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Porque era afroperuana, Because I was Afro-Peruvian: Sexual Harassment in the Lives of Black Women of Peru

Mariagracia McLin Rodríguez

This essay offers a moving section of a master's thesis project that examines the racialized sexual harassment experiences of Afro-Peruvian domestic workers from the organization AMUNETRAP (*Asociación de Mujeres Negras Trabajadoras del Perú*, Black Women Workers Association of Peru).¹ The original project examines racialized sexual harassment in Peru based on personal narratives the author collected by conducting individual interviews with Afro-Peruvian women in 2021. The project is informed by Kimberlé Crenshaw's representational, political, and structural intersectionality frameworks (1991). Each framework serves to analyze an aspect of racialized sexual harassment in domestic work. Critical race feminism (CRF) is used to diagnose the effectiveness of reporting systems, legislation, activist organizations, and state response to the issue. Whereas few recent studies have filled gaps on sexual harassment and domestic work in other Latin American countries, there are still limited studies in the context of Peru. In Peru, in particular, Afro-Peruvian domestic workers' racialized sexual harassment experiences are acknowledged. In addition, legislation, reporting mechanisms, and community organizations effectiveness are evaluated, while simultaneously analyzing their perpetuation of anti-Black gendered racism.²

Keywords: sexual harassment; violence against women; Afro-Peruvian women; activism

Reporting Racialized Sexual Harassment

Cuando tú comentabas o le decías a la persona que supuestamente era la autoridad en ese tiempo, o tu jefe superior, [te decían] "Eso es una broma, tu autoestima, tienes que superar [mejorar] tu autoestima" y ahí quedaba. Cuando yo sufría [de] este acoso y que me quisieron tocar... Yo no fui la que me quejé incluso en algún momento, creo que del susto o porque yo le dije [al agresor], "No, usted, ¡no me va a tocar y ahorita me voy a quejar!" El señor funcionario, se quejó. Entonces me llegó a mí una carta de preaviso de despido.

When you comment or would tell a person of authority at that time, or your superior, [they would say] "That was a joke, your self-esteem, you need to overcome [improve] your self-esteem," and that's where things left off. When I suffered from this harassment, and they tried to touch me... I was not the one to complain, I believe at some point, I believe due to fear or because I told him [the aggressor], "No, you are not going to touch me, I am going to report it!" The official complained. Because of that, I received a letter stating my dismissal.

Elvira explained that when she was sexually harassed at her company by an official, she did not report the incident, and she told me that in the 1990s if you could not 'handle' these sort of advances or jokes, your superiors or colleagues would shame you. They treated this harassment as a joke, and she felt that they would not have taken her seriously. At the moment she experienced this attempted assault, Elvira threatened to report the aggressor and she believed her threat scared him into complaining to his supervisor. As a result, after being continually harassed, and almost physically assaulted, Elvira was the one that received a termination notice. It was not until later that she learned the man was fired, because someone else witnessed the incident.

I asked Elvira if she had resources to report at the time, she clarified: "¡No! ¡Al principio no tenía recursos, incluso iban las personas como los abogados y tampoco sabían! [No! At the beginning I did not have resources, there were people like lawyers that also did not know]." During this time period in the early 1990s, lawyers did not know what to do, they had no clear proceeding on how to handle sexual harassment cases.

Elvira made it clear that her experiences were related to her being Afro-Peruvian, based on the gendered racism and stereotypes that she saw were entailed with this harassment. She reiterates: "Porque como te digo y no lo vi con otra trabajadora y no vi que han tocado el seno a otra trabajadora... entonces considero que es porque yo era afroperuana. [Because, like I told you, I did not see this happen to another (female) worker, and I did not see them touch another worker's breast... that is why I consider that it's because I was Afro-Peruvian]." She did not witness a similar occurrence with other (female) employees, and she was convinced that it was because she was Afro-Peruvian this sexual harassment and attempted physical assault were directed at her.

