

ORIGINAL
ART & WRITING
BY YOUNG
PEOPLE ON
THE SUBJECT
OF MENSTRUATION.

MENSTRUAL FREEDOM WATCHDOG

A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

For this edition of the watchdog, we wanted to focus on menstruation as a relevant SRHR topic. We opened a call for submissions, and were humbled by all the amazing work young people shared with us. In this publication, you will find their illustrations, paintings, articles, videos, poems and photographs. Each of these submissions contains a unique take on menstruation, and contributes to a discussion that is essentially political, because addressing menstruation openly is already a huge step forward from the way this topic has been treated historically.

We want to highlight that there is still a lot to be done about how periods are perceived, and that we need to keep working to guarantee the right of all to menstruate with dignity. This is true in many dimensions: menstruation is often left out from sexuality education, stigmatized by society, and treated as taboo. Access to menstrual management products is an economic burden on many young women, girls, and menstruators, who most times already experience economic exclusion. When menstruation is put on the agenda, it often excludes menstruators with diverse gender identities, by using gender-binary language targeting only women and girls. Besides, painful menstrual health conditions, such as endometriosis and PCOS, are often misdiagnosed. Menstruation is viewed as dirty, not as a normal bodily function of

folx with uteruses (this is why we choose to speak of menstrual health or menstrual management rather than menstrual hygiene, because menstruation is not dirty!).

This compilation of young people's thoughts on menstruation exemplifies the diversity of circumstances that affect menstruators. In the pages below, you will find takes on all of this, from young menstruators from all over the world, both critical and celebratory, political and personal. We hope that this ignites a fire that allows us to keep advocating for menstruation free of gender-binary norms, stigma, shame, pain, and exclusion. Let's bring these perspectives on menstruation to all of the spaces we occupy, to make sure that decision-makers take into account the concerns of young people.

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in this edition of the watchdog, and all who made this possible through their support.

We hope you enjoy reading this.

In solidarity,

Mariana Montiero & María León González
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Untitled (article) Asmita Thapa, Nepal	04	Menstrual pain and stigma (article) Ruth Mbone Agala, Kenya	14
Rosita (photo) Mixtzin Alejandra Moreno, Mexico	05	Normalizing period conversations (article) Agudin Taofeekat, Nigeria	16
Untitled (poem) Lía Quezada, Mexico	05	La Mancha Roja (story) Adela Vargas Murillo, Ecuador	17
Period Poverty & Access to Menstrual Products (article) Alinafe Likoya, Malawi	06	Figuras en el agua (photo) Natalia Álvarez, México	17
Menstruación en mi comunidad (article) Anonimx, Mexico	07	La menstruación como limitante espacial (article), Luchar contra el silencio de lo corporal (photo), Untitled (photo) Natalia Álvarez, México	18
Cycles: a personal story on menstruality and mental health (article) Isabel Pérez Witzke, Argentina / Venezuela	08	Why are we gatekeeping periods? (article) Celestina Bogle, Canada	20
Arte Menstrual (photos & video) Kat Jadán, Ecuador	09	Blood, Moon, Power and Pain (drawing) Julia Sal, Brazil	22
Menstruar no nos hace mujeres (article) Luz Maria Rangel, México	10	Chaupadi: The tradition of menstrual exile (article) Lirisha Tuladhar, Nepal	22
Menstrua:morphosis (manifiesto), Untitled (poem) Marissa Schut, Netherlands	11	Menstruation and pain (article) Wairimu Ndung'u, Kenya	24
Mi Guerra Ensangrentada (article) Ana, Mexico	12	Pinky (graphic story) Akanksha Badhan, India	25
Embrace Nature (painting) Kagina Ishack, Uganda	13	The case against period taxes (article) Maria Leon, Mexico	26
Untitled (poem) Andrea Paola Hernandez, Venezuela	13		



UNTITLED

Asmita Thapa, Nepal

Goddess Durga and I shared the same red, why I am impure?

“Nothing is impure about my period.”

“Have your 30 days of month, not 25 .”

Just imagine, you waited years to celebrate rituals and started bleeding. Oh shit, my menstrual cycle started. Suddenly your goddess turns into an impure demon, being isolated from rituals and family.

Dear youth, many of us belong to a society where we hear and talk about problems related to festivals and menstruation. We may have different cultural beliefs. Development of the era has moved menstruating women inside the kitchen, but what about existing irrational menstrual religious myths?

Our medical education fails when menstruation comes while performing religious rituals, our soul doesn't accept it. Because somewhere in the corner of mind and heart, we have a moldy belief, anxious thinking that it is a sin resulting in bad consequences. Even I was one step backward when it came to matters like going to the temple and praying. Believe me, change comes within yourself once you start to wear a lense of debate for irrelevant things.

A red colour is my blood during my cycle and the same colour vermilion is offered to Durga. Didn't Goddess Durga bleed? Why is she worshipped but bleeding women are forbidden from entering into her temple? How is she pure and I'm impure?

Isn't it an era to remove our glass tinted with religious fanaticism? I am not saying be against religion, but just remove a rooted irrational discrimination in the name of God. Trust me, Goddess Durga will be sad seeing her daughters being isolated from blessings.

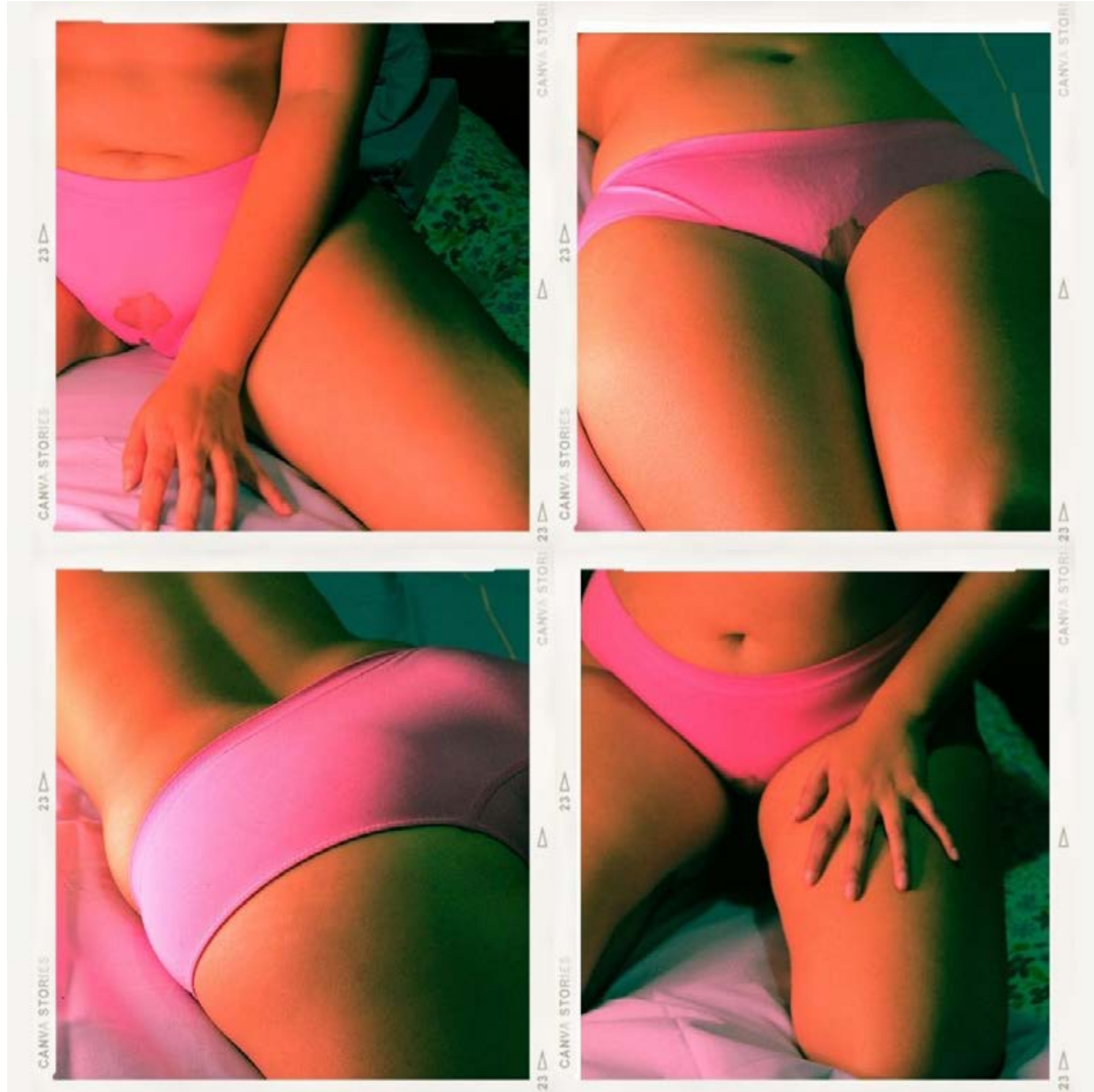
Why are we women always bound just because of our smooth body functioning? Why do we have to pay for not being pregnant?

Our lifestyles have changed with the availability of menstrual hygiene products. Menstrual cups are just a miracle. The Chaupadi system of Nepal is changing but what about deeply rooted menstrual myths and beliefs in urban communities? If we can't change this, who will? Do you want this cycle to continue to the next generation? Don't let bleeding deprive you and future generations. Just give it a try. Trying continuously gives a change. “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”

Have your 30 days, not 25 days. Don't be your own phantom. Let us end this taboo.

