The Ritual Construction of Fetal Personhood
A Voyage through the Gendering of the Unborn in Peruvian Baby Showers

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‘Rituals and practices that govern person-making are extended to fetuses: fetuses are sexed, named, “photographed,” surgically altered, spoken to and about, and even speak themselves, Hollywood style’

(Morgan and Michaels 1999:6)
Acknowledgements

Research is always a collaborative enterprise. I am indebted to a number of people, who have accompanied me on different stages of this path that I embarked upon while setting out to understand a social phenomenon foreign to my own sociocultural reality (and surely just therefore so intriguing).

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And to the Letter – for all those songs you played.
Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse how gender is ‘done’, represented and reproduced in a Peruvian baby shower ritual. The study is situated geographically in the urban Andean setting of Cusco, and theoretically, in a feminist framework combining an ethnomethodological ‘doing gender’ perspective, anchored in social interactions, with a linguistic performativity approach, as formulated by Judith Butler. In the latter, gender is understood as performed through discursive practices of iterability. The ethnographic material, collected from two baby showers and additional interviews, demonstrate several ways and sites in which gender is done and performed in the Cusqueanean baby shower. This occurs, for instance, by the means of gendered gifts, decorations and performances of gender-crossing and hyperbolised displays of masculinity, femininity and sexuality.

Furthermore, to help make sense of the notions of prenatal gender, as well as the strictly gendered cultural norms for invitation cards, decoration and gift-making, which made me unknowingly brake conventions when bringing gender-neutral wooden toys to a Peruvian baby shower, I draw on theorisation of fetal personhood. Adapting van Gennep’s (2004[1909]) concept, I propose that the baby shower could be conceptualised as a rite of passage, in which the unborn transcends from the state of fetus to a gendered baby. The acts of naming and attributing gender in the baby shower ritual, I argue, are requisites for incorporating the child into the society, as family members and, ultimately, as human beings. The baby shower can, thus, be regarded a crucial site for the ‘social birth’ of the Cusqueanean baby.

Keywords: baby shower, rituals, rite of passage, doing gender, fetal personhood
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Introduction

You know what, on Sunday we will throw a fiesta for my baby, this baby shower! Will you be there? It’s a little boy!

This excerpt of a phone conversation, which I overheard through a friend while living in the Peruvian Andean town of Cusco, marked the departure point of my voyage through the gendering of unborn fetuses. As I soon came to realise, the last piece of information of that call was a vital clue for the guests. Shortly thereafter I had my first experience of shopping gifts for a baby shower, a ritual that I was yet to become familiarised with. I got the future baby a nice set of wooden toys. Sunday came and before the other guests arrived, while the female family members of my pregnant friend prepared the catering food, I helped blowing up blue and white balloons that were to be put in the living room to provide clues on just who was the subject of the celebration.

This was, I was later told, a simple informal baby shower without, for instance, entertainment, games or a rented locale. The fiesta did, however, contain the standard elements of writing down wishes for the baby’s future life and the ‘gift guessing game’. During the latter, the blindfolded mother had to use her tactile skills to figure out content as well as the correct giver. I soon became aware that my gift would not be difficult to guess, given that I, the only present foreigner, was also the only one to bring toys. Unknowingly, I had broken the strictly gendered conventions of gift-making for a Peruvian baby shower. This whole experience sparked my interest in further investigating the gendering processes that occur not just from the point of gender assignment at birth, but several months earlier, while we are still fetuses in our mother’s wombs. There and then a seed was sown to make a future case study of the Peruvian baby shower.

Statement of the problem

The aim of this study is to analyse how gender is represented and (re)produced discursively and through social interaction in a local adaptation of the baby shower ritual, set in the urban Peruvian Andes. In this endeavour, I will examine the following interrelated questions:

- In what ways are the baby shower ritual gendered?
- How is gender conceptualised prenatally by the informants in this context?
Background

As all informants eagerly point out, the Peruvian baby shower is a custom imported from the USA, although as most cultural imports, adopted as suited to its proper cultural settings. Hence, the informants assure that there exist major regional variations in the practice of the ritual between, for instance, the highlands of the Andes and the coastal regions, as well as between, for example, the major southern Andean cities of Cusco and Arequipa.1 The present study is situated in the former: the ancient heart of the vast Incan empire, namely the puma shaped city of Cusco, home to around 430,000 people (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática [INEI] 2015:9). That being said, this case study does not claim to be representative of other realities and contexts than those in which it surged, at most. Apart from the geographical setting, the socioeconomic context imposes further delimitations, making the material only relevant for the urban middle and upper class stratifications of Cusquenean society. The informants unanimously argue that the baby shower is an exclusively urban ritual, which has not been adopted by the rural populations in the Cusco department, who are said to possess ‘another way of thinking’ (interview Mirian 2014).

To further explore these dynamics, an intersectional approach would be needed, in order to focus on how power axis such as race and class interact with and are reinforced by each other as well as with globalised processes and Peru’s colonial relation to Europe and the United States. Calderón Bentin (2012) explores Peru’s neoliberal colonial ties to the USA through an opposite scenario, namely the traffic in Latin American cultural products to the North American continent. Through the cases of a Hollywood film and an archaeological collection, Calderón Bentin theorises the commodification of Latin culture with a Foucauldian twist, using the concept governmentality of empire, which implies ‘a global process of configuring and institutionalising US hegemonic power through colonial and neoliberal governing practices’ (2012:45). My interlocutors testify that the traffic in cultural heritage also moves in the opposite direction. The past few decades among the urban middle and upper-class strata of the Cusquenean society, new globalised and commercialised celebrations have come to complement the local ones. Apart from the baby shower ritual, other examples include Halloween and Valentine’s Day. These celebrations are permeated with market logic and individualistic ethics foreign to Andean cultures. I found it plausible that there is a special attraction among younger urban mestizo and white middle and upper

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1 My informants pinpoint a major difference between the Cusquenean and Arequipenean baby shower to be the form of the gift; whereas it is common in Arequipa that the guests bring a money envelope, the same gesture would be socially unacceptable in Cusco, where the invited are supposed to give away objects suitable for the first months of the baby’s life.
class populations to embrace these globalised/Americanised individualistic and commercial celebrations, which in the case of the baby shower is also aligned with technical advances, and hence signals modernity and progress.

As secondary sources on this cultural custom in a Peruvian setting are scarce, not to say non-existent, I will in the following contextualisation depend solely on the accounts related to me by my informants. Their narratives on when this relatively new cultural phenomenon began to be practiced in Peru in general and Cusco in particular hold it plausible that it surfaced in the 1990s, but thenceforth became more popular among the mothers in the first years of the new millennia. Currently, it is rather a rule than exception to organise a baby shower for the mother-to-be, especially the primigravidae. Although ‘not mandatory’, as one of my interlocutors puts it, the vast majority of new-born babies in the urban Cusco of today have unknowingly been the subjects of a party while still in their mothers’ wombs. Typically, the expectant mother’s friends or sisters take the initiative, while she is merely ‘waiting to be asked’. As baby showers have come to gain commercial value for local enterprises, there is also the option for those possessing the means to hire a special party organiser to take care of the arrangements.

Plausible reasons for not throwing a baby shower are, for instance, lack of financial means or time, or in the case of the baby not being the first born, already being fully equipped with baby paraphernalia. Out of her own experience, my informant Mirian also stated that some fathers-to-be do not approve of the idea, mainly due to the fact that it is an imported custom which consists in ‘begging for economical support’. This critique is constructed as an exclusively male formulation. In accordance with the traditional urban hegemonic masculinity, the principal breadwinner of the Cusquenian household unit has been conceptualised as male. This ideal prevails first and foremost among the elder generations. Accepting economical support by family and friends while expecting a baby can thus be jeopardising the masculinity of the father-to-be.

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2 There is evidence of similar nationalist resistance against globalised/Americanised tendencies and cultural imports elsewhere in Latin America, which could plausibly be attributed to the continents colonial past. In Mexico, for instance, the pejorative term malinchista is used for those who display a ‘preference of everything foreign’, which is regarded as a ‘betrayal of the Mexican for the Alien’. The term malinchista has its origin in La Malinche, a native Nahua woman who was the advisor translator and lover of the Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortés, and therefore has come to embody treachery in public imagination (Hryciuk 2010:500).

3 The father referred to here is in his late forties. Among younger urban generations, women are also expected to contribute economically to the household unit through paid labour. This could perhaps be tracked down to the economic changes that shook Latin America in the 1990s when Peru as well as several other countries opened up to market economy. In rural settings in the department of Cusco, women are supposed to work alongside the husband on the fields but also in economic activities, which the cholas depicted by Weismantel (2001) exemplify. These market women travel daily to the city of Cusco in order to sell their produce (see also de la Cadena 1995; Seligmann 2004).
The purpose of a baby shower is explained as twofold. There is an economic incentive, as it is considered a way to secure the baby’s material needs for the first months. The informants underline that it is economically beneficiary, despite the expenditures that may arise for food, snacks, beverages, entertainment and rent of locale. ‘The idea is that the guests bring you gifts in order to get everything ready for the delivery’, Mirian explains, adding that the baby shower provides practically everything that will be needed for the baby. Another motive mentioned is the ritual component; the baby shower is a fiesta to auspicate the baby’s arrival, an occasion to bring the family together to celebrate.

Before the baby shower boom in Cusco, the local custom consisted in felicitating the mother with gifts right after her delivery by dropping by at the hospital or the home. The informants explained why gifts before birth were unthinkable some decades ago: a simple consequence of that era’s lack of modern biomedical equipment that can predict the baby’s gender. In the pre-ultrasound era when Elena gave birth to her six children, she concluded it impossible with a baby shower.‘How would they know? By chance did we know what thing it was’ – with ‘thing’ in this context being applied as a reference to the sex/gender of the fetus. In other words, in order to secure gender appropriate, thus, correctly coloured gifts, the congratulants first had to inquire about its sex. Nowadays, when a majority of the expecting parents in Cusco choose to find out the sex of their fetuses as soon as possible with the help of sonograms, the possibility of ‘showering’ the prenatal baby with appropriate gifts lies open.

