

PUBLIC SPACES FOR THE DISCUSSION OF PERU'S RECENT PAST

ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS PARA LA DISCUSIÓN SOBRE EL PASADO RECIENTE DE PERÚ

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ABSTRACT In the aftermath of civil conflict and a truth commission into twenty years of violence (1980-2000), Peru is presently engaged in the difficult task of establishing overarching narratives that provide frameworks for organizing personal and collective memories in the few public spaces available for the discussion of this recent past. This article looks at two public spaces, a series of performative events in Ayacucho during the submission of the truth commission's Final Report, and Lima's memorysite, *The Eye that Cries*. One contentious memory is over who are appropriate victims and heroes to remember.

KEY WORDS:

Peru, Political Violence, Memory, Performance.

RESUMEN Después del conflicto armado interno y una comisión de verdad que investigó los veinte años precedentes (1980-2000), Perú está en el proceso de escribir en espacios públicos las narrativas que proveen las marcas para organizar las memorias individuales y colectivas de este pasado reciente. Este trabajo estudia dos espacios públicos, una serie de eventos en Ayacucho durante la entrega del Informe final de la Comisión de Verdad y el monumento *El ojo que llora* en Lima. Una de las memorias más conflictivas apunta a quién es la víctima apropiada y el héroe nacional para recordar.

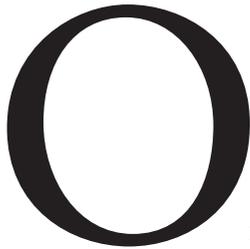
PALABRAS CLAVE:

Perú, violencia política, memoria, performance.

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CYNTHIA E. MILTON



INTRODUCTION

ON THE EVE OF THE HANDING IN OF THE PERUVIAN Truth Commission's final report to the community of Ayacucho, August 28th, 2003, a series of performative events marked the solemn occasion. School children adorned the central plaza of Ayacucho with chalk and flower carpets called *alfombras*, poster boards held articles on the recent internal war and left spaces for passersby to contribute comments, and a candle-light vigil inaugurated a series of speeches by community members. In the dark evening, a moderator called out the names of towns and communities hit hard by the violence. After each name, people replied "present". The gathering chanted "Never Again", "Death, Never Again", "Torture, Never Again", "Disappearance, Never Again", "Rape, Never Again", "Mass Graves, Never Again", "Impunity, No", "Justice, Yes", "Peace, Yes", "Life, Yes", "Truth, Yes!". The overall sentiment of the evening seemed to be one of hope, of truth-telling, and of reconciliation.

Almost five years have passed since the Peruvian Commission for Truth and Reconciliation –Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación, hereafter CVR—made public their report. Yet, rather than taking the center stage of national discussion about the past, and despite their severity, the findings of the CVR

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are kept alive by the work of a few branches of the government and non-governmental organizations. The CVR's report was staggering: 69,280 people dead or disappeared, over 43,000 orphans, and some 600,000 internal refugees in the preceding twenty years of violence, ignited by *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), and made worse by the armed forces' brutal, indiscriminate, response. Three out of every four victims were *campesino*, Quechua speakers from the Peruvian highlands. The regions hardest hit were isolated towns in the Peruvian highlands—in the departments of Ayacucho, Huancavelica, Apurímac, Junín, and San Martín—representing 85 percent of the victims. The President of the Truth Commission, Dr. Salomón Lerner, in his address at the submission of their final report—*Informe final*—to the President of the Republic, Alejandro Toledo, called these years of violence a “double scandal”: the first scandal was the large-scale assassination, disappearance, and torture; and the second, the indolence, ineptitude, and indifference among those who could have prevented this humanitarian catastrophe from happening (Lerner, 2004: 148). If we are to take seriously the claim that a nation needs to recognize its past—and more than that, incorporate this past into national historical narratives alive in the present—in order to foster a more democratic and just future, then we need to ask how this recognition and incorporation of the past can take place given the present political landscape where the politics of oblivion, indifference, or subversion of memories continue to prevail. Part of the answer may lie in the public spaces where the debate over this past violence takes place.

