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Tuki Walmikuna¹: Quechua Women, Domestic Labor, and Life Hopes in Peru

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Abstract

This article discusses Quechua women, labor, and educational opportunity in Peru and explores the relationship between coloniality and violence, Quechua racialized labor and Spanish exploitation, and unequal access to formal schooling, which have impacted generations of Quechua women. Drawing from a larger narrative project with three generations of Quechua grandmothers, daughters, and granddaughters from the Andean highlands of Peru, the article revisits the Agrarian Reform Law era, foundational and

¹ The title of this article utilizes the Wanka Quechua variety found in Junín. Walmikuna (warmikuna in Quechua Collao) refers to women, and tuki is beautiful. The Cusco variety of Quechua is also used in this article as the project I describe works with both Quechua language varieties.

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gendered research gaining prominence through the 1970s, and offers insights regarding life hopes gained through newly emerging testimonies.

Keywords: Quechua women; Indigenous women and domestic labor; Quechua life stories

Introduction

I do not tell my story so people tell me, “you poor thing, look at everything that has happened to you,” but because the story of my childhood and youth is the story of many Indigenous women of my land. Many women, upon reading my story, will say, “That happened to me as well.” That is the reality of Indigenous women in Peru. (Supa Huamán, 2008, p. 21)

At the age of 14, my mother traveled from her Wanka Quechua agrarian community in the Andean highlands of Peru to work in the coastal capital of Lima as a *domestica*, domestic servant, which in the 1950s was the civil term for Indigenous girl children working for generally well-to-do families. Employers called the girls *cholas*, a derogatory term referring to highland *indios* (Indians, also derogatory) and *la muchacha* (the girl) or *mi muchacha* (my girl), reflecting their race and class and the subjects they became upon entry into employment. Living in the homes of their employers, if they were paid, room and board were deducted from a miniscule salary, and any remaining money was perhaps divided between savings and remittances sent home to their families in rural Indigenous communities. Formal schooling was not an option as they worked long hours, and Indigenous girls came to the city for servitude, not to enjoy the privilege of an education. In addition, out-of-school socialization as Quechua females in their communities was curtailed as they could rarely afford to travel home to the highlands. Thus, participation in Andean cultural practices like religious ceremonies and daily interactions with loved ones became limited. In the cities, they faced discrimination as markers of their Indigeneity, from their physiological features to clothing to Quechua language, popularly symbolized the ‘uncivilized’ and

‘underdeveloped.’ Furthermore, despite living in the city, they were expected to remain silent and hidden, to maintain their social status well beneath that of their employers who were members of the dominant Peruvian classes of Spanish descendants and new generations of other European immigrants.

I begin this article with former Peruvian Congresswoman Hilaria Supa Huamán’s opening lines from her autobiography, *Threads of My Life*, because she, like my mother is a member of the grandmother generation who left her community for a major city—in her case, Arequipa²—in order to work as a servant where she also experienced racism and multiple forms of abuse that were internalized and that continue to require physical and emotional healing. Today, as a daughter and an educational researcher, I find myself asking how these things transpired and why the systematic oppression of rural Quechua women is ongoing. I ask not disparagingly but with intent of understanding with Quechua women of different generations, how coloniality functions in relation to our labor and our dreams and what have been our responses over time as a collective. I also engage these questions in order to resist apathy and defeat because testimonies of relentless exploitation of Indigenous women are significant to social change; Indigenous women’s economic, social, and cultural contributions and losses in relation to family, community, and the state are rooted in stories that matter.

More specifically, this article examines the relationship between coloniality and violence against women, Quechua racialized labor³ and

² Supa Huamán describes being brought to Arequipa by a relative to work in the homes of extended family members under the guise of formal schooling provisioned in exchange for household duties. This practice continues today, it is uncertain in the words of this class of employers if this is class status oriented or due to need for labor or both. Quechua girls can be forced to work such long hours under harsh conditions, they are left vulnerable, and the promise of schooling is not fulfilled.

³ I do not explore the experiences of Afro-Peruvians who were brought as slaves by the Spanish. However, it is critical that their histories in Peru in relation to any of the appropriate themes raised in this article must also be recognized and brought to the fore by Afro-Peruvian researchers, and there is archival research and historical memory that

Spanish urban oligarchic exploitation, and unequal access to formal schooling, which have collectively impacted generations of Quechua women. I discuss research focusing on the Peruvian colonial era, revolutionary government ideological shifts in the 1960s, and foundational and gendered research on Indigenous women that remains impactful today⁴ (Ames, 2013; Deere, 1977, 1981, 1990; Deere & Leon, 2001; Silverblatt, 1980, 1987, 1988, 2004, 2006; Bourque & Warren, 1976, 1981). I draw from a larger Quechua community-based participatory narrative project in development with three generations of grandmothers, daughters, and granddaughters from the Andean regions of Junín and Cusco Peru. In particular, I highlight the grandmother generation who encountered limited life trajectories—being sent to work on the *hacienda*, working as servants in cities, or remaining in their agrarian communities to help their families. None of these options provisioned formal education; at best, girls who remained in their communities were offered some primary schooling opportunities. While the larger project explores all three trajectories and the ways in which Quechua women have navigated life possibilities, this article focuses on Quechua *domesticas* and offers insights regarding life hopes gained through emerging testimonies.