Elvira's hesitancy to report is a common in the thirteen interviews I conducted with other Afro-Peruvian women. Although, there were no reporting mechanisms in place for sexual harassment in the 1990s, the women of AMUNETRAP felt that in 2021 they could not trust the reporting mechanisms (for example, *Centros Emergencia Mujer* or CEM and *Línea 100*) because of how they treated Black women. The CEM and *Línea 100* illustrate the government's efforts to support women who have experienced violence in Peru. Some had no information on how to report as a domestic or informal worker. All thirteen women had no or very limited knowledge about the *Ley de Prevención y Sanción del Hostigamiento Sexual* (Law of Prevention and Sanction of Sexual Harassment).³ The majority of the women did not have a designated place to report, they would have to report directly to a supervisor or employer, often times the family of the aggressor or the aggressor themselves. Most of the women were afraid to report sexual harassment in the workplace, because they feared losing their job, not having enough proof, or that no one would believe them. This distrust in reporting stems predominantly from racist interactions governmental agencies have with Black/Afro-descendent populations in Latin America. Law professor Tanya K. Hernández (2019) has looked closely at race relations, racism, and law and society in Latin American, and in various cases she observed that Afro-descendants who reported discrimination to a *comisaría*, or police station or another government agency, were dismissed due to lack of evidence. She argues there is an overall reluctance to view ethno-racial discrimination as a crime that would be prosecuted like any other.

Focusing specifically on sexual violence reporting agencies in Peru, anthropologist Eshe Lewis (2020) documents the interactions she had with *Centros Emergencia Mujer* (CEM) workers, and

the way they portrayed Afro-Peruvian/Black women. During this time, Peru started acknowledging that government services such as the CEM needed to ask for ethno-racial identification in order to serve populations adequately. Lewis observed that there existed a hesitancy to discuss race in the cases of women who were using CEM services. She perceived this as problematic for the Afro-Peruvian women who were seeking resources, as it was further ostracizing their needs. By taking into consideration the challenges that Afro-descendent women have when reporting, in my analysis, I identified three main themes that coincide with their reporting/non-reporting experiences. By following the experiences of three women—Juliana who attempted to report to the comisaría, Mariela who reported to the Ministry of Labor, and Natalia who did not report—I garnered much insight. The cases of these three Afro-Peruvian women demonstrate how they navigate the structural systems for reporting sexual harassment in Peru, and how their intersectional identities form their experiences when accessing resources.

“Nunca hacen nada”

“They never do anything,” said Juliana. I interviewed her in the summer of 2021, at that time she had been working as a trash collector and street sweeper in Lima. This was one of the many ‘informal’ jobs that she had in her lifetime. She felt that she was always at risk of being fired, especially when she was a domestic worker. When I asked about her previous work and if there was a place where she could report sexual harassment, she told me: “En los hogares mayormente si me quejaba era que me botaran, porque ya lo tomaban como que uno era mentirosa, falsa, cínica... [In the houses (she worked in) if I complained, most of the time they would have fired me, because they would consider I was a liar, fake, cynical].”

As a domestic worker, Juliana felt the most vulnerable: if she complained about any uncomfortable situation with sexual undertones, her employers would fire her and accuse her of lying. When I asked her if she had experienced these ‘uncomfortable situations,’ she told me: “Sí, lo he pasado, porque cada cuando me decían ‘tiene buen cuerpo’ y [cuando] me daban un trabajo querían que me acostara [con ellos]. [Yes, I have experienced it, because every once in a while they would tell me, ‘You have a nice body’ and when they hired me, they wanted me to sleep [with them].”

Similar to other cases experienced by the AMUNETRAP women, Juliana experienced sexual solicitations from her employers, they expected her to have sexual relations with them, or they would make remarks about 'how good' (meaning "hot") her body was, because she was Afro-Peruvian/Black. After continuously experiencing this behavior, Juliana was fed up and went to the comisaría to report a specific incident of harassment she experienced while interviewing for a job:

Fui y puse denuncia y nunca me voy a olvidar que un policía me dijo 'pero si no te han hecho nada, no te ha violado, ¿qué puedes denunciar? Cuando te hayan violado, te hayan pegado, ahí vienes y denuncias.' Entonces, que no hay, tampoco tenemos un apoyo de las autoridades porque ellos esperan que uno vaya maltratada y casi moribunda, o muerta, para que ellos puedan hacer [algo].

I went and made a report, and I will never forget that the police told me, 'But they haven't done anything to you, they haven't raped you, what are you going to report? When they have raped you or hit you, that is when you can report.' That is why there is not..., we do not have the support of authorities either, because they want [the woman] to go beaten-up or practically dying, or dead, so that they can do something.