A central premise of this article is that the opening of public spaces for the voicing of discontent and various interpretations of the past is at the heart of building a more inclusive Peru, one that recognizes this complex, traumatic past. The stakes over the past are high: up for debate are the very notion of what constitutes a “citizen” (and the possibility of a radical redefinition in practice), the establishment of inclusive national narratives, and the negotiation over different histories at a time of social and political transformation. In particular, I look at public spaces where the discussion of memories and experiences takes place. The culmination of the process leading to the opening of a public forum was the formation of a truth commission in Peru from July 2001 to August 2003. After providing an overview of the Peruvian truth commission and a summary of its historical narrative, this article then launches into a discussion of public performance as a means to forward diverse memories, and in so doing, constructing historical narratives of the past. I focus on two examples of public spaces that emerged from the CVR: a series of performative events that took place during the submission of the *Final Report* of the CVR in Huamanga, Ayacucho; and the creation of and present conflict over a memo-

rysite, *El ojo que llora* (“The Eye that Cries”). I end the article by briefly taking up the question of Peru’s present challenges to constructing broadly representative historical narratives of the internal conflict, and by considering the social politics of the process of memorialization, in particular the naming of who are the possible victims and heroes of this recent past.

This examination of public spaces where the past is discussed –the CVR, the performative events during the submission of the CVR report, and the recent clash over the monument *El ojo que llora*– are part of an initial effort to conceptualize how performance and the creation of public spaces for memory contribute to the establishment of historical accounts, through non-official and non-written media. The idea of looking at public performance and memorysites as a means to construct historical narratives of the past emerges from a series of studies that point to the role of cultural agency, embodied memory, and visual culture in public memory (Coombes, 2003; Sommer, 2006; Taylor, 2003). These studies emphasize the importance of *space* –whether a “*marge de manœuvre*” or “wiggle room” for subaltern groups to contest power, or in the creation of places for public remembering (from such sites as the individual body to that of official monuments).

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This article also borrows from recent memory literature, in particular, the concept of “emblematic memory” as a means to structure or provide a framework to social meanings of the past. As introduced by Steve J. Stern (2004), “emblematic memories” are those memories that circulate in a public or semi-public domain and resonate broadly, thus expressing a wider meaning for a community or group. Another useful concept is that of “memory knots”, those sites where different interpretations of the past, or memories, come into conflict in the public domain of the social body. These sites can be particular human groups, events and dates, or physical objects and places (Stern, 2004). Building upon these studies, some of my questions as an historian, explored in greater detail elsewhere, are the following: if narratives of the past are constructed in public spaces –for instance, the CVR, performative events, and *El ojo que llora*– what narratives emerge and how do they come into being? (Milton, 2007). The building blocks to these narratives include memories. Which memories are expressed, resonate with others, and are incorporated into collective narratives (or become “emblematic memories”), and which ones are pushed to the margins of public discussion (and become “loose memories” or “lore”)?². How do these subsequent narratives compare with those of official narratives –including the CVR–? One of the premises of this paper is that the

2 The concepts of “loose memories” and “lore” are also borrowed from Steve J. Stern (2004).

sudden opening that allowed for the CVR and for a public discussion of past violence also allowed for several other modes of “truth-telling” to emerge, and consequently, alternative “truths”.

THE CREATION OF A TRUTH COMMISSION

Upon the submission of the *Informe final* after two years of investigation by the CVR, Peru held a national discussion about the internal war and of the deeply entrenched discrimination in Peru that sit at the core of both the violence and the indifference that had allowed it to occur. The CVR faced a barrage of condemnation, placing in question the means of measuring the number of victims, the ideological reasons for the CVR, the integrity of the commissioners, and the validity of their findings³. However, there was a public opening for a discussion of the past, even if just briefly, despite efforts by individuals, the media, and political parties to discredit the CVR.

The establishment of a truth commission came about quickly. Peru suddenly found itself in transition after a fax sent from Japan announced Fujimori’s self exile. A truth commission stood out as one of the possible options for Peru’s move away from authoritarianism toward democracy, an established mechanism used by other countries in the post-Cold War era⁴. In July 2001, the interim government of Valentín Paniagua launched a formal inquiry into the preceding twenty years, the *Comisión de Verdad*, a long-standing request made by Peruvian human rights groups, modeled after experiences elsewhere, namely the formal inquiries in Guatemala, Argentina, Chile, and South Africa. Human rights groups and the government’s *Defensoría del Pueblo* provided much of the guidelines for the Truth Commission (Youngers, 2003: 172; 437-438).