Historical trajectories of gendered colonial violence

When they arrived in the town of Pampacona, the Spaniards tried to force themselves on my aunt. But she did not want to submit and defended herself bravely; she even rubbed her body with foul and demeaning substances so that those who might want to go to her would be disgusted. She defended herself in this way many times along the road to the town of Tambo. That is where the Spaniards—

documents their labor from slavery through Peruvian Independence and into contemporary times.

⁴ In this particular article I do not comprehensively describe other scholarship but wish to acknowledge the works of Aikman (1999, 2002), Aikman & Rao (2012), and Nash (1983, 1986, 1993, 2005), which continue to inform my thinking about the issues I outline.

who were very angry with her, partly because she would not consent to what they wanted to do and partly because she was my father's sister—roasted her alive. She paid dearly for her chastity. She said these words when they roasted her: "So you take your anger out on a woman? What more could a woman like me do? Hurry up and finish me off. The deed expresses your nature in every way." (Cusi Yupanqui, 2006, p. 135)

The experiences of modern Quechua women must be understood in relation to major watersheds in Peruvian history, including the Law of Agrarian Reform of the late 1960s, as well as attempts since then to address racial inequities in Peru. However, Quechua women's stories more deeply speak to the ongoing process of European coloniality marked by violence against Indigenous women, as described above by Titu Cusi Yupanqui's recollection in 1570 of the attempted rape and subsequent murder of his aunt, Cura Ocllo, during the first decades of Spanish colonization.

The Spanish colonial project in Peru was focused on land—theft of accessible tracts of Indigenous territories, extraction of natural resources like gold and silver, and exploitation of Indigenous labor to work the land. Quechua people were "systemically pauperized" (Escobar, 1995); meaning, the creation of the idea and reality of what Quechua people lack materially (i.e. Quechua poverty⁵) is an invention of colonialism and the modern pathways that its processes created, including the global development agenda beginning post-World War II. Since the establishment of Spanish

⁵ I am cautious with the term poverty as the term is a Spanish invention that refers primarily to lack of financial resources. However, Quechua language offers insight regarding the meaning of "poor," which contains both philosophies languaged in Quechua and contemporary Quechua understandings of the term; meaning, to be poor in Quechua language, or *waqcha*, can refer to the *emotional condition* of an individual, which requires an emotional response such as sympathy and compassion from others. However, Quechua people are well aware that poverty can refer to lack of material possessions. Thus, I utilize the terms poverty and wealth carefully in order to expand their use beyond Western and dominant notions of capital. For example, Anthony Bebbington's work (1999) offers a framework for considering the notion of "assets" or what people have (or should/could have access to), including human capital, social capital, produced capital, natural capital, and cultural capital.

coloniality in Peru in the 1530s, Indigenous peoples have faced numerous environmental, economic, political, social, and epistemic challenges, all of which have impacted the ways in which women have been shaped through the colonial imagination. Thus, understanding the pervasive trajectories of coloniality across its multiple spheres—control of economy, authority, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012)—provides an opportunity to interrogate its characteristics, patterns, and repercussions. As an explanatory theoretical framework, coloniality reveals how Quechua women's labor, rights, bodies, and intellects have been controlled and restricted for the purposes of maintaining colonial and state power.

At the same time, recognizing the conditions of coloniality urge Quechua people to recognize alternatives and create spaces where Quechua women's responses can be articulated and nurtured. The work of Irene Silverblatt is crucial in this regard, and for over three decades, she has argued that racialization and bureaucratic rule shaped the violent Peruvian state from the Viceroyalty through today, and moreover that essential colonialism and what Hannah Arendt observed as the ambitions of a so-called master race have made the modern world (Silverblatt, 2004). Through archival research, Silverblatt has traced Andean cosmology and women's roles in Quechua philosophies of the universe and cultural practices, described how the Spanish shaped problematic ideas of Quechua women that became laws and societal norms, and she has proposed how and where Quechua women occupied spaces of resistance⁶. While this article does not focus on Quechua cultural practices or worldviews, nor do I

⁶ Silverblatt offers a vital discussion of Quechua women's resistances by outlining the thesis that the puna (remote highland regions largely historically considered empty and undesirable by the Spanish) has been maintained as a space of women's freedom and sanctuary. Her work examines the transference of Spanish Inquisition ideologies and enactments in Peru and the Spanish fears of what they viewed as evil in the so-called New World where Quechua women who were integral in ancestral pre-columbian religious practices were conveniently labeled as witches by the Spanish. However, rather than reproduce a narrative of Quechua women as victims, she offers that they reclaimed and held their own power through maintenance of Quechua cultural practices in places the Spanish would not venture, such as the puna.

delve into colonial period narratives by (all male) Quechua chroniclers, Silverblatt's description of Spanish economy is central to contemporary understanding the construction of Quechua labor. She wrote that under the new economic system, goods were produced for their exchange value on the European market and that no mechanisms existed to regulate labor or the exploitation of natural resources—"Both existed only as a means to accumulate wealth for the Spanish authorities, merchants, clerics, and the coffers of Spain. A Spaniard noted in the seventeenth century that 'what is carried to Spain from Peru is not silver but blood and sweat of Indians'" (Silverblatt, 1980, p. 165).

