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## Control of Cultural and Bodily Reproduction: The Denial of Autonomy in the United States, Peru and Globally

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# Control of Cultural and Bodily Reproduction: The Denial of Autonomy in the United States, Peru and Globally

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Anna M. Schloerb

| I am writing this article coming from a family of women in the calendar year in which Roe V. Wade was overturned.

**Statement of Purpose:** This project seeks to look at the ways the state and hegemonic devices of power control cultural and bodily reproduction. It asks the question of how this control inhibits people's reproductive autonomy, cultural identity, language, and generational knowledge transmission. I offer specific examples of how this control has functioned in the US, with immigrants, Indigenous, Black people and other marginalized groups. My grandmother is from Lima, Peru and because of that connection, and the inspiration of this piece, I wanted to use the 1990s-2000s Sterilization in Peru as a case study of hegemonic control happening more globally. This incorporates the way governments co-opt movement autonomy, in this case co-opting progressive feminist rhetoric. I use the examples above to consider how the fight for reproductive autonomy in US should be framed, avoiding binary view of access to abortion that positions abortion as a choice, but looking to a longstanding intersectional Reproductive Justice Movement created by and centering Black feminists and other feminists of color. I will end using an abolition feminist framework and "Uses of the Erotic" as one possible image of a liberatory future where we can decolonize our bodies and resist the forms of control I frame at the beginning of my analysis.

Elba Benedicta Munayco Pineda, later to be Elba Pineda Philips. My Grandmother. My *Abuelita*. My Ita. Born near the coast in a small town called Chincha Alta, Peru in 1930. Passing in 2021 in the midst of a global pandemic.

Juana Inocenta Munayco Ramos, her mother, born in 1903, location in Peru unknown. She and our ancestors were Quechua, indigenous to Peru, to the Andes. She raised her family in Chincha and then moved her family to Lima for better access to schooling and speaking English.

Juana, Juanita, did not pass Quechua, the ancestral indigenous tongue, to her children - we are not even sure if Quechua was passed to her. Her five children moved to the States when my Abuelita was in her 20s, the exact year we don't have documentation of, but it was around the 1950s. The children moved to Chicago, to Hyde Park - sharing the top floor of an apartment between them. Ita went to the Art Institute of Chicago for art school. She built herself a new life in the states. An immigrant. One of many that came to Chicago in the 50s. She married a Welsh man whose (many times over) great grandfather fought in the Civil War. English was the only language that was spoken in their house. Transmission suppressed.

Ita gave birth to Aileen Marie Philips born April 21st 1963. My mother. Born in Chicago Illinois, grew up in Lansing Michigan. Born the same year Juanita died. The two. Never to meet.

I hold the name Anna Margaret Schloerb. Born July 8th 2001 in Chicago, Illinois - Hyde Park.

Born to John Michael Schloerb and Aileen Marie Philips Schloerb. I am the continuation of the maternal lineage of

women who came before me. I walk and live a life touched by and possible because of those women's acts of resistance on the land I stand now and a distant homeland I've been to only once.

I grapple with the ways my abuelita's culture and language have been erased. What has not been transmitted. Assimilation. Survival. Control. Whiteness and hegemonic ideals dominate by the third generation. There is sadness, loss and frustration with erasure. However there is a duality to this loss. The erasure that has occurred is an act of resistance. The way this erasure has happened is minute and minuscule to the truly violent and horrific acts of erasure our country and world has endured.

I am 21 years old living in the 21st century and coming of age as a young woman who has been told by her country that she does not have autonomy over her body, just as my grandmother was told as a 20 year old in this country prior to *Roe v. Wade*. Her reality and my reality are different from my mother's ability to live and come of age in a world of *Roe*, 1974 (when my mother was 10). I go to college in a state currently where my "reproductive rights" are recognized but may be in jeopardy with future elections.

In this essay, my reflections turn to research as I try to understand and make sense of the way the autonomy over our bodies, minds and movements can be taken from us. I offer a discussion at the end of ways we can resist through Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic* to gain any ounce of control back. Living Erotically in Resistance.

## Introduction:

Throughout history feminists of color offer insight that the state maintains a white, heteropatriarchal system through the control of bodily and cultural autonomy, using our bodies as vessels to reproduce its desired colonial society.<sup>1</sup> Diana Aramburu, in her work *Celebrating Erotic Autonomy*, describes this control as a process of recolonization which relies on containing and disciplining primarily feminine bodies.<sup>2</sup> This process takes away individual, cultural and bodily autonomy, hence controlling reproduction and replicating white supremacist hegemonic ideals. The state does this in many ways — in this article, I will discuss the two ways the state exercises this control: the psychological control of cultural reproduction, and the physical control of bodily reproduction. Both of these instances of controlling reproductive autonomy are attempts, often successful, by the state to erase groups of people, cultures, and ways of being. While the state controls all bodies, the bodies and cultures that are erased in often violent and oppressive ways are bodies of Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples who are considered “others” to the dominant white supremacist hetero-patriarchal state. Control over (re)production is the replication of (re)colonization which causes harm through generations.

I will begin my discussion on cultural reproduction by drawing on Dylan Rodriguez’s “White Reconstruction” and the attempted and persistent domination of whiteness in our society, culture and even identity. For some individuals, a denial of their own culture becomes a form of survival. I will look at immigrant assimilation and “Americanization” as a potential form of the forced (re)production of whiteness through the upholding of white, Anglo-Saxon standards of beauty. I will then discuss boarding schools and the psychological genocide of Indigenous peoples in the United States, partially resulting from the colonial rhetoric: “kill the Indian in him, and save the man”. This section will demonstrate that by controlling an existing population, hegemonic devices of power have greater ability to control future generations’ ways of being through suppressing autonomy and erasing culture, language and identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars such Loretta Ross, Dorothy Roberts, Mariame Kaba, Mimi Kim, Angela Davis have analyzed these ideas

<sup>2</sup> Aramburu, Diana. “Celebrating Erotic Autonomy: Decolonizing Desire in Vanessa Vilches Norat’s ‘Del Dulce Olor de Sus Pechos.’” *Confluencia* 36, no. 2 (2021): 103–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27109839>.113.

The next portion of the paper will discuss bodily reproduction, focusing a majority of my analysis on a case study in 1990s Peru. This section comes from the grounds of the recent Dobbs decision overruling Roe v. Wade in the United States this summer,<sup>3</sup> a decision which returned the decision of abortion access to the states. Control of bodily autonomy, (in this case framed as abortion access) in the United States is now left up to each state. While this is a severe setback in our country, many states and organizing groups have put in place strategies and resources to help women and people with uteruses throughout the nation.<sup>4</sup> I will open this section with the history of the control of Black, Brown and Indigenous bodies in the United States - grounded in eugenics and enacted through sterilization efforts and control of reproduction.

We then will move to the sterilization in 1990s Peru under the Fujimori regime which was a mass effort to sterilize primarily Indigenous peoples in the region. The government presented it as a Family Planning project but masked population control through sterilization. Global and national feminist rhetoric was co-opted by the Fujimori regime, to back and sponsor a family planning program. The Family Planning program was presented as a means to reduce poverty and bring the country out of an economic recession, but was actually a plan to forcibly sterilize and eradicate Indigenous and economically marginalized populations in Peru. The case demonstrates both a psychological manipulation of cultural reproduction and autonomy by physically restricting autonomy to reproduce and practice cultural ways of being as they choose. In turn this affects the continuation of cultural reproduction because of the elimination and manipulation of a new generation, as well as instilling racist, classist, Eurocentric ideals onto a population. Population control efforts give semblance to efforts in the United States against bodies deemed “the other”.