The incoming president, Alejandro Toledo, kept the Truth Commission but added “reconciliation” to the commission’s title and implicitly its objectives, and changed the composition from seven to twelve commissioners and one observer. In total, the CVR had a staff of over eight hundred people who collected testimonies in Peru’s twenty-four departments, with a focus on areas most affected by the violence. The Truth Commission’s mandate was to establish the development and facts of, and the responsibility for, the violence from

3 Political parties and the media played an active role in distorting and silencing truths by challenging the findings of the CVR two months before the *Final Report* was made public. This continued after the publication of the *Informe final*. Degregori (2004: 84). Efforts to silence discussion include threats to the welfare of commissioners, defenders of human rights, and victims of violence, such as threats lodged anonymously in October 2005.

4 Greg Grandin and Thomas Klubock envision truth commissions as a product of post-Cold War reckonings with the past that served political and institutional ends (*Radical History Review*, 2006: 1-10).

1980 to 2000. The Commission hoped that their investigation and proposed initiatives would lead toward “affirming peace and agreement between Peruvians” (Article 1 of Decreto Supremo, No. 065-2001, 2001).

The CVR submitted the *Final Report*, based on almost 17,000 testimonies, to President Alejandro Toledo on August 28, 2003 in Lima and the following day to the community of Ayacucho. The conclusions of the CVR were many, constructing a historical narrative that pointed to the long-standing racism and centralism of Peru, the heavily gendered nature of the violence⁵, the primary cause of the violence attributed to Shining Path⁶, and the responsibility of Peruvian political parties and leaders for having abdicated their authority to the armed forces, including today’s president Alan García during his term from 1985-1990. The CVR tarnished the heroic myth of Fujimori in defeating *Sendero Luminoso* by documenting human rights abuses committed during his term in office, and by bringing to light the crucial role of *ronderos* –community patrols– in the demise of *Sendero Luminoso*. In sum, during three democratically elected governments –Belaúnde Terry, García Pérez, and the early Fujimori governments– the worst violence and human rights violations suffered in Peruvian republican history came to pass: according to the CVR, their “statistics exceed the number of human loss suffered by Peru in all the external and civil wars that have happened in its 182 years of independence” (CVR, 2003: “Conclusiones generales”).

While the CVR emerged at specific juncture in Peru, at the international level, the CVR appeared at a time when truth commissions in various shapes burgeoned (Hayner, 2001). Coached by international consultants such as the International Center for Transitional Justice and encouraged by national human rights groups, the Peruvian CVR was able to build upon and to go beyond other truth and reconciliation commissions. Despite having the benefit of other countries’ experiences with truth commissions, nevertheless, the CVR faced similar constraints: the CVR had a confined period to conduct investigations into the previous twenty years (the Commission had an original mandate of eighteen months with the possible extension of five months), limited

- 5 Men and women were affected differently by the violence: over 75 percent of the victims were men over fifteen years of age –most between the ages of twenty and forty nine– and were the result of *Sendero Luminoso* targeting local leaders or killed by the military; most women who died were the victims of indiscriminate violence and massacres leveled against communities.
- 6 While the CVR named the armed group *Sendero Luminoso* –1.5 percent– as the main perpetrators to violence and to a much lesser extent the urban-based Revolutionary Movement of Túpac Amaru or MRTA –1.5 percent–, the CVR also placed responsibility in the hands of successive governments, the armed forces and police, the latter two 29 and 6.6 percent respectively. *Informe Final*, Tomo II, “Los actores del conflicto,” and “Conclusiones generales,” www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/index.php

resources and difficulties of translating from Quechua or other indigenous languages into Spanish⁷. Like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the TRC, Peru's CVR worked in a media-driven and performative context. In South Africa, televised highlights of the TRC were shown on Sunday evenings and daily radio broadcasts announced recent developments. In the case of Peru, public hearings –*audiencias públicas*– were planned as performative acts in which the commissioners could “fulfill the Peruvian obligation to hear and make heard the victims” (Lerner, 2004: 123)⁸. From these public hearings, the CVR gathered over four hundred testimonies that testified to over three hundred cases of gross human rights violations. These public hearings were unique for truth commissions in Latin America (Amnesty International, 2004: 3).

