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Rights are a Reflection of Society

In 2004 my family migrated from Peru to the United States with hopes of achieving the *American dream* – stable income, home, and a job. However, there were roadblocks such as access to education. Through dedication, hard work, and perseverance my mother learned English and headed into graduate school focusing on mental health and social work. My mother had the opportunity to pursue her practicum in our home country, Cusco Perú specifically at an orphanage serving underrepresented indigenous children. These were moments and experiences that helped me appreciate the importance and complexities of reproductive rights. Reproductive rights are vital to woman across the globe because it brings to light violations and injustices to a women’s access to resources and services.

My mother facilitated groups and also translated Quechua, the native language, to English in clinics. The orphanage was located in the outskirts of the city; we took public transportation to reach the location. Upon arrival, my mother told me I could look around and as I did I came across a group of girls. They invited me to go join them in a couple of activities they had planned. A number of activities were not engaging and I remember feeling disappointed about the dry material. There were girls who were young mothers. Discussing their health and sexuality was very difficult for them because it was perceived as a topic that did not need attention. I realized there were several underlying factors behind health, specifically reproductive rights.

On my second week at the site I remember going out to fill a tin of water for one of the kids and coming across a woman who sat near the stairs. I could not remember a single day in which she was never accompanied, holding, or caring for one of the children. However, as open as she was to the children, she was very reserved. She was not a caregiver and I was curious about how she got involved with the orphanage. I inquired about her family. I knew by the shimmering in her eyes and her now slouched posture, that she was going to cry but what shocked me the most was her response to my question. She said that she couldn’t have children because the government performed a procedure on her without her consent earlier when Fugimori was president.

She opened up and her voice cracked. In addition, her breathing was uneven, it was as if it took all of her to continue. She told me she was pregnant once but that her baby died because he was born premature. She told me that years after the passing of her son, she was depressed and full of resentment and fear. She later found out she had been sterilized without her consent.

Consent is vital to all because it offers agency. She was not given a choice. In retrospect this was an experience that influenced my views and motivation to involve myself in activism. Awareness and grass root movements and organizing are key to moving forward. Amnesty International is currently working on such issue by shedding light on such event as well as highlighting the importance of coming together to have a voice. I am involved in different capacities and I hope to bring a critical lens to such efforts. Issues are a snapshot of experiences, politics, economics and values which should all be taken into consideration when discussing initiatives and efforts.