Accordingly, another reason for not throwing a baby shower could be that the mother prefers ‘the surprise’ rather than discovering her baby’s sex through an ultrasound exam. In such cases, given the ambiguity for the congratulants concerning the gendered colour codes of the gifts, my interlocutors arrived at the conclusion that a baby shower simply cannot be thrown.

This brief contextualisation demonstrates that the baby shower ritual is gendered, at the same time as being enmeshed in a web of intersectional power asymmetries structuring relationships in terms of, for instance, class, race, sexuality and age. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will in the following zoom in primarily on the gender and sexuality axes, in order to examine how gender is (re)produced in the baby shower. However, as will be further highlighted in the course of this study, this ritual is marking not just the doing of gender in the web of everyday interactions in which it occurs, but also how gender is constructed even

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4 In many affluent industrialised countries, ultrasound screening reached the status of routine procedure in pregnancy diagnostics by the 1980s (Harris et al 2004:24). However, in some developing countries, for instance India, it has been introduced with the principal aim of sexing the fetus (ibid:41; Gill 1998; Sheth and Malpani 1997).

5 The gendering by means of an ultrasound exam takes place when around 16 to 20 weeks pregnant.

6 According to the informants, this is the mother’s own stance to make, a decision over which the father has a minimum of influence since ‘the baby grows inside of the woman and not the man’.
before the moment of gender assignment at the time of birth, namely in the prenatal stage, while the child is still a fetus inside of the woman’s body.

**Methodology and material**

To arrive at an understanding of how gender is (re)produced during pregnancy as well as in the context of the baby shower celebration in the Peruvian city of Cusco, I used three classical anthropological methods, albeit in a minor format given the restrictions in scope of the present thesis. Firstly, I departed from a limited participant observation, while attending a baby shower organised by a friend of mine in November of 2008 when I lived in Cusco. Subsequently, the main bulk of data was collected through a small sample of interviews conducted in July and August of 2014, with the aid of modern information technologies, using the video conference tool Skype. Finally, I used the observation method, as I was provided with video footage of a baby shower organised by two of my informants in August the same year. The time span of six years between the first and last baby shower observed further enriches my material, as it adds a developmental aspect.

The selection of interviewees was not based on identity marker criteria with the aim to achieve a ‘representative’ sample. Rather the contrary, for this small study, which could never be representative of the Cusquenean society anyhow, my strategy was instead to handpick informants with connection to the baby shower out of which my participant observations stemmed. I performed three group interviews with a total of seven informants. In each interview, between three to five informants participated (some of them in more than one) with parts of the interviews being conducted one-on-one. Among my key informants, the prime subject of the baby shower I attended is to be found: namely the pregnant mother Mirian. Moreover, a group interview was conducted with Mirian’s elder sister Pilar, who was one of the initiators of the fiesta, her husband Alberto (only present during parts of the interview), her younger brother Miguel and their mother Elena, who belonged to the generation when there was no gift-making until after the baby was born. I also interviewed Mirian’s nephew Marco together with his pregnant girlfriend Sofia, in the midst of organising their own baby shower. All the informants identify as middle or lower upper class, heterosexual and white/mestizo.

The interviews have been processed according to the seven-step process for qualitative research interviews outlined by Kvale (2007:35-36): thematising, designing, designing, designing.
interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, based on an interview guide, but more often than not inclined to follow an informal conversational logic. The interviews, about an hour in duration, were recorded and subsequently transcribed in their entirety, after which the data were processed using the qualitative software HyperResearch. All quotes by the informants in this study have been translated by me from Spanish. With consideration to the integrity of the informants, they have been given pseudonyms.

In a feminist epistemological endeavour, I regard a perpetual reflective practice grounded in a situated knowledge perspective to be of equal importance for the social research process as data collection. Accordingly, I consider the production of knowledge to be situated in time and place, and subject to the social position of the researcher and her frame of reference (Minnich 1991). Hence, my own influence on the results has been problematised continuously, including what implications ascribed characteristics such as gender, age, race and ethnic identification might have on my research role and the web of power relations in which research activities are embedded (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). The fact that I had personal relationships with several of my informants brought certain additional dilemmas of both an epistemological and ethical nature. However, I concluded that the gain in confidence and openness that our pre-established relationship might bring, outweighed the possible disadvantages.

With this epistemological framework, in which the production of knowledge is considered a process created out of the researcher’s own position, the research experience becomes a cooperative effort; the investigated subjects (rather than objects) teach the researcher about their lives and the researcher let their perspectives speak for themselves through descriptions in words and actions (Ely et al 1993). This approach precludes a quantitative approach; the research questions cannot be answered through measurements and analysis presented in numbers or statistics. Moreover, in line with a qualitative approach, the stipulated research aim is open-ended with no hypothesis to (dis)prove. The work is grounded in empirical material, where the theory is used to interpret and elucidate the empirics inductively. In other words, the material is creating/supporting/discarding the theories rather than the other way around.

Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to, with Garsten and Sundman: ‘study local social processes in a bigger societal and cultural context’ (2003:8, my translation). A major advantage of (participant) observation is that it enables analysis of the participants’ (conscious as well as unconscious) actions or expressions in the actual setting, in the interaction with their partners, as well as between guests, during the baby shower. However,
to achieve credibility in an observation study, Ely et al advocate a ‘prolonged engagement’ to gather ‘data of sufficient quantity and quality, so as to comprehend that which we pretend to study’ (Ely et al 1993:173, my translation). This prolonged engagement, which requires continuity in field, serves to secure that documented events are in congruence with what is really going on, not just empty performances provoked by the researcher’s presence. Thus, given the limited time and space frames for the present study, the requisite of a prolonged engagement impedes the exclusive use of observation methods.

In conducting my one-occasion-only participant observation, it worked towards my benefit that I was previously acquainted with the informants. First and foremost, my observations served the need for vivid adjective-ridden accounts. As indicated by the prolonged engagement criterion, the study needed to be complemented with a method that was also able to describe people’s experiences and self-perceptions, expressing their own perspective of their lifeworlds. ‘If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?’ Kvale (1997:1) asks rhetorically. Using the research interview as principal method facilitates the aim of analysing discursive gender constructions, and to approximate the informants’ sentiments regarding gender constructions in the fetal phase as well as in the context of the baby shower celebration.

As with all methods, there are drawbacks with the interview study, which ought to be problematised and kept in mind during the whole process, in order to minimise their consequences. For instance, due to the fact that this is a relatively sensitive topic, it might be problematic for the participants to express themselves freely, and/or to reflect over phenomena that often take place on an unconscious level. When it comes to behavioural studies or studies of more implicit patterns, Kvale (2007:45) recommends complementing the interview method with field studies, just as I have opted to do. While the advantage of the interview is that the researcher gains first-hand information on the informant’s own opinions, thoughts and feelings, a major drawback is connected with the same fact. The researcher can never ascertain that the interviewee is accounting for how she really opines, thinks and feels, or that these statements correspond to her own or others’ actions in real life.

Moreover, in an interview study, the researcher is confronted with a number of ethical concerns, ranging from the integrity of the informants to exploitation of the same and possible harming consequences that the research can cause, both for the particular informant, for instance in the shape of challenged self-concepts, but also for the studied group as a whole, given that the reporting potentially could have both positive and negative influences on perceptions of prenatal gender constructions in the Cusquenean context. Following Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:219), I have adopted the stance they label ethical
situationalism, advocating the contextual judgement of different research strategies in the specific case, while at the same time striving to minimise any severe personal damage sprung out of the research experience.

**Theoretical framework**

Situating this study within a broader feminist academic debate, the overarching theoretical framework is the idea of gender as culturally and socially constructed notions of differences between women and men (Gothlin 1999). Partly inspired by post-structural theorists, who regard gender relations and expressions to be the effect of different actions rather than the cause (Ambjörnsson 2004:12; Butler 1999[1990]:103, 142, 213) and partly by an ethnomethodological focus on situated achievements in social interactions (West & Zimmerman 1987:126), I take a processual view on gender or, differently put, assume a verbal understanding (Kvande 2000:15).

Given that the theory is applied inductively in this study – a lens if you will to help making sense of an empirical social context of interactions and representations – I steer my analytic framework in a direction which I think is most suitable for my data. In that endeavour, I will cherry-pick from two traditions theorising gendered enactment, inspired by Chris Brickell’s (2003) innovative bridging of these massively influential theoretical formulations: namely, the understanding of gender in terms of performance – or a ‘doing’ – versus performativity. While the former hails from an ethnomethodological tradition, in which gender is conceptualised as interactionally produced accomplishments (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:194), the latter, accredited to Judith Butler (1999[1990]; 2011[1993]) and anchored in linguistics, posits gender as ‘performed’ through discursive practices of iterability.

**Doing gender**

The ethnomethodological approach to gender as an interactive accomplishment in everyday life was developed by thinkers such as Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel, and was subsequently adopted, refined and popularised by the author teams of Suzanne Kessler and

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8 Partly inspired by a grounded theory approach, but conscious of the limitations of the same. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s as a method of developing empirically grounded theory based on a continuous interaction between data collection, (re-)coding and analysis (Kvale 1997:84, 94). However, in a perspective where the data is considered to ‘speak for itself’, there is an imminent risk that processes of reflexivity is overlooked. Furthermore, the method has been criticised for springing out of a positivist epistemology – issues which here could be counteracted by my social constructionist approach, stressing that data are constructed by the researcher in the research process (Willig 2013:78).

