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Peruvian Grassroots Organizations in Times of Violence and Peace. Between Economic Solidarity, Participatory Democracy, and Feminism

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Abstract The new millennium has meant a new start for Peruvian society. After decades of political violence, economic crisis, and an internal war, democracy was restored, and economic growth resumed. The many grassroots organizations that had been established to address the economic and political crisis seem to have lost their initial raison d'être. Still, they have remained in operation to this very day. In this article, we analyze the history and continued presence of two types of urban grassroots organizations: the communal kitchens and the victim-survivor organizations. Our leading question is: what is the present-day rationale sustaining these grassroots organizations that originated as responses to the political and economic turmoil from the previous decades? As we will argue, insight into the values of economic solidarity, participatory democracy, and gender equality is important to better understand the organization's continuity. They shed light on the organizations' changing roles and diverging meanings that their members attribute to them. Nowadays, members see the organizations as a platform for self-expression.

Résumé Le nouveau millénaire fut synonyme de nouveau départ pour la société péruvienne. Après des décennies de violence politique et de crises économiques, en plus d'une guerre interne, la démocratie a été restaurée et la croissance économique a repris. Les nombreuses organisations populaires ayant vu le jour pour faire face aux crises économiques et politiques semblent avoir perdu leur raison d'être initiale. Elles sont malgré tout toujours actives. Dans le présent article, nous analysons l'historique et la présence continue de deux types d'organisations populaires

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urbaines, les cuisines communautaires et les organisations de victimes et survivants. Notre principale question est la suivante : quel est le motif actuel de préservation de ces organisations nées en réaction aux tourmentes politiques et économiques des décennies passées? Comme nous le démontrerons, il est important d'examiner les valeurs de solidarité économique, de démocratie participative et d'égalité des sexes pour saisir le phénomène de continuité de ces dernières. Elles font effectivement la lumière sur les rôles changeants des organisations et les significations variées que leurs membres leur attribuent. De nos jours, les membres voient les organisations comme des plateformes d'expression personnelle.

Zusammenfassung Das neue Jahrtausend ist ein Neubeginn für die peruanische Gesellschaft. Nach jahrzehntelanger politischer Gewalt, Wirtschaftskrise und Krieg wurde die Demokratie wiederhergestellt, und das Land erlebte ein erneutes Wirtschaftswachstum. Die vielen Basisorganisationen, die zur Bekämpfung der wirtschaftlichen und politischen Krise gegründet worden waren, haben augenscheinlich ihren urprünglichen Daseinszweck verloren. Trotzdem existieren sie noch heute. In diesem Artikel werden die Geschichte und fortwährende Präsenz zweier Arten städtischer Basisorganisationen analysiert-die Gemeindeküchen und die Organisationen für Opfer und Überlebende. Die Leitfrage lautet: Welchen Grund gibt es heute für den Erhalt dieser Basisorganisationen, die ursprünglich als Reaktion auf die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Turbulenzen in den vorangegangenen Jahrzenten entstanden? Wie dargelegt wird, ist ein Einblick in die Werte der wirtschaftlichen Solidarität, der partizipatorischen Demokratie und der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter wichtig, um das Fortbestehen der Organisationen zu verstehen. Sie werfen ein Licht auf die sich ändernden Rollen und abweichenden Bedeutungen der Organisationen, die ihnen von ihren Mitgliedern zugeteilt werden. Heutzutage betrachten die Mitglieder die Organisationen als eine Plattform zur Selbstdarstellung.

Resumen El nuevo milenio ha significado un nuevo comienzo para la sociedad peruana. Tras décadas de violencia política, crisis económica y una guerra interna, se restauró la democracia y se reanudó el crecimiento económico. Las muchas organizaciones de base que se habían establecido para abordar la crisis económica y política parecen haber perdido su razón de ser inicial. Sin embargo, han seguido funcionando hasta este día. En el presente artículo, analizamos la historia y la presencia continuada de dos tipos de organizaciones urbanas de base: las cocinas comunitarias y las asociaciones de víctimas sobrevivientes. Nuestra pregunta inductiva es: ¿cuál es la lógica actual que sustenta a estas organizaciones de base que se originaron como respuesta a la agitación política y económica de las décadas previas? Como argumentaremos, el conocimiento de los valores de solidaridad económica, democracia participativa e igualdad de género es importante para comprender mejor la continuidad de la organización. Estos valores arrojan luz sobre los papeles cambiantes y los significados divergentes de las organizaciones que sus miembros les atribuyen. En la actualidad, los miembros ven a las organizaciones como una plataforma para la autoexpresión.

Keywords Urban grassroots organizations · *Comedores populares* · Victim organizations · Peru

Introduction

Peru's contemporary history has been a turbulent one. High levels of poverty, political violence, corrupt governments, and the structural marginalization of its rural areas have taken a heavy toll on its population. For decades, the state was unable to offer its citizens even the most basic welfare provisions or to safeguard their human, constitutional, and civil rights (Stokes 1995; Mauceri 1995). On the contrary, the Fujimori regime (1990–2000) brutally violated the rights of the Quechua and Aymara-speaking rural populations in particular. In response to the structurally deficient and violent state and with the aim of addressing the many everyday problems, poor and marginalized people have organized in very diverse self-support groups. The urban grassroots organizations that are the outcomes of such initiatives are the subject of this article.

We will focus on two specific types of grassroots organizations: *comedores populares* (communal kitchens) and victim-survivor organizations. The first operate in poor districts, often located at the outskirts of cities. Their initial aim was to confront poverty by cooking collectively. Victim-survivor organizations, on the other hand, were founded by those who experienced human rights violations during the 1980s and 90s.[1] Members strive to obtain justice and acknowledgement of their experiences. Both types of organizations arose in the same context of severe political violence and economic crisis and aim to support their members through collective action. They have been established and are run by their voluntary members, i.e., not by professionals employed by state institutions or non-governmental organizations.

