but always connected with genitality. I think we need to explore more the link between sexuality and affection. In some of the workshops with the *Comedor* leaders we touched on different dimensions of sexuality, but I think we were too theoretical and we didn't explore it in enough depth (Romy).

While Demus's analysis and discourse on sexuality did not yet connect with notions of poverty, or incorporate the contexts and experiences of women from the popular sectors, members of staff attempting to incorporate the topic in Demus's programmes at the grassroots were also facing internal resistance from some quarters:

Recently we've been working on our institutional plan, and in one of the meetings I wrote that we should work with poor lesbians from the popular sectors, and next to me somebody put a question mark. The debate that followed was not to do with that person being against lesbians, but the argument was: 'Why should we broaden our work to include more people, when we have too much already working with poor women and girls?' My response was that it's not about including more people, it's about working with poor women and girls without assuming that they are all exclusively heterosexual (Romy).

Romy's concern here is to examine the heteronormativity of Demus's work with women from the popular sectors, and to challenge the notion that 'poor lesbians' are separate from the women and girls involved in grassroots development and human rights work with NGOs. Tesania also highlighted the false separation and the fragmentation of issues common among some of Demus's staff, which limited their understanding of the interconnections of gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality inherent in work on sexual rights:

It's very complicated – how to avoid creating hierarchies of topics. In Demus we've discussed the idea of human beings being 'integrated', rather than fragmenting them into hierarchies of needs, or thinking that first we have to eat, then we need drinking water, then such and such. It's like thinking that among poor people there are no homosexuals or lesbians, like some colleagues say: 'How can you ask them to think about sexuality amid so much poverty?' (Tesania).

Despite the fact that some of the staff of Demus were unable to make the link between same-sex sexuality and the popular sectors, the increase in work on lesbian rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and lesbian rights beyond this context since 2003 was notable. Romy believed that this major shift was due to the influence of Demus's leaders. In 2005, for example, these topics were incorporated for the first time into Demus's annual planning process:

It's a line of those who direct the institution at the moment, and now we incorporate it into our planning. Some people brought up the issue strongly, and they are also on the Board of Trustees. The ex-Director and current Director have brought it up as a personal as well as work concern, which I understand they needed to, as it was affecting them directly. They are convinced that this is important to work on (Romy).

As part of this process, Demus's Director confirmed that the staff had carried out occasional internal discussions on conceptualizing sexual orientation and rights, focusing on connecting the right to non-

discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation to the right to privacy, the right to the protection of the family, and sexual rights. One of Demus's psychologists believed that debates in the 1980s and 1990s on the body, sexuality and violence had also provided an important foundation for introducing sexual orientation later on:

From the beginning Demus has worked on the axis of the body and sexuality in order to understand violence against women. It's always been on our agenda in our training workshops and debates. I think that has enabled us to understand sexual rights and reproductive rights: how violence against women limits the development of our sexuality, and the recognition of our bodies. In reality this is related to sexual orientation. The debate has been formalized now but it was always there before that (Tesania).

Indeed, once the inclusion of sexual orientation had been formally approved by the Board, Demus was able to initiate their first legal case on sexual orientation, involving their colleague, Crissthan Olivéra. Tesania noted that although this case involved a gay man, it provided a variety of staff with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and thoughts about the topic:

When our lawyer, Jeanette, began to work on this legal case, we became directly involved as professionals. This has included dealing with psychiatric evidence given by medical professionals with an analysis from the Stone Age! This first legal case has led to positive interdisciplinary debates among Demus staff, and it has enabled more of us to initiate work on sexual orientation. However, we have not consolidated this process yet (Tesania).

While this case has promoted constructive reflection and dialogue among Demus's staff, its connection with a middle class man experiencing discrimination in a middle class district of Lima has not provided any knowledge that might challenge the notions among some Demus staff that



sexual orientation is not an issue for their work with women from the popular sectors.

Despite the progress made through specific institutional initiatives, moreover, Demus's lawyer working on the sexual orientation legal case noted that support among staff for working on sexual orientation was not unanimous:

At the moment there is no institutional agreement that we should all work on the topic of sexual preference. For example, Demus's participation in the *Mesa* was a political act, and was seen more as a way for Demus to support the LGBT movement (Jeannette).

This lack of internal consensus and involvement by all staff was also a concern highlighted by Romy:

By taking on sexual orientation we entered into a terrain of internal conflicts, some explicit and some not. There are internal dynamics that sometimes reveal how difficult it is to establish a specific position on this topic. We understand that politically it is correct to work on the topic and to relate to the LGBT allies and their realities. But there are some that feel that we should not be working on this because there are other priorities, like violence against women etc. We haven't had any in-depth internal debates on this topic yet (Romy).

The possibility of having in-depth internal debates has therefore been limited by the resistance of some staff members, and as Romy went on to recount, this resistance has been particularly felt by Demus's Director, also an activist in the LGBT movement:

Maria Ysabel has had a difficult time in Demus, because some of the staff are here because of their 'professional' skills, and they question her, above all some of the psychologists. There's some rejection of having a Director who is openly lesbian and who defends her sexuality. I think it's more of a personal and moral resistance than a political discourse. We all tolerate each other publicly, but the resistance is more symbolic, in gestures and signals. I think the resisters take the line that you can be

whatever you want, but they don't want any scandal or visibility, or open expressions of happiness with a different way of being. They don't want you to bring that to the workplace, because they consider it a heterosexual world and here heterosexuality wins. Maria Ysabel also talks about heteronormativity and fundamentalisms, but those who resist insist that we stick to femicide and sexual violence. I think it has to do with personal attitudes, and a lot of anxiety among people who find it difficult to accept that people's realities are different, that they change. I think that we shouldn't only operate in safe waters (Romy).

Efforts described by Tesania to incorporate sexual orientation into women's rights through debates on violence and bodily integrity have therefore had a limited effect, as some staff have still resisted understanding femicide and violence against women beyond a heteronormative framework. A psychologist committed to including sexuality in Demus's programmes, Tesania, believed that the problem could be traced back to the attitudes of psychologists in Demus due to the training they received in Lima's academic institutions:

In universities such as the Catholic University, the majority of psychology training is based on the understanding of homosexuality as a mental disease. They haven't updated since the 1970s, and there is little research here to challenge this. Ok, so the myth is entrenched, but if you do more empirical and scientific research you can begin to challenge it. Recently a student wanted to write her thesis on homosexuality and she didn't find a single thesis on it in the past 50 years. Without empirical and scientific research, people are dominated by fantasies, myths, beliefs. In the Catholic University in 2000 they were even distributing leaflets against homosexuality! In Lima! So it's difficult to be creative and connect with this topic (Tesania).

Tesania's reflections on the entrenched heteronormativity and rejection of homosexuality of psychology as an academic discipline in Lima highlight the cultural and intellectual challenge facing psychologists when they start to work for the only director of a Peruvian NGO who defines herself as

lesbian feminist, and who is committed to lesbian visibility and rights. Moreover, as Romy reminded me: 'We also have to remember that the history of feminism is also one of women being accused of being lesbians, to de-legitimize our work'. Some women's fear of being tarred with the same brush is still a factor for consideration.

Sometimes we talk about the women in popular sectors, and their prejudices, their ideas like those I mentioned, but I think that the problem is that feminist activists like us haven't gone to meet with the women to discuss this. We have a responsibility to show our faces, and to say: 'Yes, I am [lesbian]'. I think it's crucial that we do this at the grassroots. And when we talk about sexual identities we need to include the question of class and ethnicity. One isn't only lesbian, no? I understand the need to name identities, because if not the mandate continues to be only heterosexual (Romy).

Romy's ideas for overcoming the lack of dialogue with women from the popular sectors are influenced by Demus and the LGBT movement's central strategy of 'coming out' in public to raise lesbian visibility and challenge exclusively heterosexual mandates. Since Demus knows of no women in the *conos* who have openly taken up the identity 'lesbian', the only approach is therefore to ask middle class lesbians to visit the *conos* and meet with the women and talk about their lives in a very different context to the *conos*. However, this strategy is based on LGBT rights discourse that has yet to explore the intersections of sexuality with questions of class, ethnicity or culture, or whether promoting dialogue on an inherently middle class sexual identity would produce any benefits or support for women in the *conos* like Julia, Maria, Carmen, Charo or the women who call themselves *chitos*.

In the case of Flora Tristán, my first discussion with a staff member on the constraints, pressures and opportunities for working on same-sex sexuality were in December 2005 with the Coordinator of the Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship programme, Silvia. Unfortunately, a month later she left this job to join a political party, and another Coordinator was

not appointed until the last week of my fieldwork eight months later. In our first and only interview, Silvia confirmed that although the title of the programme included 'sexual rights', in practice the work focused mainly on reproductive rights and monitoring the Peruvian government's implementation of the UN Cairo and Beijing conference action plans. Silvia recognized that the focus on reproductive rights had contributed to Flora's failure to introduce the concept of sexual diversity into its SR/HC programme. Soon after our interview she wrote to me concerning her desire to address this limitation by first researching this aspect of women's lives in Peru:<sup>35</sup>

I have been thinking about the possibility of writing a proposal to the Global Fund for Women regarding the subject we discussed recently. Only about lesbian women, identifying the social characteristics of the double life in the case of upper class women, and the personal and social stress and the level of exclusion for working class women. It would be interesting to be able to do research purely on this social aspect of the acceptance/exclusion of sexual diversity (Silvia).

Soon after I received this e mail Silvia resigned and left Flora Tristán, leaving the programme officer, Paul, to lead on the core work. He had no authority, however, to develop more strategic planning and analysis, or introduce new areas of work or research such as that suggested by Silvia. However, Silvia's initial interest in researching lesbian women and sexual diversity in relation to the SR/HC programme was echoed by Paul. In our first interview in February 2006 he talked to me about his experience of the constraints and difficulties of incorporating sexuality into sexual and reproductive rights work in the field of women's health and citizenship. The first difficulty he raised related to the changing methodology and content of Flora's work with women from the popular sectors since the 1980s:

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<sup>35</sup> Personal e mail communication sent to me on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

In our work with women in community organizations now we've skipped an important process: we no longer politicize women's daily lives. The work of popular education seems a bit forgotten now. We've gone from demanding people's rights with the *Vaso de Leche* and *Comedor* programmes, to the totally techno-political demands that the 'gender' regime has imposed. This shift has rendered invisible the political aspects of women's daily sexual lives and their discontent (Paul).

For Paul, working on the techno-political aspects of 'gender' in the case of the SR/HC Programme has resulted in Flora Tristán shifting its focus away from women's daily sexual lives to how the Peruvian state has implemented its commitments to the Cairo ICPD action plan, which emphasizes reproductive and not sexual rights. The shift from popular education methodologies to public policy advocacy and 'citizenship participation' through health promoter training spaces such as the SR/RR *Mesa* has also changed the content of the workshops with women leaders from the *conos*:

When one decides to work on issues such as 'gender' and Cairo etc, one begins to convert spaces for reflection into technical spaces, for example for training in advocacy and monitoring the state. This often responds to important needs, but it doesn't connect with all aspects of women's daily reality (Paul).

In terms of the 'gender regime' Paul mentioned, he highlighted his experience of the way the category 'gender' was being deployed by Flora Tristán, and its limitations:

I have come to think lately that the category 'gender' has its limitations – it is no longer explaining things that the term 'diversity' has exploded. Clearly the category 'gender' has always been useful when referring to relations between women and men. But the question is, should we try to put everything we want to explain about diversity into 'gender', or is 'gender' no longer enough for us? (Paul).

As Flora Tristán's mission is to achieve gender equality and justice, and 'gender' is conceptualized only as relations between women and men, it is understandable then that Flora Tristán provides little space for incorporating thought and action on same-sex sexuality or transgression of gender identity norms. Moreover, Paul noted that many of his colleagues and friends in the feminist movement had developed what he considered to be a very valid and legitimate discourse based on 'gender'. However he felt that as a consequence questioning 'gender' was being resisted as it could result in the concept no longer being central to defining feminist work. He connected this anxiety to some of his colleagues' resistance to including sexual diversity in their work:

Of course, the resistance is clear when they say: "No, our LGBT *compañeros* work on sexual diversity". So once again there is a fragmentation, but sexuality isn't lived like that. Many women live their sexuality in the most diverse ways. It's not a question of only dealing with the issue of relations between men and women, it's more about the diverse dimensions of one's body and its practices. So there is no clear sense that this topic is important in Flora (Paul).

For Paul, this fragmentation of work on sexuality has led Flora Tristán to focus on gender equality and sexual rights within a heteronormative and reproductive framework, leaving the LGBT groups to address sexual diversity. This separation in Flora Tristán's work on sexual rights with women from popular sectors has also been reinforced by their fear of a negative response from the women at this level:

At the moment the concept of sexuality in Flora is controlled by discourse on reproduction. At least we now talk about pleasure, but in a heterocentric way, even when we know that the women from community organizations may have lesbo-erotic elements in their imaginary worlds and daily lives, even if they do not identify as lesbian. But another reason

why we don't include the agenda of sexual diversity with women from the grassroots is the fear that they will reject our work. So demands by Flora relating to sexual orientation are only found at the most political and academic levels, but they haven't been taken up in the technical discourse and project work of the NGOs, which is the level at which we work with community organizations at the grassroots (Paul).

In addition to Flora's institutional fear of being rejected by women in their projects at the grassroots if they incorporate debates on sexual diversity, Paul went on to include a more personal constraint to the work on sexual rights, pertaining to his own subjectivity:

Although I work on sexual orientation with the *Colectivo*, in the work with women I have been very careful.<sup>36</sup> From the outset, as a gay man, I wanted to keep the two agendas separate, no? For example, some women in feminist NGOs would say to me 'why are you pushing your agenda?', 'be careful', so I have always felt a tension with the issue of my political identity, so to speak. I didn't understand that maybe the feminist dimension also has to do with this, with sexual diversity (Paul).

Paul's anxiety about 'pushing his own agenda' on the basis of his political identity as a gay man manifested itself when I carried out focus group discussions with the health promoters from the Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship Programme. Although he encouraged the women to meet with me, and helped me organize the dates and venue with them, when the time came to meet, he decided not to participate, even though the women had said they were happy for him to attend. He felt that it was more important to have women who could recount experiences of lesbian subjectivity as part of the dialogue. As I believed it was important to have Flora Tristán staff present in the discussions, for joint learning and for continuity in any

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<sup>36</sup> The *Colectivo ContraNaturas* is an informal independent network of voluntary activists working on LGBT rights, and sexual and gender diversity with mainly young people in Lima's oldest settlement, Villa El Salvador,

future discussions after my departure, we agreed to invite Susel from the Human Rights Programme, and Maribel from Cesip and GALF. The health promoters knew that both women identified as lesbian feminists, and they had worked with Maribel on several occasions in their consortium-led health workshops. While this approach produced some rich exchanges in the two discussions, it also highlighted the limitation of relying on 'lesbian' women to take up the topic of sexual orientation, when such women were not employed to work in the SR/HC Programme.

On my last visit to Flora Tristán's office I interviewed the newly appointed coordinator of the SR/HC Programme, Cecilia Olea, who had been working at Flora since its foundation. From 2003 she had been responsible for leading its coordination of the Latin America/Caribbean regional "28<sup>th</sup> September" campaign to decriminalize abortion<sup>37</sup>. At the time of our meeting she was also a member of the regional coordinating committee of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights. As the new head of the SR/HC programme, Cecilia expressed her wish for Flora Tristán to focus more on sexual rights rather than reproductive rights in the *conos*, particularly in relation to sexual diversity:

What I really want is to strengthen the focus on sexuality and begin to work on sexual diversity, starting from women's and youth's subjectivity (Cecilia).

At the time of our interview, Cecilia had just begun to discuss the future of the SR/HC programme with her colleagues, and in particular Paul, who described the move to work more on sexual rights and sexuality as taking up a more radical feminist agenda. However, when I asked him for his thoughts about the future of the programme, he had no clear ideas about what this would mean in relation to the SR/HC Programme in terms of

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<sup>37</sup> For details of this campaign, see: <http://www.flora.org.pe/setiembre28.htm>



aims or activities, or how they would follow up on the group discussions I had organized with the health promoters:

These first debates you have had with the women can give us ideas about how to take up this topic. I'm very interested in working on all the issues around lesbian or homoerotic subjectivities, but in the case of women it's quite complicated. I need to work out how I'm going to introduce the topic, particularly how to connect the health promoters with the topic. We have to revitalize our technical spaces (Paul).

Apart from incorporating sexual rights and diversity, and a more radical feminist agenda, into the 'Health Citizenship' work of Flora Tristán and the health promoters, Paul reported that he and Susel had been proposing to their managers the need to develop mechanisms for incorporating cultural diversity when working on sexuality, in order to explore the topic in relation to their work in the Andes and the Amazon. Notably, however, Paul did not mention Lima's *conos* when considering the question of sexuality and cultural difference.

Paul also wanted to propose a debate on trans identities, for the first time, sharing his experience of the 'radical sexual dissidence' of the independent Collective to which he belonged. He felt that at this early stage of internal institutional debates on sexual and gender diversity, it was important to encourage staff members' individual contributions to debates, based on their own knowledge and experiences:

I think that it's really important to present issues in the 'first person'. Clearly it's no coincidence that in Demus, for example, the topic has a stronger presence, given that the director and one of the male staff members have come out of the closet. In the end, people propose agendas, more than institutions, and that's why it's important to have diversity within the organization. Here Susel has talked most about the topic – it's evident that she has politicized her anger, which is great. Even though most feminists are politically convinced, their position is one of solidarity, of accompaniment, but it's not their own personal cause (Paul).

However, although Paul believed in the important role that individuals could play in advocating for the inclusion of sexuality in the work of feminist NGOs, he struck a cautionary note concerning this strategy, based on his experience of efforts to convince the National NGO Human Rights Coordinating Group (*la Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos*) to do the same:

The human rights movement in Peru has no clarity concerning sexual and reproductive rights, and even less the question of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. What's happened is that they have reached a point of solidarity, of ethical coherence, for example with MHOL and the LGBT Non-discrimination *Mesa* in which some representatives of the Coordinating Group participate. But they are not protagonists of the issue. In this Group, everyone comes together but they keep their issues separate. So one NGO will talk about the victims of the armed conflict, but when sexual diversity crops up, they only call on the gay specialist to speak! This separation of agendas is a challenge we are still facing (Paul).

This fragmented approach to human rights, where all sexuality-related debates and strategies are designated to LGBT groups or individuals, mirrors Flora Tristán's institutional position that it works directly on gender equality and it supports the LGBT movement to work on sexuality. Only in Demus has there been an initial attempt to work on both gender equality and sexuality from a feminist perspective. However, so far this integration of the two political agendas has not yet led to any change in the discourse of each. Demus has adopted the lesbian and gay elements of LGBT rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (but not the bisexual and transgender discourse) without reflecting on how they could intersect with the questions of class, race, ethnicity and culture that the gender equality discourse incorporates. As Romy and the Director, Maria Ysabel have suggested, further institutional reflection on the heteronormativity of their work on gender equality and women's rights would provide a way of breaking down this separation of agendas. In

Chapter Seven I explore these challenges further in the regional and global feminist discourse on sexuality supported by Flora Tristán and Demus. In the last section of this chapter, I enter into the field of global debates on sexuality by examining the relationship between the international development agencies and Demus and Flora Tristán.

### **5.5 Dialogue with international development agencies.**

We need to know more about the funding agencies that work with us – their philosophy on sexuality, because it's not just that they give us the money and that's it, no? We need to generate a debate with them too, to interpellate the agencies too (Romy).

Unlike Flora Tristán, Demus has received funding from UK-based international development agencies. This has included 'one-off' grants for occasional women's human rights activities from Oxfam GB and DFID (Department for International Development) via their field offices in Lima. The only UK-based agency to have a long-standing and institutional relationship with Demus is Womankind Worldwide, since the early 1990s. Demus's other principal sources of long-term funding have come from the Ford Foundation in the United States and later from the Dutch NGO, HIVOS, starting in 2004. On occasions these relationships have gone beyond funding to encompass advocacy and dialogue on women's rights, such as when Demus's Director travelled to the UK in 2002:

I've been in meetings with CEDAW, with Amnesty UK and Womankind in London, but they never mentioned the topic of sexual orientation. I was younger then, still learning, and I didn't know how to operate in those spaces, so I didn't make a connection with lesbian issues there (Maria Ysabel).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> CEDAW is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

A few years later, when the Director had gained more experience in Demus and in relating to the international agencies, she was able to negotiate some one-off funding for specific initiatives on sexual orientation, such as the 2005 publication of the national survey of social exclusion and discrimination which was supported by a Spanish NGO, *Entre Pueblos*. In 2006 the short stories on Pleasure were supported by Ford Foundation, Womankind Worldwide and HIVOS. The sexual orientation legal case in support of their staff member Crisstian Olivera was funded by HIVOS as part of their 180,000 Euro three-year commitment to Demus from 2004 to 2006. As one of the few staff responsible with the Director for dialogue with funding agencies, Romy noted that sexual orientation was rarely on the agencies' agendas :

We've discussed sexual orientation within Demus due to the insistence of some individuals, but it would be good if agencies could ask us, talk to us, or at least stimulate the debate and show an interest in the topic. We don't have any ongoing funding for our work on sexual orientation. Apart from HIVOS recently, development agencies don't raise sexual orientation explicitly or say that it's a valid issue. Ford Foundation supports us, but they've never raised the topic of sexual orientation themselves. They let us do it though (Romy).

Despite Ford Foundation's commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, and their long-standing relationships with Demus, they have remained silent on the topic of sexual orientation, despite the knowledge that as an institution Demus was taking it on in specific and public ways. Romy noted that the general trend in reduction in funding for women's rights work after the 1990s was another constraint they were facing:

One problem is that we don't have any specific project on sexual orientation with women in the popular sectors to get us fully involved in this topic. We need a policy on sexual orientation that is cross-cutting, because at the moment we are missing opportunities working in a disconnected way, in some projects but not others. We could prepare a proposal, for example, to work with mothers who provide support to

young lesbians in the *conos*, which would be great, but this could create conflict in Demus because we now are facing the problem of overall reduced funding (Romy).

The dwindling support from international funding agencies on women's human rights has therefore put pressure on Demus to prioritize certain aspects of its work. The lack of donor interest in sexuality, combined with the fragmented or 'add on' approach to introducing sexual orientation and lesbian rights disconnected from questions of poverty, and resistance among some staff members have therefore all combined to limit the opportunities for Demus to develop its work on sexuality and women's human rights.