I will end this paper with a discussion of social movements, which are often co-opted by the state and weaponized to deny autonomy for people rather than give it, such as 1990s Peru. This has happened in the United States many times with movements that do not have an intersectional lens and do not center the voices of those most

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<sup>3</sup> 2022

<sup>4</sup> I urge you to check out some grassroots orgs near you that center Reproductive Justice rather than solely abortion

marginalized. We have seen many movements align with the belief that in order to “win the mainstream”, i.e to get support from the majority of the population the movement must tackle only one issue at a time. I offer a discussion of these movement in the US and end with the long-standing idea of Reproductive Justice, a framework which comes from Black, Brown and Indigenous feminist schools of thought. In this final portion, I will write towards an abolitionist future to inform the continued fight for reproductive rights and collective autonomy ending with Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” as a possible way for bodies to gain autonomy back, as we resist the state’s hegemonic power structures, by decolonizing our bodies and tearing systems of power down.

### **I. Control of Cultural Reproduction:**

Domination is a relation of power that subjects enter into and is forged in the historical process. It does not form out of random acts of hatred, although these are condemnable, but rather out of a patterned and enduring treatment of social groups. Ultimately, it is secured through a series of actions, the ontological meaning of which is not always transparent to its subjects and objects.<sup>5</sup>

Race is a social construct - and therefore must be upheld socially and constantly defined by who is “the [nonwhite] other”. It acts constantly to preserve its own existence by reproducing itself in the bodies and minds of all who function and create society with our existence.<sup>6</sup> Whiteness becomes “real” through this preservation. In *White Reconstruction*, Dylan Rodriguez states that “White being” can erase other ways of being if whiteness is defined as “normative paradigm of *human* being”. Our society, bodies, and minds “have been occupied by a colonial power whose very law, policy, cultural institution, and collective behavior entrench foreign ways of life in our land and on our people.”<sup>7</sup> Rodriguez describes “White Reconstruction” as a notion not of white supremacist rejuvenation but rather as a “historically persistent, continuous, and periodically acute logic of reform, rearticulation, [reproduction], adaptation, and

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<sup>5</sup> Leonardo, Zeus. “The Color of Supremacy.” In *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Wynter’s commentary on sociogenic principle as well as Sara Ahmed’s “Living a Feminist Life” are places of further research

<sup>7</sup> Dylan Rodríguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020, 3.

revitalization that shapes white social and ontological self-and-world making within the aspirational, present tense and violently future-oriented humanist projects of Civilization/Manifest Destiny/Progress, and so on.”<sup>8</sup>

| *A Progress Song*

We push  
 We work  
 We strive  
 They worked away from the dirt roads  
 So we could move forward  
 So we could have *it*  
 We move towards a land  
                   of possibility and success  
 We move, drenched in neoliberal goo  
 Which got us here.  
 For that I am thankful  
 For the path I live  
 But I look behind me

White supremacy and the reproduction of whiteness operates systematically and as a national and global colonizing force. Whiteness defines itself by defining “the other.” It is defined by articulating what whiteness is not. Whiteness functions at the “top” of the social hierarchy and participates in “the exclusion and disempowerment of those ‘outside’ whiteness.”<sup>9</sup> Who “counts” as white has changed in the history of this country — Irish, German, Italian, Polish etc, immigrants coming to the US would assimilate into American being, white being, or, as Rodriguez would state, “human being”. Immigrants coming to the United States, each with their own culture and language existed together in the United States creating what has been known as “The Melting Pot”. The idea of “The Melting Pot” comes from a 1914 Broadway play by Israel Zangwill who stated “God would melt down the races of Europe into a single pure essence, out of which he would mold Americans.”<sup>10</sup> European immigrants who were not

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<sup>8</sup> Dylan Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020. [muse.jhu.edu/book/77829](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/77829).

<sup>9</sup> “Assimilation into Whiteness.” Race - The Power of Illusion . California Newsreel, the Othering & Belonging Institute, the U.C. Berkeley Library, and the American Cultures Center at U.C. Berkeley. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://www.racepowerofanillusion.org/subthemes/assimilation-whiteness/>.

<sup>10</sup> “Assimilation into Whiteness.” Race - The Power of Illusion.

Protestant Anglo-Saxons were perhaps not seen as fully white, but compared to people of color, their whiteness becomes more visible. As sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva states “The melting pot never included people of color. Black [people], Chinese, Puerto Ricans, etcetera, could not melt into the pot. They could be used as wood to produce the fire for the pot, but they could not be used as material to be melted into the pot.”<sup>11</sup> Immigrants have played, and play, a key role in the building, prosperity and what makes the U.S. the U.S. This country has been built on the backs of their labor.

While people of color could not “melt into the pot,” there was and is an expectation to assimilate into “American-ness”, American *being* — white *being* — to exist and even survive. As Toni Morrison tells us: “In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” I situate this in my Abuelita’s story from Peru to the United States — her assimilation, and its effects on our family.

| *Cold Milk*

Aroma of  
Sweet, warm, delectable cafe con leche  
Prepared with love, to drink in the morning  
Steaming milk, sunny gentle morning

But don’t forget that

Words come with milk.

morning.

Morning met with harsh cold carton milk straight from the fridge poured into tall glass cold to the touch because of contents. Of contents. Cold and harsh.

*“You are not an American unless you drink cold milk”*

That’s what he told her.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



| *Red White and Blue, and Green for the Apples*

When I think of my abuelita I think of apple pie  
 I think of apple pie, with sweet crust, tart green apples, cinnamon sugar insides  
 Goopy, globby, delectable butter meld of flavor.  
 When I think of abuelita I think of apple pie  
 dessert, The traditionally American dessert  
 for the holiday in which we give thanks  
 A holiday seeped in the lives that we colonized  
 So that we could build anew.

When I think of abuelita I don't think of Lomo Saltado or Ají de gallina

I think of apple pie.

|“*Language was always the companion of empire*” Antonio De Nebrija

Erasure of peoples, cultures, and ways of life can happen through language. A significant aspect of assimilation is learning the dominant language — English in the case of the United States. As Ray Gwyn Smith asks, “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?” To rob someone of their language is to rob an individual and community of their way of knowing and expressing. Taking away language is robbing a person of their identity and is a violent psychological colonization. Gloria Anzaldua in her book *Borderlands* states that “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.”<sup>12</sup> Dominant anglo-white power enforces English as the language of the elite. Society's reproduction of this “fact” further robs people of pride in themselves and their language.

Quechua to Spanish. Spanish to English.  
 English to English to English to English  
 Tongue, native  
 Indigenous, colonized.

My Abuelita was an artist. She painted oil paintings of all of her grandchildren. They were grand and marvelous. The eyes of her paintings always carried heart and made the people she painted come alive — a story behind the eyes. My cousin Nadine

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<sup>12</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria. “‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’ (1987).” In *Available Means: An Anthology Of Women’S Rhetoric(s)*, edited by Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, 357–65. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001, 3.



## *Tongue*

Political silencing  
of language  
plays out in  
personal erasures,  
in gaps. Erased.