In that moment, the police not only refused to believe Juliana, but they also told her she could not seek help because she had not experienced sexual assault or physical abuse yet. When Juliana reported her sexual harassment, the police turned her away. This has implications for what it counts as sexual violence. Countless women like Juliana are sexually harassed in Peru and many other Latin American countries, but because they have not been "technically" raped, their experiences are ignored, systemically reproducing endless vicious cycles of grotesque violence against women.

Comisaría

In her analysis of the Peruvian comisarías and what *actually* happens to women when they report cases of gender violence, sociologist Lucía Dammert (2018) found that due to the disproportionate level of police being men, and because of patriarchal norms about gender and gender relations in Peru, women experienced a

taboo to report to the police. Often times, just like Juliana, being pushed away or disregarded for the violence they experienced. This treatment is not only an example of institutionalized misogyny, but in many cases, there would be refusal of services based on the ethno-racial origin of the victims.

The author sees the CEM as alternatives for reporting, but if most women still have to file a police report, then their interactions with comisarías will remain cyclically violent. Juliana also believes that the lack of attention to her case was due to her race, "...la violencia (se enfoca) todo... son con gente blanca y la gente que tiene dinero, pero una negra hasta el día no he visto... [...the violence is always (focused on) white people, and the people who have money, but a Black woman to this day, I have not seen it]." She said this referring to how cases of violence are broadcasted on television or have larger visibility in Peru. It's only the white people who are seen and heard when they experience violence. Some of the other women of AMUNETRAP shared their views on comisarías and police reporting. Mercedes explained:

Yo veo que se ocupan menos en las minorías sobre el hostigamiento, de todo ese tema delicado que pasamos las mujeres muchas veces por vergüenza o por no pasar un mal rato yendo a una delegación policial y reportar tu denuncia. [Hablando sobre comentarios de la policía] 'Ah ya, esa morena quiere dinero, dale plata, que quiere plata.' Entonces tú como que ya no tomas esta confianza y seguridad de saber que te van a apoyar de ese lado.

I see that they occupy themselves less with minorities when it comes to harassment, with all that has to do with this sensitive topic that we as women, because of embarrassment or to not go through a bad experience at the police station when reporting. [Speaking about police comments] 'Oh, okay, that morena* (other word for brown/Black woman) wants money, give her money, because she wants money.' So, then it's like you don't have that trust and certainty that they will support you in that way.

Perla and Cassandra also shared their experiences. Perla explained:

Cuando uno va nunca tienen tiempo. Hay que estar haciendo colas, es una pérdida de tiempo. Justo cuando uno va llegar a

dar su queja... tienen que poner el informe en su computadora y dice que el sistema esta lento o no ingresa. Siempre hay peros... cuando uno es negro hay peros...

When you go, they never have time. You have to get in line, and it is a waste of time. Just when you are about to make a complaint... they have to input the information on the computer, and they say that it's slow or it's not working. There is always "a but" ... when you are Black there is "a but"...

Cassandra said:

Si uno iba a la comisaría o algo, no te toman en cuenta. Porque lo primero que te dicen es 'seguro que tú provocaste el incidente' y dicen un montón de cosas que hasta los mismos policías te ofenden.

If you went to the police station or something, they would not pay attention to you. Because the first thing they will tell you is 'I bet you provoked the incident' and they tell you a bunch of things, the policemen themselves will offend you.

The comisarías are an example of a governmental structure that has failed Afro-Peruvian women, and women in general; when it comes to reporting violence, often, they blame the victim. The comisarías reproduce a system where women, specifically Black women, cannot trust them as resource, because they is almost always "a but" turned away. Not a single interviewee described a positive experience with a comisaría, and in most cases they associated it as an unwelcoming, unhelpful, and unsafe place. The comisaría and police officials' comments were not only sexist, but repeatedly used racially charged language by referring to Afro-Peruvian women as 'escandalosas' or saying that they were exaggerating. Nine out of ten times, they were blaming the victims for the harassment they faced. Juliana's case is an example on how as a Black woman and a domestic worker she had to navigate her vulnerability to hypersexualization and violence because she embodies both identities. Simultaneously, she navigated a governmental entity and supposed resource, which rejected and demeaned her entirely. The ways that she is seeking justice, as a human right, impact her directly as a Black woman, who is ignored and disregarded by Peruvian officials and Peruvian society at large.

Mariela's Story

"Ahorita en la actualidad mi trabajo para mi es formal. Porque me pagan, me están pagando todos mis derechos, me están pagando mi seguro, mis vacaciones... [Right now, for me my job is formal. Because they pay me, they pay for my rights, they pay my insurance, my vacation ...]."