Fortunately, the new millennium meant a turning point for Peru. "For the first time in its history Peru simultaneously enjoyed economic growth, political peace, and one-person-one-vote democracy" (McClintock 2006, p. 96). Despite the promising start of this new era and the profound changes in society at large, the foundation for the existence of the grassroots organizations has not been washed away. Many remain in operation to this very day. In this article, we trace the history and the continued existence of the communal kitchens and victim-survivor organizations. Our leading question is: what is the present-day rationale sustaining these grassroots organizations that originated as responses to the political and economic turmoil from the previous decades? As we will argue, insight into the values of economic solidarity, participatory democracy and feminism is important to better understand the organization's continuity, because they shed light on the organizations' changing roles and divergent meanings that their members attribute to them.

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[1] The term 'victim-survivor' is used instead of victim, because members of these grassroots associations are both victims and survivors of the political violence.

The data in this study were gathered through fieldwork in Peru. Ypeij started working in Lima's poor neighborhoods back in the 1990s. De Waardt started her research in Huancayo and Lima in 2002 and in Ayacucho 2008. Both researchers regularly visit the field for brief or extended periods. They have based their studies on qualitative data obtained through participant observation and in-depth interviews and analyze these organizations from an interpretative perspective. First, we argue briefly that important insights drawn from studies on solidarity economics, participatory democracy, and feminism enable analysis of the roles and continuity of the organizations studied. In the subsequent sections, we shed light on their rise and consolidation and the organizational crisis they underwent. Next we depict how the challenges that the present context has brought the organizations has given rise to new meanings. In the conclusion, we reflect on the potential roles and limitations of urban grassroots organizations since the profound changes in Peruvian society.

Between Economic Solidarity, Participatory Democracy, and Feminism

The newly arising debate on "solidarity economies" focusses on alternatives to profit-driven economies, as the ones based on collective organization of economic activities. Solidarity, reciprocity, and equality are key concepts (Utting 2013). These economic activities are often initiated from "below," and women supposedly play "a primary role as agents" (Guberlet 2009, p. 738). Latin American grassroots organizations are often seen as examples of these small-scale, local initiatives. They fight against poverty, are more or less based on trust and social capital and aim explicitly or implicitly to fill the vacuum left by the neo-liberal policies.[2] A precondition for doing economics in a different, alternative more inclusive manner is that these economic initiatives can function autonomously (Guberlet 2009).

Autonomy of grassroots initiatives is considered important in the debate about participatory democracy. How independently do these organizations operate? Are they merely vehicles for political manipulation and social projects conducted by the government or development organizations? And who manifest as their spokespersons? Besides autonomy, participatory democracy has two other important dimensions. The first concerns the internal governance of the organizations, and whether this governance is based on democratic principles. This dimension questions the relationship between the membership and the leadership and the way the board is selected and functions. The second relates to the role the organizations take on with respect to the national state. In considering this role, we derive inspiration from the "insurgent citizenship" concept. Friedman defines it as a form of "active participation in social movements…that aim at … the defense of existing democratic principles and rights and the claiming of new rights that … would lead to an expansion of the spaces of democracy…" (Friedman 2002, p. 77; see also Knudsen 2007, p. 9). We consider the idea of the "expansion of the spaces of democracy" especially important in the Peruvian economic and political context. The nation-state in its contemporary history failed not only to provide for the most basic needs of its population but also to offer protection from political violence or to guarantee civil and human rights. Moreover, it violently turned against its own population. How have the grassroots organizations responded to this failing and violent state?

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[2] See for example the conference 'Feminist Economics/Social and Solidarity Economy—International Conference,' Programme on Gender and Global Change, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. 16–17 October 2014.

Feminism is a third theoretical angle, which we will show is indispensable and enables us to analyze the roles and the continuity of the organizations studied. That the collective kitchens were initiated by women has drawn the attention of feminist scholars in Peru and beyond. The main concern in the debate that evolved in the 1980s and 90s about the collective kitchens has been how to interpret them. Can these collective kitchens be perceived as feminist organizations, i.e., do they strive for gender equality or "just" for collective alleviation of poverty? Molyneux's distinction between strategic and practical gender interests and Moser's strategic and gender needs are often mentioned (Molyneux 1998; Moser 1989). Practical gender interests regard the satisfaction of needs related to division of labor according to gender, i.e., women's roles as housewives and mothers. Strategic interests are those that intend to transform the social order to improve women's societal position (Molyneux 1998, p. 232). According to this argument, only organizations dedicated to strategic gender interests can be considered feminist organization. So what about Peru's grassroots organizations: do they qualify as feminist organizations?

Taken together, the three concepts solidarity economics, participatory democracy, and feminism help us interpret the collective action of Peru's urban grassroots organizations and explore the changing roles of these organizations and the meanings their members attribute to them.

Neighborhood Organizations and *Comedores populares* in Lima (1960s–1980s)

Since the 1940s, poor migrants moved from poor rural areas to Peru's cities in search of a better life. They perceived Peru's capital Lima as the city of hope. The first migrants were absorbed within the city. As the influx grew, however, the poor began settling in the areas at the edge of the cities. They tried to obtain plots of land and to start life anew in self-built houses and neighborhoods. In 1967, Turner reported that such urban settlers already exceeded 500,000 in Lima (Turner 1967, p. 168). This large-scale rural–urban migration resulted in explosive growth of the Peruvian capital.[3] In the 1970s and 80s, hundreds of thousands of people were living in what in those days were called shanty towns. Under the populist Velasco government (1968–1975), the shanty towns were named *pueblos jóvenes* (young towns); a rather ironic name, considering that in the 1970s and 80s daily life in these districts was increasingly characterized by dire poverty and limited social-economic opportunities. The associations and organizations that initiated the first squatter settlements in Lima and other cities in Peru from the 1960s onwards are an important moment in the historical development of the Peruvian grassroots organizations. Dozens or hundreds of families occupied a strip of land without a single urban facility, only sand and stones. Within a few hours, they had constructed their temporary shelters from sticks and *esteras* (reed mats).