One extreme and violent example of controlling cultural (identity) reproduction was the sending of Indigenous children to boarding schools, away from their families, communities and land from the mid 17th to the early 20th century. This was a continuation of genocide on a psychological level. Boarding schools were all over the United States affecting many different tribes and communities; their primary purposes were to “civilize” and assimilate Indigenous children. Richard Henry Pratt, one of the creators of these schools, famously declared in a speech during the 1892 National Conference of Charities and Correction<sup>13</sup>, “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” In 1879, Pratt created the Carlisle school in Carlisle, PA, one of the biggest and most abusive boarding schools. Children were forced to speak English, wear Anglo-American clothing, cut their hair, and act according to Christian American values.<sup>14</sup> Stripping or eliminating traditional clothing of Indigenous peoples is a way by which colonizers strip them of their communities, cultures, spirituality and identity. Because hair is important to cultural identity and considered sacred, a forced cutting of hair and a change in dress directly suppresses cultural autonomy. The boarding schools were part of a grand colonial project to assimilate and eradicate Indigenous peoples, cultures and identities by focusing efforts on controlling the next generation.<sup>15</sup>

One of the many techniques used in the boarding schools was the “Outing” system, started by Pratt as a way to assimilate children more deeply into daily White

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<sup>13</sup> “Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.” “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man”: R. H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans | Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/teach/kill-indian-him-and-save-man-r-h-pratt-education-native-americans>.

<sup>14</sup> “The Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Assimilation with Education after the Indian Wars (Teaching with Historic Places) (U.S. National Park Service).” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-carlisle-indian-industrial-school-assimilation-with-education-after-the-indian-wars-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> While boarding schools do not still exist, the Indiana Welfare Act of 1978 seeking to protect this from happening, now looks like it will be overturned by the Supreme Court. I urge you to look into this further about modern forms of control

American society. Many thousands of Indigenous children would spend their whole summers with white families local to the area of the boarding school.<sup>16</sup> Pratt said home training was important for the children to become “Americanized”; according to Pratt, the main purpose of the Outing Program was to help children “learn English and the customs of civilized life.”<sup>17</sup> Being forcibly removed from place is a suppression of autonomy as well because land is so central to identity for different indigenous communities. “Boarding schools run by Christian churches or the federal government also played a strong role in suppressing and criminalizing Native American cultures and religions. One impact that boarding schools had on Indigenous children and communities was loss of intergenerational cultural knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> The state controls the ability to transmit knowledge through generations. By suppressing this, the state furthers its control of reproduction, instead producing American-ness and therefore whiteness in bodies.

Indigenous families were prevented from making conscious and informed decisions about the way their children would be educated, treated, or raised, nor were they informed or aware of the short and long-term effects these institutions would have on their children and generations to come. Louellyn White, whose grandfather attended Carlisle, states, “My family was denied agency and had little choice in being subjected to the power of colonialism, whether by remaining in poverty on the reservation or by attending colonizing institutions designed to eliminate all traces of indigeneity.”<sup>19</sup> Agency of one’s body, culture and identity is taken away by colonial hegemonic forces of power through efforts of assimilation, which are inherently violent and oppressive. This control affects generations to come and the future makeup and existence of populations.

Many ways of life are based in oral tradition, passed down from generation to generation, telling the stories and histories of a people. If language is not passed down,

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<sup>16</sup> White, Louellyn. “White Power and the Performance of Assimilation: Lincoln Institute and Carlisle Indian School.” In *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, edited by Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose, 106–23. University of Nebraska Press, 2016, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Louellyn, *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Beck, Abaki, and Rosalyn LaPier. “For Indigenous Peoples, Abortion Is a Religious Right.” YES! Magazine, June 30, 2022. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2022/06/30/abortion-indigenous-peoples-reproductive-health>.

<sup>19</sup> Louellyn, *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, 119.

traditions, cultures and ways of life will oftentimes not be transmitted. Grandparents and elder generations are crucial for the continuation of culture and familial traditions, and therefore can be crucial in the next generation's cultural identity construction. If hegemonic devices of power dominate the "other" within the body of an older generation, it can affect what values are transmitted. Jackson, et al.'s "Salience of Ethnic Minority Grandparents in the Ethnic-Racial Socialization and Identity Development of Multiracial Grandchildren" shows the critical role grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren's ethnic-racial socialization and ethnic identity development. The study focused primarily on mixed children with a grandparent in an ethnic or racial minority group. It showed that grandparents are often responsible for the transmission of language, cultural values, and traditions.<sup>20</sup> Without the transmission of knowledge or the ability to transmit, which happens through reproduction, cultural knowledge, identity, language and ways of being can be erased. This is a function of the state controlling cultural autonomy.

*Tunnel down tunnel stuck tunnel go*

Tunnel down

Tunnel stuck

Tunnel go

Tunnel go on ahead without

She says she saw them in her dream.

She saw them, our ancestors

She saw them in her dream the other night

The other night she saw them

The other night, the night after abuelita passed.

She saw our ancestors in her dream the other night

at the end of long tunnel

A tunnel of years and stories

A tunnel of knowing

A tunnel of songs and laughter

A tunnel of color

They're there

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<sup>20</sup> Kelly F. Jackson, Felicia M. Mitchell, Cyndy R. Snyder & Gina E. Miranda Samuels (2020). "Salience of Ethnic Minority Grandparents in the Ethnic-Racial Socialization and Identity Development of Multiracial Grandchildren," *Identity*, 20:2, 73-91, DOI:10.1080/15283488.2020.1728535



I do not have time in this paper to tell their stories - but they are deep, beautiful and expansive.<sup>21</sup>

## II. Control of Bodily Reproduction and Autonomy

This summer the United States Supreme Court overturned the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, voting with a 6-3 majority in favor. *Roe* was passed in 1973, a half a century ago. The overturning of *Roe*, the centuries of debate on the issue of abortion, and the fact that this is even a debate, speaks to the ways hegemonic power structures function in society. As I demonstrated earlier, government systems seek to control the bodies of the “other,” which counter white patriarchal ways of being. With the overturning of *Roe*, the autonomy over one's reproduction has been literally put “back” in the hands of *the state*. By controlling abortion access, states control the autonomy of a person with a uterus, deciding their reproductive future. I will explain later that this “choice” should not function in a binary, but rather within a Reproductive Justice framework.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* acts in partnership with the long legacy of American Christian values being forced on Indigenous communities, such as the American Boarding Schools I spoke of earlier. Abortion rights are religious/spiritual rights for Indigenous peoples. Reproductive health care is an important cultural practice for Indigenous peoples including religious rituals, sacred rites, and the right to abortion; knowledge of medicinal plants has been used for thousands of years by Indigenous peoples at every stage of reproductive health, from menstruation, contraception, abortion, pregnancy, giving birth, after birth, uterine health, and menopause.<sup>22</sup> By taking away the right to abortion this effects knowledge and practices that can be transmitted. In an article written by Abaki Beck and Rosalyn LaPier they speak of their grandmother Annie Mad Plume Wall, a well-regarded Indigenous healer of the Blackfeet Nation of Montana who learned plant knowledge and reproductive health knowledge from her grandmothers. Medicinal plants were used to “regulate menstruation, for abortion, for the birth process,

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<sup>21</sup> I encourage you to interact with my footnotes when I tell these stories, so you can see pictures, videos, and additional stories of these individuals as more holistic people.