Mariela's case is rare, she is a domestic worker getting paid all her legally obligated benefits as a worker, and her employers comply with the law. She did not always feel this positive about going into work, however, there was a time she felt fear at a previous employment. She recalled, "Yo entraba al trabajo con mucha dificultad, con mucho miedo de que 'ay, que me va a decir...' Sientes como un presentimiento de que va a pasar algo. [uno] tiene ese sentimiento de maldad. [I would come into work with a lot of difficulties, with a lot of fear, 'what is he going to tell me...' You feel a feeling that something is going to happen. You have this bad feeling.]" She felt wary of coming into work at a previous employment because of the ways that her employer would sexually harass her and make lewd comments about Mariela, specifically because she was Black. She recalled, "Me dijo una vez un empleador, 'ay no, ustedes las negras calientan bien en la cama, curan bien los riñones. [One time an employer told me, 'you, Black women heat up the bed, you all cure kidneys.']." Mariela felt disgusted by the fact that her employer would make remarks about how Black women were good in bed, when she pushed back and asked what this man meant by his remarks. He told her, "ven acá y vas a ver como me curas los riñones" [come over here, and you are going to see how you cure my kidneys]" as a threat insinuating sexual assault.

The interaction she described for me marked Mariela deeply, she did not want to return to work, she told her employer she was not going to continue working there and they fired her without any benefits or pay. She went directly to the Ministry of Labor, where they calculated everything, her employers owed her. She explained, "...tuvimos que llamar a estos [empleadores], pero no me llegó a pagar. Me dijo [el empleador] que me lo podía pagar en partes... me habrá pagado la mitad [pero] el cansancio cuando uno hace un juicio que ya no quieres seguir cobrando. [...] we had to call them (the employers), but they didn't get to pay. They told me (the employer) that they could pay me in parts... they might have paid half (but) it's a burden when one makes a complaint, that you don't want to keep claiming payment.]" Mariela's experience communicating with the Ministry of Labor and Promotion of Employment

(MTPE), proved that they were not able to hold the employer accountable for their actions. Her employer was still able to withhold payment and was never cited or reported for inciting sexual violence against her. This unfortunate incident happened to Mariela in Lima, Peru.

The Peruvian Government, Its Laws, and Patriarchy

The steps that Mariela took to report the incident and reclaim her rightfully earned pay and benefits, are clearly written in the *Ley de los Trabajadores del Hogar* (Ley N° 27986, Domestic Workers Law). According to the law, domestic workers should be protected from wage theft, and they should report directly to the MTPE if this happens. The law does not address reporting sexual harassment or *maltrato*—mistreatment—in any form, it's mostly to signify the rights of domestic workers as any other paid laborer. For instance, attorney Jesús Aguinaga Saavedra (2017) has looked closely at different dimensions of paid domestic work, inviting us to consider the following: this law needs to be modified in order to include the needs of women, because domestic work continues to be a predominantly female dominated occupation.

Another important suggestion that Aguinaga Saavedra would like to offer, is the need to regulate formal contracts. For instance, to this day, employers hesitate to hire domestic workers when they need to provide a written contract. Refusal to provide a written contract gives the employer room to be unaccountable for their actions and leave little protection for workers. This refusal to sign a contract actually represents a form of workplace discrimination.

Aguinaga Saavedra's chapter (2017) addressed important issues with regard to domestic work. Four years later, Peru passed the *Ley de las Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de Hogar* (Ley N° 31047) in 2021. This law included many of the suggestions above, but more importantly it highlighted that domestic workers cannot be discriminated against based on race, gender, or sex, and that they are protected from uncomfortable or unwanted incidents such as sexual harassment. Although Mariela's case pre-dates the newly founded law, there were still protections in place, although they did very little to hold her employers accountable. The MTPE's '*Trabajo sin Acoso*' [Work without harassment] guide goes into depth about reporting sexual harassment regardless of whether a workplace is private or public. They use scenarios to depict what is defined as

sexual harassment, and how to identify it in the workplace. They provide depictions of domestic workers through imagery and certain scenarios, however, there is no clear procedure on what a domestic worker should do if they want to report sexual harassment given their work in the unregulated privacy of people's homes. In Mariela's case, she does not mention if any action was taken about the harassment she faced, and given our conversations, she seemed doubtful that there would be any justice.