The work carried out by Flora on sexual rights and health in recent years has also been funded by Ford Foundation, with occasional additional grants from the Latin America sections of UNFPA and UNIFEM.<sup>39</sup> In 2004 the Ford Foundation approved a grant of US\$250,000, which is described in their annual report as being for advocacy, policy analysis and training to promote the incorporation of gender equity and human rights in public policies on sexual and reproductive health.<sup>40</sup> However, in 2006 this grant from Ford Foundation was due to end, leaving Flora with a significant void to fill in terms of resources for sexual rights work.

During the last days of my fieldwork in 2006, when Cecilia Olea had been appointed as the new coordinator of the Sexual Rights and Health Citizenship Programme, Cecilia reflected with me on need to seek new funding for the Programme. She believed that she and her colleagues would have the space to work on sexuality even if the programme were funded by donors such as the European Commission. Cecilia was planning a sexual and reproductive health funding proposal to them as one of her first tasks as coordinator:

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<sup>39</sup> These are the United Nations' Population Fund and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

<sup>40</sup> [www.fordfound.org/publications/recent\\_articles/docs/ar2004/ar2004\\_p61-100\\_psj\\_grants.pdf](http://www.fordfound.org/publications/recent_articles/docs/ar2004/ar2004_p61-100_psj_grants.pdf). Accessed on the 6 August 2007.

I believe that if we present a project to the European Union, we have to remember to speak their language. It's not a feminist agency, but I think that if we outline the distance between the government health services and the lives of women who use them, we can propose to gather ethnographic data that reflects the cultural beliefs of the target populations of health centres. Then we could include any topic we want, because nobody can control what comes out of that research (Cecilia).

In my last interview with Paul, he agreed with Cecilia's assessment of the possibilities of working on sexuality with some donor agencies if staff in Flora Tristán took the initiative to include it. He did note, however, that the technical focus on gender demanded by funding agencies was an obstacle that still needed to be overcome:

On occasions I feel asphyxiated by gender technologies – the technical approach that funding agencies legitimately demand – even though someone has to. But now I think the idea is to look for funders who have a broad, umbrella approach. It's more about your own intentions, rather than those of the funding agency. We can say we're working on reproductive rights, and in the end we can include topics specific to sexuality and sexual diversity, like the discussions you have had with the health promoters. It's more about our own political will. I think it's interesting that there are funders, like the Ford Foundation, that don't try to limit you on this topic. They don't recommend it either, or study what you're doing, or demand it. You can put a lot of things into broad projects on sexual and reproductive rights (Paul).

Those involved in attempting to incorporate non-heteronormative approaches to sexuality in Flora Tristán and Demus therefore concur that although their funders have not expressed any interest in discussing this topic with their feminist NGO 'partners', nor have they objected to the inclusion of LGBT rights initiatives when they have occurred. Romy, Paul, Cecilia and Maria Ysabel all believe that there are opportunities to begin to integrate sexual orientation or sexual diversity into their ongoing

work with women from the popular sectors. However, this depends on Peruvian NGO staff commitment and initiatives, since the international agencies are not providing them with any support or opportunities to bring together different knowledge and ideas or to think through how to address the complexities of the task at hand.

### ***Conclusions***

Both Flora Tristán and Demus were founded as feminist NGOs in the 1980s with strong socialist influences that ensured their long-term commitment to working with the popular sectors on women's rights and gender equality. The 'popular education' approach to this work began in the early years by exploring with women in the *conos* their daily lives and the violations of their rights, seeking with them the solutions to these problems. During the early 1990s this approach was difficult to continue due to the escalating levels of violence and threats throughout Lima due to the internal armed conflict. When this political constraint was alleviated in 1992, Demus continued its training work on rights with women in community organizations, responding to their selection of topics such as violence, femicide and abortion. Flora Tristán, on the other hand, shifted its focus to regional and global networking and advocacy connected with the United Nations conferences on population and women in Cairo and Beijing. Consequently from 1996 onwards its work with women from the popular sectors moved away from popular education and began to focus on strengthening citizenship participation and training to enable them to lobby the state to implement UN agreements and to influence public policy content.

In this context, the NGOs have focused on sexual violence against women in the family and beyond, reproductive and sexual health and the need for access to safe, low-cost and legal abortion. Over the years these topics have formed the backbone of their growing discourse on sexual and reproductive rights which has maintained a clear focus on and commitment to the situation of women from the popular sectors specifically within the framework of assumed heterosexual identities and

relationships. At the levels of popular sector support and national advocacy, neither NGO has theorized sexuality in its work on sexual and reproductive rights, or encountered any other way of making the connection between these rights and women's same-sex sexuality. The very occasional mention of homosexuality or sexual orientation in a meeting or document has been tacitly accepted but not examined nor incorporated into debates, analyses or activities. The absence of any other health-related organizations or discourse in Peru making the link between women's sexual and reproductive health and same-sex sexuality has also resulted in a political void in terms of any potential source of knowledge for Flora Tristán and Demus in this field.

Demus's recent emphasis on 'sexuality and human rights', rather than 'sexual rights', has created the opportunity to break down the heteronormativity of health-related discourse and introduce debates on homosexuality and lesbian sexuality very tentatively (on one occasion) with women leaders from the *conos* of Lima. On a more general, national level Demus have taken the lead among Peruvian feminist NGOs in forging alliances and joint initiatives with the LGBT movement, and lesbian activists within it in particular. As a consequence of this alliance, Peruvian lesbian feminists' analytical framework and discourse on same-sex sexuality has dominated Demus's analysis of inequality and discrimination in Peru. As a consequence, the terms 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' are the only valid sexual identities for women, but the term has not yet been examined from a perspective of racial, ethnic, cultural, class or age difference, or in relation to notions of transgender or female masculinity. Terms such as *chito*, and the women who take up this identity, remain unintelligible and excluded from both discourse and action. This phenomenon is also reproduced in Demus's exploration of the notion of the 'right to pleasure', a sexual right that it does connect with same-sex sexuality for the first time. Moreover, notions of bisexuality, bisexual rights, and a critique of the heterosexual/homosexual binary logic are also absent from lesbian feminist discourse, excluding women in the *conos* who maintain relationships with or desire men as well as women, or who, like Maria, are still considered essentially heterosexual by some, due



to their previous marriage and motherhood, despite being in a relationship with a woman.

The 'lesbian subject' Demus constructs as a subject of visibility and rights therefore represents and reinforces the notion of a minority middle or upper class, modern, urban and Westernized subject that has little in common with the lives of the vast majority of women who participate in Demus's programme work in both urban and rural areas. Flora Tristán's initiatives to support the work of the LGBT movement have followed similar characteristics, providing important and admirable support on such a sensitive and controversial topic, but similarly unable as yet to produce discourse, meanings and symbols that are relevant and of benefit to women from the popular sectors. The role of individuals within Demus and Flora Tristán is also clearly influential in the introduction of a lesbian feminist discourse in their institutions. The women most active in the LGBT movement have not surprisingly based their efforts to introduce sexuality into feminist NGO discourse on the concepts they deploy in their lesbian or LGBT group, in particular, lesbian, sexual orientation and lesbian visibility. The incommensurability of this discourse with the reality of women's lives in the popular sectors has provided a major stumbling block to their efforts. Others who do not identify as lesbian feminist, however, found it easier to reflect in my interviews with them on the need to explore sexuality or 'sexual diversity' beyond these terms and in connection with questions of economic status, the effects of violence, solidarity, intimacy and affection.

In addition to this interest in opening up a dialogue on sexuality in the context of the popular sectors, Demus's recent publications on sexual orientation, lesbian women and social exclusion have also begun to make initial references to questions of difference and class-based and racial discrimination. However, if they are to explore these ideas further, and construct a cultural politics of sexuality with a different approach from that of only transmitting Peruvian lesbian rights discourse, they will need time and a range of resources for research and dialogue that entail financial costs and inevitably lead them to face the challenge of initiating a dialogue on sexuality with their funders. To date this dialogue has been

limited to gaining some financial support from HIVOS for specific initiatives on sexual orientation and lesbian rights, but the funders have predominantly preferred to leave the NGOs to operate in silence. In my interviews with some NGO staff they expressed the desire for a more open recognition and discussion on sexuality, or at least 'sexual orientation' or 'sexual diversity', with international development agencies in the future. In the next chapter I follow this connection to a selection of UK-based development agencies, including those that have supported Demus and MHOL in Peru, to explore their notions of sexuality in the context of development, and whether a future dialogue on sexuality could be possible.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **International Development Discourse and Policy in the UK**

Academic and Peruvian feminists' critiques of international development discourse and policy, presented in Chapters Two and Five, have highlighted the failure of the majority of development agencies to recognize and address same-sex sexuality and gender identity in their support for work with women or girls in the South (Jolly 2000; Lind and Share 2003; Cornwall et al. 2008). In addition, as I note in Chapter Two, among the minority of agencies that have attempted to overcome this limitation (HIVOS, Ford Foundation and Sida, for example), the recent inclusion of LGBT rights, sexual rights or a discussion of the concept of sexuality has not yet produced more in-depth empirical research and analysis on the relationship between same-sex sexuality, gender identity, women and international development policy and practice. In the case of Peru, as noted in the Chapter Five, feminist NGOs, such as Demus and Flora Tristán, that have incorporated sexual orientation, lesbian or LGBT rights into their discourse and activities have not yet established any dialogue on sexuality or related rights with their short or long-term international funding partners. In this chapter I address these concerns by examining UK-based international development analysis, conceptualization and representation of sexuality and gender in the context of poverty and development. I also explore the effects of the sexuality-related terms employed, similar to my study of the community-based women's organizations and Peruvian feminist NGOs presented in Chapters Four and Five.

Given the direct relationship between feminist NGOs and development agencies, it is also important to explore how these 'counterparts' or 'partners' in development interact and influence each other's policies and practice on these issues. Are Paul's frustrations about funding agencies' pressures to implement 'gender technologies', for example (presented in Chapter Five) echoed by any staff members of the agencies, such as those who are committed to women's rights? (see also Cornwall et al. 2007: 5).

Do they also consider the concept of gender equality one that forecloses the possibility of introducing the notion of women's same-sex sexuality into development thought and policies, and if so why?

In this chapter I also expand Jolly's (2000: 82) concern for the levels of awareness and sensitivity within international development agencies by exploring their internal staff policies, discourse, cultural norms, and anxieties with regard to same-sex sexuality and gender identity. This enables me to study the connections between 'internal' staff and 'external' development contexts, policies and practices, how heteronormativity operates in these different but mutually constitutive spheres, and why women's same-sex sexuality and gender identity issues in particular are so often under-represented or completely absent.

My key research questions for this chapter therefore include: what meanings of sexuality circulate or are assumed in concepts such as rights, health, equality and non-discrimination that feature so strongly in development policies aimed at 'empowering the poor'. Have these concepts led to the inclusion of same-sex sexuality and gender identity in the organization's policies and practice, and if so, where and how? How and why have same-sex sexuality and gender identity been included in the concept of diversity in internal staffing policies, and has this influenced development policies and practice, or vice versa? According to staff members within the organizations, what opportunities and constraints have influenced thought and action on sexuality, gender identity, women and development?

I believe it is important to analyse the meanings of sexuality deployed by UK-based international development agencies because they all prioritize the promotion of the well-being, empowerment and rights of women living in poverty in the South. Most of these agencies aim to achieve these goals by funding Southern NGOs and social movements. As I have outlined in Chapters Four and Five, however, my research in Peru has revealed that the feminist NGOs and LGBT organizations have yet to incorporate the knowledge, experience and agency in relation to same-sex sexuality and gender identity of women from the popular sectors. By examining the role of international development agencies, I hope to shed some light on their

limitations and constraints in the field of women's sexuality, and explore further ideas about why, and how they could be overcome in the future.

In order to focus on the connections between UK-based development agencies, Peru and feminist or LGBT organizations, while I was in Peru I sought examples of funding or other support from the UK for initiatives or programmes there in the field of sexuality and gender identity issues. Most notably Womankind Worldwide (from its office in London) was providing long-term institutional funding to Demus (as outlined in Chapter Five). On my return to London I interviewed the staff member connected with Peru (who had recently left Womankind), as well as her manager. I also learnt when I arrived in Peru that MHOL had received funding for a recently completed three-year project on LGBT human rights from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). These funds were channelled via the British Council's office in Lima, and negotiated and monitored by a staff member there who I also interviewed during my stay in Peru. Although this project fell outside the formal realm of 'international development cooperation', the tendency of development agencies to fund LGBT human rights groups as a key strategy for working on same-sex sexuality and gender identity led me to consider it of interest and to include it in my study.

In contrast to these cases, the subject of HIV/AIDS provided the only connection I could find between Christian Aid, Oxfam UK, Progressio and DFID's work and same-sex sexuality and gender identity. This was strictly limited, however, to men and male to female trans. As such major players in UK-based international development, I believed it was important to explore the reasons for these apparent lacunae in their development policies and practice. While my previous work experience and ongoing contact with staff members of Christian Aid and Progressio influenced my selection of these NGOs, I chose Oxfam GB as it is the largest UK-based development NGO, and DFID because it is the official development agency of the UK government and an important funder of UK NGOs, including the four in my study. In the case of Oxfam GB and Christian Aid I prioritised interviews with staff working on Peru and their gender advisers in the UK, but due to DFID's closure of its Peru programme a few years earlier, I concentrated on

interviewing staff based only in London working on gender, rights, equity and social policy.

All the agency staff I approached agreed to my requests for interviews and relevant documents, and expressed a positive interest in my research. I have chosen not to identify their real names to protect their anonymity, particularly due to the fact that, with the exception of the FCO/British Council, there had been no institutional discussions on same-sex sexuality or gender identity and development. Moreover, in our interviews they referred to sensitive and occasionally distressing events or contexts within their own institutions and on a personal level about which they had for the most part remained silent.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly outline the organizational backgrounds and goals of the non-governmental and governmental agencies in the study. I then explore their discourses on sexuality within the fields of Human Rights and Governance, Social Exclusion and Rights-Based Approaches to Development, and Gender and Diversity. The last section of the chapter examines the emerging notion of diversity, including sexual orientation, in the context of agency staff employment and management policies and practice.

## **6.1 Organizational histories and goals**

Oxfam GB, Christian Aid and Progressio<sup>41</sup> were all founded in the UK in the early 1940s in response to World War II, initially focusing on supporting European reconstruction efforts and the situation of refugees. Progressio was founded by lay Catholics in response to the silence of the Catholic Church's leaders in the face of the rise of fascism in Europe. By contrast, Christian Aid was founded by British and Irish protestant church leaders. Similar to Progressio, however, it has always identified itself as ecumenical and non-evangelising, but it does not share the same history of challenging its own church hierarchies' conservative political beliefs and action. Oxfam

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<sup>41</sup> A summary of the histories and work of each organization can be found on its institutional website: [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk); [www.christian-aid.org](http://www.christian-aid.org); [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk); [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk).

GB was always a secular organization, although in the 1990s it also began to fundraise among UK church networks. In the 1950s these three charities began to shift their attention from Europe to newly independent nations in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, as well as the established republics in Latin America. They also began to respond to emergencies worldwide and raise awareness in the UK about poverty in the developing world. Womankind Worldwide was founded later, in 1989, as a secular NGO to work specifically with women in developing countries.

All the NGOs in this study state that their mission is to overcome poverty and injustice, and they coincide with Christian Aid's statement that: '...we take the side of poor and marginalised people' (Christian Aid, 2005: 4). All the NGOs also prioritize working with 'partners' (civil society groups, organizations, networks and movements), providing them with a variety of donated resources, rather than implementing their own projects with their own staff.<sup>42</sup> They aim to promote the empowerment of people through the development programmes they support. The focus for all is on promoting organizations' self-reliance and their participation and representation in political, social and economic decision-making, structures and institutions. Oxfam GB, for example, states that: 'With the right resources, support and training, people living in poverty can solve their own problems'.<sup>43</sup> Womankind, the only NGO of the four to work solely with women's organizations, states that: 'Women have an abundance of practical ideas for improving their own lives and lifting their families and communities out of poverty. But this can only happen if they have the confidence and opportunities to articulate their needs and ideas and be listened to'.<sup>44</sup> While Oxfam GB, Christian Aid and Womankind provide funds for their partners' institutional costs and programmes, Progressio employs 'development workers' to work for two to five years with NGOs or social movements. Progressio's approach is for development workers to share their skills and improve the ability of the partner organizations to

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<sup>42</sup> For further details see: [www.christian-aid.org](http://www.christian-aid.org); [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk); [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk); [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk).

<sup>43</sup> [www.oxfam.org.uk/about\\_us](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/about_us). Accessed 4.12.2007.

<sup>44</sup> [www.womankind.org.uk/what-we-do](http://www.womankind.org.uk/what-we-do). Accessed 4.12.2007.

advocate for change locally and nationally. All four NGOs invest the majority of their resources in education, training, networking and advocacy. Only Oxfam GB highlights its divergence from this 'partnership' approach in the case of emergencies, noting that in extreme and urgent situations it tends to provide humanitarian assistance through the work of its own staff.

Oxfam GB was by far the largest of the four NGOs, with an annual income in the financial year 2006/07 of £290.7million, while Christian Aid's income for the same period was £93.3million.<sup>45</sup> Progressio raised £4.4million and Womankind £1.8million.<sup>46</sup> The two largest NGOs received the highest proportion (approximately three quarters) of their income from public donations and trading activities, while Progressio and Womankind depended on DFID and other institutions, both public and private, for the majority of their income.

Oxfam GB stands out as the only NGO of the four to have spent as much of its funds on emergencies as on development programmes in 2007.<sup>47</sup> In that year, Oxfam GB worked in over 70 countries, including 23 in Asia/Middle East, 21 in Africa and 15 in Latin America and the Caribbean. Christian Aid worked with around 600 partners in 47 countries, also placing greater emphasis on Asia, Africa and the Middle East, while the Latin America and Caribbean region received less than 7 per cent of total income.<sup>48</sup> As a small NGO, Womankind worked with 40 partners in 9 African countries, as well as Afghanistan, India, Albania and Peru. In 2007

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<sup>45</sup> Of this total, 24% was raised from DFID and other public authorities, and 75% came from public donations, legacies and trading. Christian Aid's distribution was almost identical.

<sup>46</sup> 64% of Progressio's total was provided by DFID and 30% was donated by other funding institutions including Christian Aid. 30% of Womankind's income came from DFID and other public authorities, 25% from public donations, 25% from trusts and foundations, and 20% from other institutions such as the Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief and the Gender and Development (GAD) Network. All financial data is provided in the NGOs' Annual Reports, available on their websites.

<sup>47</sup> A total of £95.2 million was allocated by Oxfam GB to emergency response and £99.4 million to development programmes.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Aid's grants to partners for development work in 2006 totalled £25.8 million for Asia/Middle East, £16.9 million for Africa, and £6.8 million only for Latin America and the Caribbean. [www.christian-aid.org/aboutus/incomeandexpenditure/spend/index.aspx](http://www.christian-aid.org/aboutus/incomeandexpenditure/spend/index.aspx). Accessed 5.12.2007.



Progressio was the only NGO that prioritized Latin America and the Caribbean region, allocating it over two thirds of its budget.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the geographical priorities outlined above, the NGOs have also selected thematic priorities which have formed the basis of their four or five year plans. For Christian Aid in 2005 these were: secure livelihoods, economic justice, accountable governance, HIV/AIDS, strengthening the movement for global justice, and strengthening the organization (Christian Aid 2005: 1). In 2007 Oxfam framed their priorities in terms of rights to: a sustainable livelihood, basic social services, life and security, to be heard, and to equity (gender and diversity) (Oxfam 2007: 1). In 2007 Progressio prioritized three development themes: civil society participation, HIV/AIDS and sustainable environment (Progressio 2007: 1). Womankind's key themes outlined on its website in 2007 were the advancement of women's status and wellbeing through increasing their political and civil participation, the reduction of violence against women, and the promotion of equality between men and women.

### *Government departments*

Similar to the NGOs, in 2007 the Department for International Development (DfID) stated that it aimed to ‘..fight against world poverty, supporting long term programmes to help tackle the underlying causes of poverty’.<sup>50</sup> However, unlike the NGOs, DfID prioritized eliminating poverty only in the ‘poorest countries’, and through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>51</sup> The MDGs were established at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, and represent a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.<sup>52</sup> DfID's priorities therefore concurred with those of the MDGs: to halve the

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<sup>49</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for 64% of Progressio's expenditure in 2006, Africa and the Middle East accounted for 31%, and Timor L'este 5%.

<sup>50</sup> [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/missionstatement.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/missionstatement.asp). Accessed 25.11.2007.

<sup>51</sup> [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/resource-accounts/2006-07](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/resource-accounts/2006-07). Page 35. Accessed 1.12.2007.

<sup>52</sup> [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDGs-FACTSHEET1](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDGs-FACTSHEET1). Accessed 1.12.2007

number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger; ensure that all children receive primary education; promote sexual equality and give women a stronger voice; reduce child death rates; improve the health of mothers; combat HIV & AIDS, malaria and other diseases; make sure the environment is protected; build a global partnership for those working in development.<sup>53</sup>

DFID's White Paper on International Development, its five-year strategy published in July 2006, confirmed its intention to concentrate its resources on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Notably, the White Paper's title was 'Eliminating world poverty: making governance work for the poor', thus bringing to the fore the issue of governance in addition to the MDGs.<sup>54</sup> For DFID, introducing the concepts of freedom and governance into its priorities has led it to underline the importance of 'respecting human rights', 'offering citizens opportunities to check the laws and decisions made by government..', and 'providing public goods and services in ways that reduce discrimination and allow all citizens – including women, disabled people and ethnic minorities – to benefit' (DFID 2006a: 20).

DFID's level of resources and coverage of countries far surpasses even the largest UK-based NGOs such as Oxfam GB. In 2006/07 DFID was working directly in over 150 countries worldwide, with an expenditure of £4.923 billion (excluding debt relief).<sup>55</sup> Of this total, £2.126 billion (43 per cent) was provided directly to UK-based development NGOs and multilateral organizations, such as the UN, the European Commission, the World Bank, Regional Development Banks, and the G8. Of the total aid and humanitarian assistance in 2006/07, African and Asian countries received the majority, while Europe, Central Asia and 'elsewhere' (the Caribbean, Nicaragua and Bolivia) received the smallest share.<sup>56</sup> DFID's emphasis on

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<sup>53</sup> [www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg/progress-07.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg/progress-07.asp). Accessed 1.12.07

<sup>54</sup> [www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/whitepaper2006](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/whitepaper2006). Accessed 1.12.2007

<sup>55</sup> This total represented 66 per cent of the UK government's Gross Public Expenditure on Development (GPEX). [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/statistics.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/statistics.asp). Accessed 1.12.2007

<sup>56</sup> African countries received £1,139 million, Asia received £811 million, and Europe, Central Asia and 'elsewhere' (including the Caribbean and Latin America) received £226 million. [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/resource-accounts.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/resource-accounts.asp). Accessed 1.12.2007. The three programmes remaining in Latin America were Brazil, Bolivia and Nicaragua, but by 2008 these programmes had also been closed down.