<sup>22</sup> Beck, Abaki, and Rosalyn LaPier. “For Indigenous Peoples, Abortion Is a Religious Right.”

and to address symptoms of menopause.”<sup>23</sup> Religious ceremonies were also held in which a sanctified belt was worn to prevent pregnancy and regulate fertility. “Blackfeet people viewed reproductive health and bodily autonomy as part of our relationship with the sacred realm.”<sup>24</sup> By denying the right to abortion (denying bodily autonomy), cultural autonomy is, too, denied. The overturning of Roe's effect on Indigenous populations in the United States demonstrates multifaceted state control I introduce at the start of this essay: both with the control of cultural reproduction and physical autonomy over one's own reproductive lineage. This also demonstrates that bodily and cultural autonomy are intrinsically linked.

Roe serves as one example of state control over autonomy, but there are other extreme and violent ways this control is enacted on those deemed “the other” such as coercive/forced sterilization. Eugenics is based on the idea of reproductive fitness, a term that evaluates the quality of an individual assigning a certain value to their reproduction.<sup>25</sup> Because eugenic ideology is racist, ableist and classist those who are primarily affected are those outside of the dominant white, anglo, able body. Acts of control can be enforced through efforts of population control, coercive sterilization, and controlling abortion access (often all these efforts are linked in someway).

Controlling reproduction autonomy has been a persistent feature in US history directed at people of color. There are many examples of these actions taking place, and not enough space in this essay to discuss them all. Because of the scope of this article in an undergraduate journal my examples will only include harm and trauma. This will not be a holistic image of these people, populations and lives beyond trauma and control, each one of these individuals all are so much more than trauma and eradication. However for the purpose of this paper I bring attention to these actions of horrific violence so we can learn, grow and create a better, more informed present and future.

In the late 19th century into the 1920s, the state created facilities to confine people who were deemed “unfit” mentally, physically, and socially were established and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Kluchin, Rebecca M. “Introduction.” In *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980*, 1–9. Rutgers University Press, 2009, 2.



expanded, in order to keep those peoples separate from society.<sup>26</sup> Individuals at these facilities were forcibly sterilized. Concepcion Ruiz, a 16-year-old Mexican-American, was one of those individuals. Concepcion was arrested in 1930 and tried in California Juvenile Court on the charges of sexual delinquency. Ruiz had run away with her boyfriend. In the eyes of the California Probation Officers, Judges, and Medical Superintendents, Ruiz's interest in boys, decision to run away and her lower than average IQ score (a racist method measuring intellect) was evidence enough to deem her "mentally deficient."<sup>27</sup> She was committed to the Sonoma State Home for the Feeble Minded to be sterilized. Ruiz was taken to the surgery ward, actively refusing consent and protesting. Several months later Ruiz finally gained her freedom, and described the surgery that was given to her despite her protest and active resistance.<sup>28</sup> Concepcion filed a lawsuit against the Judge, probation officers and superintendent. Her case highlighted the numerous ways in which authorities violated her constitutional rights. The state ruled against her, deeming her choice to run away and her IQ as a reflection of her mental status which ruled her "unfit" to reproduce or function within society. By deeming her as such the state reserved the right to control Concepcion's bodily autonomy and ability to reproduce. This is a racialized, violent action of the state demonstrating its need to reproduce its "fit" self.

*She is More*

Concepcion Ruiz. She is more.  
 Her story is longer  
 Her resistance is power.  
     She fought.  
     She said no.  
         The legacy of her fight remains.  
         We carry her with us  
     We do not forget, even if they make us  
 We do not.  
 We say no.

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<sup>26</sup> Lira, Natalie. "Latinos and the Consequences of Eugenics." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed December 15, 2022. [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/eugenics-latinos-and-the-consequences-of-eugenics/?utm\\_source=lterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=campaign\\_5135995](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/eugenics-latinos-and-the-consequences-of-eugenics/?utm_source=lterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_5135995).

<sup>27</sup> Natalie. "Latinos and the Consequences of Eugenics."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

I will use Rebecca M. Kulchin's *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in American, 1950-1980* to give a very brief history of birth control, sterilization as acts of eugenics and neo-eugenics in the United States. Between 1965-75, contraceptive sterilization became a popular form of birth control particularly appealing to married couples, and by 1975 — 7.9 million Americans had undergone sterilization.<sup>29</sup> However, before sterilization became a popular method of birth control it was used as a tool of eugenics — “the science of racial betterment” developing in the US at the start of the twentieth century. Eugenicists believed in the notion of biological determinism, the belief that mental, physical and behavioral “defects” were genetic and unalterable. Biological determinism enforced the idea that poverty, criminality, illegitimacy, epilepsy, feeble-mindedness, and alcoholism (others as well) were inherited traits and could not be altered.<sup>30</sup> These thoughts gained traction during the period of eastern and southern European immigration, American industrialization and urbanization. With the influx of birth rates and immigration to the United States, eugenicists “sought to control the quality of the American population in order to prevent the country from being overrun by the ‘unfit.’”<sup>31</sup>

Those deemed “unfit” were those of “the other” i.e not “natural” white, native-born Americans. This brings us back to Dylan Rodriguez's framework about witness being defined as the “normative paradigm of *human* being”. Anything outside of this is “the other” and therefore should be erased, eradicated and/or dominated. “The other” threatens purity. As Kulchin reminds us, biological determinism naturalized racial and ethnic differences, deeming white the “natural” *human* being. By naturalizing these differences, “it secured middle- and upper-class white men's position at the top of the social hierarchy.”<sup>32</sup> Society must be reproduced to maintain that status, and in order for that reproduction to occur it must be controlled.

Eugenics faded by the start of World War II but did not go away completely from American society, culture or politics — it instead transformed to neo-eugenics. Neo-

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<sup>29</sup> Kluchin, Rebecca M. “Introduction.” In *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980*, 1–9. Rutgers University Press, 2009, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Kluchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

eugenics was not a formal movement but it continued some of the ideas and practices of eugenics. Neo-eugenicists believed, like eugenicists, that poverty, criminality etc. were transmitted and reproduced, but rather than this transmission happening through genetics, neo-eugenics believed the transmission happened through culture. In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s American society faced “threats” to white systems of power and privilege which were being challenged by Black people, Chicanos/as, and Indigenous peoples, as well as other minorities, demanding an end to racial discrimination and equal rights under the law.<sup>33</sup> During this time, 1960s, Neo-eugenicists took issue too with expanding the welfare system and including People of Color in those programs, extending the ignorant idea about the cost of caring for the “unfit”. Neo-eugenicist developed the term “welfare queen” , a term that was developed to devalue the reproductive labor of poor mothers who received assistance.<sup>34</sup> Though eugenics had shifted, the idea of those “unfit” to reproduce needing to be controlled remained consistent.