"No tenía ninguna prueba"

"I did not have any evidence" said Natalia as she recalled an incident that happened during her adolescence. At the age of 16, Natalia was sexually harassed by the 21-year-old son of her former employer. During her employment, she was a tutor and babysitter for two of the woman's grandchildren. She would spend multiple days in the house, constantly followed and watched by her employer's eldest son. He would not only make comments about her body, but he would also proceed to touch her without consent. She stated:

Me decía '¡ay dios! que lindo tu cabello' y comenzaba a tocarme el cabello, luego el cuello y cuando me tocaba el cuello es cuando yo me sentía poco nerviosa... Me decía cosas como 'eres muy bonita', o 'tú eres linda' o me dijo 'qué lindo cuerpo tienes'.

He would tell me 'Oh god! your hair is beautiful' and he would start touching my hair, and then my neck, and when he would touch my neck, that is when I felt a bit nervous... He would tell me things like, 'you are so beautiful' or 'you are pretty' or he told me 'What a beautiful body you have.'

She further elaborated:

... yo sentía que la asociaba con mi color de piel y con mi identidad, porque también llegó a decir que le gustaban las morenas y yo se lo tomé como si ser morena fuera un fetiche para él.

... I felt that he associated my skin color and my identity, because he once said that he liked morenas and I took that as if me being morena was a fetish for him.

The extreme expressions of sexual objectification were clearly racialized, as a Black woman she felt unsafe in more than one way.

As an added factor, the male employer was sexually assaulting an adolescent girl, a minor. She was only 16 years old at the time, and she hid these experiences from her mother and family for the sake of helping them financially. Once she told her family, they were the ones to confront the employer about the behavior Natalia was experiencing. “Le dije a mi mamá y mi mamá lo primero que hizo fue ir a la casa de la señora. [I told my mom and the first thing my mom did was go to the lady's house].”

When I asked Natalia why she did not report these incidents, she explained:

En ese momento, sí pude haber denunciado, pero como te digo, acá las denuncias no proceden si no tienes alguna prueba mínima. Yo no tenía fotos, videos, audios, capturas de pantallas sobre mensajes, [que puedan] probar que yo había sido acosada sexualmente. Entonces no quise proseguir con la denuncia porque sentí que no nos llegaría a tomar atención. Porque, cuantos casos hay en el Perú que tienen muchísimas más pruebas que yo, o chicas que no han tenido ninguna prueba, pero si insisten que han sido acosadas hasta violadas y no proceden con la denuncia. Entonces yo sentí que en mi caso sería igual.

In that moment I could have reported, but like I said, here cases do not proceed if you do not have any evidence. I did not have photos, videos, audios, screenshots of messages, (that could) prove that I had been sexually harassed. Because of that, I did not want to proceed with a report because I felt that they wouldn't pay attention. Because of how many cases there are in Peru that have a lot more evidence than I did, or girls that had no evidence, but if they insist that they were harassed, or even raped they do not proceed with the report. That is why I felt that my case would be the same.

Natalia had seen how the police and other reporting mechanisms had treated cases with material evidence (for example, photos, videos, screenshots, etc.), and she had none of that. It was her word against the employer and her son. She decided not to report out of fear of being ignored and dismissed. When her family went

directly to her employer (the mother of the aggressor/predator) she had told them, “yo conozco a mi hijo, yo sé que clase de persona es y jamás he visto eso. [I know my son, and I know what kind of person he is, and I have never seen him do that].” Natalia’s employer refused to acknowledge that her son had been sexually harassing her, and insinuated that Natalia was the one who had a ‘crush on her son.’ Also, “I know what kind of person he is” suggested that he possessed some sort of moral integrity and was very unlikely to engage in that kind of behavior.

In Natalia’s case, and the case of many of the interviewees, reporting was not an option because they knew that they were not going to be listened to, whether it was the comisaría, another reporting mechanism (CEM, Línea 100, etc.) or their employer. Fear was the biggest factor for not reporting sexual harassment in the workplace along with distrusting the justice system. Fear that they would be called liars, fear that they would be fired, or fear of retaliation from the employer. As a result of failed policies and reporting mechanisms, Afro-Peruvian women were not and are not protected to this day.