Asia and Africa can be understood in the context of its commitment to work in the world's poorest countries, but it also reflects its evolution from the British state's historical commitment to development in its colonies, first recognised in 1929 by the Colonial Development Act.

Following a history of location within and separate from the FCO, DFID was created in 1997.<sup>57</sup> Although the FCO no longer hosts the offices for international development, it continues to administer its Global Opportunities Fund (established in 2003), which in 2007/2008 had a budget of almost £70 million. According to the FCO, the Fund's International Priorities for the next five to ten years 'reflect how closely domestic and international policies are linked' in the fields of terrorism, drug trafficking, conflict prevention, and climate security, and in the one priority that specifically addresses development: 'Promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction underpinned by human rights, democracy, good governance and protection of the environment'.<sup>58</sup> In the next section I explore this focus on human rights by the FCO, as the only institution in my study to prioritize human rights and the only one also to commit to both funding of and advocacy on LGBT rights.

## **6.2 Human rights and good governance**

The FCO does not locate poverty eradication and international development at the heart of its mission. It does, however, work specifically on 'human rights', with a formal written policy on the topic and a budget allocation for the year 2007/08 of £2.7 million.<sup>59</sup> In 2007 the FCO website stated that human rights were at the heart of UK foreign policy, and outlined the FCO's

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<sup>57</sup> The first Ministry of Overseas Development was set up in 1964, bringing together the functions of the recently created Technical Co-operation Department and the overseas aid policy functions of the Foreign, Commonwealth Relations and Colonial Offices. In 1970 the ministry was dissolved and its functions transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), only to be recreated in 1974, and then closed again in 1979. From this date it was known as the Overseas Development Administration and was once again located in the FCO until DFID was created in 1997. [www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/history.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/history.asp). Accessed 1.12.2007.

<sup>58</sup> [www.fco.gov.uk/servlet](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet). Accessed 30.11.2007.

<sup>59</sup> [www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/GOF%20HR-ProgrammeStrategy07-08.0.pdf](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/GOF%20HR-ProgrammeStrategy07-08.0.pdf). Accessed 30.11.2007.

key thematic issues: freedom of expression, child rights, death penalty, religious freedom, torture, gender and equality.<sup>60</sup> The FCO website provided details of its understanding of equality, including two paragraphs under the heading 'Sexual orientation', the first of which stated that:

The UK is committed to working for an end to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Such discrimination is prohibited by international human rights law...<sup>61</sup>

The second paragraph goes on to outline the FCO's support for the Brazilian government's presentation of a draft resolution on sexual orientation and human rights at the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2003. A review of past FCO Human Rights Annual Reports reveals that the concept of 'sexual orientation' was first mentioned in 2001, although only in relation to new UK legislation in 2000 on '..the right to equality of treatment without discrimination in Great Karenin' (FCO 2001: 27). In the 2002 report sexual orientation was cited for the first time in the section on human rights and multilateral actions, with reference to the FCO's advocacy initiatives at the UN Commission on Human Rights. The following year the concept was cited for the first time in the chapter on Freedom, Democracy and Discrimination, in relation to cases of discrimination in different countries around the world:

The FCO closely monitors reports of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, particularly when this involves harassment of the gay community. We raise our concerns with the authorities as appropriate, for example with the Egyptian Authorities in the Queen Boat case (FCO, 2003: 219)

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<sup>60</sup> [www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1028302591712](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1028302591712). Accessed 30.11.2007.

<sup>61</sup> [www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1028302591889](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1028302591889). Accessed 30.11.2007

Here the FCO makes a direct connection between the concept of sexual orientation and the introduction of the sexual identity 'gay' in the context of Egypt. A year later, in 2004, prior to the UN Commission on Human Rights' (CHR) annual session, the FCO held meetings in London and Geneva with NGOs working on LGBT rights to discuss the resolution.<sup>62</sup> The FCO also funded a panel at the CHR on the persecution of sexual minorities and supported Sweden's resolution at the CHR on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions which included references to sexual orientation (FCO 2004: 214). In 2006 the FCO's report highlighted the Nigerian government's bill outlawing public advocacy and associations supporting the rights of lesbian and gay people, as well as same-sex relationships and marriage ceremonies. The report also highlighted the speech given by the former FCO Minister Ian Pearson during the Trade Union Congress's LGBT history month event on promoting LGBT rights overseas (FCO, 2006: 261). In 2006, the annual report section on sexual orientation (within the chapter titled 'Inequality and Discrimination') emphasized the concepts of 'LGBT people' and 'LGBT community' for the first time, stating that:

Non-discrimination is one of the basic tenets of international human rights law; yet all over the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people suffer human rights violations.... Many governments do not share our views on the rights of the LGBT community, making it difficult to discuss the issue either bilaterally or in international fora. However, states have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all people without discrimination – it is a question of justice and rights, not opinion and morals. To this end, the FCO will continue in its efforts to defend the right of people not to be discriminated against on the grounds of their sexuality or gender identity (FCO 2006: 261).

The FCO's efforts to address this area of discrimination and rights should be admired. However, absent from the reports, policy documents and strategies is any discussion of how the FCO defines the concepts sexual orientation,

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<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch, ILGA, Amnesty International, the International Research Centre on Social Minorities (IRCSM), and Stonewall from the UK.

gender identity, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or LGBT rights. Consequently there is no analysis of these aspects of human subjectivity in different social, economic, political or cultural contexts, despite recognizing in its reports that many governments oppose LGBT rights.

Moreover, it is important to note that in the FCO's 2006 Human Rights Report, the chapter on economic, social and cultural rights, which makes the connection between human rights, poverty and development, only employs the term 'men who have sex with men' in the sub-section on the right to health and HIV/AIDS. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and LGBT rights are not mentioned here, rendering notions of women's same-sex sexuality, bisexuality and transgender absent from discourse and analysis of rights connected with poverty and development.

In addition to advocacy-related LGBT human rights initiatives, in 2003 the FCO approved funding for three Asian and Latin American organizations 'to help protect the rights of gays and lesbians' (FCO 2003: 219). In Peru, the FCO approved a proposal from the British Council to fund the MHOL to: '...strengthen the capacity of local NGOs to promote the rights of sexual minorities' (ibid.). This included presenting a draft law on equal opportunities '...for gays and lesbians in work, partnership, parenting and education, and an information campaign about the rights of sexual minorities' (ibid.). When I arrived in Peru in late 2005, I visited MHOL's office to ask them about their work and if it connected with women from the 'popular sectors'. Three women from the 'Lesbian and Bisexual Unit' informed me that MHOL had occasionally made this connection in the 1980s, but it had been lost since then. They highlighted the importance of the funding from the FCO/British Council, as it had provided MHOL with resources to carry out LGBT rights workshops in provincial cities for the first time. However, the women expressed their frustration at the male bias of the project and the lack of attention paid to identifying and working with lesbians in these contexts. They believed that this was due to the high levels of participation of men and male to female trans, compared to lesbians, in MHOL and the provincial LGBT groups participating in the project. This bias was only redressed to a limited extent at the end of the final year, when

funds were allocated to work with a group of women in Arequipa who were not part of the local LGBT group. After working with MHOL's project, in October 2004 they founded their own lesbian group, the *Grupo de Lesbianas de Arequipa*, which by 2007 had seven members.<sup>63</sup>

In order to examine further why the FCO chose to support this project, and the limitations of the LGBT rights work outlined above, I interviewed Marcelo, the staff member of the British Council who prepared the project proposal with MHOL and who was responsible for monitoring and evaluating its implementation. Although Marcelo was not a member of MHOL, or any other Peruvian LGBT group, it was he who informed MHOL of the possibility of gaining funding from the FCO (via the British Council) due its inclusion of sexual orientation in its human rights policy.

Marcelo believed that the FCO's decision to approve the project was due to the British Council and the FCO's partnership with Stonewall in the UK, which defines itself as committed to 'equality and justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals'.<sup>64</sup> Stonewall had been advising the British Council and the FCO on their internal diversity policies relating to staff rights and employment processes. In 2005 Stonewall celebrated the British Council as the most 'gay-friendly' employer in the UK, with the FCO placed in fourteenth position.<sup>65</sup> Marcelo concurred with the women in MHOL concerning the very limited participation of women, and the exception to this rule in Arequipa:

In the project, the topic of women was one which should have been prioritized, because in MHOL they themselves noted that the situation of women was marginal to the LGBT movement, especially in the provinces. More men and trans participate in the groups, and that was why the formation of the lesbian group in Arequipa was such a highlight of the project. Finally a group of women managed to organize, even though it was under another pretext, as a socio-cultural, literature circle.

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<sup>63</sup> For further information see: [www.promsex.org/concertando](http://www.promsex.org/concertando). Accessed on 19.1.08.

<sup>64</sup> For further information see: [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk).

<sup>65</sup> For further details see: [www.stonewall.org.uk/media/current\\_releases/694.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/media/current_releases/694.asp).

It was MHOL's workshops on sexual identity that led this group to take up the issue as their main reason for meeting and sharing (Marcelo).

The experience of this project reveals the difficulty of including women in LGBT rights work with LGBT groups. Once women do decide to organize around this issue, they often prefer to set up their own separate lesbian organization as a means of overcoming what they describe as 'lesbophobia' in the LGBT movement, similar to the feminist movement (Jitsuya and Sevilla 2004). This characteristic of the LGBT movement in Peru is clearly evident in Lima, where several lesbian-only organizations exist. In contrast, men and male to female trans people work on their rights only within broader LGBT or HIV/AIDS groups. The former include lesbians, at least nominally, even though their presence is often minimal, and HIV/AIDS groups or programmes have made no connection to date with lesbian rights or health issues.

With regard to the second limitation of the LGBT rights work, I asked Marcelo if, during his monitoring visits, he had witnessed any connection between MHOL's project and people from 'popular sectors'. In response, Marcelo noted that:

We didn't have a specific premise to approach the 'popular sectors'. The only condition was that participants were, how would you say, gay men, lesbians. It was about sexual identity and not economic status. So working with the 'popular sectors' was marginal to the project. However, there was one gay group in Chiclayo that was clearly from the 'popular' area (Marcelo).

This connection between gay men and the 'popular sectors' was occasionally evident in the LGBT movement and groups I observed during the period of my fieldwork in Peru. However, it was even more evident in the case of the majority of male-to-female trans people, who often face serious economic exclusion and resort to sex work with male clients to survive. They are often targeted by HIV/AIDS programmes for this reason, and are identified by Peruvians in general as 'gay' due to their preference



for male sexual partners and clients. In recent years a handful of trans activists have gained a high profile in LGBT and HIV/AIDS groups in Peru, highlighting the problem of poverty faced by trans people, but not yet making the connection either with women's same-sex sexuality in the popular sectors, or with women who experience discrimination because they do not conform with gender identity norms in Peru, such as the *chitos* mentioned in Chapter Four. In the case of MHOL's project, work on constructing LGBT identities only produced discourse on women when referring to 'lesbians', leaving bisexuality as an identity taken up, albeit occasionally, by men, and trans as exclusively male-to-female. When the connection with poverty is made, moreover, women's same-sex sexuality and non-normative gender identities remain absent.

It is clear that the FCO has a policy commitment to tackling discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to promoting LGBT rights. In practice, the majority of the FCO's funds and staff time have been committed mainly to advocacy initiatives at the UN Human Rights Commission, only occasionally lobbying governments such as those of Egypt and Nigeria or funding LGBT groups such as MHOL.

In order to explore why the FCO chose to work on non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and LGBT rights, I interviewed Felicity, the staff member of the FCO in London employed to work on 'sexual orientation' as part of her role in the UN team. Although she had only taken up this post two years prior to our interview, Felicity believed that part of the explanation was due to the FCO's human rights work being framed by international human rights law which includes non-discrimination on any grounds, and which is increasingly including the concept of sexual orientation. Within this context, dominated in practice by the annual UN Human Rights Commission meetings where debates on sexual orientation and gender identity have been high profile and highly controversial since the new millennium (Saiz 2004), Felicity highlighted the more recent alliance between the FCO and international LGBT organizations:

We did a lot of work in the past year trying to get accreditation for LGBT NGOs in the UN Committee and it continues to be an ongoing

nightmare that has involved writing to heads of posts explaining the situation and position and asking them to lobby specific governments, particularly those that are most against it (Felicity).

In addition to this growing alliance with LGBT rights NGOs (including the UK-based ones such as Stonewall and the LGBT section of the TUC), Felicity confirmed that the FCO also took its lead from the UK government's legal frameworks on discrimination, which since 2002 have introduced new legislation on sexual orientation. This enabled the FCO to support the Brazilian government's efforts to introduce the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN Human Rights Council in 2003. However, on the topic of gender identity, Felicity noted that:

The UK had an issue with the section of the Brazilian resolution on gender identity as there was a lack of clarity about what this meant in legal terms. I think we still have a way to go on that front (Felicity).

This lack of clarity about the legal connection with gender identity explains the absence of the concept in the annual reports cited above that only referred to sexual orientation. The influence of international and national legal frameworks on human rights and non-discrimination, together with a growing dialogue with Stonewall and the TUC on lesbian and gay rights, but not bisexual or transgender rights, have therefore been central to the FCO's discourse and action on sexual orientation and gender identity and the limited way in which it has adopted LGBT rights discourse as its basis for action. However, Felicity noted that there was a lack of systematic internal analysis, debates and strategizing on these topics, resulting in a more impromptu approach combining internal and external factors:

There is no strategy of its own for LGBT rights because it is not a priority theme. What we have at the moment is a minister who is interested in this issue and in trade union issues, and the effect of those two things coming together has meant that now this issue has slightly more prominence. It plays into internal discussions we are having on

where the UK could really add value to the UN. Lots of people are discussing torture, the death penalty or even women's rights, but no one is really championing LGBT rights at the moment, so we want to see what we could do better. We may put a panel together to discuss what kind of strategy we should have on LGBT rights and how we could be more effective, but these things depend on having the right minister at the right time and some kind of external force that brings a momentum to make us think we should be doing more on this (Felicity).

Felicity confirmed that similar to the Peruvian context, another problematic characteristic of the FCO's work on LGBT human rights was the prominence of gay men, although lesbians still took precedence over trans people:

In our work it is gay men who receive most attention, lesbians next and then transsexuals come third, at least in terms of what staff have thought to flag to London as issues that might be relevant for lines of action. It may be partly due to the countries in which the offices are located and the legal framework within which they working there. We quite often receive reports on sodomy laws, while lesbianism doesn't appear in the same ways – it's almost ignored and absent. That's not to say lesbian women aren't facing harassment or anything else, but they're not captured in legal frameworks (Felicity).

Thus although implementing legal frameworks have been instrumental in the FCO's increasing inclusion of sexual orientation in their human rights advocacy, the continued existence of laws that highlight and criminalize male same-sex practices such as those relating to sodomy, particularly in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, have contributed to the FCO's limited attention to discrimination against women and people who do not conform to gender norms.

As we have seen in the case of the FCO, human rights work on sexual orientation has adopted UK and international LGBT rights discourse within legal frameworks, including the hierarchies inherent within them that favour gay-identified men. It also leaves bisexuality and heterosexuality as abstract

and unexamined elements of sexual orientation, and reinforces the dominant dichotomy of heterosexual/homosexual, with its assumptions about the fixed nature of sexuality and sexual identities. Finally, it fails to highlight the connection between LGBT rights and racial, ethnic, religious, economic or class inequalities which are all recognized in development policies today. In the following section I explore how questions of social exclusion and rights connect more directly with development, poverty eradication and cultural change, beyond the legal frameworks of the more structural human rights approaches to sexuality.

### **6.3 Social exclusion and rights-based approaches to development**

DFID was the only development organization in my study to mention 'sexual orientation' in its corporate development policy documents. In 2005 DFID published a policy paper titled 'Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion'. The first paragraph of the Foreword stated that:

People need the opportunity to participate fully in the life of their community if they are to flourish and realise their potential. But certain groups in society are systematically excluded from opportunities that are open to others, because they are discriminated against on the basis of their race, religion, gender, caste, age, disability, or other social identity (DFID 2005: iii).

Here sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be absent, or left to be included or not by the reader into the category 'other social identity'. However, this is briefly rectified on page 3, where definitions of social exclusion repeat the above citation but also mention 'sexual orientation, HIV or other health status, and migrant status' (ibid.: 3). The 22-page document then goes on to provide a range of examples from Asia, Africa and Latin America of discrimination on the basis of gender, age, race, caste, ethnicity, disability, and HIV/AIDS, with specific reference to the Millennium Development Goals as well as conflict and insecurity. There are, however, no examples of how sexual orientation or gender identity

affects people's experiences of poverty, development, conflict, or participation in policy-making or the protection of rights, which form the main frameworks of the paper. Elizabeth, one of the Social Development Advisers in DFID who worked on the policy, explained how the idea of this policy paper came about:

The idea was initiated by my counterparts working in Latin America, where exclusion is more central to development debates and the language of rights. Also, since the Social Development Advisers are dealing with social exclusion, they wanted a bit more policy space in what was very much an economist dominated agenda (Elizabeth).

Elizabeth noted that DFID's recent move towards including rights in its development analysis and priorities, combined with the social exclusion policy debates, has enabled her and other DFID staff to introduce the notion of sexual orientation in development for the first time:

It's not obvious to DFID that addressing human rights does reduce poverty, and our mandate is poverty. So if we buy into social exclusion, what's that all about? I've realized that people recognize the 'vulnerable group' category in mainstream discourse. We thought that including sexual orientation might produce a negative reaction, and we were really pushing for it to stay in, but it didn't get challenged and there was no comeback. Actually we did look at related examples and problems but we were very limited in the number of words and in the end it was a real overview of the thing anyway (Elizabeth).

One of the problems with omitting case studies or examples of sexual orientation as a development issue, however, is that the term remains solely at the level of an abstract concept, and thus there is no evidence on which to base any analysis of possible meanings and workings of sexual orientation in the context of poverty.

The concept of 'rights', as opposed to 'human rights', is prominent in the policies and discourse on international development of the four other development agencies in my study. The notion of a 'right-based approach to

development' emerged in DFID and NGO development discourse after the UN conference in Vienna in 1993 (Eyben 2003). In 2007 Womankind, for example, stated that one of its central aims was to 'help women claim their rights and secure new ones'.<sup>66</sup> However, the organization has not yet produced any policy papers examining or clarifying its approach to its work on women's rights. As one of the staff members commented to me: 'The rights-based approach is UK development's newest trend isn't it? Everybody is doing the rights-based approach, whatever that may mean, who knows?'

In 2006 DFID hosted a two day workshop on rights-based approaches with ten UK development NGOs including Oxfam GB and Womankind Worldwide. The report of the workshop outlines the vision agreed by the participants:

Rights-based development is value-based development which works for the ethical inclusion of all people, without discrimination, in building a fair, just and non-discriminatory society. With this understanding we work to increase people's access to, and power in, decision-making which affects their lives and work. The principles and practice of participation, inclusion and fulfilment of obligation underpin all work in rights-based development. Central is the issue of power and the politicization of development.<sup>67</sup>

Although the NGOs shared a commitment to non-discrimination and the ethical inclusion of all people, this has not yet led to the inclusion of sexuality and gender identity in official documents. In 2007 Womankind's website, for example, stated that it aimed to: '...promote a "women's rights-based approach" to development that is guided by the principles and standards set out in the main international instruments'. Womankind mentioned the problems of violence against women, girls' lack of access to

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<sup>66</sup> [www.womankind.org.uk/what-we-do](http://www.womankind.org.uk/what-we-do).

<sup>67</sup> UK Inter-Agency Group on Rights-Based Approaches Report: Evaluation and Learning Process, 2006, pp. 7-8. Available at [www.crin.org/docs/iap\\_workshop.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/iap_workshop.pdf). Accessed on 11.12.2007. Christian Aid is also a member of this Group but was not present at the workshop.

education, HIV/AIDS and new trends in macro-economic policies that worsen women's poverty, but made no mention of sexuality, gender identity, sexual rights or LGBT rights.<sup>68</sup> Thus the work on sexual orientation carried out by their partner Demus in Peru described in Chapter 5 had not been incorporated into the issues Womankind chose to raise in its public documents. In an interview with one of Womankind's staff who worked on Latin America, I asked if these issues had also been excluded from internal programme debates:

I checked all the women's rights documents and they were all about reproductive rights, with very little about sexual rights and nothing about sexual diversity. So I said that if we know that some of our partners are already working on this then we should know more about it. So we did a profile of Latin America and we felt that because of the backlash [against feminist work on sexual and reproductive rights] it was very important for us to support feminist work on sexuality and lesbian rights. I also pushed for Womankind to become part of the global movement of human rights defenders because it is one of the few movements that is really serious about lesbian women's human rights (Anna).

The absence of reference to sexuality at the policy level did not mean, therefore, that this concept and lesbian rights were not being addressed or analysed by members of staff. This was due mainly to the initiative of one staff member, and the possibility that she could link these issues to the work of one of Womankind's partners, Demus, that had experience of and a commitment to work on sexual orientation. Anna confirmed that her manager supported her efforts to discuss lesbian rights with her colleagues, but the topic was not taken up by the leadership of Womankind or staff working on other regions. In a subsequent visit to Womankind's office in London, Anna's manager explained to me why she thought this had occurred:

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<sup>68</sup> [www.womankind.org.uk/womens-human-rights](http://www.womankind.org.uk/womens-human-rights). Accessed on 11.12.2007.

When you think about the LGBT movement and how it links to communities and poverty, you see that the activists in developing countries are few, and from a more privileged part of the population – that is the challenge. I think that it's probably why funders are not paying attention – like with gender you still always have to make the argument that well women are 50% of the world's population and poor, and it's always this instrumentalist approach. 'Rights' alone are just not good enough (Karen).

Thus although two of the programme staff considered lesbian rights to be important element of women's rights work, this belief was not taken up institutionally by Womankind. The predominant understanding is that lesbian rights are connected with a privileged minority of the population of developing countries, and that unless lesbian rights can be explicitly linked to poverty, and a significant percentage of the population, they will not be incorporated.