The CVR held a broader mandate than other commissions. For instance, the CVR scope was considerably wider than that of Chile –known as the Rettig Commission, 1990-1991– which at the time could investigate only the cases that led to death and disappearance. In Peru, the CVR investigated assassinations and kidnappings, disappearances, torture and serious wounds, violations of collective rights of Andean and native communities, and other grave violations against people's rights⁹. Even the much-acclaimed TRC in South Africa had a narrower focus since it considered only “gross human rights violations” that were politically motivated, excluding daily violence committed as a result of Apartheid. Rather, the Peruvian commission firmly placed the internal conflict –1980-2000– as a period in a longer national history of racism and centralism that was both the cause and a consequence of the violence. That is, in addition to determining the responsibility for abuses and violations, identify and report on the experiences of victims, develop proposals for reparations and reforms, the CVR's mandate also analyzed the political, social, cultural and historical context that contributed to the violence (CVR, 2003).

The historic moment of when the CVR came into existence had much to do with why the the Peruvian Truth Commission was able to structure a wid-

7 While Quechua is one of Peru's official languages since 1993, at the time of the CVR there was no program of studies in translation, and therefore no trained professionals. As Carlos Iván Degregori has pointed out, longstanding socio-economic, linguistic and gender divides were recreated in the composition of the commission itself: among the CVR commissioners, only one spoke and understood Quechua, while another partially understood, thus maintaining a strong linguistic gap between the mainly middle-class, male –except for two women– commissioners and the 75 percent Quechua-speaking victim (Degregori, 2004).

8 The CVR held eight public hearings with victims or family members, seven public assemblies, and five theme-based hearings –on subjects of “anti-terrorist” legislation, displaced persons, universities, women, and teaching (CVR, 2003).

9 Article 3 of Decreto Supremo n. 065-2001-PCM.

er mandate than many other truth commissions. Many commissions emerged from pacted transitions, with a still menacing armed forces securing certain privileges upon their departure. In the case of Peru, it came more from a political vacuum left by the sudden collapse of the Fujimori's authoritarian regime (Degregori, 2002: 95). In part, the quick speed of change permitted the formation of a truth commission and one with judiciary capabilities, the only commission to do so¹⁰.

The suddenness of the political transition from the quasi-authoritarian regime of Fujimori to the return to democracy with Toledo allowed for a brief opening for the public discussion of the violence in Peru from 1980 to 2000. The emergence of the CVR created a public forum for investigating this violence. But it also signaled more broadly the possibility to speak openly about the past. Cultural agency came to the fore as one of the possible modes of speaking about this past. While cultural forms had always been present in performance groups such as the theatre troupe Yuyachkani, or in regional artistic traditions such as painted wooden *retablos* and *tablas* by Ayacuchano and Sarhua artists depicting violence, or the lyrics of folk songs of *huaynos* and *pumpin* that give testimony to abandonment of natal lands and the disappearance of loved ones, such forms had an immediacy and a public recognition not before present¹¹. The CVR gave legitimacy to these other experiences by making the public voicing of them possible. That is, "truth-telling" became part of the public, national domain, rather than an affair of individuals or groups. This article now turns to the creation of two public spaces –the performative events at the time of the submission of the CVR's *Final Report* in the highland capital of Ayacucho, and the formation of a public monument in Lima, *El ojo que llora*.

PERFORMATIVE EVENTS IN HUAMANGA, AYACUCHO

On August 28 and 29th, 2003, a series of performative events were staged to mark the culmination of the CVR's labour, the publication of the *Informe final*. In the main plaza, to one corner, a huge stage in the shape of a *retablo*, a tryptic box with levels, had been set up for the arrival of the commissioners. But outside of this enormous stage built by the state, other events around the plaza seemed more spontaneous even if many were promoted by NGOs. On the plaza was a poster board with various newspaper clippings about the preceding

10 At the time of writing this article, these judicial trials are underway, including that of Alberto Fujimori, though the scale is limited. By September 2005, only forty three cases were under prosecution from of the some two hundred and fifty warrants issued by the Human Rights Ombudsman.

11 On *retablos* see Ulfe (2005); on *tablas* see Lemlij and Millones (2004); on *pumpin*, see Ritter (2003).

twenty years and a place for people to write their thoughts. Some comments repeated messages of the CVR –“we have to remember in order not to repeat”; “we have to know the truth”, etc. Others were more hostile –“why such expense for a stage for a commission when people need reparations?” Or, calling the CVR a “Lie Commission”. Around the plaza, lining the street, school children laid out flowers and chalk to design carpets, *alfombras*, describing and depicting different aspects of the armed conflict. Among the many carpets was one on which children acted out Death as portrayed by the Grim Reaper in one corner, Peace as an angel-dove in the opposite corner, and an Ayacuchan, shoe-shine boy in the center. Another carpet showed a woman weeping with a crying child on her back and the plea “don’t forget” (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. An *alfombra* (chalk carpet) portrays a weeping woman and child.