Conclusion

The cases of Juliana, Mariela, and Natalia demonstrate that even with the current mechanisms that exist, reporting seems to be inaccessible to Afro-Peruvian women, specifically those who work in domestic work. Their experiences still hold true to the experiences of Elvira in the 1990s. Although Elvira was in a “formal” work environment, much like the other women, it was still the harasser/aggressor’s word against hers. The common theme in all of their experiences as Afro-Peruvian/Black women emerges in the ways they are hypersexualized and dehumanized because their employers assumed they could harass them without repercussions. All their barriers in reporting these incidents to either the police (comisaría), the ministry, or their employers, created a distrust in the system and its willingness to protect them. They preferred to quit their jobs, and escape from these violent spaces, rather than to rely on an ineffective system to pursue justice for them, because they know it was not built to protect them.

This sense of distrust sets the basis for the experiences described by the rest of the women of AMUNETRAP, informants who reported lacking the knowledge and means to report or who simply distrusted the effectiveness of the system. They may have

known about the existence of resources, but the fear of seeking justice, and being turned away caused many to remain silent.

After more than 20 years of Peruvian gender violence legislation, reporting sexual harassment is still a taboo. It remains an untrustworthy and risky option for many women, and for Afro-Peruvian women it's a retraumatizing experience that inflicts violence, a process that some scholars identify as "secondary trauma."

The Afro-Peruvian women must navigate structures such as these ones *intersectionally*, demonstrating how race, gender, and class can shape access to resources and how it neglects some people while protecting others. Furthermore, the experiences of Afro-Peruvian/Black women highlight the structural gaps that require further scrutiny by politicians and researchers alike.

Future Research and Activist Recommendations

Creo que es clave insertar y transversalizar la variable étnico racial en los registros de hostigamiento de denuncia para conocer como nos afecta. [Me] parece que también son necesarios más estudios cualitativos a... respecto a como sucede. Hablamos mucho de la hipersexualización de los cuerpos de las mujeres negras y afroperuanas, pero los estudios cualitativos nos van a ayudar a darle matices a este. Por un lado, la educación provee herramientas para reconocer el heteropatriarcado y el sistema racista, y por otro, la educación en derecho. Que las mujeres y las mujeres negras y afroperuanas conozcan las herramientas que tienen para denunciar, las herramientas que tienen para protegerse. Y bueno [por último] una ley que las ampara ante las denuncias.

I think it is key to insert and transverse the ethno-racial variable into sexual harassment reporting records in order to understand how it affects us. I believe that it is also necessary to have more qualitative studies about how it happens. We talk a lot about hyper-sexualization of Black and Afro-Peruvian women's bodies, but qualitative studies will help us give it meaning. On one hand, education provides a tool to recognize the heteropatriarchy and racist system, and on the other hand, learning about the law. That women and, Afro-Peruvian women, know the tools to report, the tools that they have to protect

themselves. And well [lastly], a law that protects them at the time of reporting.

—Sasha

This research project is just a stepping stone to what Sasha, an Afro-Peruvian activist and scholar, referred to in their insightful reflections. The goal of this qualitative study is to provide context and amplify the voices of Afro-Peruvian women who have experienced sexual harassment. We need more in-depth studies conducted on sexual harassment in Peru. In fact, very limited research includes women's ethno-racialized experiences, specifically about Black domestic workers.

Due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, what this project could not do was create more spaces for women to learn about their legal rights, amongst other forms of training. At the beginning of this study many of the women were given a guide of sorts, to the existing reporting mechanisms. Most of the women interviewed already had knowledge on these reporting avenues, the issue was the ways they were treated when asking for support.

Sasha's emphasis on education goes beyond just the Afro-Peruvian women who have been victims of sexual harassment, this education should be expanded to government employees in police stations, in the Ministry of Labor and Promotion of Employment (MTPE), and other forms of reporting that are not culturally competent. As a result of their lack of competency, they recreate a space of traumatization by ignoring the victims or actively perpetuating anti-black racism. In the time I was pursuing this research project, I found that the Peruvian government had sexual harassment trainings, but no data was clear as to whether these were being used with government employees. This project did not examine the training that government employees receive to address sexual harassment, this is a crucial component and one that is a must for future research.