Womankind's commitment to women's rights, and in particular reproductive rights with their inherent heteronormativity, and its understanding of lesbian rights as a middle or upper class issue, therefore made it difficult for a staff member to include representations of women's same-sex sexuality or further exploration of the relevance of lesbian rights to its programmes and partners. Again, the concepts of bisexuality and gender identity are completely absent, institutionally and within Anna's proposals. By basing her own recommendations on the work of Demus, and of the Latin American feminist movement in general, only 'sexual orientation' and 'lesbian rights' become relevant concepts when addressing sexuality and the lives of women from a rights-based approach to development. Moreover, Demus staff confirmed that before she left Womankind Anna had not explored with them how their work on sexual orientation and lesbian rights could have been integrated into their work with women from the 'popular sectors', either in the *conos* or in Andean rural areas. Despite these limitations and constraints, however, the staff in Womankind working on Latin America did support in principle the work on sexual orientation



carried out by Demus, for example, as well as providing funding for global feminist work with human rights defenders that included lesbian rights.

During the period of my fieldwork in Peru, this approach was not replicated among other UK agencies working on women's rights in Peru. Christian Aid's 2005-2010 strategic plan, for example, stated that: 'We always speak out to highlight inequality and injustice, however unpopular the cause. So we take the side of poor and marginalised people as they struggle to realise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights' (Christian Aid, 2005: 3-4). However, Christian Aid's support of feminist NGOs in Peru did not include work on lesbian rights or sexual orientation, even though this is clearly an 'unpopular cause'. On my return to London, I interviewed one of the Latin America programme managers in Christian Aid, who presented some of her thoughts on this limitation in connection with notions of injustice and rights:

We all know that people who are openly lesbian or gay are excluded. We know that there are gay and lesbian people in poor communities, but nobody talks about sexuality and poverty. In the history of lesbian and gay people everywhere those who have been more up front are upper class and middle class. How many stories do we [Programme Managers] read in our work about lesbian women and the problems they face? None! I don't think people are aware there is a problem. Maybe people think that it is to do with a small group in society, and it's not relevant if you are considering poverty and the amount of people who live in poverty (Marina).

Here Marina's response mirrors that of Karen in *Womankind*, but in the case of Christian Aid, Marina had not received any knowledge on the subject from the feminist or women's organizations within the programmes she was responsible for managing. When I asked Marina what she imagined would happen if she were to present a project proposal relating to women's same-sex sexuality, Marina believed that the limited awareness, information and debates on sexuality in Christian Aid would result in its rejection:

I think that if I put a proposal forward in Christian Aid to work with lesbian women they would say: “Look, there are so many other things that we need to work on, this is not on. It’s such a small group”. It wouldn’t be a sexy project like, for example, sustainable livelihoods, because it’s about a minority. In the case like here where you have a focus on secure livelihoods, if you go around a project dealing with potatoes and tomatoes and you raise the issue of homophobia they will think that you are crazy! (Marina).

Marina was therefore not only concerned about raising the issue with her managers, she also believed that Christian Aid’s partner organizations in the Latin America region would be equally dismissive. When I explored this point in an interview with Christian Aid’s Head of Global Policy and Advocacy Division, James, he suggested similar constraints to incorporating rights pertaining to same-sex sexuality into Christian Aid’s work:

Sexuality is a complex process and I think that it is not an area or issue that development workers consciously look for in their analysis of the nature of discrimination and poverty. If you look at all the poverty analysis you will probably count on one hand discrimination and exclusion based on sexuality. Even to date there are few surveys, so you are unlikely to have a sense of the scale that this really is (James).

Apart from the absence of data and analysis of the connections between poverty and sexuality, and the concern for the issue of scale, James also noted that organizations in the South working on rights often also remain silent on this aspect of discrimination:

In more urbanized communities there is greater scope for organization and collective visibility and struggles about sexuality, and so the international community, including the aid agencies, are forced to catch up with it. I think the biggest disappointment for me is that the urban organizations that ‘talk rights’ don’t want to stick their necks out when people’s rights are being violated, because they are basically being

brutalized on the basis of their public expression of their sexual orientation (James).

Here James revealed his expectation that Southern organizations should speak out against the violation of rights on the basis of sexuality, but not that Christian Aid should take the lead and speak out on this issue itself. Nor did he suggest that it was the role of organizations such as Christian Aid to do research and analysis on sexuality and development. However, he did state clearly that in relation to its partnerships with other organizations, Christian Aid should take a stand against homophobia:

Homophobic positioning and language can't be a basis for partnership because it fundamentally contradicts the ethics and values of Christian Aid. We should challenge it – for me it is unacceptable. Things have changed, like even within Christian Aid we have people of different sexual persuasions, and so then it is discriminatory, it's insulting, it's exclusive, it just wouldn't be acceptable (James).

The notion of homophobia here provides James with a clear justification for including it as a problem about which Christian Aid should have an institutional, ethical position. This position therefore both obliges and enables staff members to challenge homophobic discrimination, insults and exclusions, at least when they encounter them among partner organizations. However, a recognition of the need to reject homophobia does not necessarily lead to an institutional interest in proposing to debate and incorporate sexuality and related rights into Christian Aid's policies and programmes. For James, this appeared far more problematic:

You can imagine that different societies have had to confront sex and sexuality in different ways. I think it's pretty deep in the psychology and privacy of human beings and somehow it's not surprising that it is one of the last things to be addressed in terms of discrimination because it takes a lot for people to come out, to express sexual preferences that are not the mainstream. And sometimes sex itself is a taboo subject – people talk about it in very closed groups generally, so it's really difficult (James).

James's first ideas about bringing sexuality into development debates therefore included addressing discrimination, entering into the private and personal psychological terrains of individuals, expecting them to 'come out' and talk about their non-normative sexualities and sex. He also understood this approach to be very problematic, leaving sexuality as 'one of the last things to be addressed in terms of discrimination'. When I asked James if, as an economist, he could imagine a connection between same-sex sexuality, discrimination and the field of economics and poverty, he responded without hesitation that a classic example is that of micro-credit schemes that rely on social or community group collateral. A micro-credit group within a community has voluntary membership and is based on solidarity, similar to the notion of a cooperative, enabling the group as a whole to support any specific member who is unable to comply with loan repayment obligations. Any individual within the community who is stigmatized or discriminated against would not be invited to become a member. James noted that in many locations, a man considered by the community to be homosexual would be an obvious case of exclusion from access to this type of development project. The challenge facing NGOs such as Christian Aid is how to take the step from being aware of such exclusionary and discriminatory practices in programmes they fund, to raising and debating the issue as part of their ongoing policy-making and programme accompaniment with their partners. Clearly for James an approach requiring people to 'come out' and discuss their private lives, sex and sexual preferences in a public, work environment is not the way forward.

Notably, unlike the FCO, none of the UK-based development agencies in my study had produced a 'human rights policy' paper. Moreover, none had included the concepts of sexuality or sexual orientation in their rights-based discourse. Only DFID engaged with the concept of sexual rights, in its policy paper titled 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A position paper' (DFID 2004). This document refers to women's health, giving priority to reproductive health and rights, but also mentioning sexual health and rights. Although the policy does list rights specific to sexual health, and although it includes the topic of HIV/AIDS, there is no attempt at defining

sexuality, nor is there any mention of same-sex sexuality. In essence, it coincides with the approach to sexual rights developed by Flora Tristán, reproducing feminist discourse for and about women in the popular sectors in all aspects except the specific commitment to promoting safe and legal abortion.

There have, however been efforts to counteract the heteronormative notions of sexual rights in DFID, spearheaded by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). IDS has been funded by DFID, as well as Sida and the Ford Foundation, to develop global thought and debate on sexuality and same-sex sexuality in connection with sexual rights and development. This process has included three events that I attended as a participant. The second event was a staff debate on sexual rights in DFID led by IDS staff in 2006 that included proposals to consider same-sex sexuality, LGBT rights and heteronormativity. DFID also contributed funding for two IDS workshops: *Realising Sexual Rights*, in 2005, and *Sexuality and the Development Industry* in 2008.<sup>69</sup> As one of the leaders of these initiatives asserts:

Putting sexuality on the development agenda is about more than breaking the silence about sex. It is about asserting sexual well-being as a legitimate development goal in itself, whether framed in terms of sexual rights or as inextricably bound up with poverty reduction (Cornwall 2006: 285).

In the conclusion of her article on the sexual rights workshop, Cornwall asks how sexual rights can be articulated within the 'rights-based approaches' currently being pursued by so many development agencies (ibid.: 286). To date among UK-based and other development agencies, rights-based approaches have facilitated a greater connection with human rights discourse (Tsikata 2007: 214). However, this has yet to make the connection with sexual orientation and gender identity demonstrated by the FCO in its

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<sup>69</sup> Details of the two workshops and related publications are available at: <http://ids.ac.uk>, including 'Sexuality Matters', IDS Bulletin Volume 37, Number 5, October 2006 and 'Realising Sexual Rights: IDS Sexuality and Development Programme 2007.

human rights policy and funding initiatives. An alternative route to connecting development with sexuality could be through incorporating sexual rights into rights-based approaches. However, this also is proving a difficult challenge in the UK, as when an agency such as DFID does introduce an institutional policy on sexual rights, it conceptualizes women's sexuality as exclusively heterosexual and connected to reproduction.

#### **6.4 From gender to diversity**

Approaches to women's rights in development have historically been connected with gender analysis and policies, thus I consider that it is important to explore how the concept of gender operates in the context of development, and if it has contributed to the heteronormativity of women's rights work to date. All of the development agencies in my study have committed to incorporating 'gender' or 'gender equality' into every aspect of their work. However, paradoxically, beyond the recognition of 'men who have sex with men' in the field of HIV/AIDS, the only connection with same-sex sexuality I have encountered in my study of UK development agencies emerged through work on gender and masculinities in Progressio. This is an area of gender and development that Progressio began to work on in the late 1990s, when one of its development workers and his Nicaraguan colleagues developed a series of workshops on masculinity as part of their NGO's support to a national feminist campaign titled: 'Men against violence against women'. Progressio's former country programme director in Peru provided me with some of her reflections on this work:

Gender is a cross-cutting theme of all our work, but we haven't incorporated the idea of the struggle against homophobia in our work on gender equality. The only time we have linked sexuality to gender was when we began to work in Latin America on masculinity. Although the central aim was not to address different expressions of sexuality, the workshop leaders raised the topic of the fear of homophobia, especially among men. It was part of their efforts to address the freedom of expression of men's feelings, for example their fear of homophobia in

connection with men hugging or holding hands in the street, which is seen as normal in the case of women. But in the case of homophobia and women, I think that the topic has simply been left out, like it doesn't exist. It's so much more difficult to raise (Carmela).

As I have stated in Chapter Three, recent academic research on masculinity in Latin America has similarly produced discourses on masculinity and male heterosexuality and homosexuality, while failing to explore the concept of masculinity with women and their sexual and gender identities. Gutmann (2003: ix), for example, states that his edition of the collection of essays titled *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America* '...is quite consciously an attempt to extend feminist theory and gender studies in Latin America in new directions'. In the only chapter in the book to briefly mention 'lesbianism', Andrade (2003: 299) noted that in his study of Ecuador lesbianism was rarely mentioned, and that this reflected '..the wider social concern with specifically male homosexuality as opposed to other practices that are still quite invisible in Ecuador'. By connecting masculinity only with men, research and activism on new directions in gender and masculinity in the context of the South have reinforced this 'invisibility' of women's sexual and gender diversity.

Apart from these examples of occasional connections made between gender, men and masculinity, gender and development policies today continue to be dedicated to addressing women's inequality with regard to men. Christian Aid's International Department Policy on Gender, for example, states that: 'Women and girls are over-represented among the poor, marginalised and oppressed, as a result of the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men in all societies' (Christian Aid 2006b: 1). The document then goes on to recognize that women's and girls' experiences of gender inequality 'differ according to their race, class, age, culture, religion and historical situation' (ibid.). Thus although the policy introduces the possibility of exploring differences among women and the connections with other forms of inequalities, once again references to sexuality and gender identity are omitted from the list. In an interview with Christian Aid's Gender Adviser, I asked her if the debates and funding (as

opposed to policy-making) for gender-related work had ever introduced the concepts of sexual orientation or gender identity:

Not that I know of, never. In relation to the programme side of the work, I think that when staff work with partners and sexual orientation becomes an issue, then they have to deal with it, but it's not something they talk about. To be honest we have a very basic approach to gender, and we are struggling to get the basic concept into people's minds. It takes all my energy just to do that, and there's no space for thinking beyond it. It's not that I buy into the concept or reject other issues. For me it's a challenge trying to make progress on gender because most of the programme staff say they don't have the space to work on gender, because they are under enormous pressure to process sending the money (Mercedes).

Sexuality is an issue, therefore, that Christian Aid staff believe would represent a new addition to their work on gender, other corporate priorities and core administrative tasks, rather than an issue already implicated in ongoing development work, including on gender equality. Meanwhile gender identity is not even imagined as connected with gender and development.

Similar to Christian Aid, Oxfam GB's corporate policy paper on gender is concerned with mainstreaming equality between men and women. Its current policy states that:

Gender inequality and rigid gender stereotypes can often prevent a household or community from freeing itself from poverty. Ensuring equality and justice, and unlocking women's potential, is to the benefit of everyone. This is why gender mainstreaming is one of Oxfam's corporate priorities.<sup>70</sup>

This policy, however, makes no connection with other forms of equality, even though Oxfam GB's strategic plan for the period 2007-2010 introduces

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<sup>70</sup> [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/gender/introduction](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/gender/introduction). Accessed 30.11.2007.



the concept of ‘diversity’ in relation to gender in its fifth and final corporate aim, titled: ‘The right to equity (gender and diversity)’. Here Oxfam GB states that its aim is to ‘defend and promote women’s rights, participation and leadership’. The document then goes on to introduce the concept of diversity in brackets:

(While the long-term goal is also that ethnic, cultural and other groups oppressed or marginalised for reasons of their identity will enjoy equal rights and status with other people, the priority for Oxfam at present is gender equality.) (Oxfam 2007: 5).<sup>71</sup>

Here then Oxfam GB are announcing the future inclusion of other groups marginalised for reasons of their identity, leading the reader to understand that these ‘others’ have already achieved gender equality, since they are not included in current gender equality policies. Different forms of inequality and discrimination are seen as separate issues, rather than intersecting, and the discourse results in the construction of a hierarchy of issues (in which gender equality is considered the most important) but it does not produce an analysis of the power relations between them. One of Oxfam’s Gender Advisers, Agnes, provided me with some historical perspective to this latest policy:

In the early to late 80s they were doing gender here the feminist way, trying to change things inside the organization as well as in the programmes, and they achieved a lot. The 80s were incredibly difficult but they were also like the golden years. I think Oxfam was then affected by the professionalization process of all the NGOs, with a lot of people coming in from the technocratic angles who looked at gender with very strange eyes. It was in this period that I wrote an article on the fact that you couldn’t talk about feminism. I got into this job three years ago and I had an agenda with it. I was sick and tired of the idea of mainstreaming – I didn’t understand what they meant. I wanted to start talking about women’s rights (Agnes).

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<sup>71</sup> Available at [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/reports/2007\\_strategic\\_plan.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/reports/2007_strategic_plan.pdf)

Here Agnes highlights her belief that a feminist perspective and a commitment to women's rights are essential elements to avoid working on gender in a technocratic manner (see also Cornwall et al. 2007). However, Agnes informed me that debates on diversity had been taken up through vulnerable group identity categories (as the policy statement above outlines) and the abstract representation of each group as separate and unconnected with each other, or other forms of discrimination or related rights. Therefore, Oxfam GB's introduction of the concept of diversity has introduced new challenges to gender policy staff:

Actually I have been very afraid because when other notions of diversity are used, they really undercut the gender struggle and strategy immediately. It's such a difficult thing to say but that's how it is. So I think that maybe people like myself are not as receptive as we could be. When we have tried even to open up the topic of gender, when you mention sexuality people go 'what?!' we are still grappling with other things (Agnes).

The problem for those working on gender in development agencies, highlighted by Agnes here, is how to keep gender alive and of importance when other questions of inequality, considered different and separate, begin to compete within the broader concept of diversity. Christian Aid's gender adviser has encountered similar challenges in her encounters with the concept of diversity:

There is also a debate to see whether we will put gender and social diversity together or have gender on its own. I am happy to work on gender within diversity because I think that the way you have to see it is not only women and men that are considered, but I want to see the specific gender objective because Human Resources already have an objective about tackling diversity. At the moment I'm receiving a lot of pressure from Human Resources to implement diversity as a whole (Mercedes).

Here Mercedes is referring to the element of her role that is connected with advising on internal equal opportunities ‘diversity’ policies which, unlike in Oxfam GB, have not yet connected with development debates in Christian Aid. However, it is important to examine further this new discourse on diversity emerging in UK development agencies. In the following section I do so within the context of internal staff employment procedures and regulations, where the term diversity is gaining greater prominence.

### **6.5 Diversity, sexual orientation and internal staff policies**

The concept of diversity represents the only area of UK international development policy in which all the organizations in my study connect with questions of sexuality. Specifically, they all refer to sexual orientation, and only in their Human Resources department’s diversity policies and strategies. The language of diversity has entered this field in the past few years following a series of changes to UK employment legislation on non-discrimination which began in 1975 with the Sex Discrimination Act (now including references to transsexual and transgender people), and which in 2003 introduced the Sexual Orientation Regulations.<sup>72</sup> In 2007 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) defined sexual orientation as homosexuality (‘gay’ for men and ‘lesbian’ for women) , heterosexuality and bisexuality.<sup>73</sup> This has led DFID, the FCO and Oxfam, for example, to produce diversity employment policies and strategies from 2004 onwards.

Bringing sexual orientation into diversity policies and practices has, however, created major difficulties for the organizations in my study. DFID’s 2006 Annual Diversity Report, for example, stated that: ‘External assessments of DFID’s policies and practices on gender and sexual orientation found favourably in relation to gender and less so in relation to

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<sup>72</sup> Following on from the earlier 1975 Sex (including marriage and gender re-assignment) Discrimination Act, and the Race Relations Act of 1976, more recent legislation has included the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, the Religion or Belief Regulations of 2003, and the Age Regulations of 2006.

<sup>73</sup> The EHRC is a non-departmental public body responsible for enforcing non-discrimination legislation in the UK. For further details, see: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com).

sexual orientation' (2006: 3). There was no analysis in the report of this finding, but one of the difficulties implicit in the report was that of identifying staff in connection with targets on sexual orientation. DFID's diversity targets for staff by 2008 include 37 per cent women, 12 per cent black and minority ethnic staff, and 4 per cent disabled staff. However, the targets made no mention of sexual orientation, or lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. This difference was reflected in equal opportunities forms completed by applicants for posts, which did not ask for information on sexual orientation.<sup>74</sup> DFID's most recent Annual Diversity Report (2007 – 08), noted that '..addressing sexual orientation continues to prove challenging' (DFID 2008: 18). The problems outlined in this report focus on the '..legal and cultural barriers that LGBT staff face when working overseas', and the '..lack of capacity by managers to deal with sexual orientation issues' (ibid.). In order to overcome these difficulties, DFID introduced the appointment of a (female) senior manager to 'champion Sexual Orientation' and lead the newly created LGBT staff network. It also established links with organizations scoring highly in Stonewall's top 100, including the Foreign Office and Barclays Bank (ibid.). There is no mention, however, of seeking dialogue with other UK-based development agencies, or any Southern organizations or movements based in countries where DFID has local offices.

Another of DFID's methods of attempting to make progress on sexual orientation has been to collect data on the attitudes to sexual orientation in the countries where DFID works, '..so that LGBT staff can get a sense of the situation in countries where they may wish to work' (DFID 2006: 13). During the period of my research no further reports of progress were available, but an interview in November 2006 with one of the staff members in London confirmed the efforts and difficulties mentioned above:

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<sup>74</sup> At the time of my fieldwork this was the case, but in October 2008 DFID's recruitment campaign for Social Development Advisers introduced into the applicant's monitoring form a question asking candidates if they identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. It was noted in the form that this question was optional, not obligatory.

You know, on sexual orientation there is a real attempt to get a network together of staff, recognizing the kinds of people who won't be comfortable about being 'out', or who won't be 'out'. They've been looking to some senior managers who are known to be gay and lesbian but they won't come out, so who is going to make it ok and encourage other people? The leadership is not there. I do know a couple of gay men who are out in DFID, and I know the senior manager who is clearly, to me at least, lesbian, but I don't think that she is willing to come out. I don't know what her reason is. I wish I could ask her (Elizabeth).

Here Elizabeth outlines the dilemmas faced by staff with the issue of 'coming out' or declaring a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity, despite the progress made in recent years in non-discrimination and LGBT rights legislation in the UK. Also implicit in her thinking is the expectation that for colleagues who have had personal experience of same-sex sexuality, the way forward is to 'come out' as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and then encourage others and lead debates on sexual orientation, including in DFID's development programmes:

I know there are some male managers in country offices who are openly gay and who very clearly put the issue of sexual orientation on the agenda. And the FCO has been good, due to a couple of 'out' country directors. With one very close colleague who works with me, DFID was very good about helping him get a posting within a context where he could feel comfortable in a good environment, they really worked hard to make that happen. (Elizabeth).

This example highlights the relative visibility of men who identify as gay, compared to bisexual, and compared to lesbian or bisexual women. DFID's efforts to help a gay man gain a posting in a country where he could feel 'comfortable' confirms this staff member's assessment of DFID as an organization that is not homophobic or unsupportive of gay men, at least. However, the reluctance of other staff to 'come out' therefore needs further exploration, and may be connected more with the reluctance to be labelled

as a lesbian, gay or bisexual sexual 'other' than with a fear of encountering discrimination at work that would affect their careers.

Staff I interviewed within the NGOs who identified as lesbian and bisexual, however, recounted different and distressing experiences on their experiences in the workplace in the UK:

I was so surprised when I got to Womankind because I thought there were going to be more lesbians and bisexual women, but no. We had discussions about age, race, ethnicity, and disability, but with sexual diversity there is not really any angle or priority. So it was difficult for me to find someone to talk to about it. I couldn't trust anybody and it was really hard, with all the assumptions because I'm married and I have kids, so I heard all kinds of homophobic comments from one my colleagues. I had been talking all the time about women's rights and lesbian rights, and he assumed I was heterosexual. I think he would have spoken differently if he had known about my diversity. I found it really hard to deal with this. I passed on what he was saying to my line manager, but there was no kind of policy for me to follow to make a formal complaint (Anna).

In this case, discriminatory attitudes were present within the NGO's office based in London, although the staff member did note that this was linked to a small number of staff. Apart from noting that in a small organization, individuals have more impact, she also raised her concern about the effect of such individuals when representing the institution in the South:

It's bad because if you have someone with these values or attitudes and they go to work in the South, it's very unlikely that groups working on sexual diversity are going to approach somebody like him. The reputation of Womankind is at stake, and the concepts of equal opportunities and ethics are lost (Anna).