However, while coloniality and its strategies for dealing with Quechua women and men provide a framework for examining Indigenous oppression and responses, as Quechua women researchers, we cannot reasonably perpetuate a binary of coloniality as "bad" and Quechua people as "victims." The homelands of Quechua people stretch across six diverse countries (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina) and their landscapes. We know from historical records that bands of Quechua peoples warred with each other—my own heritage is divided between Cusco Quechua, Huancavelica Chanka, and Junín Wanka people, for example. We also know that the Tawantinsuyu ("four quarters" of the Inka collective) was political and hierarchical with factions who allied themselves with the Spanish, until they too were eventually betrayed. Women's roles across these moments and geographic spaces and political, cultural, religious, and social domains are multifaceted⁷. In order to understand who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming, as well as what has been institutionalized through coloniality such that we cannot tell the difference constitutes a line of critical questioning that Indigenous scholars must consider. June Lorenzo (2017) is doing just that through her

⁷ For example, in Titu Cusi Yupanqui's narrative, he recalls his own father, Manco Inca, bargaining with the Spanish by using women and in order to secure his own freedom in exchange for giving the Spanish an Inka woman of high rank. The Spanish political practice was to force marriage with a high-ranking Inka woman in order to secure strategic alliances. Note that the term Inka was designated for the nobility and ruling individuals of Quechua people in the Tawantinsuyu.

research, which examines New Mexico Pueblo Indian women in chthonic law and Spanish common law—and she challenges us to ask *what, really, is ours*, reminding Indigenous women researchers that we need historical, archival, narrative, ethnographic, and statistical methods in order to find answers.

*Survivors*⁸: *Hacienda and urban servitude*

This article discusses *domesticas* in urban settings, but the experiences of the grandmother generation in *haciendas* is part of our larger project and worth mentioning here, particularly as the *hacienda* system is bookended by Spanish colonization in the 1530s and Agrarian Reform in the 1960s and symbolizes the continuity of European coloniality in Peru. *Haciendas* are rooted in the colonial Spanish institution of the *encomienda*, decreed by Phillip II, which parceled Indigenous and unused lands⁹ and everything on those lands to Spanish colonizers. Quechua people were forced to work the land and pay tribute to the Spanish landowners, producing the legacy of landless peasants¹⁰ (Faron, 1966), not to mention

⁸ I utilize the term survivors here because in initial conversation and planning stages with women collaborating in this project, they have described their experiences using wording like, “I survived that time,” and their relatives will also relate that there are still “surviving women” from those decades (e.g. pre-Agrarian Reform).

⁹ The notion of unused or under-utilized lands and resources is persistent in Peruvian national political discourse today—these terms have come to essentially mean (in my interpretation), lands that are not exploited for national economic gain (e.g. extractive industry). Spanish colonial officials could justify taking lands then as much as Peruvian government officials can justify this today by claiming that Indigenous peoples are wasting potential resources because they are not used towards the greater national and global development agenda. For more information on this see Sumida Huaman, 2018.

¹⁰ I put this term in quotes because although “peasant” is used widely by anthropologists and historians who can trace its origins as a class constructed through Spanish colonization (and in relation to and mimicking the European peasant classes), I find the term cringe-worthy. Latin Americanists may disagree with my cringing, especially as the Spanish word *campesino* (for one who works the land) has come to be translated as peasant. I do not deny that there is a significant history to the term in Spanish, which has been claimed, utilized, and reformulated as one of empowerment in different Latin

separating Indigenous peoples from their identities through land-based cultural connections (Stavig, 2000). Starting in the 17th century, these lands and others subjected to Spanish policy (e.g. *repartimiento* and *reducciones*) largely transitioned to *haciendas* maintained by Spanish ownership. Driven by economic gain, *haciendas* were characterized by production—from crops of sugar cane, corn, and potato to livestock. Labor conditions were harsh, but for landless Quechua, there was no choice but to work for the *hacendado*, *hacienda* owners, in order to eat. This system continued until the short-lived revolutionary Velasco government from the 1960s to the 1970s, which saw the dissolution of the *hacienda* system and the return of land “for those who work it” (Cant, 2012) through the Law of Agrarian Reform (Decree Law No. 17716). Agrarian reform represented transition from *hacienda* land ownership to state acknowledgement of exploitation of Indigenous labor, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. However, the *hacienda* era still holds painful memories for Quechua people. As Román Vizcarra explained, “The landlord ceased to possess all the land; but he continued to live in our subconscious mind. The fear also remained: fear of walking, fear of thinking, fear of deciding, fear of living, fear of divine punishment, fear of dreaming, fear of fear itself” (2008, p. 17).