UNTITLED

Mixtzin Alejandra Moreno, México



Instagram: @ale.mistica

UNTITLED

Lia Quezada, México

nada fluye entre mis piernas
nada se desliza
nada me recorre

cinco meses seca
pesa más la falta que la mancha
privada de esa visita mensual más o menos bienvenida
me siento un ser no sexuado
echo a un lado

la doctora, ante el abismo, nombra al vacío
me dice: amenorrea
menos estradiol que una niña o una mujer en la menopausia
sin edad
fuera del tiempo
un pasajero

me dice: depresión y falta de libido
la sequía de mis ovarios me costó una relación
puede que dos
como las rondas de progesterona
que por más que estruja no lo logra
ni una gota

la pérdida de una pérdida no puede ser más que una tragedia
cómo tomarle fotos a una ausencia

Instagram: @liaquezcda

PERIOD POVERTY AND ACCESS TO MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS, HEALTH SERVICES, AND INFORMATION IN MALAWI

Alinafe Likoya, Malawi

Health services and information delivery is an issue in Malawi and puts off females from wanting to access health services and information. Menstruation information is very important, especially issues like menstrual hygiene, period products that can be used and how to use them, information on side effects of using certain medications to deal with menstrual cramps and menstrual management products. Service providers in Southern Africa, especially Malawi, tend to regard talking about menstruation as a whole as taboo, something to be talked about at initiation ceremonies, or behind closed doors and something that you can't just question in broad daylight in a nurse's office at a government hospital where most times, the nurses show misogynistic tendencies, but in their words, they are overworked and underpaid. This leads to having women and people who menstruate who are misinformed and misguided when it comes to the talk of menstruation. Furthermore, health centers in rural areas are at long distances and have low number of workers.

Sanitary pads are very common in Malawi, unlike tampons which you can rarely find even in high end-shops. Some people use cotton from pharmacies and

stores, which are all good options, and some people need painkillers for their menstrual cramps, which are easily accessible in pharmacies, or grocery stores, the problem comes with the misinformation that comes using all these. Someone once told me that they heard that using sanitary pads, tampons or cotton would somehow eventually stop them from giving birth and they would rather just use a cloth, or how taking painkillers when having menstrual cramps will stop them from having children. One may laugh at what could be considered as outrageous thoughts, but these are strongly held beliefs, and such beliefs have been known to stop the flow of education and requires a rigorous behavior change strategy. Information on menstruation is very much needed, not only for those in urban areas, but most especially those in hard to reach rural areas where they can't even just Google for information or attend a virtual meeting to have a discussion on period poverty and access to menstrual management products, health services and information.

In a typical Malawian village, buying a sanitary pad is unheard of, never mind a reusable sanitary pad which requires the technical know-how on how to make one.

One would however hear of a makeshift sanitary pad, which is mostly just an old cloth or rag of some sort, which doesn't really work the best at absorption like a sanitary pad would. On top of all that, information is very scarce and limited. This badly affects school going females who find it hard to attend classes with the fear of soiling their clothes and becoming a laughing stock. In extreme cases, these students have to miss school for the entirety of their periods and come back when the periods are done. This is bad for the education of females which is advocated for.

Menstrual management products in schools, especially primary and secondary schools, are very problematic. The bathrooms do not have the bins for disposing of used sanitary pads, there are no structures for getting rid of used sanitary pads. Lack of information in disposing used sanitary pads is also a discussion that needs to be had amongst women and people who menstruate and get to strategize based on the context of the areas organizations are working in. Efforts have to be made towards period poverty and access to menstrual management products, health services and information.

MENSTRUACIÓN EN MI COMUNIDAD

Anónimx, México

Me situo en una comunidad originaria (se habla el náhuatl), aquí es muy complicado hablar sobre temas de sexualidad, porque nuestros padres no lo permiten, una maestra quiso hablar con nosotros respecto del tema, la comunidad no lo acepto, comenzaron a decir si hablaba nos iba a incitar a tener relaciones sexuales, otros decían que solo somos niños, niñas, el sacerdote ha dicho que es pecado hablar del tema y más si se aborta.

Quiero contarles un poco el contexto, aquí no hay doctores, hay educación primaria por parte de la SEP y secundaria de CONAFE, no tenemos centro de salud, solo una casa, ahí llega el doctor, él doctor nunca habla de los temas de salud, la verdad no entiendo porque, solo sube para tomar el peso, talla, de los niños, niñas, estamos muy alejados de la ciudad, aparte no hay transporte público, solo hay una camioneta particular, hablamos nuestra madre lengua(náhuatl), tres familias si hablan el castellano y está comunidad está controlada por un grupo delictivo.

Nuestro contexto es complicado por varios factores, no es nuestra culpa tener que pasar por varias violaciones a nuestros derechos humanos, aprendemos del tema de la menstruación por nuestra propia cuenta, porque lo vivimos, usamos trapos, algunas lavan los trapos y los vuelven a usar, pero muchas de

nosotras las usamos y quemamos o enteramos, en este lugar casi no venden toallas sanitarias y si las venden es muy excesivo el costo, porque el grupo delictivo le tienen que pagar lo equivalente de las cosas que ingresan en el pueblo. Nos dicen nuestras madres y abuelas, que cuando estemos en nuestros días, no debemos tomar refrescos, comer cosas frías, agrias y que no debemos bañarnos, porque eso hace que se corte la sangre.

Muchos de mis compañeros de la escuela no entienden del tema, pues unas de mis compañeras le bajo su primera menstruación en el salón, solo se burlaron de ella, tampoco entiendo por qué mi maestro nunca nos dice nada.

Aquí desde chiquitas nuestras madres nos enseñan hacer quehaceres de la casa, pues nos preparan para la vida, es normal unirse al matrimonio a temprana edad, después vienen los hijos, muchos hombres dicen que van a tener los hijos que les mande dios y como no hay doctores es muy rara la persona que usa algún método de planificación.

Los partidos políticos suben solo para hacer sus campañas, una vez que ganan la presidencia el resto de los días no suben.

CYCLES: A PERSONAL STORY ON MENSTRUABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Isabel Pérez Witzke, Argentina / Venezuela

“Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. / Just keep going. No feeling is final” Rainer Maria Rilke.

When I look at the past year, I feel so connected to the word ‘habitating’ because of the intricate and clear relationship between meaning and territory. The pandemic and my journey as a venezuelan migrant has been a journey of (re)habitation, but at times I felt like the main territory to be (re)habitated was my own body, now crossed by multiple new things.

I’m not the same person as before, I will never be, but if I can gently live in my own body and all of its complexity, it will be my greatest achievement.

Last year I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and far from receiving a pathologizing and stigmatizing care, I was accompanied by a psychologist in a journey of understanding anxiety and connecting with my emotions without fighting them and this is the process of (re)habitation I was referring to above, because no emotions are bad, no feelings are wrong. In that journey, I was also inevitably invited to resignify my menstruating body and physiology. You see, there

aren’t really enough conversations on what habitating a menstruating body means (nor that there is one unique way, of course) and how it isn’t even something that is valid to be considered when talking about work, productivity, economy. Most societal expectations are avoiding at all costs the concept of cycles, the constant flow of minimum changes happening in one’s body on a regular basis because that really isn’t important for you to produce and work, and I just keep wondering what would happen if this was normalized and essential to day-to-day life.

Would it be a friendlier context?
Would expectations be gentler?
Would relationships be more encouraged to self-awareness and acceptance?

I might be idealizing my own journey, but I do wonder what more curiosity about menstruality and cycling might bring to us, collectively. There isn’t really that much space to openly live this cyclicity and, how could that happen? When you read about premenstrual syndrome (PMS), the approach of the writing is on how this event affects and impacts mental health ‘neg-

atively’. Again, I keep on wondering what if acceptance of one’s cycling circumstances are not perceived as: 1) something unusual, 2) something disruptive. It is true that small fluctuations in hormones influence your behavior, how you feel about yourself and are very different from one moment to another, but is that disruptive? What is exactly disrupting?

Within this journey of (re)habitation, I tried so hard to take moments of the day for introspection, despite what was demanded from me. I was having such a bad time between cycles, I had painful ovulations, signs of PMS, painful menstruations. You could say that my quality of life was very much affected by menstruality. But my healing journey reframed this. I was not having a ‘poor’ quality of life because of these signs, my quality of life was affected by the fact that my body, as a territory, wasn’t really inhabited by me. I wasn’t connected to the present moment, to myself. My mind was elsewhere, my identity was fragmented and my trauma couldn’t breathe. I have been breathing with my psychologists, loving accompaniment is key to this.

I have been learning to commit to

small actions (like making sure I have Ibuprofen in my closet because being in pain is not okay!) in pursuit of my own wellness. I still have the signs I mentioned above, I’m still [physically] hurt during some menstrual cycles, but now I validate all my emotions, I acknowledge them, I embrace them, I accept them and don’t ruminate on the causes, on what is making them exist. These were very abstract concepts for me and I do want to say that there is no recipe for doing this, but when it happens it is the greatest sign of care I can give to myself. My attention is refocused on actions and not rumination, ruminating thoughts won’t ever be a solution, because emotions don’t have to be ‘solved’.

My mental health journey is absolutely linked to my menstrual health and my relationship to my own menstruality, and I’m excited to continue to explore gentle and caring ways to habitate them, and I just wanted to share a piece of my story.