As the sun began to set, the word “Paz” –peace– burned bright on the hillside overlooking the city of Huamanga, Ayacucho. The Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú (National Association of Kidnapped, Disappeared and Detained Relatives of Peru), ANFASEP, the Association of Young Orphans Victims of Socio-Political Violence (Asociación de Jóvenes Huérfanos Víctimas de la Violencia Sociopolítica), the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), APRA, representatives, and other groups, and individuals marched around the main plaza, some posing questions to political authorities, such as “¿Dónde están?” (“Where are they?”), a reference to the many still missing victims, and demanding justice for the victims of the internal conflict (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Participants of a candle-light vigil demand justice.

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After completing the walk around the square, and a brief rain shower, the procession gathered at one corner, near the big stage. A moderator started to call out the names of towns and communities affected by the violence. The audience replied “present”. A friend from Umaro told me that the military razed to the ground his community, and that he and his family had fled twice. The last flight took him to the Amazonian regions of Peru, and then later to the city of Ayacucho. He was upset that the name of his community was not called out that evening for he, too, was present.

Close by, mothers and wives held a symbolic *pacha vela* for their disappeared and dead loved ones. The *pacha vela* is an Andean ceremony performed after the death of a family member. The remaining family takes turns keeping company the deceased who are represented by their clothing. On this evening, women sat by the clothes of their dead and disappeared relatives, with candles and photos. Inside their circle, they had placed a large banner with the word “assassinated” (Fig. 3).

Speeches followed by different local representatives. Angélica Mendoza spoke as the president of ANFASEP. Her words resonated with the overall message of the CVR, that of unity and remembrance: “tomorrow we will be together to remember what happened to us”. An APRA member also came to the microphone. His words remind us that performative sites are not without contestation or competing truth claims. He presented a more favorable interpretation of APRA’s role in the violence during the first government of Alan García than that of the CVR findings made public the same evening in Lima. He tried to remind the public that APRA members had “put our lives on the front line for this

pueblo”; that they “had given (their) lives in exchange for nothing;” and that “people don’t remember when *apristas* are victims...”¹².



Figure 3. A symbolic pacha vela ceremony remembers dead and disappeared loved ones.

The events of the eve of the handing in of the *Informe final* stand in contrast to the more orchestrated day that followed. Under the beating sun, truth commissioners arrived to present their final report to the community of Ayacucho. The president of the CVR, Salomón Lerner, gave a moving speech that was translated for the audience by a Quechua interpreter. He started by invoking the Andean custom of reciprocity: for two years the commissioners had received the testimony of Ayacuchans and other Peruvians, now the CVR was returning to give “testimony of their own journey” as commissioners (Lerner, 2004: 163). The main plaza was full, with the audience pushing towards the *re-tablo*-stage. Many people appeared to be listening attentively. Others took the opportunity to engage in commerce: distributing bottles of water, selling ice cream, even shining shoes. At times it was difficult to hear Dr. Lerner’s speech as there was a group of *apristas* who shouted throughout his address. Protest was also apparent among the *ronderos* who marched in support of a former bishop who had been named in the CVR as having impeded claims of human rights violations (Fig. 4).

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¹² In the *Informe final*, the CVR registered 8,173 death and disappearances during the APRA government, of which 58 percent were attributed to Shining Path and “subversive organizations” and 30 percent to “state security forces” (CVR, 2003).



Figure 4. Ronderos march in support of a former bishop, despite the cvr's findings.

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Later that evening, the same podium for the commissioners converted into spectacle. Different musical and dance groups performed. A small group of Asháninka danced. Margot Palomino, Julio Humala, Carlos Falconí, and Nelly Munguía sang *huaynos* in Quechua and Spanish. They sang of disappearance, waiting, pain, lost hope, absence, and justice: “para los desaparecidos”; “Mamá siempre esperará aunque nunca vuelva”; “para el dolor... para los que tienen sueños”; “destruida esperanza”; “nombres de ausentes hermanos”; “justicia está bien cerca ya”; and “tengo que reclamar al Estado”. The powerful lyrics and the soulful singing were accompanied by images and performers who appeared on the top level of the *retablo*-stage; Pachamama, Amazonian animals, crosses, and outlines of the disappeared paraded above the musicians (Fig. 5). Members of the audience requested repeatedly the song “Flor de Retama” – “Broom Flower” – a famous *huayno* by Ricardo Dolorier that commemorates the deadly clash over educational reforms between the police and protestors in Huanta, Ayacucho in 1969. During the period of Shining Path, this song took on new significance, becoming an anthem of sorts for the subversive group. Today the song refers to *ayacuchano* identity more broadly (Ritter, 2006). In the song, the flower of Retama represents “*el pueblo*”. The flower grows where the blood of the people flows (Starn, Degregori, and Kirk, 1995: 306).

