

Q: Building off of what you just said about scalability, I'm wondering if you can tell us more about what is at stake in telling the story of LGBT rights politics from the perspective of your interlocutors. One thing you say in the article we read, is that this regional history of LGBT rights tends to be ignored at the level of national and global-scaled analyses of human rights progress and global health success. So I was wondering how your investment in telling the regional story of Amazonian Peru might also challenge the idea of history as linear and progressive, in so far as 'local cultures' are often seen as obstacles in the way of realizing human rights, and especially in global health discourses about moral stigma and HIV/AIDS.

JP: Now I'm thinking about these things beyond that particular piece, so that's really helpful. I would say first: the year 2000 is also important in Peru because this is the transition from Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian dictatorship of the 1990s to this new language of human rights and the transition to democracy. This is a big turning point and here the Global Fund enters and Peru becomes a kind of lab experiment in using a human rights framework in response to HIV, and health more generally.

At the same time, Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is happening—the final report gets delivered in 2003. The work that human rights does in Peru—it does a lot of work in people's lives, because accounting for the past and the armed conflict is such a central site of the national conversation. And so there comes to be this post-2000 thing where human rights becomes a panacea for centuries of racial and ethnic exclusion, particularly the exclusion of indigenous peoples of the Andes—which is the part of the country most affected by the conflict. Rights just become this event-horizon or important watershed in understanding the disjunct in what was the 1990s, what was the conflict, what was Peru under Fujimori... and “the post.” So that is a really important story to re-evaluate. Now that we're 20 years removed from that, it would be an interesting positioning or place for thinking, and for making connections to other scholarship.

Q: It was very interesting to read your article. I work in Egypt, which has a very similar case of historical violence towards what is deemed to be LGBTQ populations. There was one moment in your piece when you talk about how some people might see these [identity] categories as imported. Even hearing your history where the Global Fund enters in 2000—that to me was a marker of international influence on identity politics. I'm thinking in particular of Joseph Massad's critique of the gay international: that when people go out to “liberate the gays,” they also have to create the gays to ascribe to that category... and that's what my work sort of centers on... and questions of if these politics of identity work as a critique of human rights. So I'm curious how local understandings of sexuality interact in Peru with these international categories of sexuality, and how that is shot through with human rights discourses, neoliberalization of countries... in Egypt there are competing languages that don't always match. A lot of the men that I worked with don't identify with these categories and Egypt is seen as a very homophobic country, but homophobia requires an object of hate known as a homosexual... and that's where I struggle.

JP: I would say, for the first question, where I would find Massad helpful in the context of the Peruvian Amazon... is a longer history in which the Amazon has been hyper-sexualized—the tropes of the Amazon, as opposed to those of Orientalism when people are thinking about the Middle East. What are the Amazonian tropes? It's either the noble savage or the brutal savage, hyper-eroticization, they're not wearing clothes... these are the colonial tropes that continue to inform how people—even Peruvians themselves—are imagining this eastern portion of the country. And so these really profoundly colonial imaginaries inevitably affect the people that carry out the day-to-day of HIV intervention—experts from Lima who might be holding the workshop about HIV prevention and talking to people about different identity categories—who have some of these tropes influencing how they think about the communities they're working with.

In regards to the question of how to deal with naming categories and terms, that's an unending debate. Even in the history of ethnology—which throughout the 20th century has been really interested in non-normative sexualities and multiple configurations of kinship, gender, sexuality (often in a very butterfly-collecting, colonial tone)—you run into certain issues of categorization. As I write in the piece, I'm using the terms “gay” and “transgender.” I don't use “MSM/HSB” because that's not really who my interlocutors were and that's the result of the limits of an individual doing an ethnography. I had a lot of access to and rapport with gay and trans people, but less so with MSM.

On the one hand, ethnographically, people have a rich vocabulary and lexicon for talking about themselves and [on the other] they are able to draw on these terms that are required for accessing treatment and care. If your only health clinic is organized around the categories of LGBT, that necessitates a degree of legibility as one of those terms. But people have ways of resolving these multiple discourses for themselves. One thing I don't do is translate *maricon*, which could be seen as derogatory, and yet my interlocutors had access to that lexicon for making sense of things. I think for the ethnographer it's a continued question of how people themselves are resolving those issues, as opposed to my authorial decision (which is necessary though, at some point) on which terms to settle on.