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[3] Between 1961 and 2011 Lima grew from 1.9 to 9.3 million inhabitants. The share of Peruvians living in the rural areas declined from 65 to 25 per cent between 1940 and 2011 (Cuanto 2002: Table 4.6; Cuanto 2011: Table 3.4 and Table 3.6).

After this “invasion,” a neighborhood organization was set up, and specific tasks were distributed among dedicated committees, for example arranging sewage systems, tap water, pavements, and electricity. Members of these committees embarked on an extended period of collaboration, hard work, and negotiations. When the authorities or land owners did not accept the invasion, these settlers ran the risk that bulldozers might destroy their improvised dwellings. Step by step, the squatters replaced their temporary shelters with brick and concrete structures. They convinced bus drivers to serve their neighborhoods, acquired legal rights to the land and arranged public services and other infrastructure, often by assembling them on their own. Since these exercises exceed the capacity of individuals, a spirit of solidarity, reciprocity, and teamwork was essential, and the neighborhood organization became the foundation for performing the collective tasks (Ypeij 2000, pp. 29–33; see also Moser 2009 for the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador). Several scholars argue that particularly the migrants from the Andes were already experienced in communal work, reciprocity, and mutual aid (Degregori et al. 1986, p. 106; Golte and Adams 1990 [1987]). Many originated from rural Quechua-speaking Andean communities, where communal works such as *minka* and *ayni* were an essential part of the political-economic structure. The success of these neighborhood organizations is attributed to the concept “rationality of the Andes,” which denotes the values that the rural–urban migrants brought with them to the city, e.g., cooperation, collective ownership, communal control, and reciprocity (Golte 1987 [1980]). These values coincide with principles of economic solidarity and self-governance.

From the outset, women were involved in committee work and, where necessary, dug the sewages and water systems alongside the men. However, the top executive positions were usually held by men. Increasingly, women felt that the neighborhood organizations did not properly address problems they encountered as mothers and housewives, such as those concerning nutrition and healthcare (Béjar 1997; Blondet 1991, p. 100; Grandón 1990, p. 107; Ypeij 2000, pp. 29–33). These women used their experiences from the neighborhood organizations to set up their own organizations specifically aimed at, in Molyneux’s words, satisfying their practical gender needs. Blondet and Montero note that the first *comedores populares* arose in Comas in 1978. These collective kitchens operated largely autonomously, with support from parish churches and local NGOs (Blondet and Montero 1995, pp. 55–56). Soon after, they received food aid from Caritas, and from 1982 they started to receive state support as well.[4] Being self-managed or receiving state support became a distinctive feature of these collective kitchens. The first category took on the designation *autogestinarios* (self-managed entities), and the second group became known as *clubes de madres* (mother clubs). From the first government of Alan García (1985–1990) onwards, these mother clubs received not only food donations but also financial support (Blondet 2004, p. 121), which jeopardized their autonomy.[5] In this article the special focus is on the self-managed communal kitchens.[6]

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[4] From 1982, with the program ‘Cosinas Familiares’ of First Lady Violete Correa Belaunde, the communal kitchens started receiving state support.

The self-managed communal kitchens can be seen as a social movement that arose in the context of the neighborhood organizations and even partly emerged from them but had an individual identity (Ypeij 2000, p. 31). An important goal of the communal kitchens is to economize by jointly cooking in turns. Based on the principles of reciprocity and solidarity economics, the kitchens collectively purchase food, water, and fuel. The kitchens have grown explosively and offered an alternative during the economic crisis of the 1980s. Following the structural adjustment program implemented in August 1990, called the “Fujishock” after the newly elected president Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), the kitchens proved their importance as well (Hays-Mitchell 2002). Within days after the Fujishock, 7000 communal kitchens are believed to have been operational, feeding hundreds of thousands (Blondet 2004, p. 123).

Slowly the women expanded their activities beyond cooking, and the kitchens acquired additional meanings. As the women picked up meals when they were not on duty in the kitchens, they had more time to spend on income-generating and other activities (Blondet and Montero 1995, p. 118; Sara-Lafosse 1989, p. 198; Ypeij 2000, pp. 29–33). Literacy groups were formed and healthcare courses offered, with or without assistance from NGOs. The women learned management skills, and how to assume responsibility and to speak up for themselves. Their confidence in solidarity relations and joint action grew, as did their self-value (Blondet 1991; Sara-Lafosse 1989; Villavincencio 1989, p. 271; Ypeij 2000, pp. 29–33). To strengthen their organizations, in 1986 the first umbrella organizations in the form of federations were established (Barrig 1998, p. 107). The women organized at neighborhood, district, city, and even national levels. In the 1990s, a national federation functioned for several years. Increasingly, the organizations came to denote a place for the women. A woman leader told Ypeij back in 1991:

> The communal kitchen is not just for cooking, but to have contact with others too, to share one another’s problems. You learn there more or less how you might do things. Sometimes there is a woman who is having serious problems with her husband, and then the communal kitchen is a diversion. We discuss it with her. The communal kitchens have provided us with a space where we can reflect, a space for friendship, a space for sharing problems. So you come to love the communal kitchen (Ypeij 2000, p. 32).

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[5] Program of Direct Assistance (PAD according to its Spanish acronym).

[6] Regarding the women’s organizations of Lima, another type of organization is often mentioned in the same context as the communal kitchens, namely the Vaso de Leche committees. Vaso de Leche is a municipal program to fight child malnutrition, initiated by the socialist mayor of Lima Alonso Barrantes (1984–1987) in 1984 (Tanaka and Trivelli 2002).