Román is co-founder of a small school serving Quechua children in the Cusco region. Together with his family and the school association comprised of additional local families, they have worked to address traumas endured by surviving members of the grandmother generation now in their 60s, 70s, and 80s, many of whom worked as children in the *haciendas*. In a

American contexts. However, my concern is with the term as an English translation, which connotes an image of a poor farmer. Peasant is not something people strive to be, in other words. The persistence of these terms and insistence of their usage impacts Indigenous peoples’ abilities to call themselves how they see themselves or how they wish to be seen. For example, Quechua people were ancestrally known as many things we might label today in English as farmers, weavers, healers, leaders, lawmakers, and engineers. Working the land, *ayllpa*, which has tremendous cultural, emotional, and spiritual significance for Quechua people was not considered an act of the poor or uneducated. Thus this term, like others that have been assigned to Quechua and Indigenous peoples could be reconceptualized along Indigenous terms.

conversation with Román during a visit to work with their school, he reminded me of the atrocities committed by the *hacendados* who would ritualistically sexually assault Quechua girls. In response to what they were hearing, families like Román's had been devising strategies¹¹ of healing, including educational development through schooling—building spaces where new generations, such as the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these women, could thrive as Quechua people. I am moved by their work, and part of this project is motivated by the question of what else Quechua women and their children and grandchildren are doing to (re)build their lives. As asserted in other writing, if the colonial agenda represents the death project (Suárez-Krabbe, 2012), where and how do Indigenous community-based initiatives like renewed visions of education constitute the *life project* (Tom, Sumida Huaman, & McCarty, 2019).

There is a good history of Indigenous counternarratives in Peru. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Peru saw the rise of *indigenismo*, a social and literary movement by intellectuals to bring attention to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. Writers like José María Arguedas, an Andean raised by Quechua people, argued that recognizing the cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and intellectual contributions of Indigenous communities was essential to the formulation of Peruvian nationhood. His writing described the confluence and tension of Quechua and Spanish societies and values coming together by force. He wrote of violence, subjugation, despair, and isolation, and came to the conclusion that Quechua people would never see justice under colonizers. We would have to find our own sanctuaries and build justice ourselves.

One of Arguedas's most acclaimed works, *Agua*, published in 1935, was a collection of short stories, including "Warma Kuyay," featuring characters surrounding the *hacienda*. Arguedas tells the story of a boy who falls in love with Justina, a Quechua girl working on the hacienda. In the

¹¹ I use the word strategies here deliberately in that if we acknowledge the strategies of coloniality (e.g. genocide, slavery, rape) then we must also acknowledge the strategic responses to coloniality that constitute decolonizing efforts of addressing the fears that Román mentions (i.e. fear of living) and creating distance between the colonizer and those colonized for purposes of healing in Indigenous communities.

story, Justina is raped by the *hacendado*. Although “Warma Kuyay” explicitly names sexual violence enacted upon Quechua girls and women in these spaces, there is less literature and scholarly research produced during that time by Quechua and other Indigenous women writing about their own lives and histories. In other words, no matter how eloquently told, violence against Quechua women was narrated by men. At the same time, Arguedas’s work is significant as he described Indigenous experiences during the colonial transition to modern governance in Peru; as a man, he spoke against Spanish landholding male power across Peruvian society, from the rural community to the city, leaving behind a legacy for us as Indigenous researchers to cross regional and disciplinary boundaries in order to understand the impacts of that power.

There is important groundwork. As an institution, historian Alberto Fores Galindo wrote that servitude in Lima is a mechanism of the reproduction of colonialism: “Domestic servant and cholo were synonymous, but even worse, cholo was a disparaging term, at times equivalent to a dog, always a person of low social condition, the offspring of a defeated and inferior race condemned to subjection. At least, that’s what their masters believed” (2010, p. 151)¹². He pointed out that conflation of Indigenous peoples’ identities as their labor remained embedded in Peruvian society—*cholo/chola* are defined by service to the dominant classes. These perceptions suppress Quechua people’s articulations of what they desire for themselves, which must include women’s conceptualizations of a good life, good work, and educational hopes and how these interface with family, community, and the state.

¹² Flores Galindo’s delineation of servants as specialized/skilled or unskilled (e.g. manual labor) is helpful. The wealthiest families tended to have specialized servants, but middle-class and even lower class families would take on servants as a marker of social status. However, his analysis of gender in domestic servitude was limited, mainly noting the prevalence of Indigenous boys who would frequently run away. Ostensibly, domestic servitude in Lima would be marked by Peru’s major 1960s revolutionary political shift. How this impacted gender in multiple places is an important question as hard *hacienda* labor and mining would continue to preference male physical labor, and household domestic labor could be fulfilled by children.