ARTE MENSTRUAL

Kat Jadán, Ecuador

En un momento muy triste de mi vida mi instinto me dijo: “la sangre de este mes va a matar a tus plantitas, haz otra cosa con ella” y pues me dediqué a pintar. Desde entonces mi sangre es tintura natural y ahora acompaño a mujeres que quisieran hacer lo mismo. Estas fotografías ya fueron partícipes de un festival organizado por la Red de Salud de Mujeres de Latinoamérica y el Caribe y ganaron un reconocimiento.

Haz clic [aquí](#) para ver el video de cómo se realizaron estas obras.



TikTok:
[@kat.chj](#)

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MENSTRUAR NO NOS HACE MUJERES

Luz Mariana Rangel Grimaldo, México

Primer mito. “Ya eres una mujer”, me dijo mi madre cuando le avisé que había menstruado por primera vez. Yo tenía apenas 10 años de edad.

Segundo mito. Fue un domingo en la mañana. No recuerdo la fecha con exactitud pero me es imposible olvidar la sangre en el escusado, la mancha de color rojo en mi ropa interior, la cautela para evitar que se traspasara a mi pantalón y también para salir del baño y llegar a la recámara de mis padres para, en voz baja, pedirle a mi mamá que una toalla sanitaria.

Tercer mito. Sabía lo que estaba sucediendo porque en ese entonces estudiaba el quinto grado de primaria y en la clase de Ciencias Naturales la profesora ya nos había hablado del proceso de reproducción de los seres humanos y de lo que era necesario que ocurriera antes en el cuerpo de las mujeres.

Cuarto mito. Yo sólo estaba agradecida de que mi primer periodo hubiera llegado en fin de semana para poder estar en cama el resto del día y no tener que ir a la escuela.

La educación sexual que recibí nunca fue integral, sino a partir de mitos muy arraigados: que cuando menstruas no puedes desempeñar tus actividades con normalidad; que la menstruación sólo tiene fines reproductivos; que la gestión menstrual requiere el uso de toallas sanitarias sin la posibilidad de probar otras opciones; que el primer periodo nos convierte automáticamente en mujeres.

“Me bajó”, como decimos coloquialmente en México, pero yo seguía siendo una niña. A los 10 años no estaba lista ni física ni mentalmente para ser madre, rol que se entiende como sinónimo de ser mujer. Tampoco estaba preparada para tener relaciones sexuales, mucho menos cuando lo único que tenía de protección eran unos condones que me habían regalado al salir de clases como parte de una campaña publicitaria y un calendario para marcar mis días de sangrado.

Fue hasta después que, investigando, conocí los días fértiles y de ovulación de mi ciclo menstrual, que hasta antes de la vacuna contra CO-

VID-19 era regular. Años más tarde, también entendí que la menstruación es un proceso biológico que no se reduce sólo a la reproducción. Me tomó mucho tiempo probar otras formas de gestión menstrual menos contaminantes, como la copa, las toallas de tela o incluso el libre sangrado en los últimos días rojos, así como entender que cada cuerpo es distinto y eso influye en continuar o no con las rutinas. Me llevó aún más darme cuenta de que no todas las personas que menstrúan son mujeres, pues ¿dónde quedan los hombres trans y quienes se identifican como no binarixs?, ¿qué hay de las mujeres cisgénero que por cuestiones fisiológicas no pueden menstruar?

Hace poco mamá llegó a la menopausia, ese momento de la vida en el cual las personas menstruantes dejan de hacerlo. Y aunque ella me dijo que yo ya era una mujer cuando tuve la menarquia, ella ahora sigue siéndolo sin importar que ya no sangre mes con mes. La menstruación no nos define como mujeres.

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MENSTRUAMORPHOSIS MANIFESTO

Marissa Schut, Netherlands

menstrua:MORPHOSIS

theMANIFESTO



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Marissa Schut, Netherlands

with every bleed
i release womanhood:
a construction forced upon me
with every bleed
i shed social conventions:
conceived by bias and misogyny
with every bleed
i start anew -
a cyclical cleansing
with every bleed
i meet myself,
i read myself,
i see myself

as i bleed onto the page
the ink a portal to within

spilling pain,
releasing heartbreak.
making room for growth
creating space for change
birthing transformation.

@menstruamorphosis
@marissa.schut

MI GUERRA ENSANGRENTADA

Ana, México

Mi guerrera me contó que, cuando le llegó la primera menstruación se espantó, pues nadie le había hablado acerca del tema, por lo que corrió al río a bañarse, estuvo mucho tiempo dentro del agua, esperando que dejara de sangrar, sin embargo, ya atardecía y la sangre no dejaba de salir, de pronto escucho la voz de su mamá muy enojada, le dijo; hija donde te has metido, te ando buscando, ella muy asustada le dijo lo que le pasaba, su mamá con carcajadas le dijo, es normal, ahora si ya eres una mujer, te tiene que cuidar para no embarazarte, sin más, mi guerrera le daba pena de todos los cambios que estaba presentando y poco a poco iba descubriendo sus cambios.

Un día su mamá le dijo a mi guerrera, hija cómo ya eres mujer, te vas a casar, vinieron a pedir tu mano, mi guerrera se opuso, pues no se quería casar con un hombre viejo, mi guerrera dijo: mamá cástate con él y salió de esa cueva, mi bella guerrera se armó de valor para venirse a la Ciudad de México. Aquí se enamoró de mi papá, regresaron al pueblo y se casaron.

Mi guerrera tuvo a sus hijas y les contaba sus vivencias acerca de la menstruación, esto en forma de cuento, todas lloraban, un día su tercera hija de nombre Ana, le llegó la menstruación y su hija no le dio miedo, solo que a ella le daba pena decirle a su mamá, entonces no sabía que hacer, lloro mucho y sus hermanas le decían que se iba a morir, si no dejaba de sangrar.

Ana no sabía que en sus primeros meses de menstruación iba a tener alteración hormonal, entonces algunas veces le bajaba cada quince días, mes y medio, cada dos meses, y eso le afectaba mucho a la joven, pues estaba confundida si era mujer, hombre, a veces pensaba que ya estaba embarazada(sin tener relaciones sexuales), le afectó emocionalmente y psicológicamente, al grado de verse al espejo y decir estoy embarazada, me está creciendo mi vientre, pensaba como decirle a su mamá, sin embargo, un día se armó de valor y se acercó con el doctor de su comunidad, le externo sus dudas y el doctor le dijo que era normal esos cambios, le explico como se hacen los bebés, los cambios físicos, entre otros temas. .

Ana le pedía dinero a su mamá, para ir a comprar toallas y su mamá se molestaba, le decía que no había dinero para comprar nada, realmente no lo tenía, por ello le decía que mejor usara trapos, la joven no le quedaba otra opción, a pesar de la edad de la adolescente, era consciente y ella misma se decía, tiene razón mi mamá, aparte si tiene diez pesos, con ese dinero mi mamá puede comprar algo de comer (huevo, sopa, etc.)

La adolescente iba a la escuela, pero con el miedo a que se le cayera el trapo, o que se mojara en su totalidad, su miedo era cada mes, pues pensaba dónde poner el trapo, porque si lo ponía en el cesto de basura, seguro sus compañeras se burlarían de ella, entonces había días que mejor buscaba un pretexto para no ir y evitar burlas, discriminación.

EMBRACE NATURE

Kagina Ishack, Uganda



At a time when wages fell and rates of employment decreased due to the Covid 19 lockdown that greatly affected small and medium sized enterprises where 70% of Ugandans earn their livelihood, many people faced a couple of socio economic challenges that included shortfalls in domestic revenue, increasing food insecurity among others. In the testing times of covid19 the campaign “my antiflow experience” was advocating for use of reusable pads (cheaper and affordable), it is one way girls can avoid incurring expenses and yet have a healthy menstruation.

UNTITLED

Andrea Paola Hernandez, Venezuela

A Isabel

me chorreo
de las piernas cataratas
y me chorreo

sangro
el abdomen presiona y me desangro
corro al baño mientras sangro
la gente me persigue
la madre grita y corre y llora

es una arteria que se desborda

mi mamá lo anuncia
sin vergüenza alguna lo proclama
atónita

estado de timidez autosustentado
jamás aprendido porque con orgullo me divulgan
como si fuese un logro algo que no escogí
premiada soy por lo que no hice
por contenerme en un envase del que nada sé

lo tengo y no lo entiendo no lo quiero
son 14 de años de nada aprender
de procesos teóricos jamás presenciados

incubadora de carne licuada y cruenta

el público, apremiante, aplaude
las responsabilidades ganadas
los cambios silenciados
el bochorno nuevecito que ahora causan tus pieles

todos quieren que sangres

todos repugnan tu sangre

MENSTRUAL PAIN AND STIGMA

Ruth Mbone Agala, Kenya

UNICEF and the WHO define menstrual management as “Women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. They understand the basic facts linked to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity and without discomfort or fear”. Menstrual health is an integral part of reproductive justice.

Menstrual health also involves addressing harmful societal beliefs and taboos surrounding the issue. This definition applies also for all persons who menstruate. One quarter of the global population is of menstruating age, yet menstruation is shrouded in discrimination and taboos.

Severe period pain is mostly as a result of menstrual conditions are rarely addressed and this results in gender inequality. The normalization of menstrual cramps has left many menstruating persons in debilitating pain, depression and misdiagnosis of these conditions.