To this day, the women acknowledge the importance of the communal kitchens for companionship and emotional support. One woman explained repeatedly: “One falls in love with the organization.”

Victim-Survivor Associations in Lima, Huancayo, and Ayacucho (1980s–1990s)

In the 1980s and early 90s, life became extremely harsh in Peru because of the severe political and economic crisis and the atrocities committed by the terrorist organizations Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path) and MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement). Outside the capital, especially in the Andean region and the rain forest, as a way of counter-insurgency, the Peruvian government proclaimed martial law from 1982 onwards. This meant that constitutional rights were suspended, and that the armed forces started to operate very autonomously (Youngers 2007). The war gave the army unlimited authority in dealing with presumed insurgents in these parts of the country, and massive human rights violations soon followed. The suspicion that everybody who lived in these regions could be a subversive resulted in widespread violence against the Quechua-speaking population (TRC 2003).

The violent turmoil leads to a new kind of grassroots organization: the victim-survivor associations. In the early the 1980s, when the conflict had just begun, relatives of disappeared and kidnapped persons in Ayachucho, mainly illiterate Quechua-speaking women, searched for their loved ones in prisons, police stations, and wastelands. Lucia, age 60, explains how she met others during her search for her husband:

> After walking around for six months, alone, lodging complaints and everything, I met other mothers. I always saw them at the same places where I was. When Mama Angélica […] found me in tears, she told me that we had to support each other and walk together, that we needed to hand in our complaints together (*cf.* de Waardt 2012, pp. 69–70).

Women started to search collectively for their missing relative. In 1983, Angélica Mendoza founded the association later named ANFASEP (National Association of Relatives of Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared Persons of Peru). Its key demands were *justicia y verdad* (justice and truth). Angélica Mendoza, whose son was kidnapped and disappeared on July 3, 1983, recounts:

We demanded that the prosecution service intervene. We presented letters to the army. They received our papers but did not respond. Then I planned a trip to Lima to see what the authorities there would tell us. When we arrived, we organized a protest march. I went abroad to denounce all the authorities. But even when we mobilize and denounce the cases, we have not found justice … (Testimony at LUM).[7]

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[7] Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social, www.lum.cultura.pe/visita 360: una persona5 (Accessed November 3, 2016). The museum opened in December 2015.

The members of ANFASEP shared information about judicial procedures and the negligence of the officials involved. They searched together and provided each other with moral support. Soon, they needed a venue to accommodate their growing membership. The communal kitchen they started gave them more time to search for their relatives. Children who were orphaned by the conflict, men whose wives had disappeared, and people on the run from the violence also visited the collective kitchen (ANFASEP 2007). So in addition to trying to extend the democratic boundaries as “insurgent” citizens by fighting for their rights, they also included economic solidarity in their project through their work in the kitchens. Nowadays, ANFASEP members still meet twice a month to discuss victimhood-related matters and run a memory museum.

Also in the early 1980s, men and women forced to leave their villages of origin to move to safer places started to organize (Tamagno 1998). In Huancayo, these people—known as internally displaced persons (IDPs)—set up informal collective kitchens and overnight shelters to care for new IDPs. In 1984, they founded Jatary Ayllu, a Quechua name that means “Rise up people,” Together with support from an NGO, they organized emergency assistance, information meetings about human rights, education and legal aid and prepared celebrations, such as Christmas and cultural festivals. Today, as de Waardt’s research shows, the association as a whole is less integrated, but members still meet weekly in neighborhood subgroups.

In the course of the 1990s, similar associations of other types of victim-survivors were founded in different parts of the country, including organizations of those unjustly detained. By the 1980s and in still greater measure during the Fujimori government, many people were imprisoned without trial, as a result of the government’s dirty war tactics. In prison, many had been subjected to torture, abuse, and ill treatment. Some suffered lasting physical damage. Those who were released formed associations as a source of mutual psychological support. One such association de Waardt collaborated with is Reflexión (a Spanish name meaning Reflection), located in Lima. Many of its members first met during their imprisonment and saw each other again later on at psychological guidance sessions organized by an NGO. In 2001, they decided to continue the meetings on their own. After a while, they obtained funding to rent a small office and were able to expand their activities. Reflexión’s office became a shelter for unjustly detained persons from other cities, and the association started a communal kitchen as well. They organized workshops about human rights and legal issues related to the circumstances of those unjustly detained. Nowadays, they convene meetings in a *pueblo joven*, which serves as housing for many of those who were unjustly detained.

Though their daily activities may be practical, the primary aim of the organization has always had a political undertone. The members are convinced that Peruvians need to organize to ensure that the government safeguards their rights. In the words of one of the founders of Reflexión:

> In my country, you can scream without anybody noticing. We are obliged to organize, if we hope to achieve anything.

The victim-survivors attributed additional meanings to their organizations besides support with practical issues and political aspects, As they told de Waardt, the organizations offer companionship and social-emotional support that has helped them come to terms with their past. They give them a sense of home, a feeling of belonging. As 55-year-old female member of Reflexión explained:

> Here, I feel at home. It is like being with my family, with my brothers and sisters. Coming here is relaxing. I meet people here who went through the same thing (de Waardt 2014, p.115).

Other members confirmed the importance of being around people who had experienced the same atrocities as they had, or that they considered the other members to be like family. One woman said she identified with the association, because it gave her a new start.[8] Another member said: “My identity is being formed here.”[9]

As the examples of the victim-survivors organizations show, collective action is perceived as an important way to demand justice and to participate in society as fully entitled citizens who exercise their civil and constitutional rights. The collective action sphere of these organizations broadens soon after their establishment, because members—whose losses and sufferings often have an important economic dimension—have urgent basic needs, such as food and shelter. Another reason to set up community kitchens and shelters is out of solidarity with new victim-survivors.