Public demonstrations – such as the events staged around the submission of the *Informe final* – are against forgetting or repressing memories. They are performative acts, not necessarily tightly scripted, but nonetheless requir-

ing both performers and an audience –perhaps, at times, one and the same. As Laurie Beth Clark argues, performance takes many forms, and in the context of post-authoritarian societies they often include performances “to tell the story of one’s own wound” (Clark, 2005: 84). While the CVR provided one forum for telling one’s story, indeed giving “center stage to the formerly marginalized”, street theatre, demonstrations, and ceremonies allow for the telling of individual and collective narratives through a different script. As Clark notes, not only do these performances tell history, but they also make history by being an event in the contestation. One could further add that they are active in the creation of narratives of the past.



Figure 5. Margot Palomino performs while Pachamama looks down from above.

The voicing of experience and the performance of memory seem to be at the center of the performative events here described. The participation of children creating flower carpets, families walking in candle-light vigil, and a symbolic Andean remembrance ceremony, among other expressions, indicate that the participants’ memories had neither been silenced nor forgotten despite the claims of some that the CVR would open old wounds. On the eve and day of the presentation of the *Informe final* in Ayacucho, the suffering of many and the

loss of loved ones seemed far from having been silenced, forgotten, or healed. Present in many countries making transitions away from periods of violence, this concern over digging up the –supposedly “buried” and “healed”– past is expressed by social groups who think that forgetting, or an implicit accord to silence, leads to a form of reconciliation, or at least to a fragile peace; the opposite –the discussion of past harms– not only recreates the pain but may revive old antagonisms and conflict. Another perspective might argue the contrary: that by not cleansing these “wounds” –and conversely, the attempt to ignore them– will lead to social eruptions (Jelin, 2002; Jelin and Kaufman, 2000; Stern, 2004; Wilde, 1999). The performative events in Ayacucho suggest that these wounds were never closed in the first place and that people indeed wanted to speak and to be heard (Degregori, 2004).

But, this desire to speak and to remember a common suffering is not without conflict; nor did the memories that emerged during the submission of the *Informe final* suggest a homogenous narrative. The presence of groups who challenged the findings of the CVR point to the contested nature of memory, the difficulty to establish harmonious “emblematic memories” or to form a single national narrative of this violent past.

THE CRYING, BLEEDING EYE: CONTESTATION OVER PUBLIC SPACE AND PUBLIC MEMORIES

Conflict over the interpretation of the past can be quite dramatic. In addition to performance, other public spaces become the forum for recounting “truths” and memories about the past, and in so doing, spark controversy. Monuments and memorysites invite such contestation, some artists indeed solicit dispute as part of the act of remembering (Young, 1993). In his essay, “Memoryscapes”, Louis Bickford states that public commemoration and sites have the ability to shape the physical landscape of collective memory: “memoryscapes recapture public spaces and transform them into sites of memory and alternative truth-telling about the authoritarian past” (Bickford, 2005: 96). *El ojo que llora* is one such memoryscape that “captures” public space and converts it into a space for contestation and “truth-telling”, even though the artist’s original intention had been to reconcile Peruvians rather than to provoke debate. *El ojo que llora* has proved to be a site of conflict over competing memories and interpretations of Peru’s recent past, a kind of “memory knot” for the Peruvian nation (Drinot, 2007; Hite, 2007; Stern, 2004).