Carmen Diana Deere (1977, 1981, 1990) and Kay Warren and Susan Bourque (1976, 1981) have provided critical responses through explorations¹³ of women's roles in economic development linked with *haciendas*, extractive industry, and household labor. Deere's essential extensive work in the Cajamarca region explored men's and women's economic and household relationships and theorized that the *hacienda* created an especially exploitative division of labor for women as owners had specific duties for men in the fields while women's work was undefined and vast—from household services to gardening and caring for livestock (1977). She argued that *hacienda* policies ultimately devalued women's work in order to maintain and increase exploitation of entire families. While her later work has demonstrated that conditions could shift, especially due to new economic opportunities for women, she maintained that economic parity alone was not capable of correcting injustices of the past or making rectifications to reverse the course of systematic and unequal gender relations impacting Indigenous peoples. Taking up Deere's work, Bourque and Warren (1976, 1981) explored class, ethnicity, and gender in shaping Andean women's and men's lives. Furthermore, their mention of education in their broader study of women's subordination and economic development focused on poor schooling¹⁴ opportunities that resulted in Andean women's migration from rural to urban areas.

¹³ While I examine seminal literature, I do not utilize the term feminist in order to label this project, its research development, project collaborators, or the narratives that emerge. While feminist research methodologies are instrumental in women's movements worldwide, Indigenous collaborators in this project need the opportunity to determine for themselves which ideologies they will embrace and how they will refer to themselves. For example, in preliminary conversations, I have not heard the term feminist in Spanish or alluded to in Quechua. As an Indigenous CBPR project, we collectively explore these issues and the range of intellectual options available to us, and a key step is identifying how Quechua women will utilize Quechua language, worldviews, stories, and values in this process. Thus, this approach of openness regarding gendered constructions of ideologies allows for the possibilities in heteroglossic considerations of central themes of exploration in research (Hatala, Desjardins, & Bombay, 2016).

¹⁴ It is important to recognize that education in Quechua terms is not solely formal schooling but also refers to the learning of (cultural) values and out-of-school learning

Peruvian scholar Patricia Ames's research is seminal in this regard (2013). Through a longitudinal study involving Quechua students and their mothers, she examined gender and educational inequities that she concluded as resulting in three major paradoxes—motherhood, ethnicity, and rurality. She argued that advancing schooling opportunities for new generations of Quechua girls required deeper understanding of the generational shifts between them and their mothers and the ways in which girls were navigating their life possibilities. For example, new generations of Quechua girls were rejecting conventional norms of marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood while also negotiating ways to continue reciprocity in families; girls were also rejecting gender and ethnic stereotypes while also selectively renouncing or disguising their ethnic identities; and girls were recognizing the limitations of the poor quality of rural schooling and actively seeking other opportunities that would lead to advancing their schooling on to university. Perhaps most alarming for rural communities, Quechua girls and their families were concluding that reliance on an agricultural life was fast becoming insufficient to support a family. Today, this is made ever more apparent by environmental challenges in the Andes like glacier recession, environmental contamination and pollution, and climate change.

Real and perceived limitations of schooling for Quechua girls and women are critical to canvass especially with regard to the state's ability to provision education as a right for its people. At the same time, the limitations of this right, notwithstanding access, are abundant, which complicate the discourse of rights for Indigenous peoples: Borque and Warren (1981) concluded that educational opportunity and achievement could not guarantee equity, and that the ideological content of education,

experiences. Additionally, there are good efforts to expand our general understanding of education as encompassing multiple central processes for individual, national, and global development. Broadly speaking, McGrath (2018) has outlined that education serves to contribute to the psychological, social, and cultural development of individuals and societies—education is investment in the future; fundamental right; a means of building peace and recovering from conflict; building (national and other forms of) identity and resistances thereto; building criticality and resistance to injustice (pp. 2-4).

assumptions and stereotypes that become a part of the curriculum, and the societal values that give education meaning have dominant impact on the influence of education (p. 194). Over three decades later, these issues remain pressing in the Andes.

Quechua women and Indigenous community-based participatory research

Indigenous community-based participatory research promotes methods that privilege Quechua women's epistemologies while addressing visions and limitations in Indigenous formal and out-of-school education. Working with Andean women in Cusco and Junín where I have close family, we are developing a project that collaboratively examines women's labor and educational trajectories over generations, with special attention to Quechua grandmother survivors.

As *haciendas* remained explicitly connected to Spanish colonialism and oppressive policies enacted upon Indigenous communities, they represent spaces of "difficult memory" (Jamieson, 2014). I propose that there are multiple spaces of "difficult memory" like urban cities where my mother and Hilaria worked that signified Quechua women's exploitation and opportunity. These constitute our project sites—(former) *haciendas*, cities, and rural communities in Cusco and Junín. Within my own extended family, different women of the grandparent generation recall being sent to *haciendas* or to Lima to serve as *domesticas*, or remaining within our communities to help with subsistence farming. Denied opportunities for schooling, we¹⁵ center Quechua women's life stories of labor and hopes, and

¹⁵ As a project in development, I do not focus on explaining methods here. At this stage, I am also careful to not reveal women's names as we are still in the stages of determining what is ethically ideal for them. There is still fear around telling their stories. For researchers curious about numbers, I can share that a core advisory of four members of the grandmother generation and I aim for 2 women matriarchs and their daughters and granddaughters per space (*hacienda*, city, and community) per region for a total of 4 families and a minimum of 12 Indigenous CBPR co-researchers.

we acknowledge that educational processes necessarily include cultural, linguistic, and environmental knowledge.