Q: Since you mentioned the Peruvian response to COVID as a possible question: my family is Peruvian and my mom is actually stuck over there right now, so that's definitely been on my mind a lot. I was wondering how you think Peru's very strict, militarized reaction to COVID-19 might have particular implications for the LGBT community, people who are more vulnerable, and reproductive health and justice overall.

JP: I'm so sorry, that must be a really stressful situation to be in right now. I don't know if you all know, but Peru has been really intense with their measures in terms of leaving or entering the country. In fact, not only is it very difficult for anyone to come to the country or leave, but even within different states in Peru. If people were visiting Lima but are from a different state (they're called “departments” in Peru), they couldn't leave Lima. There weren't any flights, there weren't any buses—you couldn't go back to your home if you were in a different state.

And vice versa: if someone is in Iquitos (which is one of the cities I research but isn't in this particular piece), Iquitos is only accessible via air and boat. There isn't even a roadway to Iquitos. So Iquitos is a whole other major issue; there's like 20 ventilators in all of Iquitos. It's been really difficult.

On the one hand, I think the current president knows the limits of Peru's health infrastructure and is being very militant about these measures right now, because the country really can't afford treatment and care. But here's the concern and the historical resonances: I'll go to another historical moment, which is the 1990s and the emergence of Alberto Fujimori as this authoritarian president. Fujimori was elected in the middle of an armed conflict. It was this huge crisis; the conflict was intensifying, particularly in Lima. Fujimori began to implement structural adjustment measures which caused hyperinflation. People have stories of waiting in line for days to get bread and cooking gas costing 20 times more than what it used to. So there was this massive hyperinflation, the armed conflict, and then also a cholera epidemic hit in 1992 or '93, right in the middle of these other crises.

Fujimori really capitalized on the confluence of all of these crises to dissolve congress, write a new constitution enabling him to have an additional term of presidency, repress journalism, repress social and civic organizations—and carry out extrajudicial killings, which then become the cases that eventually lead to Fujimori being charged with gross human rights violations and his imprisonment today. All in the context of needing to control an epidemic, along with a couple of other things.

So for a lot of Peruvians, many really see Fujimori as having done that which was necessary—that these were justifiable initiatives in order to end the crisis. A lot of the scholarship shows that this really wasn't the case; it wasn't Fujimori's extrajudicial death squads that put an end to the Shining Path. It was things that had been happening before he was even president. But nevertheless on the one hand you have people who in 2020 still really support the kinds of efforts that Fujimori made throughout his presidency, particularly in the moment of the cholera epidemic. So you have a population that would be very supportive of the things that [the questioner] had been talking about. And then you have people who see human rights as, "This was how we were able to move past Fujimori's presidency"—move past his management of the cholera epidemic to justify gross violations of human rights.

It's such a divided population. In reference to Fujimori and what happened in that moment, which was the last memorable crisis that was particularly related to infectious disease: it really informs this thing where we want to be both concerned about what Vizcarra is doing and implementing, and also be conscious of what can be legitimized or justified in these moments.

Q: My question is more on methodology. When doing ethnographies, I wonder about individual's willingness to talk about their experiences—how you went about bridging these more sensitive, private topics when discussing these sorts of topics with individuals. I also

fear being extractive with the information that I get from populations that one is working with, so how do you balance that when talking to these communities?

JP: Two great questions. Unfortunately, as you continue with your research, I don't think you'll ever truly resolve these issues. I think a good researcher is continually asking both of those questions to themselves as they progress with their research. The fact that you're considering those questions is the first step, but don't think that it ever becomes fully resolved.

The first of these questions is about doing ethnographic research on sensitive subjects, and the second addresses the ethical implications. For one, I think for me it's really the time investment. When I first started doing the fieldwork in 2012, I didn't come in asking people, "How are you managing your HIV status?" or "Tell me about the time you were discriminated against." It's just not something that you can start off with—and you might not ever get to it, if that's not something people are willing to disclose or want to talk about or share.

A lot of my interlocutors are master storytellers—and master exaggerators, because a lot of the stories that they tell are funny and are part of managing everyday life when you're a marginalized subject. So I also think that, especially when I'm writing about sexuality, I don't think that what I'm doing is describing what happens between four walls or whatever. I'm actually interested in how people themselves are talking about and narrating it. Which is a little bit of a different perspective from, say, a global health framework that is interested in developing tools for effective HIV prevention and might also be asking similar questions. So, you have different ideas about the stories that you're getting.

It could very well be that most of the story of how this march in 2000 happened was exaggerated. But that's less important than how they were making sense, making contemporary things historical, and contextualizing it themselves. I think that's one way to think about it—that you're not actually describing sensitive, private elements of sexuality, but rather the things that people narrativize themselves and make public.