Not far from the center of Lima, in the tranquil and residential neighborhood of Jesús María, lies a solemn monument that calls upon visitors to remember the victims of violence from 1980 to 2000. Unveiled on August 28, 2005, two years after the submission of the *Informe final*, *El ojo que llora* forms part

of a larger memory project entitled *La avenida de la memoria*. This monument is placed towards a quiet end of the Campo de Marte, in a barred-off triangle, with few points of entry. Some 32,000 stones collected from the Chancay sea, of which 26,000 bare the name, age, and year of death or date of disappearance of a victim, mark a river-like pathway that spirals into a center where an obelisk-like rock stands with an embedded smaller sacred stone –the “eye”– that continuously sheds water –the “tears” (Fig. 6). This central rock intended to represent “the core inside of each person” holds special spiritual significance¹³. Originally from the Cerro de Lacco, a pre-Colombian site, the stone is thought to be of a “pure state, with an immortal security and serenity” holding the important lineage from the Apu Ausangate, a sacred mountain (Cárdenas, 2006). For the artist, this stone found a theme suitable to its importance: the Mother Earth –*Pachamama* or *Madre Tierra*– who cries for what had happened to her children (Cárdenas, 2006). Symbolic significance impregnates every aspect of the monument: for instance, the labyrinth of stones has twelve circles multiplying the number three representing the sky –and heaven– and the number four representing the earth; the stones are placed in a southward orientation, toward the Southern Cross. The serpent-like paths are meant to resemble the meanderings of rivers; in particular, the artist had in mind the River Huallaga and the thousands of victims disappeared in this river (Cárdenas, 2006). The quietness of the monument in the bustling city and the solemnity of the names and ages of victims weighs heavily upon the observer. Reflection is paramount. To leave, one must wind one’s way back through the paths of names, and thus continue contemplation. According to the Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (Association Pro Human Rights), APRODEH “each stone represents the history of tragedy and horror of a person, but also that of the entire family whose situation of exclusion, poverty, and injustice persists to this day” (APRODEH, 2007). The Dutch-born artist, Lika Mutal, who created *El ojo que llora* took inspiration from the CVR photography exhibit *Yuyanapaq. Para recordar*. Moved by the over two hundred photos documenting the violence, Mutal returned to her workshop with pain in her heart. She began work on *El ojo que llora*¹⁴.

Since its unveiling at the second anniversary of the *Final Report*, Peruvian and foreign visitors, groups, and school trips have come to *El ojo que llora*. Several activities and commemorative acts have taken place at this site: an annual remembrance ceremony on the Day of the Dead, the meeting point on Interna-

13 The number of stones is according to the APRODEH website, <http://www.aprodeh.org.pe/ojoquellora2006/index.html>, accessed March 18, 2007.

14 “Conversación con Lika Mutal,” by Roxana Chirinos. <http://www.agenciaperu.com/cultural/portada/cvr3/mutal.html#arriba>, Date accessed March 15, 2007.

tional Women's Day, the location of a Buddhist prayer ceremony, among others. It is meant as a public homage to the victims as well as a place for contemplation in the hopes of healing, reconciliation, and fostering a more just and democratic future. It is an important place for remembering the dead, especially for those families who do not have the remains of their loved ones. This monument is one that renews Peruvians' commitment to remember by the act of repainting the stones when the names begin to fade¹⁵.



Figure 6. *El ojo que llora* memorysite in Lima prior to September 2007.
Photo by Yael Rojas, Peru21 (With permission of photographer).

The creation of a monument to collective trauma is not unique. There are many examples around the world for countries that have made transitions away from authoritarian and violent pasts (Bickford, 2005). In 1999 the Coalición Internacional de Museos de Conciencia en Sitios Históricos (International Coalition of Museums of Conscience and Historic Sites) was founded that brings together nine museums that have a social mission to confront painful pasts of their countries. On the 7th of November 2006, *El ojo que llora* became a mem-

¹⁵ e.g. APRODEH sent out an invitation on December 6, 2006 to come and help restore the names on the International Human Rights Day. Email correspondence, *Para que no se repita*, December 7, 2006.

ber of this network, joining other museums including Villa Grimaldi of Chile and District Six of South Africa.

Like many public spaces, this monument is not without controversy. Indeed, symbolic reparations in general have been questioned as an adequate use of funds while victims and the families of victims seek material reparations. More directly, *El ojo que llora*, a site that was originally intended to tell a “truth” about the internal conflict in a complementary way to the findings of the CVR, has recently converted into a site of conflict itself. The conflict is at base over memory, who has the right to construct a narrative of the internal conflict, and who in post-violence Peru is considered a “victim” of this violence. Though the site originated as a location to pay homage to victims, it became the “*ojo de la tormenta*”, or the eye of a storm at the end of 2006, and again in September 2007.