Who am I in this work?

As a child, I remember being delighted with my mother's stories about her upbringing in our community of Chongos Bajo¹⁶. Until she was sent to work in Lima, she ran through the community with her favorite cousin, the fearless Rica—when Rica was home from working on the *hacienda*. Together, they played with insects, animals, and mini clay pots made as toys for children, which my grandmother would bring home from her market exchanges. My mother learned about plants, flowers, trees, and how to tell time by the position of the sun's shadows cast on the ground. She still lovingly recalls Rica's mother, Lucia, my grandfather's sister, who was a beautiful woman deaf since childhood when she had been too close to a mine explosion in Huancavelica. Auntie Lucia spoke to my mother in sign language that she invented, she constantly affirmed my mother's self-esteem, and she was there to shelter her from my grandfather's alcoholic binges.

From the women in her life, my mother learned stories of our homelands, deities, monsters, and spirits. Her childhood was rich and full. When she left the community, her life took a different pathway, and the stories take on a more somber tone. Today, I reconcile that I am a product of both her beautiful complex childhood and the fears, isolation, and traumas of her youth in domestic servitude¹⁷. As a result, my own journey as a comparative Indigenous education researcher has been to reclaim our knowledges, to identify places where we find Arguedas's sanctuary and

¹⁶ The Quechua original name for the community is often debated, and in my work, I refer to the community as Hatun Shunko (brave heart), but I would like to also acknowledge that there are other origin explanations put forward by community historians.

¹⁷ This complexity is honored in the stories of women told in their own voices and through the research of critical scholars like Mary Romero's *The Maid's Daughter*, which offers powerful and thoughtful testimony of what it means to be a/part of something, to be someone who does not quite belong.

Silverblatt's freedom, and in the course of this work to learn what can be done to prevent other Indigenous children from experiencing hurt.

I also attribute why I am an educational researcher to my mother's love for our Andean people, her frank and passionate observations of injustices, as well as to the practical connections she secured—that we remain linked to our ancestral lands through her inheritance of land in the community; that my Japanese father supported her beliefs and immersed himself in family and community life; and that my commitment to my people is the result of ties to mother's sisters, cousins, and extended family who trained me as an Andean female and to whom I owe gratitude for sharing their knowledge of the Andean universe, including Quechua language, values, and cultural practices, as well as painful histories. I have carried these with me in our work with Indigenous peoples elsewhere.

Quechua women's narratives: Precious life stories

I have alluded to this project as Indigenous community based participatory research. I offer only a brief word on methodology as this is not solely a research endeavor—asking questions that Quechua women want to know—but is also one of women coming together to tell their stories as we have done culturally for generations, to be heard by others where appropriate and desired, and considering strategies to heal from the grief of dreams denied and stolen. This work is intimate and tender, and in handling the stories, we treat what is shared as precious.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is used widely, and as a result, the term community is broadly interpreted—from geographically spatialized places that are autonomous to borderless and mobile constructs. Early CBPR literature offers key principles whereby researchers build on strengths and resources of the community and facilitate collaborative partnerships across all phases of the research (Israel, 1998). Central to CBPR is recognition of the role of power in research and the practice of equitable distribution of power and resources. Moreover, LaVeaux and Christopher (2009) identified specific approaches towards building CBPR with Indigenous peoples, which include acknowledging our historical

experiences with research and the particular issues being explored (e.g. they focused on Indigenous health) while actively working to overcome research as a negative experience; recognition of tribal sovereignty; differentiating notions of community membership and understanding Indigenous diversity; interpreting data with the cultural context; and utilizing Indigenous ways of knowing (p. 11). To these, I add Māori scholar Linda T. Smith's "Indigenous research agenda," a framework that outlines four major points for research involving Indigenous peoples that is driven by Indigenous peoples—decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization (Smith, 2012). Together, Smith's framework and LaVeaux and Christopher's observations of CBPR in Indigenous communities inform how I understand Indigenous CBPR. Moreover, what these researchers offer is intentionally generalized as broad considerations intended to be taken up, transformed, and evolved in ways that are culturally and linguistically specific and appropriate for whatever group is utilizing them. As principles, they also offer us the opportunity to ask what we need and want as outcomes and benefits of our work together, as well as vigilance in ethics or how we take care of each other as we move forward.