Common Threads (1990s–2000s)

The expansion of urban grassroots organizations gave rise to repercussions. The organizations experienced threats that were both internal and external. The communal kitchens have been the scene of many internal conflicts about work schedules and food distribution. One specific issue concerns the leadership of the organization. Being a leader of communal kitchens is a voluntary, time-consuming, skilled position. Only women able to gain exemption from the need to generate an income—e.g., because they have a partner who is the breadwinner or receive a pension—can take on this demanding task. They need to have social and leadership skills and basic knowledge of reading, writing and math (*cf* Blondet and Montero 1995, p. 110). As the women in Ypeij’s study mentioned, finding new leaders is not always easy. Though the communal kitchens may have been founded on the democratic principles of frequent assemblies, rotating board positions and elections, in many examples the same women remain on the board far too long. Other leaders turned out to be corrupt. Another problem was that those in charge of the communal kitchens became leaders of the federations as well, advancing in their “career” through all the federations’ levels.[10] This enlarged the gap between the women at the base, who were involved in daily cooking, and the leadership, increasingly involved in defending the rights of the communal kitchens in the political arena (Barrig 1998, p. 111). All this compromised the reputation of the kitchens. Today, some women leaders have told Ypeij that they fear for the future of the organizations, mainly because younger women are not interested. These women lack faith in the communal kitchens, and moreover their paid jobs curtail the time they have available. Consequently, membership is declining. The young women who join are not always willing to perform the voluntary task of cooking and are interested only in collecting the meals.

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[8] Female member of Reflexión, age 52 (interviewed on 11/23/2009).

[9] The literal citations are published in de Waardt 2014, p. 115.

[10] Some leaders are being recommended as ‘a level five leader’ (national level) or ‘she rose to level four’ (municipal level). These characterizations were presented as a token of admiration.

The collective kitchens also encountered difficulties as a result of external conditions, which rendered them subject to manipulation by political forces and compromised their autonomy in two ways. First, Sendero Luminoso infiltrated many organizations, because from Sendero's perspective they functioned as "shock absorbers" that inhibited the poor's "revolutionary consciousness" and "sold out the revolution for a plate of beans" (Guzmán in Burt 1998, p. 292). The success of poor women's and other grassroots organizations in confronting the crisis resulted in very aggressive terrorist reactions. Especially after the Fujishock, women's organizations served as a buffer that contained the social unrest and conflicts that were so important for Sendero's ideology (Barrig 1998). In addition to infiltrating their organizations, Sendero intimidated, followed and threatened many grassroots leaders, killing several of them. An internationally known example of these tactics is the cruel murder of Maria Elena Moyano in 1992.[11] Many leaders had to stop working and go into hiding; others fled the country. The infiltrations and violence severely weakened the leadership, the autonomy and the general functioning of the communal kitchens and their federations (*cf.* Blondet 1995, pp. 125–130). Another threat to the kitchens' autonomy was that they became vulnerable to manipulation by political parties and governments through food donations (see Blondet 1991 for Villa El Salvador). Under the Fujimori regime, the communal kitchens were earmarked as vehicles for the government food programs and turned into the most important way to implement social policy intended to compensate for the Fujishock.[12] As Boesten states, the government "appropriated the power of distribution of the organized women without implementing social reforms that would make the distribution of resources, knowledge and power more equal." Instead of relieving the daily hardship of poor women, the state abused their voluntary work and manipulated their organizations to obtain their vote (Boesten 2003, p. 124). These political manipulations compromised the reputations of the communal kitchens, with consequences that remain noticeable to this day. As stated above, many younger women refuse to join them.

As de Waardt's study shows, the victim-survivors associations experienced problems as well, due to conditions in and outside their organizations, limiting their means for expanding participatory democracy. The centralized nature of Peru is an example of an external condition and complicates founding a single national entity that could represent the various victim-survivor associations. The capital is too far removed from many victim-survivors in both practical and metaphorical terms, limiting the political leverage of association leaders. Some of the internal problems of the associations arise from the generation gap within the associations. In a few associations, persons who were children during the conflict have become active as members. Some wanted to forge alliances with other actors to increase the likelihood that the state will respect the basic rights of all citizens. However, not all leaders of these associations embraced topics that transcended victimhood issues. Other leaders did not agree to let the younger members have a stronger voice, because these youngers member "did not personally experience the violence."

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[11] See Barrig 1998 for an analysis of the motive for her murder. As an African-Peruvian, she transcended many ethnic and gender boundaries in daily life, and as a community leader she openly protested against Sendero: 'Moyano had proclaimed a double challenge, against Shining Path and against her origin and her gender. For that she was murdered,' concludes Barrig (1998, p. 121).

[12] The administrations of Belaúnde (1980–1985) and García (1985–1990) also gave food aid to the communal kitchens.

Like the communal kitchens, the victim-survivors associations have difficulty maintaining their autonomy. According to a report by Oxfam, 90% of the Peruvian victim-survivors' associations was directly founded by an NGO or church or had received indispensable support from such an external organization (Oxfam 2002).[13] During the 1980s, NGOs teamed up with churches to offer emergency support during exceptionally violent periods.[14] Over the years, NGOs began to offer technical support to strengthen the organizational structure of the victim-survivors associations or during judicial proceedings concerning individual members.

In 2003, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), formed to investigate Peru's civil war, issued its final report (TRC 2003).[15] Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA turned out not to be solely responsible for the bloodshed, massacres and other human rights violations. The national armed forces and local peasant-controlled groups were also identified as perpetrators of the political violence. The Quechua-speaking populations were hit especially hard, as they accounted for 75% of all the murdered and disappeared.