In my case, I have endometriosis which is a painful condition in which tissue similar to the endometrium grows outside your uterus. With endometriosis, the endometrial-like tissue acts as endometrial tissue would — it thickens, breaks down and bleeds with each menstrual cycle but because this tissue has no way to exit your body, it becomes trapped. It took me roughly four years before the proper diagnosis was done until I did my laparoscopic surgery in 2019 to confirm the condition. As a young woman, I was gaslighted severally and made to look like I was imagining the pain. The major symptoms include: painful cramps 1 or 2 weeks around menstruation, heavy menstrual bleeding or bleeding between periods, infertility, pain during sexual intercourse, discomfort with bowel movements and lower back pain that may occur at any time during your menstrual cycle among others.

1 in 10 people who menstruate worldwide have endometriosis and it is a silent epidemic with minimal research. It affects 176 million people who menstruate across the globe and yet it takes an average of 7-10 years for the condition to be diagnosed due to factors such as:

- Gaslighting whereby the patients' symptoms are often dismissed and they are seen to be exaggerating the pain. This results in misdiagnosis and vastly affects one's mental health
- High cost of gynecological fee which is a challenge because most women and persons who menstruate across the globe live below the poverty line and at times have to choose between food and menstrual products.
- Misdiagnosis; numerous times the symptoms are seen as “just bad periods” and nothing serious
- Lack of non-surgical/ non-invasive diagnostic methods; ablation and excision
- Communication barriers; especially for deaf persons who may not be able to express their pain and communicate with health care providers and have to use a sign language interpreter thus infringing on their privacy and breach of confidentiality
- Misconceptions about endometriosis. There are a lot of myths that need to be debunked about endometriosis which include: the condition has a cure, until date there is no cure for the condition but patients can manage their pain through painkillers, oral contraceptive pills, hormonal treatments, surgeries etc.; endometriosis is a direct cause of

infertility which is not really the case as much as it can cause infertility at some point it does not mean that endo diagnosis is definite in ability to conceive, pregnancy cures endometriosis is also a big myth as what happens is when someone gets pregnant the symptoms go away for 9 months since they are not menstruating and it is incorrect to assume that symptoms will automatically disappear after pregnancy, -It is easy to diagnose endo, most patients in their reproductive years may see different GPs before finding the one who is skilled in endometriosis. The only way to diagnose it is through laparoscopic surgery. -Painful periods are normal; it is abnormal for periods to limit you from going on with your daily chores such as going to school/work and there is a need to see a GP.

March is endometriosis awareness month where different people share their experiences to create awareness but such conversations need to be heard and spoken everyday not just in the month of March.

We live in a society where menstruation is viewed as a secret not to be discussed in public, it is seen as a woman's issue yet not all women menstruate and not all menstruators are women. Negative cultural norms have socialized menstruators to hate their periods instead of celebrating

them. A harsh norm that is evident even in advertisements of menstrual products such as sanitary towels whereby manufacturers use other colors such as blue or pink in packaging and not red which is the real color of menstrual blood. Our society has made it a norm through socialization that menstrual products are to be purchased in secret and wrapped in paper so that the public does not know what we are carrying and yet in the same society, it is okay to carry tissue paper without hiding. Isn't that reinforcement of gender inequality and yet both are sanitation products? Why should we have such double standards?

Distribution of menstrual products is not the ultimate goal to ending menstruation stigma until we educate the community to view menstruation as a natural aspect that it is, until painful periods are addressed and treated without bias, because menstrual well-being is a fundamental human right, until men and boys are involved in such discussions, until our states enact and fully implement inclusive menstrual hygiene management policies because we are all products of missed menstruation!



NORMALIZING PERIOD CONVERSATIONS; ENDING MENSTRUATION STIGMA

Agudin Taofeekat, Nigeria

Hiding menstrual products, embarrassed by visible period stains in public, using coded language like “time of the month, Aunty-Flo”, for menstruation, tying sweatshirts around one’s waist either stained or not are part of internalized and indoctrinated stigma felt towards menstruation. While menstruation is considered a natural process in every girls’, women and people who menstruate’s life, it is overwhelmingly referred to as a taboo, and dirty affair that must be kept secret.

The stigma and shame surrounding menstruation continues to be part of the systemic factors perpetuating gender inequality. Cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices, like patriarchy have further impacted menstruation negatively with references such as “dirty and unclean” being attached to the perfectly normal occurrence. Some religious views and teachings also alienate women from certain activities during their periods. This and many more have played a major role in conditioning shame in women and people who menstruate lives making them too embarrassed to ask for menstrual products openly, gain access to menstrual education, masking period cramps and understand the varying

changes in their bodies caused by menstruation.

5 ways of normalizing period talk:

-Breaking the hush-hush culture; Speaking about an issue is the only way to bring it to limelight. Menstruation talks should not be regarded as off-limits or taboo topics for regular conversation. Women should be able to talk about how their bodies work and own narratives of their own body without feeling ashamed. Normalizing healthy conversation about periods helps people understand their bodies better, how to manage them, how to talk about them, lull stigma and the hush-hush culture associated with menstruation.

-Comprehensive Menstrual Education: Most girls only get the bird eye view about menstruation in their menarche phase. In Africa countries, more focus is on abstaining from sex to avoid pregnancy only. Menstrual education should be more encompassing and include teaching girls and people who menstruate about the positivity surrounding period, how to handle period pain, understanding the different phases of their cycles and how it af-

fects changes in the body, and supporting healthy conversation, and questions around period.

-Creating dialogue around menstrual health: Cost and access to menstrual products is very essential. There are millions of girls and women around the world who are unable to access necessary menstrual products and adequate toilet facilities. Dialogue and conversation centering issues fueling period shame is the only way to spur changes and proffer innovative solution

-Educating boys and men: Menstrual Education is not for people who menstruate alone. Not talking about periods has detrimental effects and reinforces the stigma that boys and men shouldn’t be concerned about what happens in a woman’s body. They would continue to think it’s OK to make sexist, insensitive and taunting jokes about periods, period stains and PMS. Including boys and men in period education about physiological process of period experience ranging from (positive, normalcy, painful, exhausting, emotional) will lead to understanding what people who menstruate goes through every

month, nurture empathy, lending a helping hand, attentiveness, and period normalcy that combats period shame.

-Rephrase the ways we perceive periods: The use of coded language continues to feed into stigma and shame. “It’s the time of the month, Are you on? Aunty Flo is here”, code language continues to mask topics about menstruation as being secret, prevent it from being talked about openly, and reinforces period shame. When period/menstruation are called their rightful name, it reinforces the normalcy and realness of it being a bodily physiological process for people who menstruate.

Period conversation helps people to understand their bodies better, how to manage period pain, understand varying changes in the body and how it intersects with mood, energy, mental and physical health, and when to seek for medical advice. Ending menstrual shame and stigma through period dialogue, and menstrual education is important in achieving menstrual freedom for all and sundry.

LA MANCHA ROJA

Adela Vargas Murillo, Ecuador

I

¿Quién soy yo? ¿Por qué los ojos son redondos? ¿Por qué tengo cinco dedos en la mano? ¿Por qué las niñas usamos calzón? ¿Por qué me dan ganas de hacer pipí?

II

Mil millones de preguntas le hacía a mi mami sobre mi la vida y sobre mi cuerpo. Y ella, como siempre y con mucha calma, me respondía a cada duda que tenía.

III

Una mañana, mientras abría la puerta del baño, la vi a mi mami sentada en el inodoro, pero con sangre en su ropa interior. Yo me asusté muchísimo e inmediatamente le pregunté si le había pasado algo. Y ella, como siempre y con mucha calma, me explico lo que es la menstruación.

IV

- ¡Menstrua qué?!
- Ja, ja. Menstruación, dijo mi madre. Es un proceso muy normal que les da a las personas que tienen vagina pero cuando son más grandes. Es un poquito de

sangre que sale dentro del cuerpo por unos cuantos días. No te preocupes, no me voy a morir por eso. En algún momento te va a tocar y ya estarás preparada - Ehh, bueno... Respondí. La respuesta de mi mami realmente me convenció, aunque quizá me tranquilizó mucho más que todavía no iba a salir sangre de mi cuerpo sino cuando sea adolescente.

V

Mi mami me respondía todo lo que le preguntaba. Eso me ayudó a que no me asustara cuando me llegase el periodo menstrual. Aunque las cosas tampoco fueron tan fáciles...

VI

Cuando llegó por vez primera mi periodo menstrual, lamentablemente yo no sabía que venía acompañado de dolores en el vientre, de cólicos, de dolor, de debilidad, de tristeza y lágrimas. Entre mí me pensaba - ¡Ay, y ahora cuántas veces tendré que cambiarme la toallita! - ¡Cada cuánto tiempo?!, ¿Y si me mancho?, ¿y si me ven? ¡Por qué

ahora siento mucha vergüenza?!