Specifically, this project utilizes the life story method (Atkinson, 1998, 2002), which is shaped according to Quechua cultural and linguistic protocols. This means that stories are holistically considered across space and time and include not only the dynamics of the storyteller and the listener (in the immediate and long-term relationship), but also require exploring historical, political, geographic, cultural, and social elements across time where the storyteller is the narrator of their own experience moving through multiple spaces. Clearly, there is much that can be gained from understanding how social science researchers collect and analyze narratives as data¹⁸. However, in this project, we do not think of or refer to

¹⁸ For example, Ollerenshaw & Creswell offer excellent social science delineation of how to analyze narratives. They first outline characteristics of narratives, which can include chronological sequences of events, elements like time, place, plot, and scene, or a predicament or struggle involved and then resolved whereby data analysis aims to understand descriptions of the story and its emerging themes. They then differentiate between two forms of data analysis, including the problem-solution and dimensional space

stories as “field texts,” nor do we refer to their collection as data. Stories are willakuy, and the Quechua term refers to the required interrelationship between the story and a listener, which also *make* the story.

When I listen to the stories of the grandmother generation with whom I am building this project, I feel different waves of emotions. As a daughter, niece, cousin, neighbor, and Andean woman, I have asked different women in Cusco and in Junín—“Should we do this project?” Every woman I speak with has a story, and she would like to tell it. In Quechua daily contexts, women’s life stories are used to relay experiences that can serve as lessons to other women, including younger generations. Stories told among women are tragic and painful, but also humorous and triumphant, and always richly descriptive, evoking emotion. Since I can remember as a child, I have sat and listened, and as I grew older, I have drawn in my breath at injustices described, I have cried, and I have laughed. I do not see myself as a skilled oral tradition storyteller, and even though I am a member of the daughter generation, I feel that I have limited life stories to offer—what I do have, I offer to my nieces. For now, I sit and listen.

Emerging insights

The life story approach allows listeners to work with storytellers to draw out recollections that can be chronological, thematic, and that also underscore particular tensions or challenges faced. While this article does not re-story narratives or engage in-depth analysis, I draw emerging insights from the Quechua grandmother generation, including my own close family members who tell their stories addressing stages of life, school experiences, and gendered violence. I highlight experiences from one

narrative structure. Both of these approaches to analysis are important for researchers to capture, and in our case, to draw from in order to find ways that treat the stories and storytellers with care. In this case, the values offered by Indigenous scholars who engage Indigenous oral tradition research (community traditional stories), such as Jo-ann Archibald (2008), are helpful in providing some approaches to considering what she refers to as the “life-experience story.”

project collaborator, Mama Virtud (pseudonym), in an attempt to introduce the connections between lack of schooling with limited life pathways, translations of wealth and poverty, and the vulnerability of Quechua girls and women.

The teacher spoke with me one day and said, you have to have some things. She said, “What do you want to be?” She asked me. I said I wanted to be a doctor. But that was never going to happen. Because there were 7 of us, 8 with my cousin, and my aunt who lived with us. *It was impossible to dream.* When I finished elementary school, of course I wished to go to high school. But there was no high school then [in the community], and one had to go to Huancayo. (2019, my emphasis)

Mama Virtud outlines experiences that limited her schooling options—her family had no funds to be able to send her to school in Junín’s capital of Huancayo. Coming from a subsistence farming family with little monetary resources, she would not have been able to travel to the city and pay any associated school fees. Additionally, her 14-year old sister had given birth by one of the married male schoolteachers in the community. As she was finishing elementary school, she was also aggressively pursued by a boy completing high school. Based on the fear that she too would become pregnant, one of her uncles took her to Lima to find work as a *domestica*. She would hold this role for nearly two decades.

Upon arrival to Lima, she worked nonstop in the homes of her wealthy employers. Living in the city, she said she began to reflect on life in her community in relation to Lima:

I realized that we were poor when I arrived to Lima, when I saw the wealthy people who lived in San Ysidro, the people who lived here and there. And my sister lived in a very remote and poor place. There were little tiny houses that were uncomfortable and very poor. I noticed that when I was older, but when I was little [in the community], I would say we had so much. Because my mother... would harvest a lot of good things from the farms. We never lacked the *habas* [fava beans], the peas, the wheat, the barley, the squash. I felt like I was in opulence. I felt like I had everything. Because my

mother would sell the foods from the farm, and she would buy meat and sugar. We never lacked meat, heart, or liver. My mother would toast cereals, marvelous cereals that do not exist anywhere else in the world I would say. My mother would toast cereals with women who helped us who were poorer than us because they had no farms. They would come help us, and they lived near us. My mother would give them their share of corn, barley, wheat, *habas*, potatoes...My childhood was marvelous. My mother...had a milking cow. That little cow gave us milk almost all year, and my mother would make cheese out of that. We would drink that fresh delicious milk. With that machka—[cereal mixture like a porridge] of barley or wheat, mixed, she would toast for 3 days and take to the mill—we would go to school.