The TRC investigation was an important momentum for the victim-survivors organizations. They provided substantial knowledge about what had happened during the political violence, as they shared their gruesome experiences with the commission. After the publication of the final report, NGOs shifted the focus to promoting implementation of the TRC's recommendations. They cooperated with victim-survivor associations to initiate projects related to transitional justice. Additionally, the organized efforts of victim-survivors allowed development and human rights NGOs to address potential target groups more efficiently. However, the relations that victim-survivor organizations maintain with NGOs have also hampered their autonomy (Bebbington et al. 2011). Victim-survivors are in many situations seen as passive objects of transitional justice mechanisms and projects, not as agents. This hinders the associations aiming to be seen as representatives of specific types of victim-survivors, with the capacity and means to vocalize their claims. Therefore their needs and claims are often represented by others, such as human rights lawyers or NGOs (de Waardt 2012).

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[13] Unfortunately, the authors of the Oxfam report (2002) failed to specify this percentage or explain how they had measured the role of these external organizations; nor were they more forthcoming in the interview with de Waardt (January 2010). This does not apply or no longer applies to churches. No evidence of strong participation by church organizations at meetings or public activities of victim-survivors' associations has been recorded.

[14] In the case of the IDPs, for example, this could mean basic help to survive in new surroundings, and in the case of the relatives of disappeared persons, this could include legal support.

[15] See: http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ (Accessed November 3, 2016).

De Waardt's research indicates that victim-survivor associations encounter additional problems due to the negative connotations associated with people who present as victims. Gaining general acceptance as victims of the political violence remains difficult, because the extent and the brutality of the violence to which people have been subjected varies greatly. Conflicting interpretations persist to this day among people from different regions and across various social strata regarding the causes, duration, intensity and effects of the political violence. Some members of the Peruvian economic and political elite impede debate about human rights violations by arguing that it would imply accepting or excusing terrorism. "Victim" remains a stigmatizing label. The introduction of an officially recognized legal definition of victimhood in a 2005 law to establish a reparations program has not yet led to social acceptance of this status, promotion of victim-survivors' rights or spaces where victim-survivors and their claims are acknowledged (de Waardt 2013).[16]

Both the communal kitchens and the victim-survivors associations experienced problems that threatened their autonomy, harmed their reputation and cast doubt on their legitimacy. They encounter difficulties attracting new members for several reasons. This raises question as to how long these grassroots organizations may be expected to last in the future.

New Directions, New Meanings, New Victims (from 2000)

The former shanty towns of Peru's large and medium-sized cities are now consolidated neighborhoods. The financial situation of many households in these areas has improved over the years, and many now pertain to the rising middle class. Still, 20% of the Peruvian population lived below the poverty line in 2014.[17] Ypeij is conducting research in the now consolidated neighborhood of Año Nuevo, located in Comas in the North of Lima. In this neighborhood of around 16,000 inhabitants, established following a land invasion in 1968, Ypeij found many active communal kitchens. Some have been operating as long as three decades. Newer ones have opened on plots of lands settled more recently, where new neighborhoods are being built. Several kitchens and overarching organizations are located in brick buildings. They accommodate many activities besides cooking, such as toddler play groups, microcredit loans and capacity building, all non-profit activities that depend on input from volunteers. The values of solidarity economics and participatory democracy are still considered important.

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[16] Law number 28592 (28 July 2005).

[17] http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/peru/overview, Accessed November 3, 2016.

After an earlier attempt in the 1990s, a new National Federation was established called CONAMOVIDI in 2005.[18] The members intend to become an institute of civic vigilance that monitors public social policy. Food aid policy, according to former president of the national federation Ana Cardenas, is especially vulnerable to corruption.[19] In the autumn of 2012 the state's food program was decentralized, which meant that the program was transferred from the national to the municipal level. The National Federation supports this transition, because the women hope this will make the program easier to monitor and less vulnerable to corruption. Initially, the public authorities did not acknowledge the federation as a partner in the negotiations over these transitions. The federation demonstrated its political power by convening a march. On 7 June 2012, 8000 women marched in the streets of Lima, as did many others in different towns. The federation was subsequently invited to join the dialogue table that offers advice to and negotiates with the government. This is not the first time that organized women prove successful as "insurgent" citizens, taking to the streets and protesting in massive numbers. Organized in the National Federation comprising a wide range of women's grassroots organizations, they are doing their utmost to open up more democratic spaces to influence politics.

The second line of action being deployed by the national federation concerns rotating funds, where members obtain micro credits to invest in their income-generating activities.[20] The third line is the provision of relief aid in emergency situations. In the days following the Fujishock of 1991 the communal kitchens already revealed their potential for such support. Women told Ypeij how after the earthquake of 2007, which hit the Region of Ica particularly hard, the federation set up kitchens and distributed food aid within days. Their source of money for this work did not involve national and local authorities (where the bureaucrats were prone to corruption) but came from direct donations, for example from churches abroad. In 2012 the federation offered emergency relief in Chosica, located in the Province of Lima, which suffered severe flooding. They also map neighborhoods in danger, provisionally built on steep hills, and advise their inhabitants and neighborhood leaders about safety precautions.

Last but not least, they are discussing how to address the more general problems that women encounter because of their gender position in the family and in society (*cf.* Padilla 2004). Though most women in the kitchens firmly reject the label "feminist"—as they associate feminism with middle class values of highly educated women with whom they do not identify—hearing women in the kitchens speak about gender equality has become commonplace. “We should do things for women’s position,” and “We should turn into a real women’s organization” are phrases regularly heard nowadays. The National Federation has made the pursuit of gender equality one of its main policy goals. At the end of the 1980s, analysts concluded that the women’s organizations merely focused on women’s roles as caretakers and the satisfaction of basic needs (Safa 1990; Barrig 1989), i.e., the organizations confirmed women’s inequality in the gender hierarchy, rather than questioning that order. In the present, very different situation, the organization’s leaders are directing the efforts of the organization toward what Molyneux called strategic interests aimed at improving the social status of women (Molyneux 1998).

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[18] CONAMOVIDA (Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Organizadas por la Vida y el Desarollo Integral).

[19] PRONAA (Programa Nacional de Asistencia Alimentaria) started in 1992 under Fujimori and aims to offer food security to the poor.