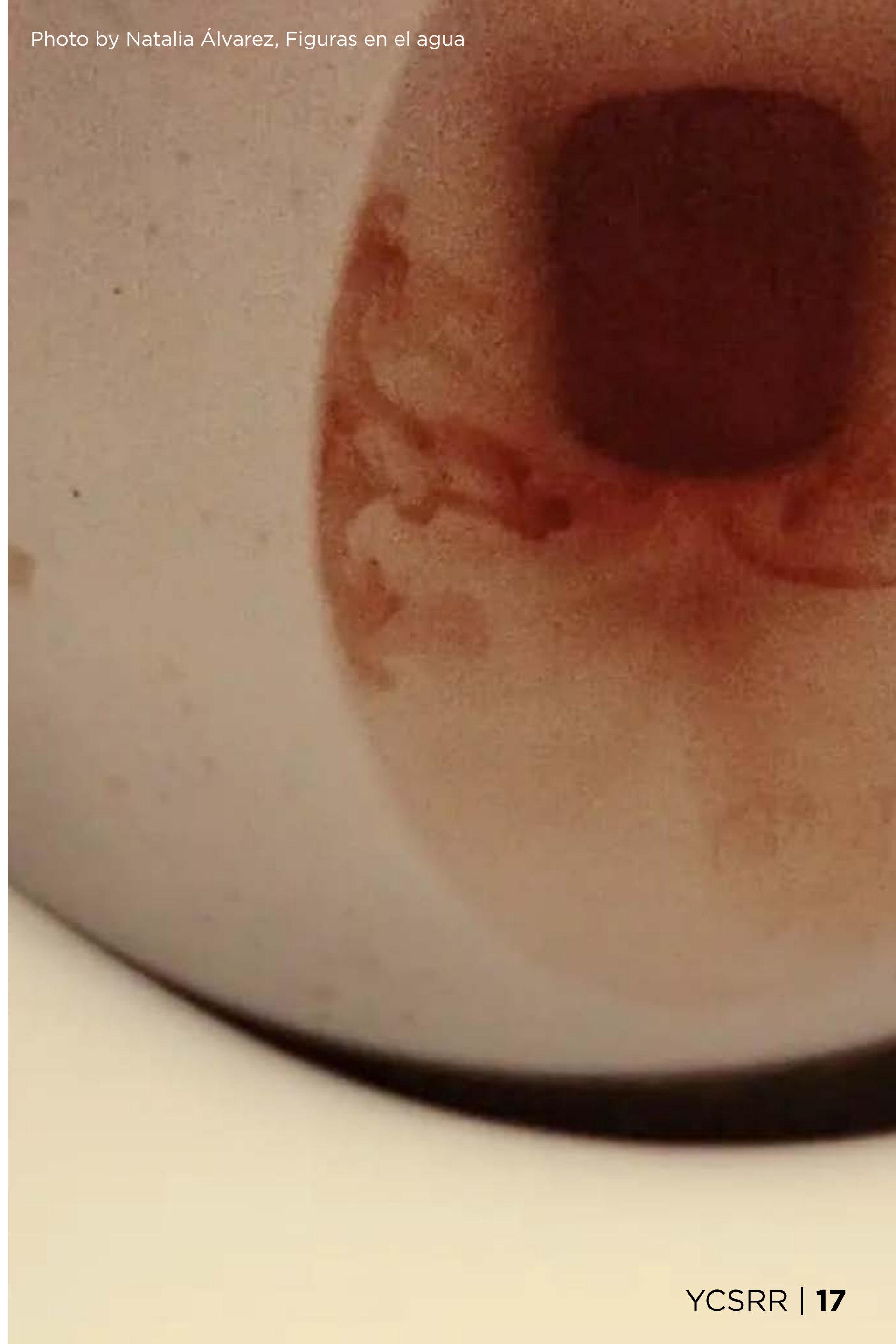
VII

A mis 12 años de edad, ya no le decía todas las preguntas a mi mami. Ahora me daba un poco más de vergüenza, pero también quería aprenderlas por mí misma o por medio de mis amigas.

VIII

A pesar de no haberle preguntado todo, mi mami, como siempre y con mucha calma, me explicó que varios de los síntomas que sentía son parte del periodo menstrual. Y entonces entendí que conocer mi cuerpo ha sido viable por la guía de mi madre. Pero también aprendí que conocer mi cuerpo ha sido también desde mi experiencia de vida. Y yo ahora, con mucha calma, sigo conociendo a mi cuerpo y a la vida.

Instagram: @ade_vargasm





LA MENSTRUACIÓN COMO LIMITANTE ESPACIAL

Natalia Álvarez, México

El espacio es creado y utilizado como un medio de control social y político, como un instrumento de dominación mediante el cual, se discrimina desde una perspectiva blanca, occidental y heterosexual a todo lo que se salga de dicha categoría y que desde ahí se defina como “la otredad”. El espacio no existe de forma absoluta, no es puro ni neutro, no es un a priori; es una construcción y reproducción social, es una manifestación del orden social y a la vez creador de éste.

A pesar de que el uso del espacio público y privado por parte de las mujeres y personas menstruantes ya no se encuentra explícitamente normado, siguen existiendo mecanismos mediante los cuales su conducta sigue siendo regulada. Se les restringe el uso de ciertos lugares y espacialidades al cumplir ciertas características (menstruante). No son libres de usar, habitar, (re)crear y (re)pensar los espacios de la forma que ellas quieran.

El ciclo menstrual y la menstruación en las sociedades “modernas” sigue siendo un tema tabú, comúnmente abordado desde el rechazo y la desinformación. Suele asociarse solo a sus

características biológicas, pero resulta importante abordarlo desde una perspectiva social, ya que no solo es un proceso fisiológico, sino que es un proceso biopsicosocial que genera comunicación y es utilizado como un mecanismo de opresión y rechazo, como una barrera simbólica y estructural que impide el acceso a ciertos servicios y espacios.

Las creencias en torno a la menstruación y las formas en las que se percibe y vive no pueden ser generalizadas porque se encuentran atravesadas por diversos factores, así como la opresión que se vive se presenta de distintas maneras porque las realidades y vivencias no son las mismas, pero en la mayoría de ellas se controlan los cuerpos de las mujeres y personas menstruantes para excluirlas y aislarlas.

Las mujeres y personas menstruantes pocas veces se hacen presentes en el espacio público para disfrutarlo, crearlo y repensarlo. Y cuando esto pasa se encuentran con dificultades debido a que la construcción y acceso a lugares (como los baños) no es funcional. También existe un miedo

construido por manchar, ensuciar, oler y no cumplir con la norma de ser y estar limpias, se les dice cuándo, dónde y cómo habitar y transitar los espacios cuando menstruan (González, Electra, y Montero, 2008). Se ven orilladas a controlar lo espontaneo de sus cuerpos.

Dentro del espacio privado (específicamente el hogar) la conducta también se encuentra normada. Lxs cuerpos menstruantes por medio de mecanismos de poder y control son “educadxs” para saber cómo deben comportarse, qué deben mostrar y qué ocultar. Existen normas sociales, lenguajes, expectativas y creencias que controlan cómo gestionar, vivir y comportarse ante la menstruación (Lillo Muñoz, Daniela, 2017, p.56) como las prácticas en torno al desecho de las toallas y tampones. No debe ser notorio que ciertos cuerpos sangran, duelen y cumplen ciclos.

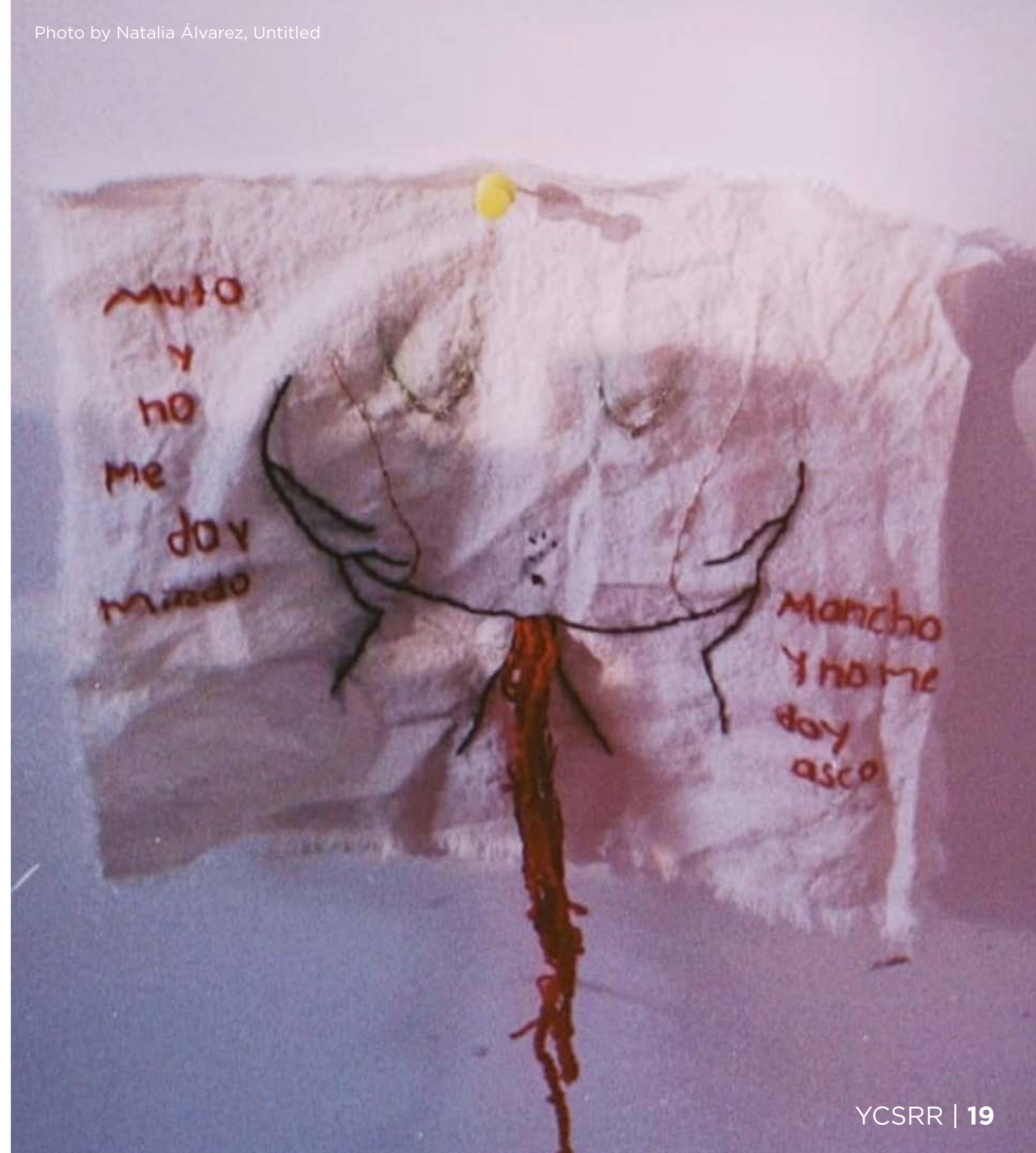
Se puede decir entonces que por medio de códigos, estructuras y relaciones se logra una espacialidad que acepta, produce y reproduce una visión sesgada y/o errónea del ciclo menstrual y de la menstruación. Dentro de la contingencia y en el intento por reducir la complejidad y el riesgo las mujeres y personas menstruantes se ven orilladas a decidir ante el horizonte de (escasas) posibilidades que les ofrece el sistema, pero la complejidad nunca se agota. En la mayoría de las posibilidades su accionar se ve restringido por un sistema patriarcal con dinámicas y normas sociales llenas de poder y simbolismos de dominación y subordinación que determinan su ser y accionar a la vez que les violentan.