Part of that has to do with the spaces where I did fieldwork. For instance, many transwomen owned salons in Peru. For a long time, historically—although this has changed in the last ten years—that would be a profession that would be socially acceptable and people could be visible business owners with their beauty salon. Part of what that is, in addition to that service, to be well-known and effective you have to entertain people. You're telling stories, people aren't really responding, and you entertain them for the entire process of doing whatever treatment you're doing. So it's about figuring out the spaces where people tell stories, as opposed to just tracking them down and saying, "I have these interview questions, so tell me about this." Figuring out where it makes sense and where people are vocalizing stories that at first might be really sensitive.

For the second part of the question, it's a little bit irresolvable. I think for me, I have a foil. A lot of the research that is inquiring as to the experiences of living with or preventing HIV and experiences of sexuality is doing so in very extractive forms. Like for instance, the offshore

clinical trials for pre-exposure prophylaxis that also happened throughout the same decade in Iquitos and other cities—where you have this proliferation of research on gay, trans, MSM sexualities—but for the ends of making sure that Truvada as PrEP is available in the Global North, even though it still isn't available in Peru right now.

In some ways, you amazing and intelligent University of Chicago students are in a position to contest [these extractive] frameworks that other people aren't. Great question, thanks.

Q: I have a question regarding your philosophy or understanding of memory, especially political and social memory. How do you reconcile opposing memories together and make value judgements on different communities? Obviously there's a special emphasis on your interlocuters but also how do you handle the multiplicity of different memories existing at once?

JP: I think in the Peruvian context, memory is such a charged notion, specifically because throughout the country you have two very distinct, divergent and clear camps in terms of the conflict and Fujimori, and that resonates today. That's just a fact of Peruvian society, where you're just going to have large numbers of people who adhere to what some scholars have called a "salvation memory" about Fujimori and the conflict, which holds that all of the extrajudicial means and clear violations of human rights that Fujimori engaged in were justified at the end of the day. That's one thing that exists in Peruvian society, and then there are others who have a very different recollection and a different way of recalling and talking about the conflict and the past. This also exists in different parts of the country. The country is so fragmented, like the fact that there's no highway to Iquitos. Or the Andes; it's very dangerous actually to take a bus from Lima to someone's hometown in a part of the Andes.

So there's already a deeply embedded bifurcation of competing memory in Peru. These two stories about why or how Tarapoto became unique or how were they able to create these accomplishments in terms of HIV—in some ways, it's a consequence of that. I think people who would point to this case of violence that was committed by the MRTA in 1989 in Tarapoto would also strongly adhere to a version of the conflict that was pro-human rights and that Fujimori was entirely at fault for the measures that he took. I think the people who would elide those stories and point to moments like this parade could be mixed. I'm going through my head now and thinking, "I know that generally they think this way." It could be mixed. That's actually a really helpful question; all of the things that I just said I've never thought about, so I'm actually going to write them down right now and put them into the chapter that I'm working on, so thank you.

Q: We read some texts today about borders, border zones, zones of exception, and regimes of citizenship. There's a part in your text that we read where you describe the city in the jungle, and on a threshold. I was wondering how thinking more broadly about border spaces could apply to your field site?

JP: I think that specifically, at least in the case of the example that's in this chapter, Tarapoto is very much in a border zone: ecological, geopolitical, social, cultural—in all of the ways that we might imagine borders are constructed. It makes it really difficult to talk about it as a space. So perhaps thinking about globally what happens in borderlands, how borderlands can be created as sites of exclusion, might be a good way to begin to think about Tarapoto. It's not a port city—though it's by a river, but not one that is navigable by large boats, to get to Iquitos or Manaus in Brazil and eventually the Atlantic Ocean. So it's sort of excluded from longer histories of things like the rubber boom and what happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, why certain cities become important. It's very different than the usual Amazonian urban space.

And these are all Spanish speakers that I'm working with. Around the city there are some Quechua-speaking communities. There's a town close by called Lamas and the inhabitants speak Quechua, which is not common in the Amazon; Quechua is primarily an Andean language. For lack of a better racial category they're [my interlocutors] mestizos, they're not indigenous. They're Spanish-speakers but they're also not elite in any sense. So there's such an in-between-ness to Tarapoto in a way that Iquitos and Pucallpa can very much be located and placed as “not border.” That probably is a productive thing to continue thinking about. I think the Sayek Valencia piece that you all read is very helpful for that.