Sasha's emphasis on ethno-racial markers in government records is similar to Eshe Lewis's (2020) research on the *Centros Emergencia Mujer* (CEM), the emergency centers where the women in her study reported domestic violence. In Lewis's study, Afro-Peruvian women could identify themselves ethno-racially in the intake forms. Sasha suggests a similar implementation be made to better capture the demographic data and quantify the Afro-Peruvian women who are victims of sexual harassment. This is cru-

cial, because Peru has very little data and studies on violence against Afro-Peruvian women, and it can shed light to the problem nation-wide, especially in areas with less access to reporting resources.

Lastly, one aspect of the research project that I wish I could have covered was the well-being of Afro-Peruvian women. I wish I had provided mental health resources for the women of AMUNETRAP. Although COVID-19 prevented the creation of communal spaces where I could engage with the participants, I believe that the possibility of healing after sharing the traumatic experience of sexual violence, racism, class discrimination, would have made all the difference for them. Each interview was structured to give the women space to share whatever the questions provoked in them, and as an active listener, the space provided a way of release. In the words of Simone, another Afro-Peruvian activist, who expressed her opinions on healing, spaces of healing are places of knowledge:

Yo creo que hablar de las experiencias marca la diferencia porque te permite saber que tu experiencia no es aislada. Entonces, eso contribuye a que podamos primero sanar y luego educar.

I believe that talking about the experiences makes a difference, because sharing experiences helps you understand your experience is not isolated. So, that gives us the opportunity to heal, first, and then be able to educate.

A Call for Action

As an Afro-Peruvian woman and scholar this work taught me something incredibly important about myself from beginning to end. It helped me reflect on the ways that I could advocate without intercepting my voice and overanalyzing the experiences. This is not meant to be just an academic work; this is a call to action and a need for change, it is activist scholarship, and I am committed to it.

If the government won't listen to Afro-Peruvian women in their meetings with the Ministries, or on the streets in moments of protest, it is important that they can hear their voices in this critical essay as a call to action. Afro-Peruvian women are hypersexualized and treated animalistically (for example, etymology of "the mule"), these stereotypes been the basis for this violence and has

continued to be the experience for Black women in other contexts. For instance, in a 2017 interview, feminist sociologist Dr. Patricia Hill Collins offers relevant reflections about the complex social forces affecting the lives and well-being of African American women. In Peru, centuries of silencing Black women has promoted vulnerability across generations and violence created by the state. As my research shows, the process of reporting has become a primary form of silencing, Afro-Peruvian women are not believed and are dismissed in these spaces. One of the reasons being that Afro-Peruvian women who are exposed to sexual violence are not 'the perfect victim' (Long 2021) because they are *not* the white women—*mujeres blancas*—with racial privileges. Afro-Peruvian women do not hold class advantages and live within the margins of society, which is one reason why they are ignored by the system. Black women are not seen as *credible*, and thus, they are not believed by these systems, like the police, because these are spaces not built to serve them, which then continues to expose them to violence.

In my interactions with the women I interviewed, I saw sadness, disappointment, and anger. I was shown that they have had enough of the invisibility in Peru. Recently, a case of racial discrimination against an Afro-Peruvian women received special media attention for being "the South American country's first conviction for racial discrimination" (teleSur 2015). Afro-Peruvian women are "excruciatingly alive to the world."⁴ Their experiences lead to always being hypervigilant and distrusting with these systems and Peruvian society. In my interview with Perla, when I asked her if she had any other questions or comments, I recall her saying with a crack in her voice:

No señorita, porque honestamente, ya he descargado lo que tenía guardado cuantos años aquí en el corazón. Al menos alguien me ha escuchado.

No miss, because honestly, I have relieved from my heart everything that I had stored all those years. At least someone listened to me.

Notes

1. See McLin Rodríguez, Mariagracia. 2022. "Porque Era Afroperuana: Racialized Sexual Harassment in Peru." MA thesis, University of Texas at Austin.

2. Demographic information about the women who participated in this study, the interview guide, and additional information on the methodology involved in this project are discussed in the original MA thesis document (see note 1).
3. The 'Centros Emergencia Mujer' (CEM) provides services for the comprehensive care for cases of violence against women, members of the family and sexual violence. In this way, the victim or complainant will be able to present their complaint and access legal, psychological, and social advice in one place. Ley N° 27942. 2003. "Ley de Prevención y Sanción del Hostigamiento Sexual." Lima, Perú.
https://www.mimp.gob.pe/files/direcciones/dgignd/normatividad/27942_Ley_de_Prevenc_Hostiga.pdf
4. See 'la facultad,' a concept introduced and examined by Gloria E. Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

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