9 Influential in the social and human sciences respectively.
Wendy McKenna (1985) as well as Candace West paired up with Don Zimmerman (1987) and later with Sarah Fenstermaker (1995) (to mention the most influential). The perspective draws on Goffman’s theatrical conceptualisation of performance, in which he proposes that while performing on the ‘front stage’, the individual, referred to as the actor, is engaged in management of self-impressions, exchanging information and meaning with the observers (staged here as the audience), thus confirming identities. The actor’s conduct, Goffman argues, is (unconsciously or consciously) influenced by her quest for obtaining the most favourable impressions from the audience. Extending this argument to gender, since there exists no ‘authentic core self’, there can be no ‘natural’ maleness or femaleness (Goffman paraphrased in Brickell 2003:159).

In their influential article ‘Doing Gender’, West and Zimmerman (1987) elaborate the insights of Goffman and Garfinkel into a theory with the same name, which marks a rupture with the Goffmanesque use of the concept of performance. In line with Goffman’s (1977:324) standpoint, West and Zimmerman (1987:138) argue that so-called ‘natural differences’ of feminine or masculine ‘natures’ are accomplished in and (re)produced through everyday social encounters. However, rather than conceptualising gender as a display, separated from other human interactions in a Goffmanesque sense, they suggest that the doing of gender is a work in progress, a never-ending routine in everyday life that cannot be separated from other interactions. Gender is, as a matter of fact, constituted in interaction, and to do gender is to do difference, they propose.

At the core of West and Zimmerman’s (1987:136) understanding of gender sits the notion of accountability. In the realms of interpersonal relations as well as in institutional contexts, gender, they argue, is done through the management of situated conduct. The process of rendering the actions of a societal member or institution accountable involves an ever-present assessment as to prevailing normative perceptions of supposedly apt activities or behaviours for a given sex category. Regardless of whether the actor/institution abides by these normative conceptions, every social interaction occurs at the risk of (a negative) assessment: an assessment that will produce an outcome for and impact upon future interactions.

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10 Without necessarily employing the term performance itself.
11 They simultaneously critique Goffman for treating gender as a variable that at times is subordinated to other forms of doings in social interaction. In their classical piece, West and Zimmerman use the term performance merely while referring to Goffman.
Performativity

Butler takes care in differentiating her concept of performativity from ‘the dramaturgical project of Goffman’ (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:197), expressing that ‘the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake’ (2011[1993]:178). She opposes the notion of the self as posed by Goffman, ‘which assumes and exchanges various “roles”’ (Butler 1988:528). Although applying dramaturgical metaphors in her own theory, her concept of performativity is to be understood linguistically in dialogue with speech-act theory (Butler 1999[1990]:xxv). Butler draws on J L Austin’s theory of performative utterances, proposing the power of the appellation; the act of the declaration is in itself what brings that very phenomena/thing/situation into existence (Butler 2011[1993]:170-171). Butler further argues, inspired by Louis Althusser, that it is through the interpellation – or hailing – which is heterosexually defined, that the subject is brought into being, thus, ascribed either the category woman or man (ibid:81-82). Consequently, in Butler’s version of performativity, the repetitive process of iterability is not performed by a subject, but is rather ‘what enables a subject’ (ibid:60).

It is precisely these ontological differences, namely the manner of accounting for social action and gendered selves that Brickell (2003:171) pinpoints to be the greatest divide between the two perspectives. While both stances critique conceptualisations of gender as a mere individual property (Butler 1999[1990]:11-13) and share a vision of ‘a social world that actively regulates and creates both our “private” and “social” selves’ (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:192), Butler takes the ethnomethodological non-essentialist argument a step further, when rejecting the notion of the individual as a ‘substantive thing’ altogether (Brickell 2003:166; Butler 1999[1990]:28, 143). Since the basis of gender identity for Butler is ‘a stylized repetition of acts’ (Butler 1999[1990]:179), there exists no subject before the expression of gender. Consequently, although she contends that ‘gender is always a doing’, she emphasises that it is not ‘a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed’ (ibid:33).

A combined perspective

Both perspectives have been criticised, on the one hand for focusing on micro rather than macro levels, thus, not accounting for social/power structures. On the other hand, somewhat contradictory, they have also been described as being ‘overly deterministic’, while not

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12 In a catch-22 manner, by using these categories we also reproduce and defend them, a dilemma that has become one of the main concerns of queer theory.
allowing ‘enough room for agency or resistance’, challenge and conflict (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:195). Brickell and others criticise that Butler’s stance implies a reification of gendered acts, since these are regarded to ‘originate outside of gendered subjects’ (Brickell 2003:166). Butler, contrarily, contests that precisely this constitution of the subject is ‘the prerequisite for and site of agency’ (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:197). The subversive potential, according to her, is found in the possibility of failure, of repeating that style divergently, given that gender is ‘a kind of imitation for which there is no original’ (Butler 1991:21).

In contrast, West and Fenstermaker (1995:21) refute the critique against their ethnomethodological formulation by reference to the workings of accountability: a process that in itself is to be considered both interactional and institutional with ‘an idiom [that] derives from the institutional arena’, in which the relationships enacted while individuals do gender come to life. Hence, according to these authors, there is a ‘reciprocal relationship between structures of power and the interactions that comprise and create them’ (ibid; Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:196). Furthermore, they regard change as an inevitable product of the accomplishment of gender, but since change as well as resistance is ‘embedded in the actualities of those particular “doings”’, they leave it up to empirical realities to demonstrate how change is played out (Moloney & Fenstermaker 2002:214).

In sum, faced with the task of bridging these theoretical perspectives, comfortably enough, there are also a number of important similarities. One pertinent connector is their rejection of the sex/gender distinction. The distinction first surfaced in the 1970s as an attempt to separate sex, which was perceived to be biological, from gender, regarded as a socially constructed cultural overlay. For Butler (1999[1990]:47), the distinction is unintelligible, as she regards both gender and sex as social constructs. On a similar note, Goffman argues that ‘any division of bodies into one of two sexes is itself a product of social practices such as naming and talk in the first instance’ (paraphrased by Brickell 2003:160-161).

By combining these perspectives, I aim to tailor-make the theoretical framework according to the purposes of the present study. For instance, whereas West and Zimmerman’s (1987) original piece, as well as later contributions by West and Fenstermaker (1995), lack theorisation on sexuality, Butler, following Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich’s respective formulations of the ‘heterosexual contract’ and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, develops a tripartite system labelled the heterosexual matrix, which theorises the connections between sex, gender and sexuality. Butler argues that the matrix renders (certain) gender identities comprehensible, at the same time as deviations from its normative conduct – that is if gender
does not match sex in a certain coherent manner or if acts of desire do not correspond with sex and gender in the prescribed way – will be castigated, punished and deemed illegitimate (Butler 1999[1990]:178, 194).

**The ritual**

In my analysis, the baby shower is conceptualised as a ritual. I build my understanding of rituals upon an anthropological conception, echoing Robbie Davis-Floyd’s (1992:8) definition of the ritual as ‘a patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of a cultural belief or value: its primary purpose is transformation’. Victor Turner (1991[1969]:vii, 8, 14) also pinpoints the transformative aspect in the ‘antistructural liminality’ that characterises rituals. Ritual activities are structured by and attain meaning through symbols, he argues. Symbolic action, in turn, is transformative, that is, with the power to influence human attitudes and practice. The prime symbol structuring a Peruvian baby shower is the gift, for which reason I dedicate a section of the thesis to the symbolic value and meaning-making produced through consumer goods, in the gendering of the fetus.

Turner (1991[1969]:94) draws on Arnold van Gennep’s (2004[1909]) concept of rite of passage, which describes an individual’s transition between two social identities. In a classical rite of passage as described by van Gennep, this occurs through the three stages of separation, liminality and incorporation. According to van Gennep, in the separation phase, by the means of symbols and symbolic behaviour, the ritual subject withdraws from her earlier state and relations – a ‘social death’ – which is proceeded by transcendence through a period of otherness, resulting then in a societal rebirth when a new status and identity are gained. In my analysis of the Peruvian baby shower, I will employ the concept of rite of passage, although in a modified manner, suited to the particular setting.

**Fetal personhood**

In order to grasp the gendering of the baby shower ritual as well as the subject of the celebration, namely the unborn fetus, I will draw on theories of the social construction of fetuses, fetal subjects and notions of ‘fetal personhood’. Feminist theorising in this field seeks to deconstruct the invention of fetal identity to lay bare the representations and meanings invested in the fetus as context-bound claims, fuelled by political, scientific, medical and technological discourses, (re)produced through social practice (Casper 1999:105).

In the following, I will regard fetal personhood, not as a ‘property’ to be unravelled, but as an ongoing production ‘in and throughout the very practices that claim merely to “reveal” it’ (Hartouni 1992). Just as in the discourses of the fetal subject that I aim to
deconstruct, my centre of attention in this study will mainly be the fetus rather than the pregnant woman. I do, however, share the feminist preoccupation that the pregnant women with their needs and feelings are being overshadowed as they are regarded to be the mere environment of the protagonist: the fetal subject (Michaels & Morgan 1999:199).

**Literature review**

Whereas, at least in a North American context, there are numerous consumer-oriented articles published on baby showers, there is a void in academic publications – a fact that motivates the present study. My search for dissertations in Swedish, North American and Peruvian databases yielded no results. The few articles encountered which actually include the topic generally do so in passing, while exploring, for example, motherhood, pregnancy or fetuses.

One exception is the two-decades-old article by Eileen Fischer and Brenda Gainer (1993), which by stretching van Gennep’s (2004[1909]) concept somewhat explores how contemporary US baby showers might be interpreted as modern rites of passage. Fischer and Gainer particularly focus on emerging new forms of baby showers, such as the work place, the mixed-sex and the feminist showers, which they mean have surged as adaptations to a society in change. In a Latin American reference, Renata Hryciuk (2010) takes her reader to a *colonia popular* in Mexico City to explore the baby shower as a strategic site of women’s resistance. In a culture where motherhood is nothing short of a cult and a social context of dynamic change, in which the Mexican state posits women as key players in their modernisation project, but where the hegemonic motherhood discourse still remains the frame for national participation, local women have made this American ritual their own. Imported through their television sets and subsequently negotiated and adapted to their local needs, this cultural hybrid has become a way of sharing experiences and celebrate motherhood on their own terms. Another study conducted in Mexico City at the end of the 90’s describes baby showers as a phenomenon among the middle and upper class, (similarly as in my urban Peruvian setting). However, just like the US baby showers documented by Fischer and Gainer (1993), the ritual described by Ángeles Sánchez Bringas (2003) is an exclusively female affair. In this setting, the financial incentive is quoted to be a stronger motivational factor than among their compatriots of less means, investigated by Hryciuk (2010).