Anna confirmed that she believed that internal debates and policies on sexual orientation and sexual diversity among staff could provide an important foundation for addressing sexuality in the context of development

policies and programmes, as well as protecting people in the workplace and reducing the risk of employing staff with openly discriminatory attitudes. In the case of Oxfam, where at least the diversity policy was in place, one of the staff members I interviewed, Patricia, who identified as lesbian, recounted her distress with regard to the organizational culture she described as always 'politically correct':

Your research makes me think about the isolation and invisibility of lesbians in international development. What is very hard for me here is that the discrimination has not been about homophobia or heterosexism, it has been about the norm being heterosexuality. The idea I feel from other people is that: 'As long as I accept you, even though you are the exception, you don't have any complaint against us'. But there is such an enormous amount of normative stuff about being heterosexual that affects the work I do and my professional life. I feel my isolation when I talk about it. I think women who do not conform to the norm tend not to rise up into leadership positions or be accepted for their leadership. There is such a pressure to pass as heterosexual in the way I dress, in the way I relate to men, and everybody I meet in Oxfam automatically assumes I'm heterosexual (Patricia)

In addition to struggling to cope with the heteronormative culture within Oxfam, Patricia also outlined her reservations concerning the work done on incorporating diversity within the Human Resources policy:

The problem was that, and I find this on race as well, it was all very superficial. We want people of certain characteristics, but I don't think that approach gets at some of the fundamental connections between how being different actually puts you at a disadvantage and increases poverty and suffering (Patricia).

Patricia's concerns about the nature of debates on diversity in the workplace were echoed by the gender adviser of Christian Aid with regard to her experiences of working on this issue:

Diversity is only mentioned in terms of the idea of working on job descriptions. We are working on diversity without unpacking it – without challenging our thinking. We make it more technical and we're missing all the politics and the real questions that need to be answered – no one really wants to (Mercedes).

Mercedes sounds a warning note here on how diversity is being deployed by agencies from a technical approach, placing each element of diversity into a separate box, without addressing the 'politics' of the concept, such as how different identities intersect, and the hierarchies, inequalities and competition that are constructed when they are imagined as separate coherent entities. Mercedes' colleague working in the Latin America and Caribbean department also provided her thoughts on why the topic of sexual orientation in particular was so difficult to include and debate within Christian Aid:

I think that here one element that makes it more complicated is the element of religion, because there are a lot of religious people here and I think that makes it more much difficult to be open to discussing this issue. This organization is supported by religious leaders, but what is their position? If you have a policy as an organization to work on this then it will be easier to talk about it, and we need research done that proves what the situation is of lesbian and gay people in relation to poverty. (Marina).

Similar to staff in other agencies, Marina highlights the importance of the role of the leadership and senior managers in overcoming the anxieties of staff members about talking about sexuality. In an agency connected with the churches such as Christian Aid, this becomes even more imperative when some of those churches, such as the Anglican Church, are experiencing high-profile internal conflict on the subject of homosexuality. As Marina stated, staff need clear leadership, opportunities for discussion, and evidence of the situation of 'lesbian and gay people' in relation to poverty. This last idea reflects the foundation of the problems facing the agencies in the UK: the reliance on the concepts of sexual orientation,



lesbian and gay, when exploring sexuality beyond heterosexuality, and the difficulty in envisioning the relevance of lesbian and gay people's lives to the context of poverty at the heart of development policies and programmes.

### *Conclusions*

With its focus on human rights and not 'poverty', the FCO has incorporated same-sex sexuality and gender identity into its human rights policy and funding programmes by adopting British and global legal and political discourse on non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and LGBT rights. This has resulted in funding for LGBT rights projects of groups in the South such as MHOL in Peru. As this case has shown, however, such projects predominantly involve working with urban men identifying as gay, and male to female trans. Promoting dialogue with and supporting women identifying as lesbian, or anyone not able or not choosing to take up any of the LGBT identity categories has proven far more problematic. Similar to the example of the lesbian subject constructed by Peruvian lesbian feminist activists, questions of the intersections of sexuality with female masculinity/gender identity, class, race, ethnicity, culture, religion or geographical location (rural and urban, for example) all remain absent from UK development and human rights analysis. Similar conceptualizations of sexuality are reproduced in the agencies' internal policies and debates on diversity and sexual orientation, also reliant on LGBT identities that are seen as separate from other 'diversity' categories such as ethnic minorities, women, and the disabled, while the concept of social class remains completely absent. Perhaps if the DFID 'sexual orientation champion' were a Muslim woman born into poverty in a Kenyan rural village, disabled, and unwilling to identify either as lesbian or bisexual, the diversity monitors would struggle to know which box to tick in her case, but thinking on sexuality could extend beyond fragmented compartments and make connections between sexuality, women and development far more easily. In this sense, research and 'evidence' on the lives of women from the popular sectors is an important potential contribution to rethinking sexuality and development.

Questions of intersectionality are therefore equally pertinent to the development agencies' initial and problematic efforts to work on sexual orientation with LGBT people in their own offices. The pre-theoretical commitments of the lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans subject inherent in both external international development and internal staff employment policies of the agencies currently foreclose the notion of same-sex sexuality in any context beyond the urban, modern, economically independent, middle or upper class childless people who embrace their 'L, G, B or T' identity as a central, fixed and positive aspect of their subjectivity. These are questions development agencies will need to consider if, in the future, they decide to adopt or continue with LGBT human rights discourse and strategies.

The connection with same-sex sexuality beyond LGBT rights and non-discrimination has only been evident in UK-based agencies in the fields of HIV/AIDS and 'men and masculinities' in the development context, with their focus on men who have sex with men and homophobia connected with men. Consequently they explicitly and implicitly construct and reinforce the notion that all 'poor women' in the South conform to heterosexual and gender norms including those pertaining to femininity and masculinity. Meanwhile, gender equality and rights-based approaches to development remain to date firmly founded on notions of normative sexuality and gender identities for all people in development contexts.

Of all the different and co-existing elements of international development concepts and policies concerned with questions of equality, justice, well-being, non-discrimination and inclusion, that of sexual rights seems key in its potential capacity to make a direct link between sexuality and women from the popular sectors in the South. It is clear that DFID's policy on sexual and reproductive rights is based on the dominant meanings of sexual rights developed and implemented by global and particularly Southern feminist movements. The challenge presented to DFID by IDS in the UK, however, exemplifies the need to think of sexual rights, women and development beyond heteronormative sexuality and reproduction. One way to do so is to examine what global and particularly Southern feminism has to say about sexual rights, low-income women, same-sex sexuality and gender identity. How does the movement conceptualise these links, if at all? In the

next chapter I explore these questions in the case of Latin American regional feminism and the regional and global discourse of this movement's Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **New Directions in Latin American Feminist Sexual Rights**

We know so little about sexuality in our region. Those of us working on sexual rights have done so little on sexual orientation – it's like a myth that everyone forgets about (Roxana Vasquez, Peru).<sup>75</sup>

This reflection from a Peruvian feminist corresponds with some of the key findings from my research. Since the new millennium, however, the feminist movement at a regional level has begun to pay specific attention to the concept of sexuality, and gender identity, in its reflections and political activism on sexual rights and reproductive rights. The key example of this, and my case study for this chapter, is the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights. Originating in 1999 from an idea of members of the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for Women's Human Rights (CLADEM), the Campaign represents the most recent knowledge and analysis of sexuality and reproduction from a Latin American and Caribbean social movement perspective. It also represents a long term process of new knowledge production, after which new proposals for sexual rights and reproductive rights will be constructed for presentation to national governments and the Organization of American States (OAS) at a regional level.

The Campaign is of particular importance to my study because it represents the first attempt by Latin American and Caribbean feminist and LGBT movements to incorporate same-sex sexuality and gender identity into the discursive field of sexual and reproductive rights, and to take their discourse to a global level, within the World Social Forum process. This global process provides the potential to bring the feminist and LGBT

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Roxana Vasquez in Lima in November 2005. Roxana Vasquez has worked on women's human rights in Peruvian feminist NGOs such as Demus and regional feminist networks such as CLADEM since the early 1980s. Roxana was one of the three coordinators of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights from its initiation until November 2007.

movements' work on sexuality and gender identity into contact for the first time with other major social movements, as well as a wide range of international development NGOs that fund and participate in the process.

As a regional feminist initiative, it is important to examine the Campaign within the context of the Latin American and Caribbean and feminist movement, the history of which I summarize in the first section of this chapter. The context and dynamics of the regional feminist movement provide a basis for reviewing, in the following sections, the meanings of sexuality and gender constructed by its discourse, strategies and methods. I also explore the connections between the regional, national and global levels, focusing on the Campaign's contact with its Peruvian members and its launch at the global World Social Forum event held in Kenya in January 2007, which I attended as the final element of my fieldwork (see Chapter One).

In my analysis I focus on the constraints, pressures and opportunities to develop an analysis of sexuality and gender encountered by Peruvian feminist leaders of the Campaign. In particular, I address the question of how to expand the exploration and conceptualization of women's sexuality and non-normative gender identities across differences of class or economic status, race, ethnicity and national context. A study of this Campaign provides the opportunity to examine how the concept of sexual rights is developing and expanding, in geographical as well as political and conceptual terms, and in its expansion, which subjects and subjectivities are being included or excluded, and why. I hope that my study will contribute to the Campaign's ongoing process of reflection and learning, while at the same time providing a similar basis for reflection and learning among international development and human rights NGOs, whether they are, or are not, already committed to the topics of sexuality and sexual rights.

### **7.1 Latin American regional feminism: historical perspectives**

Same-sex sexuality, in the form of lesbian feminism, has been present in the Latin American and Caribbean regional feminist movement since its inception in the late 1970s. Following the launch of the UN Decade for Women in Mexico in 1975, regional feminist interaction has centred on '*encuentros*'

(conferences) which have been held every two or three years, commencing in Bogotá, Colombia in 1981. One of the movement's leading figures, Virginia Vargas, from Peru, has summarized well the original aims of organizing among feminists in the region:

This transnational feminist action was oriented fundamentally towards recreating collective practices, deploying new analytical categories, new visibilities, and even new languages being invented by feminisms at the national level, naming that which heretofore had no name: sexuality, domestic violence, sexual harassment, marital rape, the feminization of poverty (cited in Alvarez et al. 2002: 539).

According to Sonia Alvarez, a political scientist who has attended and analysed the *encuentros* from their early years, this regional search for a region-wide feminist cultural politics brought together many local socialist feminist actors in the late 1970s. At that time they were disenchanted with the Latin American Left that rejected feminism as a “bourgeois, imperialist import” (Alvarez 2002: 539). However, the feminists in question shared the Left's internationalist ethic, which inspired them to come together across borders for two distinct reasons. Alvarez (2000: 3-7) refers to the decade of the 1980s as the period in which Latin American and Caribbean regional feminism was characterized by an ‘international identity-solidarity logic’ which reinforced the symbolic and cultural dimension of feminism. This logic entailed constructing or reaffirming personal and strategic bonds of solidarity with others who shared locally marginalized feminist values and identities (such as Afro-Latin Americans or lesbians). The second aim of the movement was to expand formal rights and influence public policies in regional structures (such as the Organization of American States), as a means of strengthening national political advocacy by putting a united regional feminist pressure on particular governments seen to be violating rights or resisting desired policy change (Alvarez 2000: 3-4).

During the 1980s, this combination of cultural and policy-oriented approaches concentrated on the regional level, through the *encuentros*, and through newly formed regional networks focusing on women's health and

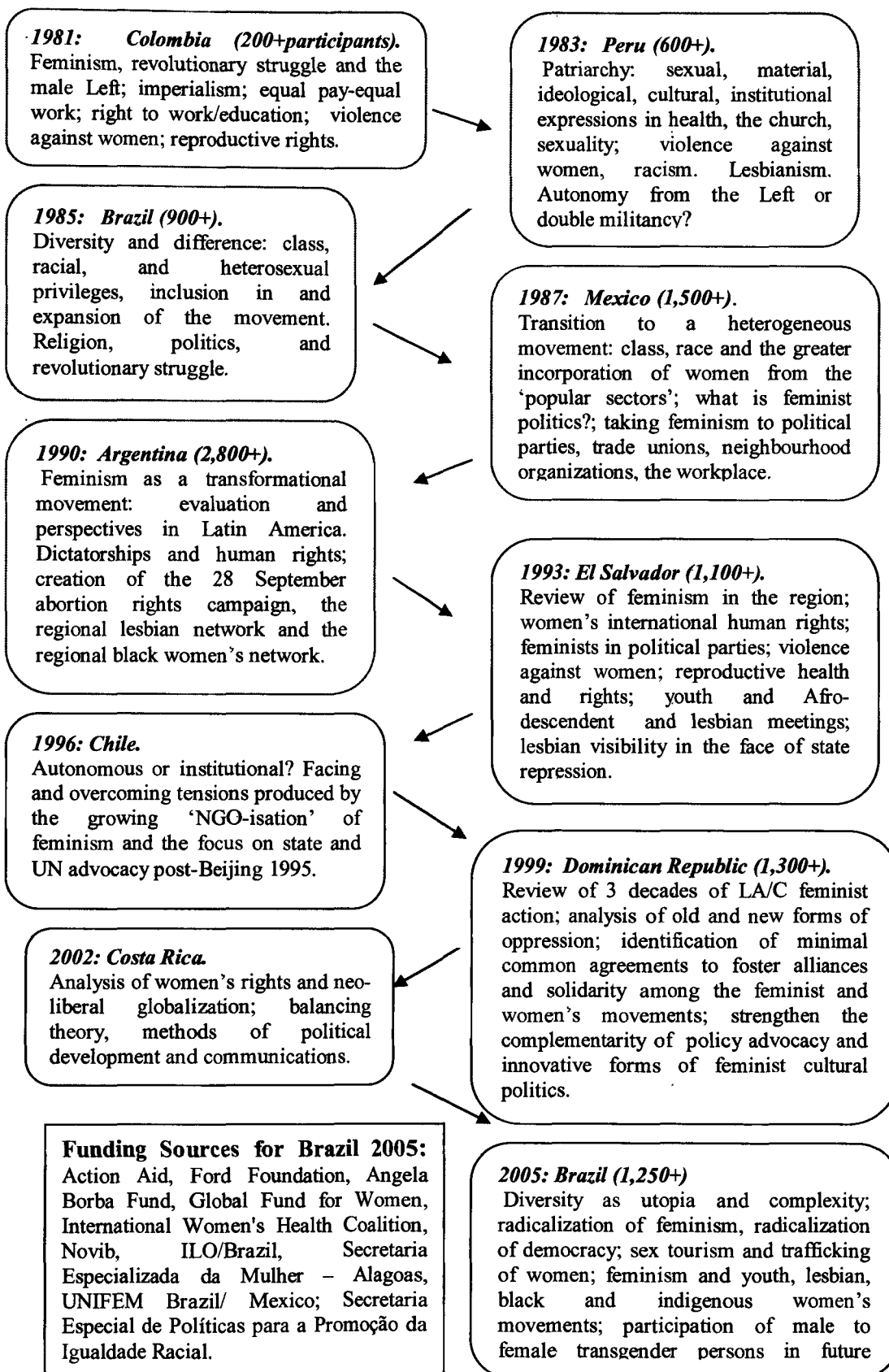
human rights. The predominantly middle class, white or *mestiza* and socialist leaders of the first years of the feminist movement always viewed women from the popular sectors as key to their political project, resulting in the growing participation of the burgeoning grassroots ‘women’s movement’, including women from rural and urban trade unions, Black and indigenous movements, landless movements, and guerrilla organizations (Alvarez 2000: 6). Attempts at achieving such a broad range of participation have, however, been marked by processes of exclusion endemic to the region, leading the feminist regional events and networks to continually struggle ‘..with the ways in which class, racial and heterosexual privileges have structured power relations among women in society and within feminism itself’ (Alvarez et al 2002: 545). Figure 2 summarizes the central issues debated by the movement in the *encuentros* from 1981 to 2005, highlighting in bold the changing terms connected with sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>76</sup>

In this struggle, however, same-sex sexuality has not occupied the same priority ideological status as class, race and gender, and has been addressed in complex and contradictory ways. As some of the leading lesbian feminist activists of the region have recently documented, in the first *encuentro* in 1981, lesbianism was only spoken of ‘in the corridors’ (Sardá et al. 2006: 6; Díaz-Cotto 2001: 80). However, two years later in the *encuentro* in Peru, it became the subject of a separate workshop, which attracted crowds of women, including some from the popular sectors and the ‘women’s movement’ (as Julia and Maria’s experience described in Chapter Four confirms). This workshop inspired some of the women to create country-specific lesbian feminist groups or join newly formed mixed ‘homosexual’ groups (Sardá et al. 2006: 7). A few years later, lesbian feminist activists created their own regional network in Mexico, in 1987, which provided them with the opportunity to develop their own political identity, demands and proposals at a regional level. Their continuing regular participation and growing profile in

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<sup>76</sup> Sources for the data compiled by the author to produce Figure 2 includes: Alvarez 2000; Alvarez et al 2002 and 2004; Sternbach et al. 1992; Shayne 2004; [www.fire.or.cr](http://www.fire.or.cr); [www.radiofeminista.net](http://www.radiofeminista.net); [www.10feminista.org.br](http://www.10feminista.org.br); [www.delatierra.net](http://www.delatierra.net).

**Figure 2: Thematic priorities from 1981 - 2005 and recent funding sources for the Latin America/Caribbean Feminist 'Encuentros'.**





the feminist *encuentros* produced mixed reactions from feminist leaders, with some keen to dialogue and others resistant:

Either because they were afraid of being assumed to be lesbian, or because the priorities being debated weren't lesbian, some heterosexual feminists did not see the presence of lesbians in the feminist movement as a positive thing (ibid.: 8).

Indeed, some feminists' fear of being identified as lesbian became a reality in 1993, when the organizers of the *encuentro* in El Salvador had to confront death threats from right-wing politicians who denounced all feminists as lesbians and communists. Fortunately the United Nations peacekeeping forces present in the country to oversee the peace process were on hand to provide protection for the event's participants (Alvarez 2002: 550). However, as Alvarez notes, although lesbian feminists have been key actors in the regional feminist movement, '...they have had to struggle to put the issue of sexual orientation on the feminist agenda, this despite the fact that *encuentro* workshops focused on lesbian issues are often among the most well-attended, where participants overflow into the hallways' (ibid: 565). The search for the institutional and public legitimacy of feminist demands was reinforced by the priority given in the 1980s to political activities with the women's movement, from the popular sectors, which was also structured by a heterosexual framework (Mogrovejo 1999: 331). During the first decade of the movement, therefore, lesbian identity and solidarity was permitted and grew at the *encuentros*, but with discomfort among some, and even hostility among a few although this has waned over time (Díaz-Cotto 2001: 80). However, despite increasing levels of acceptance of lesbians in the *encuentros*, the theoretical analysis and construction of discourses for the movement's national and regional public policy advocacy continued to be based on the conceptualization of sexuality as heterosexuality, with its interconnections with race and class or economic status.

Instead of exploring ways to integrate lesbian feminism into the heart of regional feminist discourse and action, in the 1990s, the movement entered

into a new, complementary phase, engaging for the first time in global arenas. The early 1990s witnessed the ascendance of a new form of international feminist activism targeting inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and international policy arenas, leading the movement into a 'transnational IGO-advocacy logic' (Alvarez 2000: 3). Central to this entry into global arenas were the UN Summits in Rio de Janeiro, Vienna, Cairo and Beijing in the first half of the 1990s. During this period, feminist activists created new transnational advocacy networks and practices focusing on the topics of reproductive health and rights, women's human rights and gender-based violence against women. During my fieldwork in Peru in 2006, I discussed this history with Virginia Vargas. Virginia described the 1980s as a decade in which the movement constructed its own discourse of '*lo deseable*' (what it most desired). However, she affirmed that for those that took on the advocacy work in the 1990s in global inter-governmental policy arenas such as the UN, the change brought with it an important and problematic shift of strategy:

We abandoned our efforts to construct our utopia, and began to name only what was possible [*lo posible*], leaving behind us the issues of sexual diversity and abortion, which for me are the two tips of the iceberg of feminist transgression (Virginia Vargas, Peru).

It is important to note that Latin American and Caribbean feminists did initially attempt to translate their discourse of abortion and lesbian rights from regional networking to global policy advocacy. However, they met with powerful conservative opposition in the UN among the majority of delegates. In Beijing in 1995, for example, these (predominantly Catholic and Islamic) conservative forces finally won the conflict over feminist proposals, for example, for plural conceptions of the family to include lesbian couples, and for a commitment to end discrimination against women on the grounds of sexual orientation (Franco 1998: 280, Lycklama a Nijeholt et al. 1998: 43). The second half of the 1990s therefore marked a period of global feminist advocacy that was forced to debate global policies within strictly heteronormative UN discourse on women's rights and health. Attempts by lesbian activists to advocate for the inclusion of their rights at the Beijing + 5

UN meeting in New York in 2000, moreover, were met not only with the conservative obstruction of Beijing in 1995, but also direct aggression in the form of 'sexuality baiting' - verbal attacks and physical intimidation by predominantly male Christian religious figures (Rothschild 2005: 108). As I have discussed in Chapter Six, only in the UN Human Rights Council since 2003 has there been a growing and more productive lobby on LGBT rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, established by the expanding LGBT movement which included lesbian feminists often also closely connected to the feminist movement (see also Rothschild 2005: 115).

Meanwhile in the mid-1990s the Latin America and Caribbean regional feminist movement entered into growing conflict over the 'institutionalization' of feminists working on global and national policy advocacy. This led to acrimonious debates in 1996 at the *encuentro* in Chile, polarizing the 'autonomous' and the 'institutionalized' participants, and then to a reassessment and re-visioning of the movement at the *encuentro* in 1999 in the Dominican Republic (Alvarez 2000: 24). Here the majority of activists agreed to work towards ensuring greater complementarity between the identity-solidarity approach of the regional *encuentros*, aimed at constructing a culturally transformative feminist agenda, and the advocacy approach aimed at transforming legal and other public policies. It is within this framework of the desire for a complementary approach, and in the same year, that the Campaign for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights was created.

## **7.2 A campaign for the new millennium**

The idea for the Campaign in 1999 was the product of an alliance between feminist organizations, networks and campaigns in Latin America and the Caribbean, led by CLADEM.<sup>77</sup> These regional and national feminist spaces

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<sup>77</sup> The organizations and networks included CLADEM, The 28 September Campaign, Catholics for a Free Choice, CIDEM (Bolivia), Cotidiano Mujer (Uruguay), Flora Tristán (Peru), the Latin American/Caribbean Women's Health Network, Rede Feminista de Saude (Brazil), the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Sexual Rights and

were working throughout the region on women's and young people's health and human rights, specializing in different elements of sexual and reproductive health and rights. One of the members, IGLHRC, also specialized in LGBT human rights. In December 2005 I interviewed Roxana Vasquez, the Coordinator of the Campaign, in her office in Lima. Roxana described how the original founders proposed from the outset a ten-year process of consultation and dialogue on sexual rights and reproductive rights. The overall aim was to implement a process of knowledge construction on sexuality, reproduction, rights and democracy within the Latin America/Caribbean region, with additional input from contacts across the globe. The intention was to pool the knowledge and experience of the different regional networks and national NGOs in order to integrate different elements and create a more holistic, comprehensive, region-wide understanding of sexual and reproductive rights.