[20] That not all new activities are successful is clear from the efforts by many kitchens in the 1990s to start productive workshops, with the aim of offering their members an income enabling them to purchase the daily meals. Bakeries, restaurants and textile workshops are the main examples (Ypeij 2000, 2003). At the end of the 1990s, these projects still seemed promising, and state programs were developed to facilitate the projects. In the urban economy of Lima, competition is fierce, and many communal kitchens were forced to close their productive workshops.

De Waardt’s research shows that today’s victim-survivor associations are highly diverse, in terms of both their activities and their membership. They focus increasingly on specific categories of victim-survivors, such as the unjustly detained, internally displaced persons and the relatives of the disappeared. The organizations that represent these victim-survivors vary according to the scope of their activities at local, regional or national levels. Some meet frequently, others irregularly. Some provide for basic needs, others organize information sessions or continue their struggle to persuade the government to acknowledge their rights.

In the run-up to the presidential elections in 2016 a group of victim-survivors manifested increasingly prominently: rural women from the Andes who were forcibly sterilized. In the framework of Fujimori’s National Family Planning Program, 200,000 to 270,000 women and 20,000 men were sterilized between 1996 and 2000. In 1998 the first report of the coercive element in the sterilizations was published. Healthcare workers had to meet quotas imposed by the Ministry of Health and operated in conditions that lacked hygiene, medical knowledge and follow-up care. At least 18 women died as a consequence (Ballón Gutiérrez 2014; Coe 2004; Getgen 2009; Theidon 2014).[21] Most victims originated from small, impoverished Quechua and Aymara-speaking communities. Since the start of the Family Planning Program in 1996, protests had resounded. Hilaria Supa, a Quechua-speaking politician from Cusco called attention to these violations of sexual and reproductive rights back in 1996.[22] In 2004 she established the Asociación de Mujeres Afectadas por las Esterilizaciones Forzadas (AMAEF, Association for Women Affected by the Forced Sterilizations) with sections in Cusco and Anta.

Only recently are victim-survivors’ stories of violent healthcare workers, food in exchange for “consent,” intimidation, manipulation, lies and coercion, all to “encourage” them to undergo the operation, starting to receive more attention. In 2013, the Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadores Campesinas de la Provincia Huancabamba, Piura, established the Comité de Defensa de los Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres Esterilizados Contra su Voluntad de Huancabamba (CDME-AMHBA, Committee to Defend the Human Rights of Women Sterilized against their Will). The association receives support from feminists and human rights organizations.[23] In May 2015, Superior Public Prosecutor Luis Burgos announced that the investigation into the forced sterilizations was being reopened, and that women victims would be asked about their experiences as well.[24] In July of the same year, the sterilized women's organizations organized a seminar in the center of Lima, titled Esterilizaciones forzadas. 18 años sin justicia.[25] Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the former president and imprisoned Alberto Fujimori, stood for president in 2011 and again in 2016. As she had served as first lady (her parents divorced during her father's presidency, and she took over her mother's role) during the implementation of the Family Planning Program 1996, she was forced to make a statement about these human rights abuses. In the run-up to the 2011 elections, because of her candidacy, the forced sterilizations received a lot of media attention, which subsided after the elections. In 2016, Keiko Fujimori ran again (and lost for the second time), with the same effect on media attention for the forced sterilizations. Just before Pedro Pablo Kuczynski was inaugurated as the new president, a public prosecutor ruled that the former president and his health ministers were not responsible for the nationwide family planning program. Fujimori was cleared of all criminal responsibility. Victim-survivors organizations and human rights groups have vowed to appeal the ruling, and Superior Public Prosecutor Luis Burgos has announced that he is reopening his investigation.

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[21] In 1998, feminist, lawyer and human rights activist Gulia Tamayo published an investigation on the forced sterilizations (CLADEM and CRLP 1998, CLADEM and Tamayo 1999).

[22] Hilaria Supa Huamán was a member of congress from 2006 until 2011 and currently serves in the Andean Parliament. The first elected female politician with a Quechua background, she started her political career as a grassroots leader. See her Wikipedia page (Accessed November 3, 2016).

Whether this revived attention to a specific human rights violation as a result of collective action will offer a window of opportunity for social, financial, judicial, and political acknowledgement of human rights violations suffered by all types of victim-survivors remains unclear. The Andes, where it all happened, is far away from the capital Lima, both geographically and culturally, which has thus far been a reason why the human rights violations are scarcely recognized.

Despite the new directions and the inclusion of new topics, the above shows that both types of grassroots organizations continue to represent mainly the needs of their particular rank and file. Although the National Federation of Women tries to encompass different women's groups, in Peru opportunities seem limited for horizontal or vertical expansion of issues or identities across scales and broadening national coverage. This observation aligns with other recent studies on Peruvian civil society, particularly on extractive industry movements. As Bebbington et al. (2010, p. 1321) argue: "… movements have emerged around issues and identities within their respective societies, but not in response to the structure of their societies as a whole. To the extent that they elaborate alternatives (which is at best occasionally), they do so only for their specific issues." The authors attribute this shortcoming in part to the weakness of political parties, because of which no constructive platform exists to join different interests.

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[23] At the 2016 edition of the IDFA yearly documentary festival in Amsterdam, the Quipu Project by Maria Court and Rosemarie Lerner was presented to the public. This is a website to which telephone lines are connected. Victim-survivors call from special telephones and leave their oral testimonies on the website. So far, over 150 men and women have recorded such testimonies. See www.quipo-project.com (Accessed November 3, 2016).

[24] See publication on internet by Reuters.com: Peruvian women haunted by forced sterilizations seek state apology, by Anastasia Moloney, 3 June 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/03/us-peru-women-rights-idUSKBN0OJ2FN20150603, Accessed October 7, 2015.

[25] La Republica, 16 July, 2015.