Furthermore, for my study, it is pertinent to review the research on fetal subjects. Linda Layne (1999:251) and Lynn Morgan (1996:47-48) problematise that ‘the emerging fetal subject’ which is now taking a prominent place in US media and public debate has been under-theorised by feminist scholars, due to concern that raising the topic might favour the pro-life movement. However, an excellent overview of the field is provided by the already
referred anthology *Fetal subjects: Feminist positions* (Morgan & Michaels, eds 1999). The contribution by Layne (1999) is particularly relevant for my purposes, as she discusses the vital role of consumer goods in the social construction of fetal personhood in a Western context. By examining consumerism in the context of pregnancy loss, she throws light at the iterative processes of gift sharing and other acts of consumption, which serve to produce a new societal member, materially as well as socially. Drawing on Beth Conklin and Morgan, Layne contrasts this individualised Western approach to fetal personhood with a processual-relational oriented, a way of viewing personhood common, for instance, in lowland South America (Conklin & Morgan referred in Layne 1999:253). A similar pattern is detected in the highland Ecuadorian rural community that Morgan (2006) investigates by manner of a cultural comparative analysis. In the United States, Morgan likewise observes a radical individualisation of fetuses (or rather put *the fetus*, constructed as a singular unified fetal subject). Morgan (2006:368) also discusses differences in the attribution of prenatal gender. The ideas expressed by the Ecuadorian highland women regarding the differences in the formation of female or male fetuses is echoed by other Andean studies, such as in the articles by Tristan Platt (2002) on ideas of conception among Quechua-speaking women in Bolivia, or by Ana María Carrasco Gutiérrez (1998), exploring the gendered life cycle in a Chilean Aymara village.

Any contemporary research on fetal personhood is practically obliged to discuss the biomedical influence of the past few decades. As Barbara Duden (1999:16) puts it: ‘The fetuses we live with today were first conceived not in the womb, but in visualising technologies’. The author team behind the article ‘Seeing the baby’ investigate Australian ultrasound examinations in order to deconstruct notions of the fetal persona. Applying Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, or techniques of surveillance, they demonstrate how an essential element in these visualising technologies is the pleasure induced among the expecting of visualising her embodied experiences of pregnancy (Harris, Connor, Bisits & Higginbotham 2004). Lisa Mitchell and Eugenia Georges (1997) take a cross-cultural approach to discourses on fetuses, in the context of ultrasound imaging. Relying theoretically on Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg, these authors examine the couplings between human beings and machines.

In sum, these articles on the construction of fetal personhood reveal what Morgan and Michaels denominate the ‘cultural capital of fetuses’ (1999:3): a capital that is culturally specific as ‘the meanings attached to life before birth vary enormously from culture to culture’ (ibid:2). The same is of course true for the attribution of prenatal gender, which will be explored further in the following sections.
Outline

With the research questions in mind, the presentation of the empirical data has been divided into three subsections, of which the first two elucidate the question of how the baby shower ritual is gendered, while the third part examines how gender is (re)produced during gestation. First, I invite the reader along to a baby shower ceremony, in order to provide a situated ethnographic account of how gender is done ritualistically: enacted and performed both in regard to the fetus as well as by the participants themselves. The second part discusses the baby shower gift as a symbolic device in the construction of gendered fetal personhood. Thereafter, the setting changes, moving inwards from the outer social reality of the festive occasion, to what is considered to take place in utero, when the informants explore gendered conceptions surrounding pregnancy and life before birth more generally (what could be considered the foundations of a baby shower). In the last chapter, which further discusses and summarises the findings of the study, I entrench the ethnographical data theoretically and discuss the research aims and questions in light of the empirics.
Analysis

The rite of passage

Positioned at the centre of a circle of spectators, there is a man with colourful clothes, shoes too big and a red nose, demanding everyone’s attention. He speaks in an infantile voice, provoking cheering laughter at the hosts’ and guests’ expense, while mocking primarily the male guests and, above all, the male host. The latter is seated with his pregnant fiancé, right in front of the room’s central focal point: a stage decorated like a shrine in different shades of blue and white. This deliberately chosen colour theme is found in everything from curtains and table cloths to the neat paper decorations and the small pillars made of balloons. On the main table, there is a plastic doll dressed in blue mini balloons, while some other paper figures of babies have been collocated on the curtains behind. All are dressed in the proper colours connoting boyhood: blue, white and yellow. To further ensure that all possible ambiguities concerning the main identity marker of the subject of the fiesta, namely the fetus, have been straightened out, the paper figure is also wearing a cap. The scene is staged to construct the fetus as a baby boy.

During his show at this baby shower, the clown makes the parents-to-be pick three friends each to join him in the performance. Assuming their gender-separate positions on the floor, the selected three women and three men are asked to introduce themselves in a baby voice. Thereafter, in a sudden move, the clown turns the setting into an international beauty pageant. The ladies are instructed to put one hand on their hips and keep the other hand in the air while moving down the catwalk, blowing air-kisses that are to be caught and kicked away with their bottoms. When it is the men’s turn, the clown clarifies corporeally with his hand on his hip: ‘You men will not move like that, oh no! You walk in our style’, he exhorts, manipulating his voice in a deep hyper-masculine style. ‘Walk like a man, with your hands in your pockets, all the way up to the centre where you’ll throw seductive glances and then, do a spin around of salsa!’ The clown further elaborates on this perceived gender difference: ‘Men and women have different forms of modelling, right? The gentlemen have other ways, a stronger way, don’t they? When the gentleman comes forward he has to put himself like this’, he continues, while flexing his muscles, ‘and put on his mean face’.

This ethnographic moment suggests that gender is done in different sites during a baby shower: apart from establishing the status of the fetus as a baby boy, symbolically as well as materially (which is to be examined further in the next section), the clown’s

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13 According to the informants, the clown is almost exclusively male identified.
performance highlights how normative gender behaviour is ritually celebrated. While ridiculed, the gender dichotomy and the hierarchical relations between the categories are simultaneously defended and sustained. Key in understanding how gender is done is to conceptualise masculinities as well as femininities plurally, as cultural constructs ordered hierarchically, situated temporally and spatially, ‘defined collectively in culture, and…sustained in institutions’ (Connell 2000:11). The baby shower demonstrates precisely these collective processes, in which masculinities and femininities are constructed and enacted in certain accountable ways (ibid; West & Zimmerman 1987).

The masculinity on display when the clown flexes his muscles is what R W Connell (2000:10) denominates as hegemonic: the most ‘honoured or desired’ form of masculinity in the culture or community in question. This hegemonic masculinity, mocked and celebrated simultaneously in the clown’s performance, is a construction that several of my informants describe with the term *macho*. When asked why a mother would be subjected to heavy criticism if she was to dress a baby boy in pink, Elena answers: ‘We are like that here, we are *machistas*. It’s a macho city.’ Likewise Marco owes the fact that he would not play football if he would father a daughter to the ‘theme of machismo’, which to him explains why Cusqueanean girls simply do not enjoy it. In their studies of Mexican-American men, Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank and Tracey (2008) define machismo as a standard of behaviour exhibited by Latin men. The emic use and understandings of this term differ somewhat from its academic employment, in which its exclusively negative connotations are ‘often being evoked as a descriptor of a particular Latin American brand of patriarchy’ (Ramírez paraphrased in Meza Opazo 2008:24), associated with ‘notions of hyper-masculinity’. The term has also been highly contested in academic discourse as a generalising, simplistic descriptor of a complex reality. However, Meza Opazo argues that ‘both within Hispanic communities and mainstream discourse’, ‘the social construction of Hispanic masculinity is intricately tied to understandings of machismo’ (Meza Opazo 2008:24).

The multiple forms of masculinities are hierarchically ordered in complex relations of dominance and subordination, in which the hegemonic form is constructed both in relation to different subordinated masculinities and to women (Connell 1987:183). To exemplify this, Connell points to comparative anthropological research, which demonstrates vast differences in how homosexual practice is conceptualised in relation to dominant forms of masculinities; whereas ‘some societies treat homosexual practices as a regular part of the making of masculinity …; others regard homosexuality as incompatible with true masculinity’ (Connell 2000:10). As demonstrated by the clown’s show, the Cusqueanean take, at least in our setting,
is rather the latter, coupled with a construction of hegemonic masculinity that celebrates a form of hyper-masculinity, incompatible with child care. There is a fear of, but also titillation with homosexual elements, as will be further elaborated with more ethnographic details.

When interpreting the sexualised performance that the participating women are obliged to put on while moving down the imagined catwalk, the concept of hegemony proves to be of little help. Connell contends that there could be no hegemonic femininity since the concept of hegemony connotes power. On the contrary, if there is a defining feature of the differentiation that constitutes femininities, it would be the subordination of women to men. Instead, Connell (1987:183) introduces the concept of emphasised femininity to refer to the form of femininity that adheres to these ideals of submissiveness and ‘the interests and desires of men’. Emphasised femininity is on display when the women follow the clown’s example of blowing kisses that are to be caught and kicked aside with their bottoms. By acting out a beauty pageant, they are doing gender in an accountable manner.