The United States used coercive sterilization to exert control over the rising immigrant population in the late 1960s and early 70s. As the United States population rose drastically due to increased birth rates and immigration, the state viewed immigration from Latin America as a threat to white supremacy. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were sterilized without their informed consent when they went to Los Angeles County USC Medical Center for an emergency cesarean section. *No Más Bebés*, a documentary archiving the events and the resistance which followed, documents stories from women who were forcibly sterilized. Women who were told they needed an immediate cesarean section — with blood dripping down their legs and in a great deal of pain — were asked to sign a consent form for a tubal ligation.<sup>35</sup> Some signed right in the middle of labor, some don’t remember signing at all. Many of these women did not speak or read English, so many did not know what they were signing. Presenting documents that would cause a life altering decision in an unfamiliar language is coercive and used as a tool of the state to enact its control on these women. Additionally, many of the doctors were told these

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Espino, Virginia, Johanna Velasco Demetrakas, and Aldo Velasco. *No Más Bebés. Independent Lens*. Corporation For Public Broadcasting, 2016.

women needed to be sterilized to save taxpayers from paying welfare money and stop population growth.<sup>36</sup> This example shows the way racism influences the state's efforts to control Chicana women's bodies and reproductive autonomy.

These injustices did not go without resistance. A case was taken on by a Chicana lawyer who gathered hospital records from a whistle-blowing doctor. They filed a civil rights lawsuit in 1975, *Madrigal v. Quilligan*, arguing the right, under *Roe v. Wade*, that a person has the reproductive right to bear a child.<sup>37</sup> This was just the beginning of the civil rights movement for Chicana women in the United States. This displays resistance against state control over bodies that do not reproduce whiteness.

The history of the United States is fraught with a brutal lineage of control over the bodies of those deemed "other". Indigenous women/people with uteruses have been at the front lines of white Americans' brutal conquest for Native land and control since the start of European conquest of the Americas.<sup>38</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s Indian Health Services performed forcible tubal ligation surgeries on one out of every four Indigenous women (or persons with uterus), without their knowledge or consent.<sup>39</sup> The IHS, as an extension of the state, has a dark history of forced sterilization. From as early as 1832, medical services from the Department of the Interior (becoming IHS) were part of U.S. agreements with sovereign tribes.<sup>40</sup> The IHS did provide better health care, but as scholar Jane Lawrence writes the IHS operated under historical assumptions that Indigenous peoples and people of color were "morally, mentally and socially defective"<sup>41</sup> rooted within racist, eugenics history of "the other". An example of this function is that some physicians did

not believe that American Indian and other minority women had the intelligence to use other methods of birth control effectively and that there were already too many minority individuals causing problems in the nation,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States: 1978: *Madrigal v. Quilligan*." Research Guides. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/madrigal-v-quilligan>.

<sup>38</sup> Theobald, Brianna. *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Blakemore, Erin. "The Little-Known History of the Forced Sterilization of Native American Woman" Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-little-known-history-of-the-forced-sterilization-of-native-american-women/>.

<sup>40</sup> Blakemore, "The Little-Known History of the Forced Sterilization of Native American Woman".

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

including the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement. Medical personnel also believed they were helping these women because limiting the number of children they could have would help minority families to become more financially secure in their own right while also lessening the welfare burden.<sup>42</sup>

These beliefs were assisted by government assumptions that birth rates of Indigenous mothers should be reduced and controlled to stop reproduction. Forced sterilization under IHS began in the 1960s, though genocide of these women and peoples had been on going. In 1974 legislation was created to protect against sterilization, but the abuse continued.<sup>43</sup> Between 25 to 50 percent of Indigenous women were sterilized from the 70s to the 76s.<sup>44</sup> Leaders from WARN, Woman of All Red Nations, who articulated early visions of Native Reproductive Justice, alleged that many of these cases of sterilization were performed coercively and with genocidal intention.<sup>45</sup>

The results of sterilizations are still felt within communities today, much like the forced assimilation of Indigenous children in boarding schools. Lawrence says; “Tribal communities lost much of their ability to reproduce, the respect of other tribal entities, and political power in the tribal councils.”<sup>46</sup> A tribal community represents sections of a tribe, thus meaning the population size of a community reflects the number of representatives that can be elected to council and to national organization — meaning the power in the tribal government is affected by the population size of a tribal community.<sup>47</sup> Lawrence points out further that if a community suffers a large number of sterilizations there are social and cultural repercussions as well, one being that a community can lose the respect of other communities “because of its inability to protect its women.”<sup>48</sup> In this case specifically political and social/cultural autonomy is taken by

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<sup>42</sup> Lawrence, Jane. “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women.” *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2000), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Blakemore, “The Little-Known History of the Forced Sterilization of Native American Woman”.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Theobald, Brianna. *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence, Jane. “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women.” *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2000), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence, “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women.” 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

the state's control of reproduction. Yet again this serves as an example of forced sterilization in the United States of the bodies of those deemed “other” (to the white-anglo-man) and functions to show the way the state controls bodies’ reproductive autonomy. Control of this reproductive autonomy function to control reproduction of offspring (bodily autonomy), controlling cultural autonomy with knowledge and generational transmission as well as lack of access to culturally appropriate sexual and reproductive health education.

Population control measures have been intended to prevent people of color with uteruses from reproducing. Eugenics laws, immigration restrictions, sterilization abuses, targeted family planning and welfare reform have been used as vehicles for implementation and justification for population control and forcible sterilization. I will now transition us into a case study of 1990s Peru under the Fujimori regime which parallels forcible sterilization of Indigenous peoples in the United States as well as many instances of racially motivated suppression of “the other”.

*| Reproductive Autonomy controlled by the state.*

### **III. Case Study on Peruvian Sterilization | Control of Both Cultural and Bodily**

#### **Autonomy:**

This control can be seen beyond the United States and in many countries all over the world. I will be focusing on a case study of the sterilization which happened in Peru from the 1990s-2000s. The government co-opted progressive/feminist rhetoric in the service of an anti-woman, anti-indigenous agenda. The government used Feminist “Free Choice” rhetoric to promote a “Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program”, which masked a larger agenda of population control through the forced, and coercive sterilization of primarily Indigenous communities. Population control specifically targeted towards Indigenous women in Peru parallels anti-abortion/sterilization against Indigenous women, and other women or people of color in the United States. The “medical services”, provided by Indian Health Services in the United States resulted in the sterilization of 25 to 50 percent of Indigenous peoples with uteruses from 1970 to

1976.<sup>49</sup> These parallels are significant because they show the methods the state uses to control bodies and deny reproductive autonomy.

In addition to progressive feminists' "Free Choice" rhetoric, the government used blatant racial and class biases to promote its Family Planning Program. The propaganda was distributed not to the general population, but rather it was targeted toward low-income and indigenous populations. Posters and large calendars hung in the rural health clinics depicting two contrasting pictures.<sup>50</sup> Ewig analyzes these propaganda stating one picture depicts a happy, clean family with a boy and a girl in a nice house with a neatly kept green yard contrasting the second picture of a shack depicting a sad family with many children in a dirty neighborhood. The poster reads: "Sólo tú puedes decidir cuántos hijos tener" (*Only you can decide how many children to have*).<sup>51</sup> This poster promotes the idea that you can elevate your class status by controlling your fertility. Since Lima is in a desert, only families in wealthy neighborhoods can afford an irrigated green lawn, flowers and trees, which is depicted in the smaller family. The children from the smaller family dress in school uniforms and hold books which show their family is able to pay for uniforms and school materials. This poster uses racism to manipulate the population and perpetuate racist ideologies.