Concluding Remarks: A Platform for Self-Expression

In this article, we have analyzed how poor and marginalized people in Peru organize in very diverse self-support groups in response to the failing and violent state. In addition to failing to address their everyday problems and providing for their basic needs, the state inflicted harm upon these people and severely violated their human rights. We have described the rise and development of Peruvian grassroots organizations by focusing on the economic and political roles of two seemingly rather different types of associations: the communal kitchens and the victim-survivor organizations. These organizations have emerged in the same context of political and economic crises, and over the course of their existence their roles have become comparable.

The goals of the communal kitchens are a good example of what nowadays is called solidarity economics. By alternative structuring of economics based on reciprocity, collectivity, and mutual support, poor women tried to alleviate their poverty by providing for food. Although the main motivation of the victim-survivor organizations was the quest for justice, truth, and later reparations, they also provided for the basic needs of their members by operating communal kitchens and shelters. This gave their members time to continue their pursuit of acknowledgement and a space to discuss their activities and receive supporters.

Both types of organizations are struggling for participatory democracy and political inclusion. They are expanding the boundaries of democracy to make their voices heard and give proof of “insurgent citizenship.” In 2012, the National Federation of women’s organizations CONAMOVIDI successfully claimed a greater role in politics and demanded that the government acknowledge the communal kitchens as a serious counterpart in making and implementing policy. Members of the victim-survivor organizations have through their mere collective actions formed new spheres of democracy. Their testimonies to the TRC of the atrocities they experienced during the political violence attest to this. In the latest investigations of the Public Prosecutor into the forced nature of the sterilizations, rural women have come to the foreground as well.

Feminism has been our third perspective in analyzing the contemporary histories of the Peruvian grassroots organizations. Although the kitchens at first served mainly to ease women’s role as caretakers, provide food, and combat poverty, the quest for gender equality has become an important issue. Whether these organizations are feminist in nature is subject to various interpretations. If feminism is identified with fighting gender inequality, the women’s organizations increasingly reflect traits of a popular variety of feminism (*cf* Barrig 1998; Vargas 1991; Padilla 2004). As the voices of the forcibly sterilized women are resounding more, certain victim-survivor organizations are starting to include sexual, reproductive, and gender rights in their scope of action. Although the two types of organizations are founded on very different underlying rationales, over the course of their existence their activities and values have become comparable. The kitchens were started out of economic solidarity and added the struggle for a more inclusive democracy to their activities, while the victim-survivor organizations started with the struggle for justice, human rights and acknowledgment as fully enfranchised citizens and expanded their agendas to offer their members food and shelter. The kitchens and their overarching federations have become increasingly aware of existing gender inequalities and the need to engage with activities to improve the gender position of their members, while the first victim-survivor organization recently resorted to this discourse.

Stressing only the positive aspects of the grassroots organizations, such as their solidarity, new forms of democracy and social equality entail the risk of romanticizing depictions of poor people happily and willingly working together. While the organizations may give us hope, we should never forget the severe social-economic inequalities, poverty, human rights violations, political violence, and racism that gave rise to these organizations in the first place. In the Peruvian context of a severe disjunction between official institutions and political elites on one hand and large sectors of the population suffering marginalization and discrimination on the other, collective action is perceived as one of the few viable courses to achieve political inclusion.

The organizations face many internal threats. They have suffered internal undemocratic rule and corrupt leadership, while external threats to their autonomy and survival have included terrorist infiltration, political manipulation, repression, and killing of their leaders. They also risk more professional non-profit organizations speaking in their name in public and political settings.

Currently, both the kitchens and the victim-survivor organizations are having difficulties legitimizing their existence. Membership of the communal kitchens is decreasing to such low levels that their survival is at stake, while the victim-survivor associations have made hardly any progress in their political claims. The leaders are well aware that if they step down, there is no guarantee that others will succeed them. Still, the active members are not discouraged and continue to invest time, energy, and dedication in their associations and work as volunteers, even when this limits their income-generating possibilities. As Jenkins (2009) shows in her research on women's long-term involvement in community development in Peru, women are expected to be continuously committed to fulfilling needs, due to the absence of the state in the organization of welfare. Like the kitchen and victim-survivor organizations, however, this is based on voluntary efforts. The intensity of the activities may therefore vary, depending on the availability of these women. However, the needs remain the same. The women involved in the kitchens are aware that ever fewer new members are willing to cook collectively, and that the reputation of the kitchens has been compromised. In spite of this, they are searching for all kinds of multi-level activities to keep the organizations going. Victim-survivors face indifference and receive little social and political support due to contrasting discourses on the recent history of violence. Nonetheless, organized victim-survivors still seek acknowledgement of the human rights violations they suffered or take the initiative to establish new organizations. Given the difficulties, they encounter in achieving political results for victim-survivors and the dangerously low numbers of women active in the communal kitchens, the hard work and the discontinuities of the organizations, what keeps members motivated?

Members value the organizations as a learning environment for all kinds of practical skills. Moreover, this has raised their awareness of their rights as citizens, women, and victim-survivors. The organizations are a meeting place for companionship and social-emotional support. They give rise to lifelong friendships and give their members a feeling of belonging. As a participant in a communal kitchen put it: "One falls in love with the organization." As Inglehart (1990, p. 377) argues about more affluent societies, values in social movements transform from material values, in which fulfilling economic needs and physical security is the central focus, to the post-material values of the so-called new social movements. Regarding the Peruvian grassroots organizations, post-material values increasingly motivate their members to stay involved, while material values remain high on the agendas of the organizations. Initially, the activities of the women cooking collectively and the victim-survivors concerned the immediate needs of their members. Nowadays, the communal kitchens and the victim-survivor organizations pursue changes in politics and public opinion and aim to offer material and other support to their members. They continue to progress, sustaining an infrastructure that in future times of crisis may once again function as an important social safety net.

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