Here, parallels can be drawn to feminist cultural theorists’ analysis of ‘the mechanisms of viewing’ (Walters 2005:50), a framework mainly developed in the context of visual media studies, but useful for my purposes in interpreting the representation of the female body in the clown’s amusement act at the baby shower. Suzanna Danuta Walters discusses the processes that ‘produce women as sexual spectacles’ by reviewing earlier work in the realm of gender and looking. The consumption of the female body as an object of desire has been theorised through the concept of the objectifying ‘male gaze’, which ‘carries with it the power of action and of possession’ (Ann Kaplan quoted in Walters 1995:58). The male gaze contains both voyeuristic and fetishistic desires, expressed through the objectification and sexualisation of the female body. As the visual world is constructed for male pleasure, there is no equivalence to be found in a ‘female gaze’ since ‘the ability to scrutinise is premised on power’ (ibid:66). I suggest that the drama enacted in the baby shower ritual is staged through the male gaze of the clown and mirrored in the cheering approval by the ‘voyeuristic, penetrating and powerful’ (Betterton quoted in ibid:59) masculine heterosexual gazes of the gender mixed spectators.

According to Marco, while the male host ‘plays it all’, the pregnant mother’s role is

\[\text{\footnotesize 14} \text{ On a methodological note, it can also be added that I utilise visual media in the clown scene to frame an analysis built upon observations.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 15} \text{ Indeed, similar jokes and performances as those put on by the clown in the baby shower appear in other types of Cusquenean fiestas too, in which the clown always plays the part of exaggerating differentiations and stereotypes, and thus implements and reflects the male gaze.}\]
more passive. The games including the expectant mother are normally of the non-mocking kind: to guess the size of her belly and, as has been noted earlier, the gift-opening falls within her responsibility, which involves being blindfolded and guessing the right content and gift-maker. The informants speculate that the more passive role of the female host can be owed to the fact that the pregnant woman can neither drink nor move around a lot. This does not explain, however, why the other female guests are normally not objects of the banter either. Sofia confirms that the clown almost never plays jokes on the women; that is simply the role of the father and the male guests.

As we are to see, while returning to the baby shower setting once again, sexuality is a crucial ingredient in more than one sense. While the women are both sexualised and passivated, the hegemonic masculinity enacted by the male participants always operates in relation to subordinated masculinities and the ever-present ‘homosexual threat’. After the ritual celebration of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, the clown precedes to mock the male guests even more. It is time for one of the baby shower’s prime moments: the delivery scene performed by a man. One of the male guests gets to play the part of Sofia, while a man and a woman are cast as the husband and the doctor. The man who is supposedly going into labour is forced down on the floor with his legs wide spread, as the feet are positioned on separate chairs. To the delight of the gathered crowd, the other male participator gets pushed underneath the blanket that is spread out to cover the ‘birth scene’. From his position between the other man’s legs, the clown makes him report on how the delivery is proceeding. This ‘prohibited visit’ provokes a massive gale of laughter.

The feminisation of the father-to-be as well as the male guests is one of the essential components of the Peruvian baby shower: a component that also includes a play with sexuality. In addition to the gender-crossing games, there is also a male infantilisation, manifested in games that oblige the future baby dad to crawl on the floor, put on a giant diaper, a bib and a pacifier, as well as to demonstrate his abilities to change the diapers, and drink alcoholic beverages out of a baby bottle. These games can be interpreted as a way of confirming hegemonic masculinity and male heterosexuality through parodic infractions: an argument that will be further developed in the concluding chapter.

The gift

One of the principal mechanisms in gendering the ritual of the Peruvian baby shower, thus legitimising it, is by using colours. In her study on the colour pink as a categorisation mechanism, Fanny Ambjörnsson demonstrates convincingly how colours operate as mirrors of our societal norms and values, or with another striking metaphor, force-fields that ‘mark,
sustain, and challenge…societal borders’ (2011:11, my translation). As this case study has indicated thus far, the colour codes are applied in each stage of the ritual, all the way from the preparation phase of sending out the invitation cards to the construction of the scene where the ritual is to be performed, and, indeed, in the ritual’s central element: the gift.

The socially sanctioned gift categories for a Cusqueanean baby shower consist of clothing, shoes and baby paraphernalia, such as blankets, bedspreads, bed sheets, mattresses, bathtubs, towels and feeding bottles, but also consumables, for instance shampoo, soap, baby oil, talcum powder and diapers, in short, everything the baby might need during the first few months of its life. The parents of the mother-to-be are normally expected to give more expensive gifts, for example, cribs or strollers. Marco, who is in the midst of organising a baby shower for the fetus in his girlfriend’s womb, seems confident that the gifts they are to receive will cover everything required for the care of their future baby. While the gift options are the same regardless of sex, Marco clarifies that ‘obviously the colour changes. You wouldn’t give pink to a boy. No, that’s a societal thing, isn’t it?’ When asked if she received any pink coloured items for her baby boy, Mirian responds with laughter:

Pink no! You don’t give pink here, I don’t know, but here, oh no! Pink is always for girls. Although lately I’ve seen that guys are also using it, aren’t they? I’ve seen pink tees and shirts. But, no, no, on babies never! On babies, there always has to be a distinguished colour difference.

This resonates with Ambjörnsson’s (2011:31, 217-218) study among Swedish preschool parents, who invest in their kids’ aesthetics as a means of actively creating gender difference through colour coding. Besides naming them, clothing and accessories might be one of few possibilities of creating gender distinctions among little children, who otherwise might be challenging to sex.

In our Cusquenean middle class context, the gifts are gendered by the colours, as well as by the figures that adorn the clothing and bedding sets etc. Adequate figures for baby girls are for instance dolls and angels; for boys, teddy bears and cars. Elena describes the classical baby colours as pale blue for boys and pink for girls, together with the more unisex colour of yellow, which is supposed to attract luck among new-borns. While Marco attributes yellow mostly to girls, Mirian regards the colour as mainly determining boys. Elena points out that new-borns of both sexes should be dressed in pastel colours. Except pink and purple which is girl-coded, all other colours are described as fairly unisex. However, when asked which colours are preferable for respective sex, most light colours but pink seem to be conceptualised as suitable for boys: pale blue, cyan, celadon, cantaloupe melon – Marco even mentions red – while for girls, the informants first and foremost think of pink, purple or the
neutral colour white, which is used for girls or boys alike.

Elena recounts the story of when she gave birth to her son in the late 1970s and her aunt had knitted a baby set in pink for the occasion. Having applied the available methods for foretelling the sex, such as evaluating the shape of the belly, the aunt was convinced that a little girl had just seen the light of day. Therefore, she brought Elena pink gifts to the hospital bed. Albeit breaking gender conventions, as pink is a taboo colour for little boys, Elena put the clothes on. This memory still provokes laughter. The boy’s elder sister Pilar, who also participates in the interview, proclaims giggling: ‘How ugly! How could [he] use girl clothes?’ ‘But how was I to discard the garments?’ Elena counters. ‘My aunt had knitted beautifully.’ She explains that when the family found out that a son had been born, they immediately started knitting appropriately coloured items, but in the meantime she dressed him in pink. Pilar remembers how the siblings considered the pink clad body of their baby brother to be peculiar; they teased and laughed about it. Elena’s husband did not bother, but she herself eagerly underlines that the colour choice does matter a great deal. When asked if she could have put on the clothes was her son to be bigger, say three or four years, she reacts with distaste, finding it impossible: ‘Because boy is boy, right? No, no, no! Pink is a girl colour.’ She goes on to explain that they would have been subjected to heavy criticism, since ‘people here are nit pickers… “How dare you dress him as a girl? How could you give him a pink sweater?” they would critique’.

When asked what reactions might be sparked by dressing a baby girl in pale blue, Elena seems confident that given that it is a baby nothing at all would happen, because a baby girl could wear blue as well. She adds that nowadays, even when they are bigger or adult, women don blue. Hence, while girls might use the colour palette which is more conceived as boyish, the scandal is a fact if a boy is dressed in girl colours. Ambjörnsson accounts for the stigma of the colour pink in a Euro-American context, where it for just over half a century has been used as a marker of femaleness. Before the 1950’s, due to its relatedness to red, which carried war (/blood) connotations of male bravery and strength, pink was regarded a male colour. Blue, on the other hand, was considered female in Catholic contexts, as it bore connotations of Virgin Mary. Ambjörnsson describes the gradual inversion of the binary meanings stronger/weaker attached to these two colours (regulating also their association with the perceived stronger/weaker sex) to be a consequence of the aesthetics of the First and Second World Wars.\footnote{With its colonial past, Peru is certainly differently situated historically and never became involved in the World Wars. Nonetheless, the example put forward by Ambjörnsson gains relevance for my case study, in that...}
masculine, pink became female coded with the opposite associations of softness, childishness and innocence. In this light, the displacement in meanings of the colour pink could be interpreted as a way of maintaining the gender polarisation (Ambjörnsson 2011:215).

Ambjörnsson (2011:10) further points out the essential role of capitalism and the consumer society in emphasising and enhancing gender distinctions, with the children’s apparel industry as a vital actor. According to Layne (1999:258), children are produced through consumption, and thus also their social identities. As Ambjörnsson (2011:163-164) concludes, little boys are the most restricted in colour choices. While girls can wear the more neutral and darker colour shades, boys cannot risk wearing a girl colour. Not only is feminisation at stake, which implies lower status, but cross-dressing or choosing pink is also jeopardising the young boy’s future heterosexuality, which the following scene will help to illustrate.

Mirian, accompanied by her mother Elena, discusses what would happen if she dressed her son in pink or in dresses. When asked if her son would have ended up being a girl if treated like one, she reacts with revulsion. He would not have become a girl, but setting such a ‘bad example’ would have been hurtful to her five-year-old.

It would be bad for him, make him feel like “hey, you can dress in pink or skirts like a woman!” No, no, no, that isn’t good. Once, [my son] told me… “Mum, and I can’t use earrings?” [Elena gasps.] Well, and I told him, “when you are grown-up, of course, they are beautiful. Look, there are boys using them. It’s all cool”, I told him, “but later. When you decide if you like them or not.” And do you know what he told me? In confidence, he said to me, “oh, but why are only women wearing skirts, why are they using earrings? I would like to! Hey, isn’t it possible to change?” he told me.