Another instance of government propaganda as a racist tool of control was a billboard in the rural province of Ayacucho. The billboard reads: "*Planifica Tu Familia - Vive Feliz*" (Plan your family - Live happily) next to a family of 4, followed by: "Asi NO;" inside the "O" of the word "NO" is a typical rural indigenous family with a mother and daughter wearing *Polleras* (wide skirts) with long dark braided hair. The parents of the five children look anxious and exhausted. This contrasts the tranquil and calm parents of the smaller family of two fair-skinned children whose mother has bouncy blonde/lighter hair. Not only were these campaigns targeted towards poor indigenous women who had little access to contraception, they reflected the class and racial biases of Peruvian society.<sup>52</sup> In this case, racism is used directly to control Indigenous peoples' reproduction.

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<sup>49</sup> Blakemore, "The Little-Known History of the Forced Sterilization of Native American Woman".

<sup>50</sup> Ewig, Christina. "Hijacking Global Feminism: Feminists, the Catholic Church, and the Family Planning Debacle in Peru." In *Global Empowerment of Women*, 1st ed., 632-659. Routledge, 2007, 645.

<sup>51</sup> Ewig, *Global Empowerment of Women*, 632.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 645.

Christina Ewig argues that the Fujimori government, under President Alberto Fujimori, viewed bodies (primarily indigenous women’s bodies) as “mere vehicles through which broader antipoverty or economic development objectives could be achieved.”<sup>53</sup> This traces back to where I started this essay, stating that the state uses/controls bodies’ autonomy, using them as vessels to reproduce hetero-patriarchal, colonial society. I will primarily be using Ewig’s analysis of propaganda in Peru at this time, as her essay inspired and provided a lot of my research.

I must recognize the limitations of this essay primarily using an American’s analysis of the Peruvian sterilization — I hope to do further research that is more cohesive, holistic and does not fall solely within American Western academic analysis. My purpose in doing this is to bring attention to these stories in 1990s Peru. I hope they serve as a history we can learn from and help further Feminists of Color’s Reproductive Justice framework informing us as we collectively fight for a liberated future. I hope we can see the resistance which occurred and is ongoing in Peru and remember these women and people who had their lives altered. My hope as I continue this research and project is to honor these women as complete humans rather than just their status as Indigenous mothers, or *wish to be mothers*, who were sterilized and had their lives altered by this moment.

I will start by highlighting specific people and specific events that happened during the sterilization. The sterilization program in Peru has only gained more national and global attention because of the Quipu Project which created an interactive transmedia platform documenting the testimonies of women and men who were coerced or forcibly sterilized. The transmedia platform is an interactive website with oral histories, Peruvian soundscapes, videos and historical elements — a documentary project. The audience can interact and choose the threads of the Quipu.<sup>54</sup> The project is inspired by this and aims to “shine a light on the sterilizations, creating a collective memory archive of this case.”<sup>55</sup> The project gave space for individuals to call in and record their stories. In Peru many of the individuals didn’t know they had been sterilized

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 636.

<sup>54</sup> A Quipu is a knotted cord used by the Incas to convey complex messages

<sup>55</sup> “Quipu Project.” Quipu Project. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/listen/134?view=thread>.



until years later when the project was published or when they were asked to be interviewed.<sup>56</sup> This is because many of those who were sterilized lived in rural communities of Peru. The family planning program and sterilization efforts went “under the radar” because many individuals didn’t speak Spanish and were unaware of the consequences of participating in the program. The Quipu Project helped expose the incentives that were given to individuals to participate in the program, such as food, money, land, housing, while at other times threats, fines and misleading information about the procedure were given.<sup>57</sup> The stories the Quipu Project collected demonstrates the hegemonic coercion the state (the Peruvian government in this case) used to control bodies and deny them reproductive autonomy. What follows is a graphic description of forcible sterilization.

Gloria Bailio, a Quechua woman with three children, was visited repeatedly by public health officials at her home, each time she told them she was not interested in the surgery. The officials kept returning, telling her that the president, Fujimori, “had ordered the surgery for women with large families — women who they said ‘reproduced like rabbits.’”<sup>58</sup> Gloria finally conceded to the sterilization program one day while her husband was away. Though she initially “consented”, Gloria changed her mind in the operating room. She was restrained and blindfolded so they could continue the surgery.<sup>59</sup> She was forcibly sterilized. This was documented by Gloria in the Quipu project. Gloria was pressured many times over to have the surgery. She was manipulated. By the description of the president literally comparing Quechua women to “rabbits,” Gloria’s story brings in the element of racism and the view of Indigenous peoples as “others” on the level of animals who can be controlled and do not have *human* reproductive autonomy. Direct racism functions as a form of control,

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<sup>56</sup> Suresh, Arvind. “Forced Sterilization in Peru: Did Modern Eugenic Practices Slow Population Growth?” Genetic Literacy Project, August 20, 2022. <https://geneticliteracyproject.org/2014/12/11/forced-sterilization-in-peru-did-modern-eugenic-practices-slow-population-growth/>.

<sup>57</sup> Suresh, “Forced Sterilization in Peru: Did Modern Eugenic Practices Slow Population Growth?”.

<sup>58</sup> Miller, Leila. “Tied down and Sterilized: Peru’s Dark History of Family Planning.” Los Angeles Times, October 29, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-10-29/peru-forced-sterilization-alberto-fujimori>.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, Leila. “Tied down and Sterilized: Peru’s Dark History of Family Planning.” Los Angeles Times, October 29, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-10-29/peru-forced-sterilization-alberto-fujimori>.

dehumanizing people and promoting the belief that bodies deemed “other” are inferior to the superior colonizing force.

“Our intention is that these stories are never forgotten, that these abuses will never be repeated.”<sup>60</sup>

Those who weren’t literate in or didn’t speak Spanish were taken advantage of. Some were asked to sign consent forms without understanding the tubal ligation procedure. Some of those who had just given birth or were actively giving birth, and in extreme pain, would be pressured to sign consent forms “agreeing” to the procedure (the sterilization).<sup>61</sup> These methods of coercive sterilization through language and timing of asking for “consent” are very similar to methods used against Chicana women in the United States.<sup>62</sup> Such as information about the procedure being given in a language that was not the individuals’ native tongue, thereby manipulating them to “agree” to a procedure they did not understand fully. Or by hurriedly giving information and asking the individuals to sign while they were in pain. This coercion represents another way the state controls bodily autonomy.

Medical complications could arise after the procedure because of a lack of follow up. Conditions in which surgeries could take place were unsafe and unhygienic.<sup>63</sup> Aside from medical complications, the act of being sterilized disrupted and infringed on Quechua cultural practices and ways of being. Quechua women are expected to have a lot of children because family is a large part of the culture and life in the Andes. Those who were sterilized could no longer serve that “purpose” or provide children, and many potential mothers would lose themselves and lose their families. Maria Elena Carbajal was forcibly pressured into sterilization; while at the hospital for a visit, her husband left her because he thought she had been willingly sterilized and could therefore be unfaithful to him without consequences. Maria then found another husband who also ended up leaving her because she could not “provide” him with kids. Maria’s biological right, and

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<sup>60</sup> “Quipu Project.” Quipu Project. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/listen/134?view=thread>.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, “Tied down and Sterilized: Peru’s Dark History of Family Planning”.

<sup>62</sup> Espino, Virginia, Johanna Velasco Demetrakas, and Aldo Velasco. *No Más Bebés. Independent Lens*. Corporation For Public Broadcasting, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Suresh, “Forced Sterilization in Peru: Did Modern Eugenic Practices Slow Population Growth?”.

part of her cultural desire/purpose was taken from her. Her autonomy over these choices and the effects of that loss affected the trajectory of her life. By being forcibly sterilized the state both took control over Maria's bodily autonomy as well as her cultural autonomy by controlling the way in which she could participate in society.