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Instagram: @plantalia_alv



WHY ARE WE GATEKEEPING PERIODS?

Celestina Bogle, Canada

Every year is queerer, gayer, and trans-inclusive than the year before. We are amidst a cultural shift. Although there are still many areas of improvement to make places and spaces safer for gender-diverse people, I offer a simple resolution to foil the plight of those trying to erase our voices and those of our allies: stop gatekeeping periods. Period liberation and trans liberation are linked in the quest to remove our bodies as a place for public discourse and shame. By understanding who can menstruate, removing our biases, and supporting gender neutrality, we can get a step closer to liberation.

Bodies do not determine our identities.

A fact is that not all women menstruate and those who menstruate aren't always women. At first, this seems confusing, but it makes a lot of sense when you break it down. Not all women menstruate; different factors impact someone's period ability. Sometimes stress will disrupt cycles. Or, some people may have had a hysterectomy,

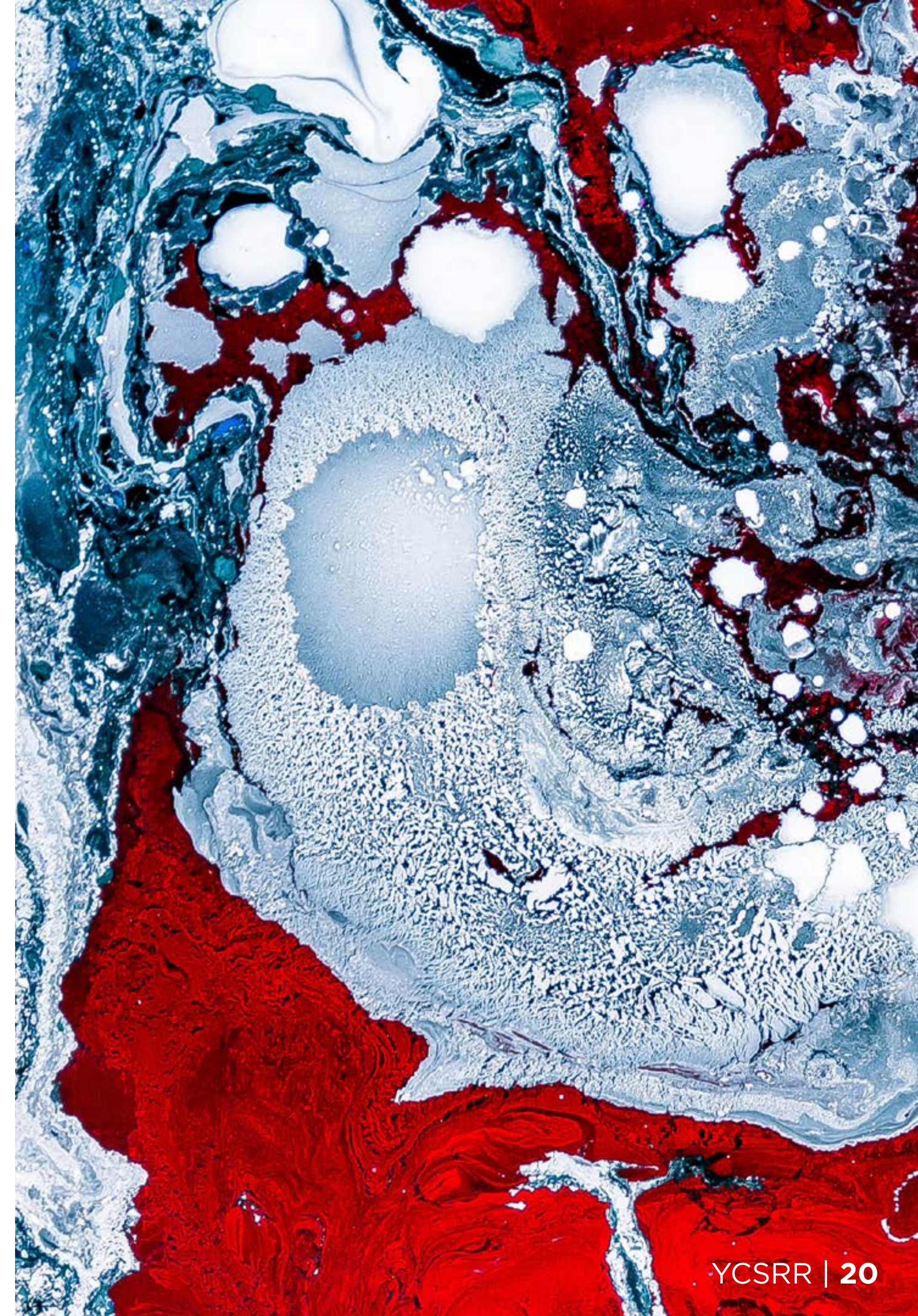
meaning the organs a part of menstruation are no longer in the body. Others may have chosen to not menstruate. Eventually, menstruation stops. When we assume that only women have periods, we alienate all women (cis-gender women and trans women), gender diverse people and more. Intersex people exist, and not everyone who is intersex can menstruate, and those who are intersex and menstruate may not be women. Transwomen exist, and whether or not they menstruate does not imply they are more or less a woman. Some agender and gender diverse people menstruate, some don't. Menstruation is not a requirement nor a prerequisite of womanhood. In the simplest of terms, some people have periods, and some don't. And that's fine. Our language should reflect that.

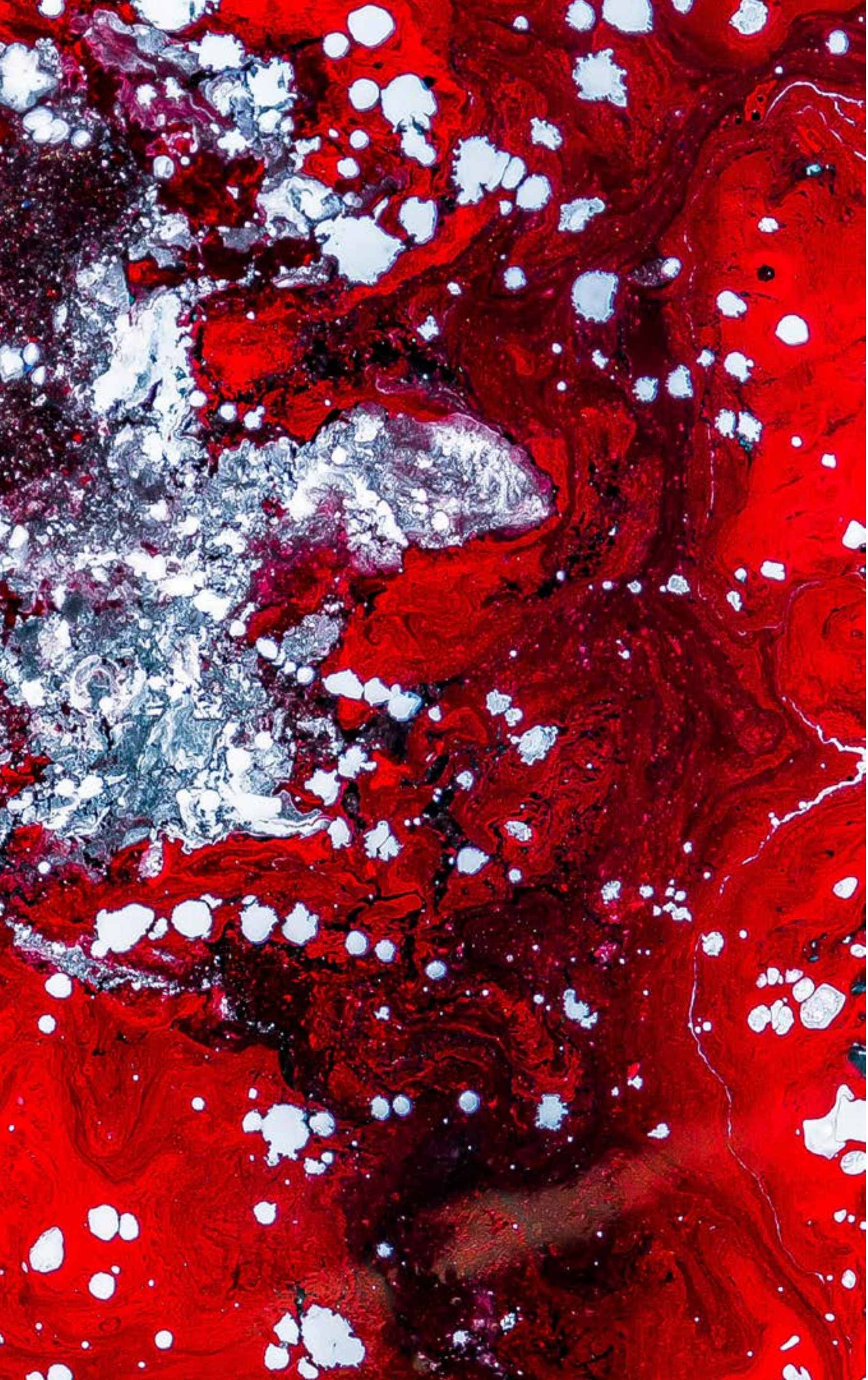
Time to remove our language bias.