At this point, Elena exclaims loudly: ‘Oh, I can’t believe you!’ Mirian then comments on Elena’s strong reaction with laughter: ‘Look, mummy’s freaking out!’ She continues: ‘Do you know what I told him? “Son, no, no, no”, I said, “you’re a boy! You’ve been born a boy and you are a boy!”’ [Elena: ‘Insist!’] “You have to dress like a boy and you have to act like a boy!”… But this is just his curiosity.’ Elena breaks in again: ‘I’ve heard that from an early age they’re fond of dressing like a woman and that it has to be interrupted!’ She refers to these cross-dressers as mariachi, a dialectal metaphrasing of the pejorative word maricón, its historical perspective uncovers the temporality in the significations and gender connotations of colours and how these suddenly can become inverted. The fact that pink and blue currently are the primary colours also for Peruvian baby girls and boys respectively could possibly be attributed to the effects of processes of globalisation, North Americanisation, the market and the popularity of heavily US-influenced Mexican TV series.
fag, which makes her daughter crack up. Mirian continues:

Yes, it seems like they’re curious at this age… One day he also put on his chemise all the way down. “Look mummy, this looks like a skirt”, and I told him “no, no, no, son”, I told him, right? But it’s a question of…simply explaining it to them… I explained to him, “Son, you are a little boy and you dress like a little boy”… Well, I think that it also depends on the upbringing of the parents… [My partner] is very traditional, he likes things to be in their place, and he’s a little…homophobic… And he would be shocked if [our son] sometime would utter these things, if he explores that topic…so I try to avoid it. But I also feel that…he is a boy, isn’t he, and he has to be boy, right?… But I haven’t noticed this anymore. He isn’t talking about these things at all now.

When, in classical Beauvoirian spirit, posed with the question if one is born a boy or becomes one, Marian responds that she believes that it is more biological (a not very Beauvoirian stance, indeed). (Elena counters: ‘But some become later, and others from an early age’, probably still referring to ‘becoming’ homosexual.)

One is born boy and is indeed boy the whole life. But it depends on the upbringing of the parents as well…the guide…[and] example that they’ve had, the parents’ concepts, how their mentality is, everything. Everything has an impact, indeed. But I believe that if he is a boy he has to be a boy, always. And if girl, a girl of course. Well, at least in our culture; you know how we are. And I think like that myself as well.

This ethnographic scene further illustrates how the colour pink also regulates sexuality. In a Swedish setting, Ambjörnsson (2011:46) discusses a similar reaction. Her informant Susanne reveals how a friend’s five-year-old is mad about dressing up in pink and high heels. This preference has provoked his parents, especially the father, to take measures in order to ‘rescue’ his sexuality. Assured that he is gay and that it is vital to put him straight before it is too late, they have brought their son to psychologists.

The limits that these parents, as well as Elena and Mirian, impose on their (grand)son’s behaviour highlights the specific difficulties for a boy to gender bend; while small girls are more allowed to imitate boys, boys in turn risk being regarded as sissy and gay. Whereas blue-clad girls are generally not considered lesbians, a boy donned in pink is risking both his male gender identity and his straight sexuality (Ambjörnsson 2011:221). Pink has come to mean subordination, be it on grounds of gender or sexuality or other power axis such as class, age, ethnicity or race (ibid:220). These symbolical constructs, which permeate also the Peruvian society, are reflected in the baby showers, where pink, indeed, is the only truly controversial colour: mandatory if the fetus is sexed female, but taboo if not.

I will now turn to another form of gendered symbolism, through which I will examine the importance attributed to gendering the fetus from a slightly different angle. In the
following section, the point of departure will not be the baby shower ritual per se, but its condition: the pregnancy itself, and the gendered symbolism that permeates it.

**Conceptualising pregnancy**

There are different manners of conceptualising gender while still in utero. One of the most popular techniques of sex assignment employed among the Cusqueaneans is that of evaluating the form of the belly: a pointy ball shape means a boy while a flatter stomach signifies girl. My informants also display more intricate ways of gender assignment, a reminiscent of the days when there were no scientific means of finding out which colours to knit. Sofia explains that when the heartbeats are stronger, distinguishable as early as in the third month, it is a boy, but when heard first in the fourth or fifth month, the fetus is sexed female. Softer heartbeats, then, equal girl. The male fetus is believed to be more active. Here, similarly as in the baby shower, passivity is connoted with femaleness. This unanimous account regarding the dualisms of activity/passivity and strength/weakness, as well as the gender assignment technique of distinguishing hard/soft bellies corresponds with beliefs reported from other corners of the Andes, for instance by the rural Aymara villagers of Northern Chile, among whom Carrasco Gutiérrez (1998) conducted fieldwork, or the Quechua community in Bolivia, researched by Platt (2002). The Chilean Aymara women explain that female fetuses are calmer and lighter; the first thing they develop is their hands. The heavier male fetus, however, have their brains developed first (Carrasco Gutiérrez 1998:90). Possibly, this doing of difference based on notions of gendered body parts could also be reflected in the daily labours expected from men or women; whereas thinking is established as a male task, women are made to work with their hands.

If viewed in the light of the rhetorical question posed by Sherry Ortner (1972) in her classical article ‘Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?’, the construction of the hands as an essential female attribute places women closer to nature, while the male-coded brain would indicate men’s proximity to logic thinking, hence culture, and domination over the natural elements. Ortner argues that women’s universal subordination to men is the result of their association with procreation, tying their bodies and psyches symbolically to nature, which is dominated by human culture. This explanation of women’s inferiority to men has been heavily criticised as ahistorical, ethnocentric and static, as it does not account for cultural variations, agency or change (see for instance the response in the volume edited by MacCormack & Strathern 1980). I agree with the limitations of Ortner’s theory. However, in this limited case, I believe it to have certain explanatory value.
Moving on to Bolivia, the field data gathered by Platt reveal that the Quechua mothers metaphorically compare the fierce movements of the male fetus to their having ‘a little fish playing in [their] bellies’. The female is moving softer like a drifting cloud or the waves of a lake, they say. This is attributed to their belief that a female fetus does not solidify as rapidly or fully as the male counterpart (Platt 2002:136). In a similar vein, Morgan reports from her Ecuadorian field site that gender differentiation takes place during the formation of the fetus. The male is believed to form already during the first month, ‘just like Christ’, according to her informant Doña Josefina. Meanwhile, the female fetus is merely blood and tissue up until the sixth month of gestation, when it slowly begins to form. As Doña Teresa comments with a smile, ‘they say girls are lazy’ (Morgan 2006:368).

Morgan notes that the women’s personal experiences of miscarriages are used to reaffirm rather than reject the social perception that girls are later in their development than boys. For example, Doña María relates the events of her stillbirth of a three-month fetus sexed male: ‘He was born completely formed, with all the boy’s parts.’ In contrast, a miscarried female, she says, ‘has nothing’ but comes out merely as a ‘chunk of flesh’ with a single ‘chicken’s eye’ (Morgan 2006:368). Also in this regard, Platt (2002) makes comparable observations from Bolivia.

Returning to Cusco again, clues in finding out the sex can also be mediated to the expectant mother or her relatives and friends through dreams. Mirian emphasises that dreams are of central importance in the foretelling of gender and constitute a much debated theme among her friends and colleagues. ‘What have you dreamt?’, they exhort and speculate, ‘well, I think it will be a little girl, it won’t be a boy!’, Mirian tells. The rich symbolism conveyed by dreams is interpreted as guidance in the gender attribution of the fetus. For instance, when gendered objects, such as flowers, appear in the subconscious, the baby is imagined to be female. Following the same colour scheme as that applied to the gift, pink-painted dreams carry messages of a baby girl, while those dominated by yellow or blue supposedly promise a boy. Elena mentions, however, that it is not always like that; sometimes it is simply a matter of coincidence. Mirian attributes the faith in dreams and foretelling to a certain superstition that she believes to be specific to the local culture.

Furthermore, Mirian turns the attention to pregnancy cravings as a way of conceptualising the gender of the unborn, pre-(or post-)ultrasound scans. Mirian herself suffered purely from salty cravings, which some people interpret as indicative of that she was carrying a boy. Her friends told her that cravings for ‘strong’ flavours (sabores fuertes) meant a boy, while ‘softer’, mild flavours predicted a girl. With strong flavours, Mirian refers to for example sour, pickled or fat food, typical Peruvian plates such as chancho (pork), asado
(barbecue), *chicharrón* (crackling) or *cuy* (guinea pig). It might be precisely due to her pregnancy cravings of ‘strong’ flavours, she says giggling, that her son indeed has turned out too strong a character. In the category of mild flavours, Mirian includes light non-greasy food, such as salads, vegetables and fruits, as well as sweets, like desserts or cakes. Cravings for bloody meats or sour foods then are male connoted, while sweet and light snacks are conceptualised as female.

This demonstrates how gender is done by attributing characteristics to female or male fetuses that are desirable features for girls and boys when born: sweet and passive girls, strong and active boys. Platt (2002) analyses the women’s notions of fetal movement, for example, as part of a social construction of gender that takes place during gestation. The mother interprets her sensations as a token of an emerging gendered conduct. In other words, the woman acts as the messenger, who constructs the gendered conduct that she expects the future baby to display, and hence she reconstructs the binary oppositions that permeate society, as if they were essential innate differences (ibid:136). The notion of a gendered dualism of activity/passivity goes back to the days of Aristotle, and was subsequently picked up by philosophers such as Hegel, who claimed that the two sexes ought to be different. He thus prescribed passivity for women. In her classical piece, explaining why women have come to be regarded *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (2002[1949]:46, 115) notes satirically that when one sex is deemed to be active and the other passive, of course passivity befalls women, the sex that is constructed as the Other. As Toril Moi (2002:32) argues, in the modern societies of today men’s physical strength as well as women’s reproductive capacities are obsolete features. Consequently, the sexual stereotypes that connote strength and activity with men, and weakness and passivity with women should be rendered superfluous. According to Butler (2007[1990]:147-148), the appellation of gender differences is an act of dominance, which creates the illusion of natural differences. Through the iteration of these speech acts, they become normative institutionalised performative acts which create the social reality they are naming.
Conclusive discussion

To accomplish the aim of the study, this concluding chapter will review the empirical findings in light of the research questions, relying on the combined perspective of my theoretical framework. As part of my aim to investigate in what ways gender is represented and reproduced in the Peruvian baby shower – or with the terminology of my theoretical framework, how gender is done and performed – the first question I set out to answer was just how the ritual is gendered.