Florentina Loayza was only 19 when she "got the string" (as sterilization is sometimes referred to). Florentina expressed a deep sadness whenever she saw a baby.<sup>64</sup> Florentina was robbed of a natural bodily right, of which she should have complete control and autonomy over.

Beyond just social, religious and cultural condemnation came as well. Justina Rimachi, like many other women, experienced an impact on her connection with her religion due to getting the string. In catholicism, sterilization is considered a sin whether it was voluntary or not.<sup>65</sup> Justina and many other women were robbed of their religious autonomy (a cultural and spiritual practice), therefore autonomy of identity, as a result of sterilization which exemplifies how the state controls cultural reproduction in its control of bodily reproduction.

Rudecinda Quilla says that when she tried to get issued a birth certificate for her fourth child in 1996, she was told by doctors that the only way to get the certificate would be to agree to have tubal ligation.<sup>66</sup> Ms Quilla, who was 24 at the time, refused. She says she was forced onto a hospital bed, her hands and feet tied while she was injected with an anesthetic. When she woke up hours later, she had been sterilized and staff told her that she would "never breed like an animal again."<sup>67</sup> Again, this directly echoes Gloria's story and many others who were directly compared to animals. This is state racism: individuals not being seen as humans who have reproductive autonomy, but rather vessels to control.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Peru Forced Sterilisations Case Reaches Key Stage." BBC News, March 1, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56201575>.

<sup>67</sup> "Peru Forced Sterilisations Case Reaches Key State."

Maria Elena Carbajal, Florentina Loayza, Justina Rimachi, Gloria Bailio,  
Rudecinda Quilla

...  
more than **270,000** women  
and **22,000** men.<sup>68</sup>

“They put me on a bed and four of them held me.  
Two held my hands and two held my legs, so they could  
give me the shot, then I don’t remember.”<sup>69</sup>

“They kept us imprisoned, they closed the gates  
and when we saw how other ladies  
were crying with pain,  
we wanted to leave  
but they wouldn’t let us go out.”<sup>70</sup>

“They forced us, because we were powerless, they forced us to get sterilized.”<sup>71</sup>

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The government did not expect backlash because the program targeted primarily impoverished, illiterate, Quechua speaking women, who lived in remote areas. The government was wrong. More than 2,000 Indigenous women came forward **demanding justice**.

Fight, Resist, They are not silenced. They force themselves into history. This essay is an attempt to make them more visible in just the smallest way. Please check out the Quipu Project and learn more, read more.

The resistance from activists in Peru greatly influenced the cases and charges Fujimori was arrested for. I want to be conscious and recognize the brutal harm and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “Quipu Project.” Quipu Project. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/listen/134?view=thread>.

<sup>70</sup> “Quipu Project.” Quipu Project. Accessed December 15, 2022. <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/listen/134?view=thread>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

trauma Fujimori and his administration cause, but also realize this more than an individual's fault, but a deeply rooted bias and racism against Indigenous peoples entrenched deep in hegemonic systems of power.

I will now briefly discuss Fujimori and the Peruvian government's co-optation of global and national movements towards reproductive rights. By the late 1990s there had been a shift globally for reproductive rights Peru seemed to have absorbed. At the UN Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, the International Conference on Population Development in Cairo in 1994, and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, feminists were successful "for the first time in placing women's rights on the international human rights agenda."<sup>72</sup> Fujimori took this rhetoric of "Free Choice" and popular discourse around reproductive rights and used it to promote his population control agenda. Fujimori's revised family planning program seemed to reflect the Cairo agreements; advertising for the program also appeared to be feminist. In 1998 *El Sol*, a newspaper, ran a full page ad that said "There are those who still do not understand that Peruvian women, or the couples in Peru, have the right to choose."<sup>73</sup> Ewig states that this produced the image of a progressive government program supporting the reproductive rights of all Peru's citizens.<sup>74</sup> In this way, Fujimori presented himself as promoting the right to choose and women's freedom. Even against criticism from the Catholic Church, Fujimori declared he stood firmly in "alliance" with the feminists. Fujimori stated that; "a sector of the church is restricting *the freedom* of citizens with its medieval opinions and recalcitrant positions."<sup>75</sup> Despite him situating himself against the church and aligning with progressive policies, Fujimori positioned himself as a progressive political candidate who believed in the rights of all in his country. It is clear however, that he promoted himself this way to get alliance and votes of the Peruvian people and in no way actually believed in the reproductive rights of the Peruvian Indigenous population. Fujimori

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<sup>72</sup> Ewig, 634.

<sup>73</sup> Taken from Ewig's translation of an Ad in 1998 that ran in *El Sol*, 21 Jan 1998

<sup>74</sup> Ewig, 643.

<sup>75</sup> Brooke, James. "Peru's Church Battles a Contraception Plan." *The New York Times*, November 16, 1990. <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/16/world/peru-s-church-battles-a-contraception-plan.html>.

promoted an anti-woman, anti-Indigenous population control program co-opting the national and global feminist movement to sterilize “the others” that he viewed as non-human and animalistic, and therefore should not have reproductive autonomy. Fujimori’s co-optation represents control of bodies, reproductive autonomy both physically and culturally.

In 1995 former President Alberto Fujimori introduced “voluntary surgical contraception” to his Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program. The program however did not explicitly state that the majority of the project targeted Indigenous and poor people with uteruses.

Ewig tells us that an 1993 influential government document “Basic Social Policy Guidelines,” developed by the prime minister’s staff projected increased population growth for Peru which if left unchecked would overtake Peru’s economy.<sup>76</sup> Other government documents, such as “Social Policy: Situation and Perspectives,” reveal that the high-level authorities promoted sterilization over other forms of contraception contrary to the agreements made at the International Conference on Population Development in Cairo in 1994 which required a choice of birth control methods that included options other than sterilization.<sup>77</sup> Ewig demonstrates that various government documents show clearly that the goals for the family planning program were not reproductive health/rights, but rather economic growth and poverty reduction. The government measured the success of poverty reduction by the number of women sterilized — which should not directly coordinate.<sup>78</sup> This shows further that nowhere were reproductive rights actually valued; they were just a tool co-opted by the state for its own gain of both ethnic cleansing and economic stability.

#### **IV. Reproductive Justice Framework in the United States:**

This type of co-optation of movements happens within the United State as well, Carceral feminism being an example of the co-optation and manipulation of a social

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<sup>76</sup> Ewig, 643.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 643.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 644.

movement. This form of white feminism imagines the state to be a savior, a notion that explicitly produces harm for Black women, poor people, gender non-conforming people, immigrants, and people with felony records. Abolition feminism defines the politics of those groups of people who overlap but are also distinct. Today, we have the #MeToo movement and Carceral Feminism which relies on the state to solve problems of domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment against bodies, predominantly by locking up perpetrators. Locking up perpetrators continues the cycle of harm and does not address the root of the issue of violence. It creates an alliance with the carceral state and the prison industrial complex rather than relying on human relationships and community healing and accountability.

Mimi Kim's Anti-Carceral Feminism argues that feminist reform strategies appearing to be progressive, such as #MeToo actually contributed to mass incarceration policies. Even restorative justice efforts, while well intentioned, can partner with the carceral state and hence with carceral feminism. Any attempts at a solution, if partnered at all with the state, can lead to harm. Mariame Kaba tells us we must fight with reform programs within the system while also working to create programs completely removed from the state: it's a "both", "and".