Mama Virtud observed difference in lifestyles and resources between her community and her employers. Along with her awareness and how she was treated as a “poor Indian,” these constituted her realizations about poverty. In reality, both spaces hold relative resources—her community was rich with farm fields and harvests (which also provided some monetary or exchange value in the local markets), animals, and adobe homes. The cities had concrete homes, material goods that she had never seen before, and Western style clothing that she had never worn. Although she came to understand *poverties*¹⁹ in relation to what she saw in Lima, especially comparing an older sister’s new urban life in the shantytowns, she maintains that her family was wealthy because of their land and food resources, along with their abilities to work the land and care for the animals, their families, and each other within the community. Then when asked to further describe poverty, she responded,

There was a time—because my parents lived from the harvest, from the farm—there was a time when the frost came, and we didn’t have even one grain of harvest that year. That made us suffer. There was barley, but it was like chaff. My mother tried to make that into a

¹⁹ I use this term deliberately as plural. If people hold multiple forms of capital, they also experience multiple manifestations and constructions of poverty.

soup. And there was no kancha [corn for roasting]. We lived off of kancha, *habas*—my mother would make soup from *habas* and peas. But there was nothing. I remember that one day, one of the neighbors from our farm field... came to play with me on a tree trunk, eucalyptus... I didn't have kancha. But she brought kancha in her pocket, and she arrived eating kancha. I just looked at her and looked at her. I couldn't have kancha. That I could say is poverty—the hunger. I longed for the kancha, and she gave me one pinch. That was like a prize for me. That is poverty. I don't know how my mother raised us through that.

The loss of harvests due to drastic weather shifts in Junín and across the Andean regions of Peru is an issue of increasing concern, especially due to climate change leading to the severity of impacts by Super El Niño. When subsistence farmers rely on their crops for their survival and to take to local markets for selling and trading or purchasing of goods they do not harvest (e.g. fruit and coffee), monetary resources, which are also used for their children's school fees, become even more limited. Mama Virtud's consideration of poverty adds to research that challenges us to take up more robust ways of thinking about wealth and poverty in relation to assets, strengths, and capital (Bebbington, 1999). We need to understand these notions in relation to cultural contexts, class considerations, policy construction, and across geographic spaces, especially those influenced by severe challenges like environmental pollution and climate change.

In her life story, Mama Virtud traced the different homes she worked across Lima, revealing her dependency upon her employers and glimpses into her own agency. For example, she started employment working in homes where her family members had recommended her for work. She would begin work in one home and then be passed to the home of a relative of her employer to care for a newborn baby or some other employer family request. In one case, after working for an employer's family for a few years, she was falsely accused of stealing an item from the household and immediately asked to leave. She had no place to go and began knocking on doors wherever there was a "servants wanted" sign. During this time, she worked in several homes for only a few days to a couple weeks, explaining

that she would leave for some reason or another—maybe the employer was too harsh or abusive. Some abuses were tolerable—such as being spoken to in a degrading way, while others were not. She recounted,

One day, a man wanted to rape me. But there was a woman [tenant] who lived there in another room—this was a big house. The man had two children, and one night, he got up and entered my room. The woman who lived there, began knocking the door when the man closed the door to my room. The man went out, and the woman said, “You know that you do not need that girl. You should go upstairs to the woman with whom you have your son. You should go upstairs, you have no right to be there.” But I was ready to scream. Even before I screamed, that woman left her room and came over. You know, I believe in angels. Even though my mother was not in agreement with me, when I returned home, she told me that she would kneel in the pampas [deep hills] so that I would be okay.

Statistically speaking, we do not know what percentage of Quechua women in the three project settings we explore have experienced sexual violence. But among our grandmother generation, we are hearing recurring stories regarding physical, sexual, and psychological abuses that include perpetrators who span all three geographic spaces, and Indigenous communities are not exempt. In this case, Mama Virtud refers to the activity of men of the household of employment—husbands and fathers, sons and brothers, and extended male relatives. We hear these reports across Junín and Cusco where another grandmother project collaborator in Cusco shared that she had heard upper class women proudly declaring that they let their sons “practice” on the Quechua girls from Cusco’s surrounding rural villages who were brought to work in their homes. What reports like these tell us is that there is a glaring need for the kind of work we have engaged together as Quechua women. There is a strong legacy of Quechua women and other Indigenous women worldwide who have been working for the safety and rights of Indigenous women for decades, and we seek to add to these efforts.

Conclusion: Honoring the stories

In this article, I have outlined the some of the ways in which Quechua women have been shaped by the limitations created under conditions of coloniality and how women have sought opportunities for survival in ways that reveal both the nature of the colonizer (in the words of Mama Cura Ocllo) and their own agency. What our project seeks to understand is not only the ways in which Quechua women have navigated places of difficult memory, but also how they have hoped and dreamed and worked to realize those dreams—some for themselves and most for their children and grandchildren. Moreover, this work extends the ongoing conversation on Indigenous rights and its necessary considerations of all beings, gender, space, and time—for example, how do conversations on Indigenous rights acknowledge spaces of profound inequalities that reflect damaging constructions of Quechua women over time, and how does the idea of the right to education today rectify past injustices that reveal structural violence that has limited the life possibilities of Quechua women in the grandmother generation? Clearly, the work is before us in this regard. There are many stories that remain to be told, and it is our collective hope that we all keep listening.

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