In my conceptualisation of the Peruvian baby shower as formulated hitherto, the ritual consists of two main components: the gift and the construction of fetal personhood. Both of these components require a continuous doing of gender in social interactions. As my informants point out, gendering the fetus is a precondition for gift-giving; without having visualised the baby’s sex with the aid of modern biotechnology, there could be no ritual. Through the gendering of gifts the guests partake in the doing gender of the subject of the social gathering. Hence, gendering is also vital in the construction of the fetus as a subject; fetal personhood, in turn, is a mechanism for incorporating the future child into the community and society. Consulting the combined framework again, Butler (1999[1990]:44) claims that the notion of the subject is in itself made intelligible only through a non-ambiguous gendering. Consequently, it is the gender attribution that renders bodies human. According to this line of thought, the infant becomes a human being the instant the question ‘is it a boy or girl?’ is answered (ibid:142). Before immersing further into these aspects of the ritual, I would like to develop my claim that the baby shower could be considered a kind of initiation rite – a rite of passage to speak with van Gennep.

A subversive liminality?

Fischer and Gainer (1993), too, discuss US baby showers as rites of passage, although from a different angle. In contrast to my analysis of the ritual, which I frame around the fetus, these authors take the perspective of the expecting mother as their point of departure. They conclude that the contemporary mother-to-be does not necessarily follow the three-phase rites of passage formula as planted by van Gennep (2004[1909]), which implies a separation from one’s old role before transitioning into the new one as a mother. Indeed, Fischer and Gainer (1993:324) observe that nowadays women seldom leave their previous professional responsibilities behind, but rather assume the additional maternal role on top of their existing duties.

Whereas I aim to explore how gender is produced not in maternity but before birth, I
analyse the rite of passage with the fetus rather than the pregnant woman as my (study) object and subject (of the celebration). From this perspective, the rite of the baby shower marks a separation of the fetus from its previous state as mere biologic matter. Through the liminal state that characterises the baby shower feast and the different ways of doing gender therein (the clown’s performance, the gendered gifts and decorations etc), I would like to propose that the medical *fetus* becomes humanised and turns into a *baby*, in other words a social being that can be incorporated into the community of the parents.

According to van Gennep’s (2004[1909]) three-stage model, during the liminal phase while the ‘liminal personae’ finds her-/himself at the margins of society, or as Turner (1991[1969]:58) puts it, at the threshold, in the ambiguous state between different social roles, ‘the very structure of society [is] temporarily suspended’. Within this fluid and changeable space, new traditions and institutions can emerge, argues Turner. Thus, if we regard the baby shower celebration as the stage for the liminal phase of the fetus – a liminality that the participants help to construct for the *persona* who is not yet a person – we might add to the analysis that it is precisely in this context of liminality that standard gendered elements of the Peruvian baby shower, such as gender-crossing, feminisation and play with sexuality could be understood. When the performance put on by the clown occurs in this kind of liminal space, everything is allowed to be mocked, hence, the (hetero)normative conduct prescribed by the heterosexual matrix can be exceeded. In the terms of West and Zimmerman (1987), during the celebration the participants are temporarily not held accountable for what is enacted.

Although not quite *everything* or everyone. As the empirical data have indicated, women are not included in the ongoing gender bending and spoofing. In the baby shower ritual, women are to safeguard gender normality it seems, by performing an emphasised femininity at most. As the clown scene demonstrates, women are sexualised through the male gaze of the clown, who acts as the director of the conspicuous gender performances, exhorting the participating women to model in a hyper-feminised daring manner for the male heterosexual gazes of the audience. The male participants, on the other hand, are urged both

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17 It is worth reiterating that my analytical entity of the fetus does not imply that I do not find maternity (and paternity) important for the baby shower ritual. My analysis does not preclude the possibility that the rite simultaneously provides a space of liminality and transition for the expectant mother, as argued by Fischer and Gainer (1993). However, my contribution to the baby shower literature lies in exploring how the fetus is converted into a person through processes of doing gender. I encourage future studies to further develop the aspect of motherhood in relation to Peruvian baby showers as rites of passage.
to perform a hegemonic hyper-masculinity that is ridiculed, at the same time as they are feminised, infantilised and always balancing on the seemingly fragile boundaries of accountable sexual behaviour.

This could be compared with the exclusively female traditional US baby showers documented by Fischer and Gainer (1993). Paradoxically, these showers work both toward a transition of the woman into complete adulthood, at the same time as she gets infantilised through childish games, decorations and snacks, a fact that the authors interpret as symbolising a return to innocence and purity on the part of the woman. Whereas in the Peruvian shower, the male participants are the infantilised ones, the women, by not ‘playing it all’ (as for instance the male host does according to Marco), are being passivised and take on the responsible part. The fact that men are made to crawl, wear diapers or drink alcohol through feeding bottles to the spectators’ amusement could also be interpreted as a manner of exhibiting the absurdity in men as care-givers; while the nurturing role that is awaiting the mother is regarded to come more ‘naturally’ for her, the ritual emphasises that men are neither prepared nor apt for the part.

Following van Gennep’s (2004[1909]) argument, the temporary suspension of the societal structure in the liminal phase could provide a site for change. How can we explain, then, that outside of the marginal space of the baby shower, in which norms for gender and desire can be stretched in a parodic manner, there are no signs of occurring changes in the normative doings of gender, of hegemonic masculinity or emphasised femininity? Butler attributes the space for subversive action to the parody of gender performance. Her prime example is drag performances, which parody the very notion of an ‘original gender identity’. When the disparateness between bodies, genders and sexuality is uncovered, gender is denaturalised and the heterosexual matrix is revealed to be a set of norms rather than societal truths (Butler 1999[1990]:xxii-xxiv, 175). If viewed in this light, are the gender-crossing acts performed in the baby shower to be understood as subversive? Supported by a number of popular cultural references, Butler clarifies that the denaturalisation of gender norms can also take the opposite effect, namely that of reinforcement. Despite the fact that gender is exposed as imitative, drag performed by ‘heterosexual culture’ does not contain subversive potential, she claims, but rather operates to ‘reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question’ (Butler 2011[1993]:176). This, I argue, is what happens in the baby shower.

In a parallel, Alexeyeff (2000:116-117) describes the cross-dancing in Cook Islands drag shows as a form of ‘clowning’. In a space ‘bracketed off from the everyday’, the reversal of status hierarchies could be tolerated as mere play. Nevertheless, she stresses the conservative element of these performances; the ‘parodic deviations from the norms’ serve to
reaffirm the normative structures of society. Under the flag of parody, the remarkably oversexualised forms of femininities enacted by men could be regarded as setting (bad) examples, which elucidate the limits for respectable femininity as well as accountable behaviour for men.

Moreover, albeit outside of what Butler refers to as ‘heterosexual culture’, ethnographic accounts of *travesti* identities in Latin America similarly indicate that their gender dissonance does not have a subversive effect. While assigned male gender at birth, the *travestis* adopt female names, pronouns and attributes. They mould their bodies to acquire female forms without self-identifying as neither female nor men, but as *homosexuals*. Both Andrea Cornwall (1994) and Don Kulick set their studies in the city of Salvador, Brazil, in which the *travestis* ‘elaborate the particular configurations of sexuality, gender and sex that undergird and give meaning to Brazilian notions of “man” and “woman”’ (Kulick 1998:9). As Cornwall (1994:129) puts it, ‘in representing femininity as passive, subordinate and a mere object of masculine desire’, rather than disrupting the gender system, the *travesti* ‘supports – and exemplifies – a particular version of patriarchy’.

These examples serve to support my argument that the ritualistic gendering practices during the liminality of the baby shower are reaffirming the accountable ways of doing gender in accordance with the (hetero)normative gender order – an order that the celebration is socialising a new member of society into, even before birth. Having conceptualised the Peruvian baby shower as a rite of passage, I would now like to return to the elements that I have pinpointed as central in the Peruvian baby shower ritual, namely the gift and the construction of fetal personhood.

**Gifts of passage: The regulatory practices of the colour pink**

In this ‘ritual of consumption’, the distinction between the economic and the symbolic is blurred as the recipient of the ‘threshold gifts’ or ‘gifts of passage’ is also ‘the intended recipient of the symbolic properties that the gift contains’ (Layne 1999:259, 276, 270). In his classical piece, Marcel Mauss (2002[1924]) theorises the close to magical properties that he attributes to the gift, as it enables the creation of social bonds, and hence transcends the division between the material and the spiritual. In other words, the gift exceeds the object itself, since its provider gives away not merely a materiality, but a part of oneself. The gift is inseparable from its giver. I would like to propose that in a baby shower, the transaction of gendered gifts could also be said to be inseparable from its *recipient*, since the gift, by consolidating the gender of the fetus, is used to construct its identity, personhood and societal membership.
In a cross-cultural comparison of the symbolic processes involved in the social construction of babyhood, Layne (1999:254) equals the importance of sharing bodily substances among the Wari’ of the Brazilian Amazon with the sharing of consumer goods in capitalist Western cultures, as a way of ‘imparting qualities of identity to those to whom they are given, including fetuses’ (ibid:270). Thus, the gifts shared in a baby shower might be considered the means through which ‘the baby’ is ‘born’, while still in utero.