The pro-choice rhetoric of Planned Parenthood does not reckon with the way Black, Indigenous and Latinx women and people with uteruses are prevented by the state from parenting the children that they want. Planned Parenthood works within the binary of "Free Choice" without the intersectional lens needed for a truly liberated future. Reproductive Justice movements, on the other hand, prioritize both the ability to end pregnancies that are unwanted and build families that are wanted, with marginalized mothers at the center. A pro-choice position only addresses the former. Jael Silliman states that the conception of choice is rooted in neoliberalism, placing individual rights and control over one's body as central to freedom rather than the freedom from hegemonic systems of oppression which control our bodies.<sup>79</sup> When focusing solely on the individual's right to choose, it obscures the social, political and economic context in which an individual makes a choice. A person may decide to have an abortion because

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<sup>79</sup> Davis, Angela Yvonne. *Policing the National Body: Sex, Race, and Criminalization*. United Kingdom: South End Press, 2002.

of economic necessity, which does not feel like a “choice.”<sup>80</sup> This places blame on individuals for their “place” in society instead of blaming the way the state regulates population, exercises control over reproduction to reduce populations deemed “unfit”.

These politics are both longstanding tracing their political activist genealogy and emergent.<sup>81</sup> The politics are being taken up in new ways all over the place and though it owes its intellectual genealogy to enslaved women, also through Combahee River Collective,<sup>82</sup> its currently being articulated in the way that reproductive justice and abolition feminism are understanding themselves right now in this post Roe moment.

The state cares about control, not rights. The Reproductive Justice movement in the United States must be reframed and defined by feminists of color as not simply the “Free Choice” to abortion. We must approach reproductive rights and civil rights through an intersectional approach. Lorretta Ross in *The Color of Violence* reminds us that we and our movements live within a system of oppression, one that controls our bodies. Emancipatory freedom will not come if a movement is not fought through an intersectional lens. Ines Smyth, an anthropologist, suggests that “reproductive rights” for population establishment differ from a feminist understanding of the same concept. By the late 1980s the “notion of self-determination in childbearing” was central to feminist definitions of reproductive rights, as too seen in the United States. Smyth argues this equates reproductive rights with consumer choice in a free market rather than a fundamental human right one possesses.<sup>83</sup> Reproductive Justice counters state control and neoliberal ideology, seeing the fight as an intersectional one which cannot fit inside an oppressive binary.

The Peruvian Sterilization from the 1990s to 2001 explicitly illustrates the way feminist pro-choice rhetoric can be employed by the state for racist ends. I’m not saying that this is where the US is going, rather, that this is a cautionary tale and a global parallel of some of the ways in which “human rights” movements can be co-opted by the state so as to be used to further neoliberal agendas rooted in racism and classism

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<sup>80</sup> Solinger, Rickie. *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 1 (2005): 239–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317117>.

<sup>81</sup> Adrienne Maree Brown would call this an Emergent Strategy

<sup>82</sup> Harris, Duchess. *Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Trump*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Ewig, 639.



fueled by a deep history of eugenics. In our current historical moment, a reproductive justice movement led by women of color is essential to the longevity and ultimate emancipation of all of us beyond just reproductive rights, but within a framework of Abolition Feminism.

| *As We Learn*

I have realized as I grow  
I have learned

we cannot trust those given the crown of our country  
we must listen to those who have known this truth all their lives  
our bodies  
    our words, our intentions, our movements  
        become their aid  
        become the key to their election  
        become the key to their domination  
        we become the key to the lock  
    violating our own freedom  
    Leading us to their cage

## **Conclusion:**

| *Suggesting reproductive justice, abolition feminism, and uses of the erotic as ideas/ goals for a liberatory future*

In “Uses of the Erotic”, Audre Lorde explains her work as a potential framework for a liberated future, free from the control of the state that I have laid out in the first portion of this paper. Lorde describes the erotic as separate from just pornographic sexual eroticism, which she argues the state has actually tried to manipulate and control for its own ends of power over our bodies. Lorde opens her essay by stating:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

Lorde describes how our souls have been suppressed through the white supremacist power structure. Stating that even our most personal, erotic, has been used as a form of control by the state against our bodies. Society, in fact, has manipulated the erotic into something for its service and way to control us further.

*Del Dulce Olor de sus Pechos*, a short story by Vilches Norat, demonstrates the power of erotic autonomy as a political and liberatory force. Erotic autonomy liberates and decolonizes bodies from the heteropatriarchal colonizing machine.<sup>84</sup> “The political potential of the erotic lies in its targeting of the process of recolonization; a process that relies on the disciplining and containment of women’s bodies [bodies with uteruses] so that they continue to function as the State’s reproductive vessels.”<sup>85</sup> I will summarize briefly moments in this short story;

The Protagonist of the story is a pregnant woman who when she recognizes the power of her erotic life is unwilling to conform to certain standards. She does not accept her invisibility. The story starts with the husband's desire for his wife’s body. It is a night ritual. He burrows his head into her breasts and breathes in her aroma.

*“Después de un pesado día, se refugió en los senos de su mujer. Todas las noches entraba a la cueva de su pecho para instalarse en ese olor sin el cuál se pensaba perdido. Muchos años venía oficiando el ritual” (29).*

Her body is passive. Her body serves to calm her husband after a day of stress. As the story goes on the protagonist begins to be less invisible and passive. She begins to celebrate her body and her body is celebrated by neighbors who didn’t notice her

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<sup>84</sup> Aramburu, Diana. “Celebrating Erotic Autonomy: Decolonizing Desire in Vanessa Vilches Norat’s ‘Del Dulce Olor de Sus Pechos.’” *Confluencia* 36, no. 2 (2021): 103–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27109839>.113.

<sup>85</sup> Aramburu, “Celebrating Erotic Autonomy: Decolonizing Desire in Vanessa Vilches Norat’s ‘Del Dulce Olor de Sus Pechos.’” 113.

prior to pregnancy. She welcomes the gaze. Her “erotic visibility leads not only to her sexual empowerment, but also to a new affirmation of her agency.”<sup>86</sup> She begins to wear clothes which show off her pregnant belly, *gordura*.<sup>87</sup>

*Del Dulce Olor de sus Pechos* demonstrates an erotic awakening, born from the protagonist’s experience of pregnancy through her body which is no longer a vessel for the nation’s reproduction. This example is not a map of what all humans with uteruses should do to be free, but as an example of the power we all possess to transform our bodies and communities into resistance against the state’s control of our minds, bodies, movements.

The purpose of this paper is to show the ways the state controls our bodily and cultural reproductive autonomy and even co-opts our movements — showing that we cannot trust the state, or anything within these hegemonic systems. Each human, each community must find their erotic autonomy in their own sense of the word. Perhaps this can lead us to decolonizing ourselves, our minds, and our communities. We must create anew. We must tear down and build back up. We must know the forms in which we are all controlled and dominated. We must be creative. We must survive by any means necessary. We must exist together in community. Erotically connected worlds beyond a sexualized, possessive definition of the erotic. I hope this article has served as a start or continuation of your *knowing* which will begin or continue your journey of decolonization. While this is not *the* solution to the problems of control and domination perhaps it’s one place to start?

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

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