At the end of this process of dialogue and debate, the Campaign would produce a draft bill for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights to be presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. If successful, this would commit all governments in the Americas to implement the Convention, and provide a basis for litigation in the Human Rights Court of the Inter-American Commission of the OAS, if the violation of these rights were not sanctioned at the national level by member states.

Financial support for the Campaign was obtained from the Ford Foundation and the International Women's Health Coalition (both based in New York), HIVOS and the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA), with costs of the Campaign averaging \$200,000 per annum. As Roxana explained, the Campaign's priority was to maintain its political and cultural autonomy in its relationship with both non-governmental and governmental international donors:

We are working on a political process, not a project, and that means fighting for complete autonomy. We can't adjust our agenda for any donor, so any

funding we receive has to support our proposals and plans. There is no funding from the UK, nor have we requested any. We've only looked for funding from organizations that are committed to the topic, and British organizations are not interested in this field (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

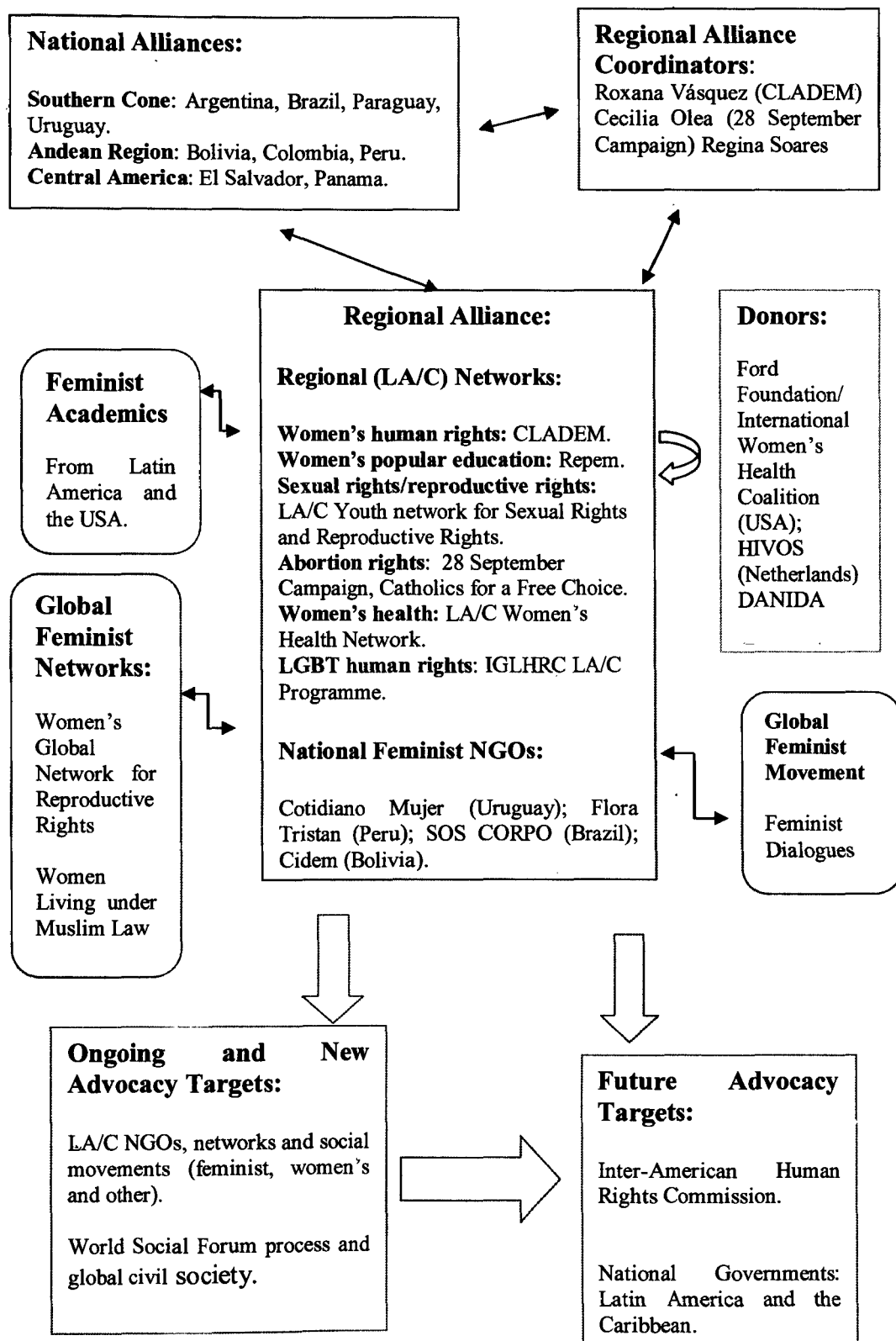
The strategy was to develop funding relationships with donors who had already clarified their policies on sexuality and reproduction in the development, health and human rights context, and could therefore be trusted by the Campaign's members not to limit their political positions or exploration of new ideas. Consequently, given their silence on sexual rights, Roxana did not approach any UK-based NGO for financial support.

Roxana also highlighted the importance of the Campaign's strategy of building alliances within civil society in order to broaden the knowledge production process:

We want to expand the debate on sexuality, reproduction and rights, and in order to achieve this we have adopted a politics of alliances at the local, regional and global level. These alliances are important as they enrich and deepen debates, and give more legitimacy to our proposals (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

In order to build these alliances, the Campaign has gradually expanded its membership (see Figure 3 for a summary of the Campaign's membership and sites of action) with a variety of strategies. The first stage was to encourage debate with and feedback from all the members of the networks, campaigns and organizations, mentioned above, that formed the 'Regional Alliance' (*Alianza Regional*). Membership and input was then expanded by creating country-specific 'Local Alliances' (*Alianzas Locales*) in ten Central and South American countries. Each Local Alliance comprised organizations, academics representing universities, and individuals, with an annual rotation of leadership. In the case of Peru, for example, the coordinator in 2007 was a member of Perú Afro, an Afro-Peruvian organization. Other members included nine feminist NGOs including Flora Tristán and Demus, and four LGBT and lesbian-specific groups, including the lesbian and bisexual unit of

**Figure 3: Membership, advocacy targets and funding sources of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights (until 2007).**



MHOL.<sup>78</sup> In addition to disseminating the input of the member organizations, the Regional Alliance has published articles written by other contacts with work experience or research in the field of sexuality, reproduction and rights. The articles are disseminated in a series of publications, including one title '*SeriAs para el Debate*' which focuses on a specific theme in each edition.

The Campaign's website also provides access to numerous (over 130 in 2007) and wide-ranging documents on sexuality and reproduction in the region, including overviews of the status of sexual and reproductive rights in specific countries in the region. One such study of Peru, for example, covering the period 1995 to 2003, summarizes the treatment of sexual and reproductive rights in national legislation and social policies on a range of topics including, briefly, 'sexual orientation', but not 'gender identity'.<sup>79</sup> The Campaign website has also provided the opportunity to carry out a 'virtual debate' online, and to disseminate information about conferences and other events organized by members of the Campaign across the region. It has also disseminated documents from other continents and about global processes and events such as the World Social Forum. At a global level, the Campaign initially consulted key networks and individuals, including the Global Network for Reproductive Rights and Women Living Under Muslim Laws, as well as academics in the US with specialist knowledge such as the human rights academic and lawyer Alice Millar. Dialogue has also been maintained with staff from the donor agencies supporting the Campaign. As a result of this process, the Campaign published its first Manifesto in 2002, outlining its key principles, beliefs and objectives.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For a list of all members of local alliances in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, El Salvador and Panama, see [www.convencion.org.uy/menu-13.htm](http://www.convencion.org.uy/menu-13.htm).

<sup>79</sup> *Perú: Diagnóstico de la situación de los Derechos Sexuales y los Derechos Reproductivos 1995 – 2002*. Available at [www.convencion.org.uy](http://www.convencion.org.uy). The sixteen topics listed are: sexual violence, sex education, family planning, contraception, marriage/civil union, divorce, prostitution, adolescent pregnancies, abortion, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS, responsible paternity, assisted reproduction, sexual harassment, maternity and paternity in the employment sector, pregnancy monitoring, birth and post-partum health care, and breast and cervical cancer screening.

<sup>80</sup> This document is available in Spanish on the Campaign's website. Its contents are repeated and expanded in the second Manifesto, which I examine at length in the following section.

On the basis of this Manifesto, the Campaign then carried out a much wider process of consultation within and beyond the Latin American and Caribbean region, which led to the publication of its second Manifesto in October 2006. The Campaign describes this second Manifesto as ‘...a political charter and at the same time a proposal that contributes towards laying the foundation for a future Inter-American Convention on sexual rights and reproductive rights’ (Campaign 2006: 3).<sup>81</sup> At this stage, the content of these rights are therefore still not specified, but by producing a political charter the Campaign is stimulating coordinated feminist reflections and debates about sexuality throughout the region for the first time. The second Manifesto is an abstract, theoretical document without specific examples or case studies from the region. As such it is intended as a framework for thought and action on sexuality and reproduction in specific local contexts within the Latin America and Caribbean region, as well as for the future construction of a Convention on sexual rights and reproductive rights. This framework is based on the ‘essential principles’ presented in the second Manifesto:

We aspire to construct a radical democracy that demands the discontinuation of the natural order of domination and establishes the social recognition of all those people who are denied their rights. According to this vision, the economy must be subordinate to politics, the market to human rights, and democracy must be conceived not only as a political system but as a form of organization of social life, in the public and private sphere and at the local and global level (Campaign 2006: 20).

Central to the Campaign, therefore, is to locate a feminist cultural politics of sexuality and reproduction within the framework of the construction of a radical democracy for the region that prioritizes politics and human rights over the increasingly globalized neo liberal free market economy of the region.

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<sup>81</sup> Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights: Manifesto. Second Version (for debate) October 2006, p.3. This Manifesto is available in English and Spanish at [www.convencion.org.uy](http://www.convencion.org.uy).



### 7.3 Reconceptualizing gender and sexuality at a regional level

The Campaign exemplifies a new strategic approach to a regional feminist politics of sexuality that seeks to carry out cultural analysis and transformation as a foundation for defining policy discourse for later national and regional advocacy. This coincides with debates held at the continuing regional feminist *encuentros* that have also produced a shift in feminist thought and discourse with regard to gender and sexuality. For example, at the 10th *encuentro*, in Brazil in 2005, one of the participants, from the Latin America and Caribbean section of IGLHRC, launched a successful campaign for the inclusion of trans and intersex people in future *encuentros*, endorsed by more than 200 individuals and organizations.<sup>82</sup> This was the first time these issues had been debated by the movement, as Roxana Vásquez explained:

In Peru, for example, until recently there were no groups talking about transgender, but that is changing fast now. Both the feminist and LGBT movements are committed to learning more, and we understand that we need to work on this issue together, in alliance. It questions all our binary thinking of the construction of the concepts of gender and the body. So this debate has entered into different spaces, with resistances and support, of course, and we have it in our Campaign manifesto too (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

Responding to these regional debates on transgender, the Campaign's second Manifesto begins its reflections on the concept of gender by asserting that globalization processes have weakened traditional customs and perceptions of human beings. The emergence of new subjectivities, identities and social actors have led to flexible sexualities and genders, new rights and possibilities for expanding citizenship:

People are now more in touch with ideas of autonomy, individuation, freedom and equality, thus being able to modify their self-perception and

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<sup>82</sup> A brief report of this decision is available at: [www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/section.php?id=5&detail=6060](http://www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/section.php?id=5&detail=6060)

their status as the subject of rights. The gender paradigm itself has changed and it is no longer supported by the old capitalist model of the male as provider and the female relegated to the domestic sphere. A more complex view of gender has been achieved, overcoming the reductionist perspective that situates it as a binary opposition between men and women, and incorporating into gender ontology not only the possibilities opened up by transvestites, transgender, transsexual and intersex persons, but also a constant re-signification of what being male or female implies in our culture (Campaign 2006: 8).

This summary of the changing gender paradigm is notable in its rejection of a 'reductionist perspective' of gender as a binary opposition between women and men, and the inclusion of trans and intersex identities which have previously been absent from feminist discourse and activism on gender or sexuality. However, while the text does not specify which trans subjectivities are being considered, in practice in the region, it is the male to female trans identities that are dominating national and regional feminist and LGBT movements' changing discourse on gender. Female masculinity, or women's male identification or cross-dressing, for example, remain unexamined and unrepresented. To a certain extent, this limitation is addressed at the end of the second Manifesto, in a section titled 'Recognition and celebration of the diversity of existing gender expressions', which states that:

It is necessary to recognize and celebrate the diversity of gender expressions that exist in our world – male, female, androgynous, trans etc. – and affirm the right of each person to his/her own gender expression, whatever this may be and whatever his/her personal identity may be – an identity recognized by the law – his/her body or his/her sexuality. It is only by doing so that we will succeed in destroying the heteronormative logic, which in admitting only two appropriate gender manifestations, stigmatizes, excludes and punishes other forms of femininity and masculinity (we are talking of masculine women or feminine males, transvestites, and all those people who define themselves as trans persons, intersex persons, androgynous persons etc.).... [I]t is necessary to consider different gender expressions as options that are culturally available to all

persons, without any prerogatives of propriety or originality, being at the same time open to a process of constant cultural re-signification (Campaign 2006: 30).

Here the specific mention of ‘masculine women’ opens up the possibility of feminist reflection on the problematic conflation of the notions of masculinity and *machismo*. It also connects with past attempts of lesbian feminist activists to encourage women to identify as lesbian, not *chitos*, as well as the exclusion of male-identified women from lesbian or LGBT groups, such as those documented in my study of Peru. As the Second Manifesto (2006: 9) states on the issue of identities: ‘Reconceptualising politics, the economy, national and global powers also requires reviewing arbitrary categories and concepts that currently organize life and assign citizenship’. However, it is also important to apply this principle of critique to traditional (such as *chito*) as well as newly emerging non-hegemonic gender and sexual categories and terms being constructed by women themselves or social movements.

One of the new terms dominating the Campaign discourse is that of ‘diversity’, as the citation above reveals. Indeed, the meanings of sexual diversity and sexuality are interchangeable in the Campaign Manifesto. Despite the active involvement of LGBT groups in the National and Regional Campaign Alliances, it is particularly noticeable that in the Second Manifesto (2006: 10-12), the term ‘LGBT movement’ has been replaced by ‘movements for sexual and gender diversity’. Moreover, the document frames its discussion of sexual and reproductive rights with reference to the flexibility and plasticity of sexuality, non-hegemonic sexual identities, and the need to recognize different types of family or other forms of non-heterosexual sexuality.

By framing rights in this way, the Campaign does not consider it necessary to deploy the terms lesbian, bisexual and gay, which are notably absent from the document except in two instances. In the first, they are named together with ‘heterosexuals’ when referring to people who do not accept sexual norms:

The impact of symbolic cultural normativity on the conception of what a woman's body should be and what sexuality is considered as "normal" by the heteronormative system, is evident. This affects lesbians, gays, trans, intersex and heterosexuals who do not accept "the norm of sexual normalcy" (Campaign 2006: 23).

Notably, the term bisexual has been forgotten here, but lesbians and gays are considered together with some heterosexuals with regard to who might resist heterosexual norms. The second mention occurs, unusually, in the discussion of reproductive rights:

Reproduction is seen as the role par excellence of women in a hegemonic heterosexual framework, This has serious limitations, as it does not recognize the reproductive rights of all persons and the right to affirmation of sexual diversity and the quest for pleasure (Campaign 2006: 28).

The document goes on to emphasize the need to '...radically widen/modify the reproductive health focus..extending reproductive rights to lesbians' (ibid.). Notably, however, bisexuals, gay men and trans are not included in these extended rights.

The Manifesto does not explicitly critique lesbian, bisexual, gay or heterosexual identities or their meanings and effects in rights-based work, rather it simply excludes them from its discourse apart from this one example. Overall the Second Manifesto text represents a clear intention to use the broader concepts of sexuality and sexual diversity as a foundation for exploring sexual and reproductive rights. By including heterosexuals together with lesbians and gays as those who resist sexual norms, it also attempts to recognize that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not synonymous. However, the Campaign does not go so far as to explore ways in which heterosexuals are also negatively affected by heteronormativity, a move that would also contribute to disrupting the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy still inherent in LGBT and feminist discourse on 'discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation' in Peru, for example.

It remains to be seen if this discursive shift at a regional level will translate into national feminist and LGBT movement thought, discourse and practice. Will it prove more attractive and inclusive to those for whom the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual have no cultural meaning or translation, or that represent very specific meanings with which only a minority identify? As we have seen from my research in Peru, this is directly relevant to exploring how sexuality and sexual identities are connected with poverty and class, racial and ethnic difference, and how they are constructed and lived by people from the popular and indigenous sectors of the population. In the following section I examine the Campaign's approach to these questions of difference and heterogeneity within countries and the region as a whole.

#### **7.4 Race, ethnicity, culture and poverty**

As I have noted in Chapter Three, although poverty and racial or ethnic exclusion and discrimination are inherently linked in Peru, for example, this connection is often made invisible by dominant discourse (including that of social movements) that establishes social class/economic status and culture as the key markers of inequality, together with gender. Specifically the concepts of race and ethnicity are subsumed under notions of class and culture. In a region that is marked by great racial and ethnic heterogeneity within countries as well as between them, and with so many of the different languages having no linguistic connection with the four dominant European ones (Spanish, Portuguese, French and English), it is important to explore how cultural differences influence constructions of sexuality and gender identity. In the Second Manifesto, the importance of culture (discussed with reference to Peru in Chapter Three) is highlighted as central to the Campaign's work on sexuality and reproduction:

Historically, Western culture appears as the yardstick against which the rest of the "world as a whole" is measured. This has impeded the restoration of a more plural, democratic and complex vision of the significance of the co-existence of pluriethnic and multicultural nations in our region. But it is not enough to merely acknowledge multiculturalism, as this would then be

construed as mere “fact” that does not entail any commitment on our part to a dialogue between cultures. What is important is for us to be able to cut across the cultural boundaries that have been constructed to separate us. This is only possible if there are horizontal and democratic relations (Campaign 2006: 17).

Here the Campaign gives importance to democratizing relationships between different racial and ethnic groups, recognizing existing power relations and inequalities, and the personal as well as collective dimensions of these relations. However, in our interview in Lima in 2006, Roxana Vásquez confirmed that the Campaign had not yet established dialogue or alliances with the indigenous and Afro-Latin American women’s movements and organizations in the region:

We need greater democracy and participation in the Campaign process, to get a wider vision of sexuality and reproduction and of the understanding of the role we want sexuality to play in our utopian vision of society. There are various tensions in a process such as this. For example, how can we make theoretical discussions on complex issues clear enough for the majority? The second Manifesto is really for a certain elite. We think we need to produce different versions of the Manifesto for a wider range of audiences, so it is more accessible (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

The challenge facing the Campaign, to become ‘more democratic’ and provide documents for debate in a range and different levels of language, was clearly important to Roxana and other leaders of the process. This is in part due to their expressed need to gain greater insight into how sexuality, gender and reproduction are conceptualized across a region Roxana described as ‘extremely heterogeneous’, making it difficult to identify regional tendencies in any political analysis. However, analysing and incorporating cultural difference is also essential to the Campaign’s objective of contributing to a new radical democracy and cultural politics, with cultural and social transformation as a foundation for future rights-based advocacy at governmental levels. Roxana framed this challenge with reference to the

relationship between the Regional Alliance/Campaign and the local level in each country:

We want to achieve a good understanding between local and regional levels, so that the regional level doesn't become a 'perfect skin' (*cáscara pura*) and so that the local groups can identify with the Campaign. We need coherence between the local and regional, and we need the local to provide the fire for the ideas we're cooking. So we need to make the relationship between the regional and local more dynamic, for example by enabling the coordinators of Local Alliances to participate in the Regional Alliance (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

Roxana's emphasis on the need for a dynamic and non-hierarchical relationship between the Regional and National Alliances symbolizes the question of how to address heterogeneity and local cultural differences when considering how universal terms such as sexuality and reproduction are theorized and introduced into political action. However, what remained absent from the Second Manifesto and my interviews with the Campaign leaders was their analysis of who participates in the National Alliances, and how this could be broadened to include women from urban and rural popular sectors. In the case of Peru, for example, the National Alliance membership in 2006 comprised feminist and LGBT organizations, and one Lima-based group, Perú Afro, working on racism against people of African descent in Peru (*'afrodescendientes'*). The woman representing Perú Afro was clearly committed to the Campaign and sexual and reproductive rights, but when I observed her presentation of the Campaign in the first Lima conference on racism in Peru, in 2006, she conformed to feminist NGO discourse, making no link with questions of sexual diversity, sexual orientation or lesbian rights. The approach was to add sexual and reproductive rights (in their heteronormative mode) to the other issues considered of importance for *afrodescendientes* to analyse in their lives. As Roxana reported to me:

The organizational form of the alliance, of multiple organizations and networks, provides a collective potential that is there to be taken up. Because the women in the alliance are connected to many different locations and

contacts, we have a great capacity to achieve more. This makes it easier to imagine how we can position our ideas on a wider scale. We want other people's opinions, feedback - a critical view of what we are producing. But we also want them to begin to incorporate sexual rights and reproductive rights into their agenda (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

However, as the example of Perú Afro demonstrates, the cautionary tale in taking advantage of the Campaign's collective potential is that sexuality needs to be theorized incorporating questions of difference and diversity that interconnect sexuality, race, class and so on. If not, encouraging the incorporation of national feminist understandings of sexual and reproductive rights into the agendas of other civil society groups and movements for the first time (such as Afro-Peruvian, indigenous or peasant movements) will only reproduce and reinforce normative assumptions. As Cecilia Olea noted, however, sexual and gender diversity were the 'difficult or controversial issues' the Campaign had identified as needing further debate among feminist groups first, before taking the topics to other social movements:

The topic of sexuality is so new, and some countries have done more on this, and on abortion, than others. In some areas, like Central America, where the Catholic Church and the right in general are so powerful, local feminist groups are really afraid. They could be closed down for raising these issues, and they worry that if they are not expert enough in the topics the Opus Dei will defeat them in public debates (Cecilia Olea, Peru).