Unfortunately, far too many people won't get on board this basic movement because of how it sounds. Apparently, "people who

menstruate" or "people who have periods" doesn't roll off the tongue quite like just saying "women". How limiting! Strangely, some consider aesthetics a valid reason to ignore the voices of people who menstruate, but alas, it's a loud counterpoint. At its core, this rhetoric is about cis discomfort, being afraid of getting it wrong, and, ultimately, cancel culture. This is deeply rooted in binary thinking; the idea that there are only two genders, men and women. Even worse, this argument has evolved to the misconception that inclusive language is a part of a larger plot stemming from the patriarchy and men invading women's spaces. Despite the false news that TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists) would have you believe, gender-neutral language is not a war on women or women's bodies.

Moreover, reducing trans and gender diverse people as men (or the "other") who are lurking and waiting to steal women's spaces is transphobic. Regardless of intention, that's what it is. Not all gender diverse people are AMAB (As-





signed Male At Birth) and not all AMAB people are gender diverse. When we think about “the other” or “othering” it is this idea that those who don’t neatly align with our ideas don’t matter, we’re telling them you are not worthy of being considered, and instead of taking time to learn more about ways to make spaces more safer for you, we’re going to make it worse. That’s awful! Why spread more stereotypes? And in this specific case, there is a clear weaponization of historical (and present) fear as a means to control a conversation about inclusivity. However, we all know that operating in fear has rarely allowed us to advance and grow.

While I agree the patriarchy has historically erased “othered” or made-marginalized people, I can’t help but wonder if this TERF argument is projecting their internalized misogyny and acting as proponents of patriarchy by upholding rigid and outdated gender norms. As the times change, so does our understanding of biological, social, and cultural norms and constructs. For example, not all women menstruate, and those who menstruate aren’t always women. This is not an erasure of women, just an understanding

that biological processes do not need to be gatekept and do not dictate our identities and genders. And it’s okay to not get it right the first time. It’s not about perfection. It’s about small steps to reach a larger meaningful goal, neutrality and inclusivity. When language does not allow for either, we have to take a step back and wonder why. Why can’t we talk about biological processes without gendering them?

Times are changing. Time to get with it.

As period neutrality and gender liberation have become more widespread, so have some companies. While many well-known brands have kept their traditional pink marketing with stereotypical ideas of women as the face of the product, others have chosen a different method. Gone are the days of wanting to see white blonde skinny women dressed in pink, talking about how the newest tampons make them feel beautiful and unstoppable. I’m not saying pink is oppressive, but people who menstruate deserve options that aren’t pink-washed in cishet constructions of our bodies. With diy options, cups, period underwear, and more dressed in gender-neu-

tral marketing, modelled by different body types, sizes and colours, the times are clearly changing, and so are we. While capitalism is problematic in itself, the existence of these products do indicate that enough people care about being more inclusive that they’ve invested their dollars in it. And wherever possible, we should too.

In summary, people of all different identities and bodies have periods. This is a fact. Transphobia and period shaming impact people who menstruate. If our ultimate goal is to remove the stigma around menstruation, why would any continue to gatekeep it? Our bodies are not a place for public discourse and shame. Cis discomfort and TERF ideology have no place in this new time of liberation. By understanding who can menstruate, removing our biases, and supporting an inclusive movement, we can get a step closer to freedom. Isn’t that the goal?

BLOOD MOON POWER AND PAIN

Julia Sal, Brazil

My idea was to represent my experience with period and how I feel and understand that process. It is inspired in my own body, with the woman in the drawing being a reflection of myself. The snake represents the duality I see in periods. Just like to our menstruation, people have given snakes the image of something “profane” and “dirty”, but that’s not the truth. Both exist and are part of nature. However, the fact that they exist and are something natural does not invalidates the pain and discomfort they can inflict on people. Snakes are part of nature, but can also be scary and uncomfortable, getting our periods too.



CHHAUPADI: THE TRADITION OF MENSTRUAL EXILE

Lirisha Tuladhar, Nepal

I kept staring at the closed door of my cozy room, waiting for mother to bring up the hot soup she promised because I was on my period cramps yet this month as well. How lucky that I am being cared for. But my thoughts kept drifting towards other people who menstruate, who seldom might have been as lucky as I have been.

As a young woman from Nepal in her 20s, living a privileged life even during menstruation makes me feel unsettled, when I know that there are people who have to live in exile for menstruating.

Menstruation- A natural process that should open the door to a new phase of life for the person. A time when women and those who menstruate are supposed to experience and cherish every month nurturing the development to bring a new life to the world when it’s time. However, in Nepal, the tradition of “Chhaupadi” makes women exit their own homes, opening the doors to a secluded home called the “Chhau Goth.” The word Chhaupadi is derived from a local word used in the Raute dialect of Achham district in the Far West where “Chhau” means menstruation and “Padi” means a woman.¹ The practice of Chhaupadi has been in the existence in the far and the mid-western regions of Nepal, banishing the women from their homes during the monthly menstruation period. This is a tradition followed in the Hindus, deeming the women to be impure during their menstrual period. The women are mostly exiled and banned from living and touching the other members of

the family, especially the male members. The cultural practice implies restrictions on the women to perform their daily activities, impacting physically, psychologically, and socially. Hence, the natural process of menstruation has become a curse for many adolescents, young girls, and women.

The practice of Chhaupadi encompasses the restrictions in the consumption of nutritious food, entry to religious places, limitation in the movements along with the danger of being the victims of snakebites, rape, and gender-based violence while they are banished outside their homes to a makeshift hut or livestock shed. Chhaupadi is the cultural practice that has resulted in the death of many girls, women, and menstruators of that region.

The practice of Chhaupadi had been declared illegal in 2017 and the government had taken measures to demolish altogether 1,273 menstrual sheds. Despite the declaration and effort, the deeply rooted tradition still exists and is being followed in many communities in Province 6 and 7 in Nepal.²

My cramps intensified though I was engulfed in layers of the warmth of the blankets. My thoughts went over

to trans people who menstruate in Nepal. The society here still hadn't normalized accepting the other gender identities than male and females, I often heard the trans people needing to hide their menstruation from their own family telling them they no longer have menstruation or having to hide it. This often led them to have unhygienic menstrual practices such as using the same menstrual products all day long for the fear of the society knowing they menstruate if they are found disposing of it or changing it.

Nepal has surely been known to be rich in cultures and traditions however there too exists some of the practices that are harming the young people. Being also an activist for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), young people and adolescents have surely been the main targets for the harm done by the Chhaupadi Tradition. Not only has this tradition exiled the ones who menstruate physically but also mentally they are made to feel excluded, taking menstruation as a curse they have to endure. These practices had led the impacts on the people to believe that the women and one who menstruate are impure people who have been cursed by the god and should be excluded.

It is time now to address such reli-

gious and harmful traditions with patience and proper intervention to eradicate them from the very roots of their origin. I believe that such a deep-rooted tradition takes time to be eliminated and it could be done with the help of evidence-based information that portrays the negative impact on the mental, social, physical, and psychological well-being of menstruating people, especially the young ones. The traditional beliefs have wrapped such a huge blanket on the people that the warmth of that practice may surely take some time to cool off. Thus, the inter-generational collaboration along with the activism for the young people would be an appropriate way to address and eliminate this tradition.

I hear the door creaking open as mother enters with the drifting smell of the soup she prepared. I no longer felt the cramps yet I felt a new rejuvenated zeal to be that menstruating person who would be able to contribute to bringing an end to create awareness among the people to end Chhaupadi Tradition. My mother who herself to some extent used to follow the restrictions in the family has accepted that menstruation needs no more restrictions. If she can accept the change, why not other older generations for their future generation?

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MENSTRUATION AND PAIN

Wairimu Ndung'u, Kenya

I was 17 when I found out I had Adenomyosis. When my period started at age 12, I would only experience a headache and over time absolutely no pain. I was living the dream.

I had just moved to a new high school around the time of my diagnosis because my mental state was deteriorating due to untreated bipolar II disorder. I was in form four when I threw up for the first time because of painful periods.

As seniors, we always took 9 p.m. coffee to help us study for an extra hour when we retreated to our dormitories. At the time, I had no idea how much sugar and possibly caffeine would impact my periods.