My analysis of the baby shower gifts identified the colour pink as the main gender marker. Mirroring the current societal values, the colour that connotes femaleness symbolises weakness, subordination and a drop in status for boys approaching it. Donning pink for a Cusqueanean boy signifies a loss not only of masculinity but also of heterosexuality, which for instance Mirian’s six-year-old son experienced while being reprimanded for desiring to dress up like a girl. Theoretically, the connection between a perceived male femaleness and homosexuality, apparent both in the taboo of the colour pink and the feminisation/infantilisation/sexualisation games, can be anchored within Connell’s (1987:183; 2000:10-11) masculinities framework, which emphasises that all masculinities are hierarchically ordered. The idealised, hegemonic form subordinates all other forms of masculinities (such as the non-straight ones) as well as femaleness. This theory could explain why men who approach anything female connoted, be it the colour pink or other perceived female attributes, put their heterosexuality at stake. Ambjörnsson (2011:45) concludes that ‘according to the heteronormative logic that opposites attract, a man who is attracted to other men will be associated with femaleness’.

Butler further develops this idea through her concept of the heterosexual matrix. While first distinguishing masculinity from femininity the matrix then ‘ties them together through acts of heterosexual desire’ (Butler paraphrased in Ambjörnsson 2011:190). Hence, these regulatory practices cause anyone unable to present the correct connections between the biological body, gender and sexual behaviour to be regarded as abnormal and subject to corrections and punishments (ibid:191, 218; Butler 2011[1993]:60), as was indicated by Elena’s and Mirian’s response to their (grand)son’s cross-dressing.

**A person-making ritual: Gendering, naming and affiliation**

In complying with the aim of this study, the related question to be examined is how gender is conceptualised prenatally, or clad in my theoretical terms, in what ways the discursive constructions of fetal personhood are gendered. The informants testify to a range of gendering assignment techniques of their unborn: the shape of the belly, the movements felt, the cravings and the dreams are all carefully monitored and evaluated, in order to declare whether
the fetus is a girl or a boy. Together these accounts make up patterns of envisaged traits that
the heteronormative logic of the heterosexual matrix prescribes for either sex. The
accountable behaviours described by the informants often centres around the dualisms of
activity/passivity or strength/weakness, in which the first in the pairs are connoted with
boyness and the latter with girlness.

To make sense of these strictly gendered notions of gestation and fetal development, I
will in the following consult theories of fetal personhood. Michaels and Morgan (1999)
explore the attribution of personhood to fetuses, and specifically the tendency in the United
States to conceptualise fetuses as social actors. Before seeing the light of day, these tiny
actors are ‘already granted names, rights, possessions, and social identity’ (ibid:7). The fetus
is attributed symbolic power as a sacred image of life itself, as it represents ‘the human, the
nation, the species, and the future’, in short ‘an embodiment of progress’ (Franklin 1999:64).
This tendency, however, is not unique to the North American continent; Michaels and
Morgan address what they call ‘the globalisation of the fetal subject’, at the same time as they
stress the plurality of these subjects. However globalised, the fetal subjects are socially
constructed in culturally specific locations, shaped by local debates and struggles. This allows
for a great variety of manifestations, practices and social meanings attached to fetuses
(Michaels & Morgan 1999:2).

Against this theoretical backdrop, in our urban Peruvian middle-class context, I plant
the baby shower as the main person-making event during which the new family member is
‘born’ socially and incorporated into the family collective. I would like to suggest that during
the baby shower the person is created through the means of three interconnected processes,
which operate interdependently to construct and reinforce each other: 1) gendering 2) naming
3) affiliation.

The personhood endeavours on the part of the parents start even before the day of the
festivities. As my field data illuminate, it is essential to communicate the expected sex of the
baby to the participants in good time before the baby shower to enable them to bring the
‘right’ gifts. At the time for the invitation cards to be distributed, the majority of the parents
have already chosen their future baby’s name, but in case they still have not made up their
minds, the gender could nonetheless easily be interpreted by the design and choice of colour-
coding: pale pink for girl or pale blue for boy. This is but one example of how gendering and
naming operate together as essential elements that allow for the affiliation of the future baby
with the communities of its relatives. Van Gennep (2004[1909]:62) argues that ‘when a child
is named, he is both individualized and incorporated into society’ [my emphasis]. This gender
blind remark can be complemented by Morgan’s elaboration on gendering and naming:
‘When pregnant women and their partners ascertain fetal sex and use that knowledge to name and personify an unborn child’, she (2006:358-359) contends, they simultaneously ‘construct the fetus as a valued member of the family’. As we have seen, my informants also detect the welcoming act of the future family member as the main purpose of the baby shower, apart from the economic initiative. Affiliation, then, refers to the processes of gaining community membership, firstly of a kin group and the parents’ circle of acquaintances, secondly, of the society and finally, of that of human beings.

Given that the Peruvian society during the last few decades, according to my interviewees, has been heavily subjected to US cultural influences (of which the baby shower ritual is but one expression), moving in an ever more individualistic direction, the Cusqueneans’ constructions of fetuses have been altered accordingly. Whereas the hegemonic North American conceptions surrounding fetal personhood derive from biology and genetics rather than social actions (Morgan 2006:370), Morgan’s Ecuadorian field reality demonstrates that these women, on the contrary, combine personal, social and religious actions to construct a gradual development of personhood. The content of the women’s womb is considered part of herself rather than an individualised agent. Instead of reifying fetal subjects, their constructions of pregnancy and the unborn is characterised by ambiguity (ibid:361, 371). It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that a similar image, in which the unborn is conceptualised not as a ‘coherent biological “thing”’ but as ‘liminal, unripe, and unfinished creatures’ (ibid) might have been common among my informants’ foremothers as well, or even in the rural parts of the Cusco region of today.

However, as indicated by my interlocutors, an essential ingredient of the recent individualised constructions of fetal personhood in our urban Peruvian Andean context is the new imaging techniques that the biotechnological development has brought forth. In previous sections, I described how the surge of the baby shower ritual is intimately linked with the implementation of ultrasound screening, as its sexing practices of the fetus enables gift-giving before birth.18 In a time and place where the Western faith in science is almost like a new religion, ‘a biomedical definition has come to dominate our cultural understanding of “life before birth”’ (Pyne Addelson 1999:26). Among the Cusqueanean middle class strata, the attraction of imaging the fetus may also partly be the consequence of it being ‘both a metonym for modernity and a vehicle for constructing oneself as a modern subject’ (Mitchell & Georges 1997:n/a). However, the traditional cultural techniques of gender assignment are

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18 To re-emphasis, there have always been ways of gendering the unborn – techniques still in use as we have seen – but the scientific status of the new imaging technologies has warranted a perceived certitude allowing the celebration to take place.
applied even after gaining knowledge of the sex through biomedical devices, in order to reaffirm that knowledge in a continuous doing of gender. Moreover, the creation of the cyborg, in other words, ‘the couplings of body and machine, mediated and translated by experts’, ‘simultaneously dissolves women’s bodily boundaries, undermines their experiential knowledge, and represents the fetus as an autonomous, conscious agent’, according to Mitchell and Georges (1997:n/a). The loss of authority on their own bodily experiences is mourned by some women during ultrasound exams (ibid).

In a historical account of the unborn, Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1999:29) reports that in 19th century America, quickening – the moment when the pregnant woman first feels movements from her womb – was also when the child was adopted into the family, the community and the church. Just some decades ago, it was rather biological birth that marked the social initiation of personhood, as biological and social birth were then historically fused (Morgan 2006), similarly as Elena related of her deliveries in the Peru of the 1970s. In the pre-ultrasound era in the US, the moment of birth was ritualised among family, kin and friends with gifts, pictures and announcements, as the event was regarded the commence of a new social identity and personhood. Since there were no possibilities of ascertaining gender and name before birth ‘parents-to-be typically had to wait until biological birth to “know” the baby and bestow its selected gender-specific name’ (Morgan 1996:59), and, may I add, affiliate it with their own social circles. Since then, due to social changes that encompass not only technological advances but also the capitalistic commodification of babies, the new social category of fetal persons has emerged, as ‘social birth’ now may antecede the biological ditto.

There are different accounts also in current Western ethnographies as to when social birth occurs, in other words, when personhood begins to form. In the Greek and Canadian social realities investigated by Mitchell and Georges (1997), it is regarded to take place in the maternity clinics, but the women of different cultural backgrounds interpret their ultrasound exams rather differently. During the Canadian examinations, the cyborg fetus emerges as a social being with its unique identity, enmeshed in a web of social relations. In the Greek clinics, however, similarly as among Morgan’s Ecuadorian informants, the fetus is not regarded as an independent subject with its own agency or personality. Indeed, fetal personhood is evoked during the exam, but fetal persons are regarded by these women as processually and relationally constructed over time. This resonates with the perspective offered by Morgan (1996) that she denominates ‘fetal relationality’, namely the social processes that produce fetal identities through relationships.

While I have theorised the ritualisation of fetal personhood as occurring in the
liminality of the baby shower, I posit fetal imaging as a vital precondition for the ritual to take place. Hence, I do not consider the baby shower to be the sole event for the ‘social birth’ of the Cusquean baby, although a crucial site, indeed. I regard fetal personhood as something which is ‘dynamically constructed and contested’ (Morgan 1996:63) in social interaction through accountable practices of doing gender, within complex structures of power relations. Fetal personhood is processually-relationally done both through the gendering practices during biomedical examinations, as well as in the traditional gendering practices mediated through dreams, cravings and fetal movement. These ‘doings’ of fetal personhood are then ritually manifested through the rite of passage, that is, the baby shower.

To wrap up, the question is not so much when the process of fetal personhood is sparked, but the fact that this very process is gendered and intimately connected with the two interdependent processes of fetal relationality: those of naming and affiliation. As Morgan (1996:64) puts it, ‘the fetus's capacity for relationality is not determined by its intrinsic characteristics, its personality or biological functions, but by the meanings people give it in a social world.’ Accordingly, judging by the meaning-making produced in, and surrounding, the Cusquean adaptation of the baby shower ritual, before seeing the light of day the fetus transcends from its fetal state of biological matter to become a named baby girl or boy with social ties – well, even a cultural capital of its own.
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