The power of the ultra conservative elements of the Catholic Church in some areas of the region is therefore a serious constraining factor for women inexperienced in advocacy work in locations where 'fundamentalist' attitudes to sexuality and reproduction dominate. Given the power of conservative political forces in the region, combined with the concern that sexuality is a new topic for indigenous, peasant, Afro-descendant movements or members of urban popular sectors, for example, the difficulties faced by the Campaign to promote debate on sexual and gender diversity beyond urban middle class locations are not to be underestimated.



Just as the Second Manifesto mentions but does not explore the intersection of race, ethnicity and culture with sexuality, it makes a similar connection between poverty and sexuality. For example, the document rejects the view of poverty as an apolitical phenomenon, identifying it as a consequence of the inequity in the redistribution of wealth. It states that for human rights to prevail over the market, economic, social and cultural rights must be restored as an inalienable expression of citizenship and human rights (Campaign 2006: 21). The call is to recognize the indivisibility of sexual and reproductive rights with economic, social and cultural rights, and to extend human rights beyond a focus on only civil and political rights. However, the Manifesto does not explore or provide any examples of the connection between sexuality and the economy or people's economic status beyond the points outlined above. Roxana Vásquez explained to me that she believed that part of the reason for this limitation in the Campaign's Manifesto was the changing nature of the relationship between feminist organizations and women's grassroots movements and women living in low-income areas such as the *conos* of Lima, that had evolved since the 1990s:

This relationship has diverted away from strategies of training and education, so to what extent can we sit around the table, dialogue and construct a common agenda on sexuality? We haven't reached that point. This is important for us as a movement, as we need to debate conceptual questions in more depth so that they can be more inclusive and of more interest to a wider range of people. I think that the current tendency of being a predominantly middle class movement is worrying for us. We need to examine how the living conditions of poverty construct sexuality, how they enable or limit it, without making assumptions or being judgemental (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

Roxana also confirmed that the lack of NGO or academic studies in the region exploring the relationship between women, poverty, sexuality and gender, had left the Campaign with a serious lack of data for its own debates and reflections.

## 7.5 Sexual rights go global

In addition to facing the ongoing challenge to construct a discourse of sexuality within which local, national and regional groups and movements could interact, at the end of 2006 the Regional Alliance decided to take the Campaign to the global level, selecting the World Social Forum in Nairobi for its first contact with the WSF process outside the Latin America region. In preparation for this new move, the Second Manifesto incorporated a global perspective on sexual and reproductive rights by examining the new economic scenarios that have unfolded in the Latin American and Caribbean region due to the shift from industrial capitalism to a financial, global and networked capitalism. This created a context ‘...where the hegemony of the neo-liberal focus prioritizes the market and facilitates the ungoverned power of transnational capital’ (Campaign 2006: 7). The document highlighted the enormous but ambivalent and contradictory impact of globalization on the cultural, subjective and symbolic dimensions of society and citizenship. It stated that on the negative side, for example, ‘By privileging free market economy over the welfare of citizens, the current globalization model subordinates politics to the economy’ (ibid.: 8) Combined with this, the complexity and unequal development of economic, political, technological, cultural and emotional dimensions of globalization ‘..have tended to exacerbate existing social inequalities and exclusions, defensive attitudes, individualism and fragmentation’ (ibid.). The connection between globalization, sexuality and sexual rights was not developed further in the document, which concluded that:

The challenge before us is not to create more state, but to create another state that is truly democratic and includes all its citizens in an effective manner (Campaign 2006: 9).

The connection between globalization and democracy outlined in the Manifesto is also a central theme of the World Social Forum process that emerged from Latin American regional civil society initiatives against neo-

liberalism in the mid-1990s (Smith 2004: 414).<sup>83</sup> The first WSF global meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, was organized as a protest against neo-liberal globalization, as a parallel event to the World Economic Forum. The subsequent meetings have taken the process beyond protest into a broader expression of global civil society cultural politics and reflection on radical participatory democracy and non-violent political and economic alternatives to neo-liberalism, singular or hegemonic thinking, and all forms of fundamentalism. By the fourth world meeting, in Mumbai in 2004 and the first to be held outside Latin America, one of the central goals was to explore the best ways of promoting values of justice, solidarity and democratic participation at the world level (Keraghel and Sen 2004: 483).

The WSF process, coordinated by an International Council and based on a Charter of Principles, defines itself as an 'open space' for a free exchange of knowledge and ideas among NGOs and social movements that can challenge empires and celebrate diversity and plurality (Whitaker 2004). When considering the WSF's rejection of a search for a single theory, de Sousa Santos (2005: 16) emphasizes the importance of the wide range of movements and NGOs involved in the WSF that constitute themselves around a number of goals, creating their own forms and styles of resistance, discourse and practice. These differences are the basis for the identity of each group that separates it from each of the others, leading at times to contradictions, rivalries, factionalisms and fragmentation that he calls 'the dark side of diversity and multiplicity' (ibid.).

The goals and strategies defined by the WSF process, including the challenge of developing interaction and 'translation' among different identity and issue-based movements, are all too familiar to the Latin American and Caribbean feminist movement's work in its *encuentros*. The WSF has provided feminists with a new global arena for the exploration of its efforts to promote counter-hegemonic social and cultural transformation. The rise of the WSF also coincided with global feminist recognition that their coordination and advocacy at the UN level '...had yielded meagre results in all

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<sup>83</sup> Smith connects the origins of the WSF specifically to the 1996 First Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, hosted by the Zapatista indigenous peasant movement in Chiapas, southern Mexico, and the second *Encuentro* in 1997 in Spain.

but the most palatable issues of the feminist agenda' (Alvarez et al 2004: 199). Consequently, many feminists from around the world chose to be part of the WSF process from the beginning, participating in the International Council and organizing workshops, high profile spaces and marches at all the regional and global Forums.

An important link between regional feminist movements and the WSF has been the 'Feminist Dialogues', a new and informal coordination of networks and organizations funded by the Ford Foundation that is attempting to move global feminist coordination beyond the corridors of the United Nations. In 2003, in Mumbai, global feminist participation in the World Social Forum became more coordinated with the creation of the Feminist Dialogues, committed to the political project of global feminist movement-building, '...even if the understanding of movements is fluid, dispersed, and full of diversities and contradictions'.<sup>84</sup> The Feminist Dialogues process is managed by a Coordinating Group which is also responsible for planning, managing and evaluating a three day Forum prior to and at the same location as the bi-annual WSF. One-third of the twelve members of the Coordinating Group are Latin American and Caribbean networks, including three key members of the Campaign's Regional Alliance: CLADEM (with Roxana Vasquez), The Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (REDLAC) and the *Marcosur* Feminist Articulation (AFM) represented by Virginia Vargas, from Flora Tristán, Peru.<sup>85</sup>

Virginia Vargas has also provided an important link between the Campaign and the WSF, as a member of the International Council from its inception. In my interview with her in Lima in 2006, Virginia provided a historical perspective on the inclusion of feminism and sexuality in the WSF process since 2001:

First of all, it has been a battle for us to be recognized from the start as feminists but then after we made progress, we began to open up space for

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<sup>84</sup> 'Feminist Dialogues 2007. Transforming Democracy: Feminist Visions and Strategies', page 10. This report is available on the Feminist Dialogues' website: [www.feministdialogues.isiswomen.org](http://www.feministdialogues.isiswomen.org).

<sup>85</sup> The other member is the Network of Popular Education Between Latin American and Caribbean Women (REPEM), based in Uruguay.

others, such as the sexual diversity movement that first became visible in our 'Diversity Ship' (*Barco de la Diversidad*) in Porto Alegre in 2005.

Here Vargas is referring to one of the ships on the river in Porto Alegre, Brazil, that the AFM hired in order to visualize its campaign against fundamentalisms, generate new debates and approaches on WSF issues, and to provide a space for "diverse" diversities. The "Diversity Ship" was located close to the press centre, and was decorated with symbols and slogans of the feminist regional campaign: "Your mouth, fundamental against fundamentalisms". Several workshops of different groups, debates, parties and a press conference took place there, including on the topic of sexual diversity.<sup>86</sup>

This feminist space was just one of the initiatives supported by the Feminist Dialogues, which describes its objective as:

..the development a profound critique of democracy that will enable its transformation and radicalisation, in collaboration and partnership with other social movements. Implicit [in this] is the democratization of feminist and social movements themselves... This self-reflexive space has provided us, feminists, an opportunity to work on a transnational movements level and creatively and radically address the backlash and challenges to feminisms that have also grown exponentially with the rise and dominance of neo-liberal capitalism and the consolidation of ethnic nationalist and of religious fundamentalist movements and nation states.<sup>87</sup>

Two of the central issues subject to various expressions of the 'backlash' against feminist politics in global arenas in the 1990s have been sexuality and sexual rights. As such they have been at the heart of the Feminist Dialogues agenda at each of its three pre-WSF global events up to and including in Nairobi in 2007. As I did not attend the first two, in Mumbai and Porto Alegre, my first direct experience of the Feminist Dialogues was in Nairobi. I

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<sup>86</sup> For further details see: [www.cotidianomujer.org.uy/2005/41p20.htm](http://www.cotidianomujer.org.uy/2005/41p20.htm). Accessed on 10.3.2008.

<sup>87</sup> Rajjeli Nicole, p. 3, Editorial in *Women in Action*, No.1, 2007: *Radicalising Democracies: Feminist Dialogues and the World Social Forum 2007*. Published by ISIS International, one of the members of the Feminist Dialogues Coordinating Group.

was originally accepted as one participant among approximately 250 on the basis of my PhD research at the LSE, but at the last minute I also took on the role of official interpreter for all the plenary and several group debates. The theme of Feminist Dialogues event in Nairobi was ‘Transforming Democracy: Feminist Visions and Strategies’.

The previous strength of presence of Latin American and Asian feminists was complemented for the first time in Kenya by African feminists, who presented a report of their first African Feminist Forum (AFF) held in 2006. In Nairobi they launched their Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, which includes in its list of ‘Individual Ethics’: ‘Freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation’.<sup>88</sup>

During the three days of the conference, the participants spoke openly of the diversity of sexualities and gender identities present, and the need to understand the space not as one where lesbians, bisexuals and female to male transgender people are welcomed by the conforming majority but where sexual and gender diversity are the norm. Preference was given to the concepts of sexuality, gender, diversity and rights, with little specific reference to lesbian, bisexual or transgender rights. The shift away from lesbian, bisexual and trans identities was reflected in the ‘Concept Note on Feminist Perspectives on Radical Democracy’ prepared by the Coordinating Group just before the event. The document proposed that the notion of citizenship need to be reconstructed for a radical democracy:

We need to see citizenship as not merely a legal identity but also as an expression of affinity with others. What happens when citizenship is understood to mean the common political identity of a wide range of people engaged in diverse activities and movements? This group of citizens are bound together by a shared recognition of a set of ethical and political values that are reached through democratic debates and temporal

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<sup>88</sup> For full details of the AFF and its Charter of Principles, see L. Muthoni Wanyeki, 2007: *The African Feminist Forum: Beginnings*. Available at [www.isiswomen.org](http://www.isiswomen.org).

convergences at various historical points. This allows for both a plurality of allegiances and for the respect of individual liberties.<sup>89</sup>

In this statement, it is clear that the Feminist Dialogues process is seeking to overcome the limits of pluralism experienced, for example, in the Latin American and Caribbean regional *encuentros* in the 1980s and 90s, where different, marginalized identity groups participated, but where their subjectivities and related rights did not influence the content of dominant discourse and advocacy strategies. The document then connects these reflections on citizenship with the notions of subjectivity and sexuality:

We seek to create a democracy that recovers subjectivity as part of the transformation of social relations, with multiple sites that enrich emancipatory democratic agendas. One of the challenges of radical democracy is to understand the relationship between sexuality, production and reproduction as questions that are part of the symbolic and material dimensions of social relations of domination and exploitation.<sup>90</sup>

The growth of the Feminist Dialogues and the importance it gives to sexuality and reproduction has therefore provided the Campaign with an important location for its strategy to articulate with feminists at a global level, as well as with other social movements and NGOs within the World Social Forum process. Towards the end of 2006 the Campaign Regional Alliance decided that it was ready to formally present the Campaign at the WSF event in Nairobi in January 2007. Consequently the Second Manifesto of the Campaign was published in English as well as Spanish, as a foundation for this new global site and phase in its consultation process. In Nairobi, Roxana Vasquez highlighted the importance of key individuals at this initial stage of moving beyond Latin American and Caribbean regional feminism:

The Feminist Dialogues have really helped us identify people like Muthoni [Wanyeki, from Kenya], and keep in touch with Sunila [Abeysekera, from

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<sup>89</sup> Final Concept Note on Radical Democracy, 13 January 2007:p.2: 3rd International Feminist Dialogues, 17 – 19 January 2007, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.: 4.

Sri Lanka] who we knew from before. There are others, such as Candido Grzybowski and Boaventura de Sousa Santos from the International Council too, thanks to Gina [Vargas] who has been a key contact for the Campaign in relation to the WSF (Roxana Vasquez, Peru).

The combination of the Feminist Dialogues in general and these key contacts provided the opportunity for Roxana and other members of the Regional Alliance, from IGLHRC, to raise awareness about the seminar on the Campaign they had planned for the WSF event itself. The Campaign was not the topic of any specific debate in the Feminist Dialogues, but the seminar at the WSF was well advertised throughout the three days of the Dialogues. As Cecilia Olea pointed out to me in Nairobi, the Feminist Dialogues have also influenced the content of the Campaign's discourse, and the interest in connecting with social movements not working on sexuality or reproduction:

Since the second WSF those of us in the Campaign have debated and analysed sexual rights and reproductive rights in more depth, because we think that these are the topics that have least entered the dialogues with other social movements. First we debated among ourselves, and then we began to link it to what we call the global democratic agenda – the construction of new meanings for social co-existence the creation of a connection between sexual rights, reproductive rights and the construction of radical democracy (Cecilia Olea, Peru).

Connecting with Asian and African feminist movements within the Feminist Dialogues in Nairobi consequently proved very productive for the Campaign. The seminar planned for the WSF was based on the idea of a panel of guest speakers, led by Virginia Vargas for the Campaign, who would provide their responses to the second Manifesto, from their different perspectives. Sunila Abeysekera and Muthoni Wanyeki agreed to respond from Asian and African feminist perspectives, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos from the perspective of the WSF International Council. Marcelo Ferreyra from IGLHRC and I agreed to do the interpreting between Spanish and English, to ensure that language translation was not a barrier to the dissemination and consultation process.



Dealing with the logistics of setting up the seminar in the WSF event, however, proved highly problematic. On arrival in Nairobi, Roxana informed me that although the Campaign had registered and received approval for the seminar before leaving Peru, she had received no information about the date, time and location of the space allocated by the Kenyan Coordinating Committee. During the Feminist Dialogues, the Committee failed to resolve the problem, until the day before the WSF opening ceremony. The Campaign was then allocated a time on the first day of the WSF, which gave the organizers almost no time to publicize the seminar beyond the Feminist Dialogues. Visiting the stadium the night before and sticking up improvised posters advertising the seminar was the only option available for Roxana and a group of helpers. Moreover, the WSF opened with very few timetables printed and available to the participants, a problem that continued into the first day, meaning that the majority of participants had no idea of the content, time and location of any of the workshops planned for the first day. However, as it turned out, this had no effect on the Campaign's seminar, since when the timetables were finally distributed, details of the seminar were not included.

Consequently, once the seminar began, it was clear that the audience comprised almost exclusively representatives of the Feminist Dialogues, due to the interest created during its pre-WSF conference. Logistical problems did not end there, however, since the seminar was allocated to an evening slot in a zone of the main sports pavilion without any electricity for lighting or microphones. The audience of approximately 50 people stayed, however, to the very end, with a few candles lit for the panel and the rest in darkness, and the speakers and interpreters relying on a battery-powered microphone obtained half way through the three hour event.

It is impossible to ascertain if the difficulties encountered by the Campaign coordinators were due purely to the administrative limitations of the Kenyan Coordinating Committee, or if the subject of the seminar was being marginalized. However, what became clear throughout the rest of the four days of the Forum was that conservative church-based groups had been accepted to participate in the Forum, against the wishes of the International Council. Moreover, they clearly had a good level of resources, with tents and generators for their lighting and amplifiers. On the final day of the Forum,

they also carried out a march against abortion within the main WSF site with full permission of the national Coordinating Committee.

The LGBT movement faced similar logistical difficulties at the start, having registered in advance and then finding that their allocated space had failed to materialize, as the ILGA representative reported:

But we had no tent! The space reserved by the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) was nowhere to be found! Was it intentional? There was no time for controversy this Sunday – the first hectic day of the Forum: we’d squat in the first empty tent we could find! (Stephen Barris, ILGA).<sup>91</sup>

In contrast, however, to the beleaguered efforts of the Campaign to raise the profile of sexual rights and reproductive rights in the main WSF event, the global LGBT movement increased its profile considerably compared to previous WSF global forums. Financial support was provided by ILGA, IGLHRC and Hivos, and some of their key LGBT rights staff were present throughout, supporting the various small and newly formed LGBT groups in Kenya that joined forces for the WSF and created the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK). They set up the spacious ‘Q spot’ tent, which became the focal point for anyone in the forum interested in debating sexuality-related issues. In the absence of a ‘women’s tent’ at the Forum, the Campaign coordinators, including two representatives from IGLHRC, negotiated to carry out a workshop in the Q Spot tent which gained an audience of about one hundred, many of whom were involved or interested in the LGBT movement. This growing coordination between the Campaign and its feminist supporters, and the LGBT activists, led to their joint participation in the Women’s Rally on the last day. The rally brought together over 300 people including many of the members and supporters of GALCK with their banners about LGBT rights. Sexual and reproductive rights and LGBT rights became the central themes of the rally and the Campaign gained a lot of profile with this event. The feminist movement clearly strengthened its

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<sup>91</sup> The ILGA report of the WSF is available on the ILGA website: [http://www.ilga.org/news\\_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileCategory=50&ZoneID=2&FileID=1030](http://www.ilga.org/news_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileCategory=50&ZoneID=2&FileID=1030)

alliance with the LGBT movement in a global space, while, as Roxana Vasquez noted afterwards, other social movements were still difficult to engage:

In terms of the World Social Forum, a lot of the social movements, whether strong or fragile, always have their respective demands. Each of them is looking out from its own window and apart from that, each one is struggling for visibility and competing for leadership, including feminism. With regard to the WSF, the discourses of the different social movements that are committed to human rights are very open, but in practice they have a heteronormative focus (Roxana Vásquez, Peru).

As the only movement addressing questions of sexuality and rights, the LGBT movement continues to be the most accessible movement for feminist alliance-building. Cecilia Olea confirmed that she considered the Campaign a positive step forward for the feminist movement, as it brought lesbian activists back into feminist debates:

One important aspect of our work on sexuality with the Campaign is what I would call the 'human contact'. In the '80s at the regional and Peruvian level it was very important to have contact with lesbians, and their groups. They ran workshops for the feminists in Peru about our prejudices and resistances which really helped us. These were based on ethical principles, and it really helped explore feelings, interpersonal relations as well as the social and political dimensions of thinking beyond heteronormativity. I think that in the 90s feminism stopped asking itself questions about lesbianism, so in the new millennium it has been very important to recuperate a public presence of organized lesbians who have debated with and questioned feminists (Cecilia Olea, Peru).

The strategies and activities of the Campaign, which have strengthened the alliance between the feminist and LGBT movements at national, regional and global levels, have yet to be analysed in terms of the effects of this alliance. However, it is clear that questions of sexuality in the Campaign become automatically connected with lesbian activists and rights, and LGBT discourse

more generally. The absence of alliances with indigenous, Afro-Latin American, trade union, peasant or women's community-based movements, results in an absence of dialogue on sexuality or gender identity that could address some of the racial, ethnic, cultural and class differences that evade feminist cultural politics of sexuality to date.

### *Conclusions*

The Latin American and Caribbean regional feminist movement, in contrast to specific national movements such as the Peruvian, which has framed the main case studies in this thesis, has provided a greater space for lesbian activists to continue their involvement with feminist debates and political action. Despite the heteronormative emphasis of the regional movement's global advocacy phase in the 1990s, the regional *encuentros* have played an important role in keeping lesbian sexuality visible in feminist spaces, and, over the years, in reducing feminist resistance to this visibility. This increasingly legitimate lesbian presence has not, however, provided a different perspective on the principal discourse and political practice of the movement, for example on questions of violence against women, globalization and poverty, popular education or indigenous or Afro-Latin American women's rights.

Yet on the topics of sexual and reproductive rights, the regional movement's creation of the Campaign for an Inter-American Convention represents, for the first time, a move to overcome the heteronormativity of feminist analysis and practice. Specifically, 'sexuality' has for the first time entered into both sexual and reproductive discourse. This shift has relied principally on the Campaign's concerted efforts to build an alliance with, and promote the participation of, the LGBT movement at national, regional and global levels, such as the National and Regional Alliances and the World Social Forum. Moreover, the new presence of male to female trans activists in the 2005 regional *encuentro* has combined with the Campaign's connection with broader LGBT rights discourse (as opposed to the narrower concept of lesbian rights), leading to the unprecedented incorporation of transgender subjectivities and the notion of female masculinity into sexual and reproductive rights discourse.

A conscious effort to overcome the heteronormative approach to feminist notions of sexual and reproductive rights has taken a long time to materialize. It represents a crucial step forward in a discursive field that has historically prioritized the situation of women in the region facing economic hardship and racial, ethnic and cultural marginalization. The Campaign has also taken the initiative to adjust, rather than simply adopt, LGBT discourse by introducing and placing emphasis on the more open concepts of sexual diversity and gender diversity, representing a desire to move beyond a fixed sexual and identity-based politics. However, beyond the Second Manifesto text, in the political spaces of the Regional and National Alliances and the World Social Forum, LGBT identities, groups and individuals are dominating discourse on the connections between sexuality, gender identity, and sexual and reproductive rights. Exploring meanings of sexuality and gender identity with women from the urban popular sectors, or indigenous, peasant or Afro-Latin American movements has yet to occur. Until it does, the likelihood is that assumptions that sexuality and sexual diversity mean homosexuality, and that gender diversity relates to the (male to female) transvestite subject so visible in popular culture in the region, will be reinforced. Moreover, questions of the racial, ethnic, cultural and class-based diversity of sexuality and gender identity in the region remain to be explored by the Campaign.