The following day I went to class as usual but around midday I started experiencing extremely painful cramps accompanied by nausea. I rushed back to the dorms to be closer to the toilet and in no time I threw up. Afterward, I rushed to my bed to rest but the pain was unrelenting so instead of sleeping I was squirming and crying, begging the pain to stop.

However, I threw up again, felt a little relief before the pain resurfaced with more vigor and cried helplessly on repeat. I managed to walk to the dining hall for lunch but

went back to bed soon after. Nowadays I know how much eating regularly aids in nausea management during my menses.

The school nurse wasn't around during the day as I went through this horrid cycle and when she finally came around in the evening a quick diclofenac jab seemed to do the trick. I was okay for the remainder of that period as I regularly went for painkillers but it wouldn't be the last time I experienced such excruciating pain while in boarding school.

Fast forward to the final semester of high school, a month or two before sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary School Education (KCSE), the ferocious cramps resurfaced. This time, I felt intense nausea during the 4pm break when the students rushed to the dorms to shower and unwind.

There I was hovering over the loo throwing up so loudly amidst growing tears. I wouldn't say I was humiliated but I felt extremely helpless. I decided to get into bed and rest and nothing prepared me for the kind of aggression that would follow.

The matron walked in about an hour later and literally pulled me out of bed and dragged me to the nurse's office. I tried to

explain why I was in bed but my desperate words were drowned out by her bellowing voice as she scolded me.

I remember her laughing with the school nurse at this idea that I was merely pretending to get out of attending evening studies. Sure, you "caught" a sick girl, good for you. I would experience something similar in the future when a nurse asked me whether I was really in as much pain as I shared.

After another round of painkillers I walked my drowsy self into what seemed like an examination room and sat down for a Biology paper that I managed to pass. It was about seven years before I found herbal medication that has dramatically reduced the gravity of my symptoms while on a period.

This herbal medicine has been my saving grace and it is a product made by an African woman who believes women deserve relief from menstrual pain and fertility issues.

We should all believe women in pain and support them.

PINKY

Akanksha Badhan, India

Pinky, 14 years old. Every morning, she helps her mother fill water from the village pump, cook, and clean before she goes to school.

Following her mother's advise, on days that she's menstruating, Pinky stays at home and doesn't engage in any of these activities. Upon being asked, she is instructed to tell her brother and father that she is unwell.

But what if Pinky gets caught?

One day Pinky's brother noticed she had stained her skirt.

In school, her brother discussed this incident with his friends.

In response to the noise and chatter, the teacher approaches the group and asks what the commotion is about. She says, "both boys and girls' bodies go through changes, and part of growing older is that girls have periods every month."

Her brother asked her that why didn't she come to play with their friends today. She shied away and cried.

He was unable to understand what was happening to his sister. She can't play and her dress is stained. Their mother said that she fell from the stairs.

What happens next in school?

Pinky is not alone. The biological process of menstruation in India continues to be shrouded in a culture of silence and shame. Inequitable gender norms manifest in social, religious and food intake restrictions imposed on menstruating girls and women, and the pervasive belief that menstrual blood is impure and that menstruating women are unclean.

We all need role models like Pinky's teacher to break silence around menstruation.

This #MHD19 let's pledge to redefine this unhealthy narrative by including men and boys in this MHM dialogue!

This graphic story is an attempt to create awareness and reduce stigma around menstruation by involving boys and men in the conversation. This will help girls feel more comfortable and will provide a safer environment.

Instagram: @Akanksha.td

THE CASE AGAINST PERIOD TAXES: WHY I HATE THEM (AND YOU PROBABLY DO TOO!)

María León González, México

When I first got my period at 11 years old, the prospect of decades of periods seemed daunting. How was I supposed to handle years and years of bleeding, cramping, PMS, and worrying about leakages? Menstruating is definitely something that I didn't choose for myself.

Having a regular period doesn't only mean putting up with the physical aspects of menstruation: it is also a financial burden for women, girls, and menstruators all over the world. On average, women and menstruators have periods for 40 years of their lives. Let's say that you use 4 pads a day, for the four days your menstruation lasts... that is 16 pads per cycle. If a box of 20 pads costs 9 USD, you will spend about \$3756.78 on period products over your lifetime (link to the tool that I used to calculate this number). And these expenses come as an extra cost for a bodily function which you have no control over, and which most men and boys don't experience (looking at cis-

gender men! Remember that people from all different gender identities menstruate). This clear economic difference that builds up over a lifetime makes the cost of menstrual products political. Reducing the cost of period products is the least we can do to counter the economic exclusion of menstruators, girls and women, who are at a more vulnerable position economically at a global scale. It's a key item in the SRHR agenda.

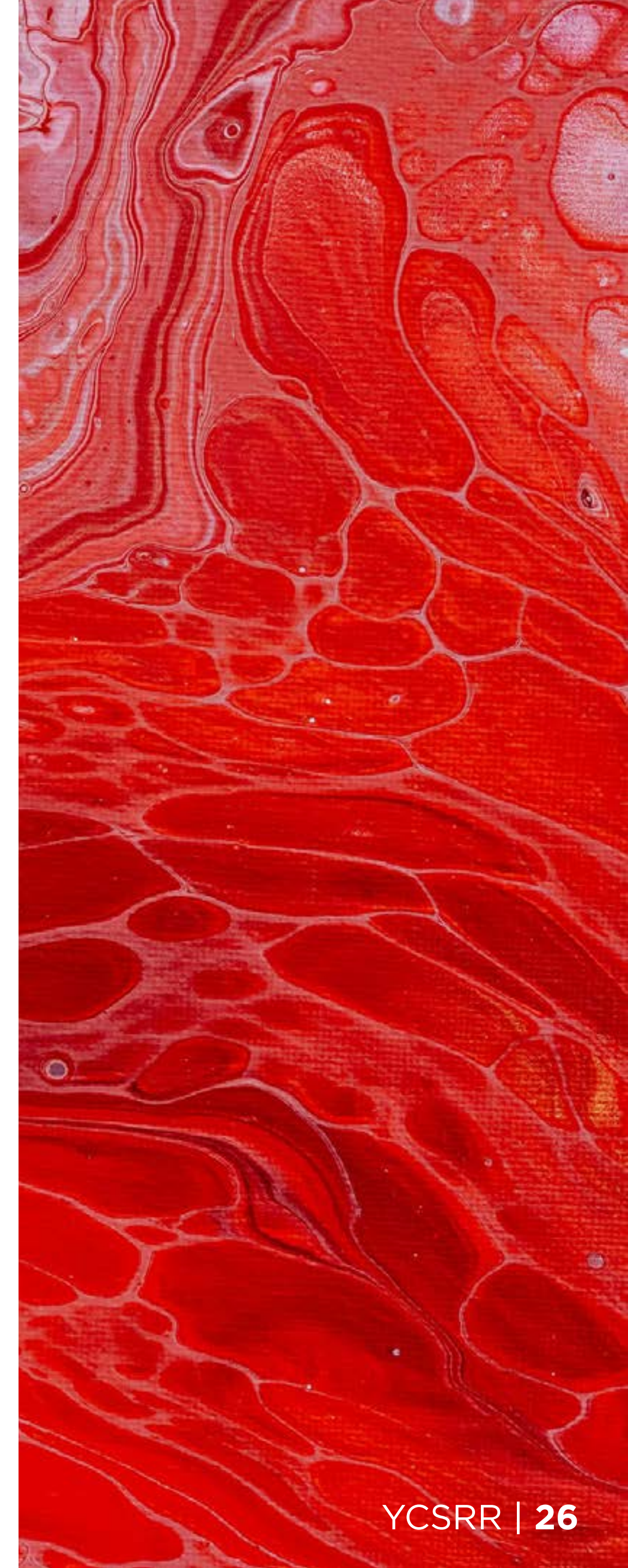
This is where the discussions on the period tax come in - please bear with me. Most countries have taxes that apply to the things we buy and consume on a daily basis: these are called value added taxes (VAT). The percentage of VAT charged differs by country, but in most countries it's between 10% and 20% of the product's base cost. Usually, products considered basic necessities are exempt from this tax. This tends to include food, water, medicines and hygiene products, as well as books, magazines, newspa-

pers, etc., though the list of exempt products varies by country. This is the important part, though: menstrual management products are generally NOT included in this list of tax-free products! This means that menstruators don't only bear the financial burden of the actual cost of menstrual products, but they also have to bear a tax burden that is not present for products such as viagra, books, or jewelry (read more about the period tax here).

The good news is that this has been changing for the past few decades. In 2004 Kenya was the first country to make period products tax exempt, and the rest of the world has slowly followed - and grassroots advocates have played a key role in this. Canada removed its tax on menstrual products in 2015 following an online petition, in 2018 India went on to do the same after a year-long lobbying campaign, in Colombia the Supreme Court ruled against this tax in 2018; and Mexico abol-

ished its period tax starting 2022 as a product of a grassroots effort led by the collective #MenstruacionDignaMexico. If you want to know more about the specifics, The PeriodTax website has a database that looks at the tax regulations on period products around the world, as well as resources to connect people to local efforts and to start their own.

Though these victories are amazing, there are lots of places (like half of the states in the U.S.) where period products are still taxed, or where tax-free law initiatives have been reverted. Furthermore, removing taxes on menstrual products isn't quite enough to remove the financial burden on menstruators - I would like to eventually see a world where menstrual products are free for all as a part of the right to universal health care! In the meantime, let's keep supporting the initiatives to eliminate the period tax, and further economic justice for menstruators around the world.



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