Consequently, for women the urban, modern, economically self-sufficient lesbian subject of rights continues to symbolize the only alternative to a life of secrecy, silence and discrimination. The heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, a fixed notion of sexuality, and female masculinity remain unexamined. These understandings of sexuality and gender present a major challenge for a future cultural politics of sexuality and gender in the Latin American and Caribbean feminist movement. This is particularly urgent since from its inception the movement committed itself to incorporate into its knowledge and practice the class, racial, ethnic and cultural differences that have historically divided people throughout the region.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how the meanings of sexuality have changed over time for Peruvian and Latin American feminist movements and as they have travelled through different discursive fields and sites of action. Specifically, I have investigated the work of feminist NGOs in Peru, and the connections they have made between sexuality and women from the popular sectors, state policies, international development policies and agencies, the regional feminist movement and other social movements at national, regional and global levels. My main aim has been to explore the reasons for, and the effects of, the changing meanings of sexuality, taking into particular consideration the apparent disconnection in feminist discourse between same-sex sexuality and women from the popular sectors. Excavating and tracing the travels of the concept of sexuality in feminist movements has revealed that sexuality has been constructed in Peru and regionally within women's rights frameworks, principally in the fields of sexual rights and health, and sexuality and women's human rights (see also Correa et al. 2008: 4).

As I have outlined in Chapter Two, the location of sexual rights within the field of health, population and development has resulted from the concept's emergence from global feminist debates and constructions of women's reproductive health and rights that gained prominence during the UN conferences in Cairo and Beijing in the mid-1990s. As Petchesky (2000: 81) notes, at the dawn of the new millennium, sexual rights language was, however, 'still infantile, (if not embryonic)'. Feminists' theoretical constructions of sexual rights, exemplified by the work of Correa and Petchesky (1994), emerged from previous reproductive and sexual health discourse's central concerns with women's lives in the context of poverty, development, human rights and differences among women. They emphasized sexual rights as both personal and social and as dependent on women's economic development, political empowerment and sense of entitlement. Correa and Petchesky (1994: 107) also proposed that sexual rights should incorporate the principle of diversity based on a respect for differences among

women, including sexual orientation, and the abolition of gender, class, racial and ethnic injustice.

These conceptual frameworks combine to provide the foundation for sexual rights work that makes a direct connection between notions of sexual orientation and gender identity and women from the popular sectors. As my ethnography of Flora Tristán's programme on sexual rights and health citizenship in Lima has revealed, however, neither the institutional definition of sexual rights, nor the training programmes and dialogue with women from Lima's *conos*, has discussed or theorized sexuality *per se*. Terms invoking notions of same-sex sexuality, such as sexual orientation, have been occasionally and nominally introduced into Flora Tristán's official advocacy documents and workshops with women health promoters by a small number of individuals. Debates on sexual rights with health promoters in Lima have thus not entirely excluded references to same-sex sexuality, but the occasional addition of sexual orientation has not yet resulted in an examination of the heteronormative assumptions of feminist sexual rights discourse. These assumptions are reinforced by a focus on activities with health promoters that prioritize domestic and sexual violence and reproductive health and rights, topics that are founded on the aim of overcoming problems in heterosexual relations faced by women in the *conos*, framed by the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Flora Tristán's sexual rights programme, with its focus on 'health citizenship' and political participation, has also emphasized the importance of training health promoters to influence state policy-making in the fields of women's health and rights. This policy advocacy approach connects low-income local community contexts with broader national, regional and global feminist strategies to influence United Nations international policies and state implementation of the agreements signed in Cairo and Beijing pertaining to women's reproductive and sexual health. However, the United Nations' explicit refusal to include references to same-sex sexuality in these fields has consequently reinforced the heteronormative framing of sexual rights by Flora Tristán at the level of local communities and the popular sectors.

As my interviews with women health promoters in Lima's *conos* revealed in Chapter Four, questions of same-sex sexuality and gender

identity in the daily lives of women from the popular sectors very quickly emerge when the concept of sexuality is explicitly introduced into discourse. These discussions produced examples of the health promoters' varied experiences and knowledge of women's same-sex sexuality and female masculinity in their own families, neighbourhoods and community organizations. Their narratives connected predominantly with examples of women's problems, as well as their own interest in contributing to overcoming them. The health promoters' understandings of sexuality reproduced dominant national constructions of a heterosexual/lesbian binary opposition, but they also expressed their understanding of the possibility that a woman's sexuality could change over time. They understood from their connections with Flora Tristán and broader NGO networks in Lima that the term '*lesbiana*' was the new and acceptable identity for women, compared with the previous and 'traditional' identities *machona* and *marimacha* that have been historically dominant in the *conos*, predominantly in a pejorative sense. Notably, none of the women in the community organizations referred to *chitos*, underlining the lack of popular knowledge of this term chosen by women in the *conos* who transgress acceptable expressions of female masculinity as well as heterosexual norms.

Most notably, the health promoters and staff of Flora Tristán, including the very few who identified as gay and lesbian, were unable to make any connection between women's same-sex sexuality and their work on sexual or reproductive health and rights. This disconnection at local community and state policy advocacy levels is mirrored by the international agencies that fund feminist NGO programmes on sexual and reproductive rights. Similar to feminist NGOs in Peru, sexual rights policies and programmes among international NGOs have been minimal compared to those of reproductive health. Where they have existed, in the case of Ford Foundation or DFID, for example, sexual rights have also been founded on references to reproductive and sexual health and gender equality, without a discussion of sexuality or references to same-sex sexuality in any form. The underlying connection between sexual rights, poverty, women's health and gender equality, where at least the woman is assumed to be heterosexual, remains unquestioned and unexamined.



By contrast, the new discourse emerging from the regional Campaign for a Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights is striking. The Campaign's introduction of sexual and gender diversity with reference to sexual and reproductive rights represents a major shift in feminist notions of both sexuality and reproduction. The Campaign represents the first conscious step by the regional feminist movement towards challenging its own heteronormative meanings of sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, by introducing the notions of diversity and flexible sexualities and genders, the Regional Alliance has made a conscious choice to overcome binary and fixed notions of sexuality and gender. This shift to non-dichotomous thinking contrasts with the regional and national LGBT movements' discourse on LGBT rights and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The recent discursive shift towards sexual and gender diversity has been influenced in part by the development of debates on future political strategies of the regional feminist movement during its *encuentros*. In 1999 the decision was to complement the previous decade's focus on national and global policy advocacy with a commitment to 'innovative forms of feminist cultural politics'. By 2005, the *encuentro* in Brazil was highlighting 'diversity as utopia and complexity' (similar, notably, to the Brazil *encuentro* twenty years earlier) and voting in favour of the participation of male to female trans in future *encuentros*.

The growing emphasis on cultural politics and the concept of diversity in the regional feminist movement since the new millennium has also been directly influenced by the active involvement of regional network representatives, such as Virginia Vargas, in the development and coordination of the World Social Forum (WSF) process. This participation became more structured in 2003 when the 'Feminist Dialogues' process was established to strategize global feminist contributions to the WSF global and regional events. As I have outlined in Chapter Seven, diversity, along with plurality, is one of the central concepts of the WSF Charter of Principles, in recognition of the wide range of social movements/NGOs/networks, identities and issues that come together in the process. Given that the production of the Campaign's Second Manifesto was led by Virginia Vargas and one of the three coordinators of the Campaign, Regina Soares from Brazil, it is of little

surprise that diversity was the principle term of choice with reference to both sexuality and gender. In the final section of this chapter I explore some of the challenges that this discursive shift presents for the Campaign and the participants of the Latin America regional and national feminist movements in general.

In contrast to sexual rights in the field of women's health, Chapters Four and Five have demonstrated how a focus on human rights and feminism produces opportunities to introduce terms related to same-sex sexuality and women. Flora Tristán's recent expression of this connection has included the (albeit initial) documentation of the sanctioning of sexual relations between women in Amazonian indigenous customary law in Peru. This study was carried out by Susel Paredes in the Human Rights Programme, who was also a human rights lawyer in the LGBT movement. On a broader institutional level, Flora Tristán has also continued its long-term commitment to a position of solidarity with human rights and the LGBT movement in Peru.

Meanwhile Demus's institutional identity as a feminist human rights NGO, combined with having a Director actively involved in the LGBT movement supported by members of the Board, has enabled it to engage more proactively than Flora Tristán with the LGBT movement with its focus on human rights issues and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Paradoxically, however, the adoption of LGBT movement discourse and emphasis on legal and policy mechanisms has produced institutional dynamics that have reinforced the heteronormative aspects of Demus's core work on women's human rights. This is evident in the absence of references to same-sex sexuality in its national campaigns against violence against women, femicide, and sexist advertising in the media. It is also particularly tangible in Demus's training programmes on women's rights and community organization strengthening with women from the popular sectors that only once introduced a discussion on lesbian sexuality within a broader debate on sexuality and human rights. Here it became clear that an institutional agreement on a position of solidarity with the LGBT movement did not include an agreement among staff that lesbian rights should be integrated into their work on sexuality and rights with women from the popular sectors. This

institutional ambivalence is reinforced by staff members' disagreements about the idea of integrating discourse on lesbian sexuality into ongoing dialogue with women's community organizations. It also reflects the notion among many that lesbian issues are unimportant or irrelevant in work with women from the popular sectors and only appropriate in LGBT sites and as separate projects. At the time of my fieldwork in Peru this fragmented, hierarchical approach to sexuality and sexual identities in women's rights work prevailed in Demus due to the lack of agreement among the staff and the consequent lack of internal exploration and analysis of women's sexuality in Demus's core work.

As a consequence of these constraints and disconnections, the 'lesbian subject' constructed by Demus as a subject of visibility and rights inadvertently reinforces the notion of a minority middle or upper class, modern, urban and Westernized subject that has little resonance with the lives of the vast majority of urban and rural women who participate in Demus's programmes. This symbolic lesbian subject then reinforces doubts about the relevance of debating lesbian rights with women from the popular sectors, especially when the latter remain silent on expressions of same-sex sexuality in their dialogue with NGOs. As I have shown in Chapters Two and Six, these connections and blockages between sexuality and women's human rights have been equally evident in international agencies that have begun to take on LGBT rights as human rights in development. Their funding privileges LGBT rights activities that in Peru, for example, focus on men and male to female trans and that have yet to recuperate the very early lesbian consciousness-raising groups' connections with women in the *conos* of the 1980s.

Consequently, women leaders such as Carmen conceive of issues connected with their own or others' same-sex sexuality as private, personal and separate from their public, political involvement in community organizations and feminist NGOs. Dialogue, mutual learning and the provision of support and advice therefore becomes impossible with women such as Carmen, Julia, Maria, Charo, Ceci, women identifying as *chito*, or any other women resisting heterosexual and gender identity norms. The meanings of sexuality, identity categories and female masculinity constructed by women in contexts such as the *conos* therefore remain known only within their

borders, unable as yet to permeate and influence feminist, LGBT and international development thought.

On the basis of the findings of my research, I propose that it is important to incorporate studies of the construction and effects of meaning-making of social movements into the growing multidisciplinary field of transnational sexuality studies. My focus on feminist movements, connected with international development discourse and funding, is particularly pertinent because it provides insights into influences on cultural constructions of women's sexuality and gender identities in the South that have received relatively little exploration and analysis compared to those of men and male to female trans subjects (Lind and Share 2003; Boellstorff 2007). Moreover, the socialist foundation of feminism of Peru and the Latin America region has ensured a direct connection with women from the popular sectors who represent the subject of least academic and political analysis to date (Wekker 1999), particularly in their relationship to social movements. The circulation of meanings of sexuality and gender identity produced by feminist movements also represents an important contribution to the effects of globalization processes on women in the South that has been absent from feminist transnational theories and ethnographic studies of sexuality to date (cf. Alexander 1994; Grewal and Kaplan 2001; Wekker 2006; Rofel 2007).

Post-structuralist theories of sexuality in anthropology and other fields of cross-cultural, transnational scholarship have emphasized that meanings of sexuality and gender are historically and culturally contingent (Moore 1994; Parker 1998; Vance 1999). It is evident from my study of Peruvian and Latin American regional feminist movement discourse that their constructions of women's sexuality and gender identity have changed over time and according to the cultural contexts of their cultural politics and policy advocacy. Key to these changes are the different sites and discursive fields of knowledge production and action, and the intersections of sexuality with feminist notions of gender, class, race, ethnicity and culture. Constructions of sexual rights and lesbian rights' languages connected to policy advocacy have foreclosed the theorization of sexuality as a concept, reproducing dichotomous, essentialist and exclusionary meanings of (hetero)sexual and lesbian sexualities and gender identities. Outside these sites of state and international policy-making,

however, the regional feminist movement is beginning to address this constraint in more democratic and open spaces such as its own *encuentros* and the World Social Forum. Here the movement has the opportunity to explore a more critical analysis of sexuality in its own and global historical and cultural contexts, and aspire to '*lo deseable*' (their ideal) of cultural and social transformation without the restriction or fear of fundamentalist intolerance or 'sexuality-baiting' (Rothschild 2005: 41). I am not advocating here the abandonment of a rights-based discourse and politics of sexuality and gender. I suggest, however, that an explicit theorization of sexuality could provide an important foundation to future, as yet unknown, constructions of sexuality-related rights that could address the challenge of overcoming the exclusionary effects of their current normative meanings in the fields of both health and human rights, and beyond.

In this context, it has been important to incorporate Foucault's (1990) understanding that meanings in discourse are complex, unstable, and often most powerful in their effects when they are concealed or when they produce silences. After an initial period of critiques of compulsory heterosexuality and promotion of lesbian identity and community-building in the 1980s, references to sexuality have been notably absent from feminist rights discourse with, and in relation to, women from the popular sectors. This invisibility and silence, reinforced by similar phenomena in international development discourse and funding, has contributed to the powerful influence of pre-theoretical commitments and normative assumptions of sexuality that have circulated below the surface of discourse and produced unintended effects (cf. Ferguson 1990).

The need to bring to light the silences and absences of sexuality in the circulation of local and global feminist discourse also influenced my methodological choice to trace the interconnections of changing meanings of sexuality-related concepts across different sites. In her study of women's local and global networking for the Beijing Conference on Women, Riles's (2001: 20) proposal to 'channel attention' through erasing detail and providing a 'thin' description, rather than attempting to fully describe feminist discourse and practice, has been particularly appropriate for this research. However, I consider that to have followed Riles's selection of her research subjects'

artefacts and aesthetics as the data and tools of analysis would not have provided me with the means to excavate the hidden assumptions and unintentional effects of meanings of sexuality produced by feminist movements. More important, in this sense, has been my engagement with feminist epistemological commitments to incorporate an exploration of difference, intersectionality and the ways in which sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and class in post-colonial contexts are mutually constitutive. As Ong (1999: 17) asserts, transnational processes are situated cultural practices. Thus, the cultural logics of Peruvian feminist discourse on sexuality are likely to differ from those of Brazil or Jamaica, for example. On this premise I examined, in Chapter Three, the displacement of the concept of race in Peru by that of social class, with culture and ethnicity understood to refer only to the Amazon region. This contributed to an understanding of the racial, ethnic and cultural pre-theoretical commitments of feminist activists from predominantly modern, middle class Lima. The absence of attention to racial, ethnic and cultural differences, female masculinities, traditions and modernities, in constructions of sexuality in their dialogues with women from the popular sectors can be understood in light of the national context and history. The consequent assumption in feminist NGOs is that a 'poor' woman of Indian descent in the *conos*, married to or separated from a man, living with her with children and perhaps other family members, could only be heterosexual and have no interest in 'lesbian' issues and related problems. These assumptions inform and are reinforced, moreover, by the NGOs close connection to international development discourse. It remains to be seen if Peruvian feminists' new regional and global spaces and cultures can shift these notions and create greater dialogue and reflection.

As I have noted above, the regional feminist movement's latest phase of giving equal priority to promoting cultural transformation and policy change has enabled it to return to Appadurai's (2004) notion of social movements' 'capacity to aspire'. For the first time sexuality and gender identity have recently become the subject of critical reflection. Above I have outline some of the more positive consequences of this change in regional feminist language and political strategies. Notably, the Campaign represents a radical shift in feminist discourse on sexuality and gender compared to that of the

period of United Nations advocacy in the 1990s documented by Alvarez (2000; 2002) and Riles (2001). In this period women's networking and attention to UN documents and frameworks took them towards only 'achievable' goals within sexual and gender normative frameworks, leaving them disconnected from questions of 'what it means to be female' and the possibilities for a utopian feminist project (Riles 2001: 174).

However, the findings of my research on international development agencies in the UK have shown that the introduction of the term 'diversity' has not been enough in itself to overcome the agencies' repeated disconnections with women from the popular sectors who do not conform to sexual and gender norms. The recent introduction of diversity into staff employment policies, described in Chapter Six, have still depended on unexamined notions of sexuality and identity categories. Diversity in this context is automatically translated into sexual orientation and LGBT people, considered separate from and competing with the other categories of women, ethnic minorities, black people and the disabled. When diversity occasionally enters into discourse in the context of international development, for example in Oxfam, it has yet to name sexuality, referring only to women, ethnic, cultural and 'other groups'. As Ahmed (2007: 235) notes, the language of diversity runs the risk of being deployed strategically by practitioners as a solution to 'equity fatigue', thus becoming detached from histories of struggles for equality. The way in which diversity gets taken up depends on how this is done, as well as who does it (*ibid.*: 254). Little will change if direct attention is not given to overcoming the fragmentation, differences and competition between the categories named within diversity.

In the case of the Campaign and regional feminism more generally, there is therefore a need to theorize sexuality, gender and diversity with reference to historical and cultural contexts in order to understand how and why meanings of sexuality, femininity and masculinity are constructed and what effects they produce. Dominant pre-theoretical commitments about sexuality and gender need to be examined, as well as those of social movements and development agencies. An intersectional analysis provides the potential for feminists to examine the relationship between sexuality and gender identity and women from the popular sectors for whom questions of racial hybridity and economic

survival are central to their subjectivity, experiences and agency. This approach goes beyond the notion of 'queering' development and rights-based work with women at the grassroots, especially when the meaning of queer fails to examine the ways in which sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class and questions of modernity are mutually constitutive. If we take seriously Appadurai's (2004: 70) concern for the capacity of social movements to debate, contest, inquire and participate critically in the context of poverty and exclusion, then this is the challenge facing Latin American national and regional feminist movements' future examinations of the meanings of sexuality and gender. Modern, urban, economically and racially privileged notions of women's sexuality and gender identity would then cease to represent the norm of feminist discourse and shift to being one cultural perspective among many in debates in the context of poverty and exclusion. As Moore (2007: 311) argues, culture is not the opposite of modernity, globalization and capitalism, but constitutive of them. Moreover, culture is always politics, and as such culture can never be self-evident, and should always be open to radical interrogation and interpretation (ibid.).

Moving into a new phase of cultural politics, away from the constraining frameworks of major international policy circles such as the United Nations, also provides an opportunity for the regional and national feminist movements to construct cultural debates with other social movements, particularly those that incorporate questions of poverty and social exclusion. They could include the women's community organizations I encountered in the *conos* of Lima, for example, or the indigenous, peasant and other rural movements that may all produce different cultural meanings and practices of sexuality and gender, and that are already connected to the feminist movement by other discursive fields. These debates go beyond the call by Correa, Petchesky and Parker (2008: 224) for political solidarity in order to overcome dichotomous thinking in sexual rights. As we have seen with Peruvian feminist relationships to the LGBT movement as discussed in this thesis, when solidarity means an unquestioning support for the others' discourse and adding it unmodified, fragmented and separate to one's own, the consequences can be exclusionary and detrimental to relationships between women across class, racial and cultural divides. De Sousa Santos's (2005: 16) concern about this 'dark side of



diversity and multiplicity' leads him to suggest that social movements need to recognize that all cultures are incomplete and can therefore be enriched by dialogue and confrontation with other cultures through the work of translation. As Spivak (1993: 199) argues, 'an exceeding and expanding translation is possible'. Moreover, in addition to exploring a dialogue with other social movements, the Campaign's inclusion of the contribution of academic scholars in law could also be expanded to include scholars of sexuality in the fields of Latin American anthropology and history and of scholars in cultural, post-colonial and development studies, for example. Equally important, however, are the contributions of individuals located outside academia, and of groups, movements or networks as yet invisible in representations of Latin American sexuality. As Moore (2004) proposes, these partial connections and the construction of composite theories could therefore contribute to a greater understanding of the ambiguity and productive tensions between universal claims and specific historical contexts. Most importantly, however, the knowledge, agency and capacity to aspire of women such as Julia, Maria, Carmen, Charo, and unquantifiable others in Peru and the region represent potential contributions to feminist meanings of sexuality and gender that should remain unintelligible no longer.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Interviews carried out in Peru. UK and Kenya:**

#### **Flora Tristán**

Virginia Vargas 9.6.06

Paul Flores 22.2.06

Paul Flores 19.7.06

Susel Paredes 19.4.06

Susel Paredes 28.5.06

Susel Paredes 17.6.06

Susel Paredes 15.7.06

Cecilia Olea 19.7.06

#### **Demus**

Maria Ysabel Cedano 15.12.05

Maria Ysabel Cedano 15.2.06

Maria Ysabel Cedano 10.3.06

Romy Garcia and Tesania Velasquez 24.1.06

Romy Garcia 20.6.06

Romy Garcia 4.7.06

Romy Garcia in London

Staff group discussion 18.7.06

#### **Lima settlements (*Conos*)**

Julia and Maria: 31.3.06

Julia and Maria 5.4.06

Julia and Maria 9.7.06

Charo 19.5.06

Flora 8.7.06

Carmen 10.7.06

Carmen 14.7.06

Federation of *Comedores* leaders 26.4.06

Federation of *Comedores* leaders 26.6.06

*Mesa Sexual and Reproductive Rights* 3.6.06

*Mesa Sexual and Reproductive Rights* 21.6.06

**Campaign for an Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights**

Roxana Vasquez 15.12.05

Roxana Vasquez 17.4.06

Roxana Vasquez 26.6.06

Roxana Vasquez and Cecilia Olea January 2007 at the World Social Forum

**LGBT Organizations**

MHOL Lesbian Unit 1.2.06

Violeta Barrientos , GALF member 11.4.06

Maribel Saldana, GALF Coordinator 7.6.06

**UK International Development Agencies**

Carmela, Peru Country Representative, Progressio 28.6.06

Marcelo, Project Officer, British Council Peru 20.5.06

Martin, Andes Regional Director, Oxfam GB 14.6.06

Agnes, Oxfam GB 19.10.06

Patricia, Oxfam GB 6.11.06

Anna, Womankind 26.10.06

Karen, Womankind 7.12.06

Mercedes, Gender Adviser, Christian Aid, 20. 9.06

James, Head of Policy Department, Christian Aid 16.11.06

Marina, Programme Manager, Christian Aid 17.10.06

Elizabeth, Social Development Adviser, DFID 20.11.06

Gerard Howe, Head of Equity and Rights Team, DFID 14.12.06

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