A recent decision by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos), CIDH, based in Costa Rica leveled a serious challenge at the socio-political meaning of this memory site and at its continued existence. In November 2006, the CIDH made its ruling on the case of the *Penal Miguel Castro Castro vs. Perú*. The CIDH ruled illegal the killings by the military under Fujimori of top *senderista* leaders in the high-security prison Miguel Castro Castro in 1992. As a consequence of the court’s findings, the Peruvian state should recognize its responsibility for these extrajudicial killings, and financially compensate the victims or their families. Their other recommendation included symbolic reparations. The CIDH ruled that “within the space of a year, the State should assure that the all of the people declared victims in the present sentence –the names of the *senderistas* killed in Castro Castro– be among those represented in the monument *El ojo que llora*”. That is, in an odd twist, this international court ruled that the perpetrators of violence –*senderistas*– were also “victims” and as such should have their names placed along with the victims of their acts of violence¹⁶. This conflict over marking out the boundary between victims and perpetrators was present as well in the CVR findings and in the performative events in Ayacucho at the submission of the *Informe final*. But the CIDH ruling made much more explicit this problem of defining victims: how could a monument built to pay homage to the victims

16 “Caso del Penal Miguel Castro Castro vs. Perú” www.corteidh.or.cr/casos.cfm?idCaso=258. Date accessed March 22, 2007. The strangeness of this ruling is further heightened by one judge’s references to Albert Camus’ *La peste* and José Saramago *Blindness* as appropriate allegories to brutality and violence in the Castro Castro case and to the “human conscience made manifest and symbolized today in the monument *El ojo que llora* in the recognition of the suffering by the victims and as an expression of solidarity with them”. Section “Voto razonado del Juez A.A. Cançado Trindade”, point 19.

of the internal conflict lay the names of victims beside those who had committed the crimes?

As a result of bringing to light and to public debate this painful problem of defining “victim”, the ruling of the CIDH ignited a series of condemnations of *El ojo que llora*: newspapers such as *El Diario* and *Expreso* called the site “a monument to terrorists” because they claimed that among the thousands of names could already be found the names of *senderistas*¹⁷. Opponents to *El ojo que llora* called for the abolition of the monument, though the mayor of Jesús María stopped short of this. Those who came to the defense of the monument –in a “march to save *El ojo que llora*”– were accused of participating in “a pro-terrorist march” (Wiener, 2007). Using humor and creativity to defend themselves against these accusations, the Asociación Paz y Esperanza and the citizens’ movement Para que no se repita (Association of Peace and Hope, and In Order that It Won’t Happen Again) organized a public activity, “Origami de la Paz” (Origami for Peace), on January 12th. On this day, participants took sheets from newspapers “that had begun a campaign of disinformation” by calling the *El ojo que llora* “a monument to terrorists”; through the ancient Asian art of folding paper, they transformed these newspapers sheets into doves of peace.

El ojo que llora became a stage for Peruvian politics. Alan García and others used the CIDH court ruling as an opportunity to both criticize the Paniagua and Toledo governments for joining the CIDH and for allowing the Castro Castro case to be heard by an international court. García called for Peru’s immediate removal from the CIDH. He also took this opportunity to seek popular support for the introduction of the death penalty for terrorists into the Peruvian legislation. Sensing the building of a political maelstrom that could overflow into his neighborhood, the mayor of the Jesús María, Luis Enrique Ocrospoma, decided to close access to the monument in late January. He did so in order to prevent “unfortunate acts” that could come from “people of the extreme left who defend the ideology of subversive groups or individuals from the right who wish to destroy the monument” (*La Primera*, 2007). Fortunately for the mayor, a potential nonpolitical resolution to the problem came in the form of a legal loophole: according to a law passed on April 20, 1968, the Campo de Marte –where *El ojo que llora* is located– had been declared an “untouchable green

17 The cover of *Expreso* on January 3, 2007 has a picture of *El ojo que llora* with the lead article heading “there exists a monument to terrorists”, “*existe un monumento a terroristas*”.

space". For this reason, *El ojo que llora* –or any other structure such as a play park for children– should not have been built here¹⁸.

But even among those sympathetic to *El ojo que llora*, and its intended message of unity and remembrance, appeared divided as how best to respond to the court ruling and the imminent threat posed to this memory site. While APRODEH wished to march –on Sunday January 21, 2007– in the defense of *El ojo que llora*, other groups, namely the Asociación de Familiares de Víctimas de la Violencia Terrorista (Association of Relatives of Victims of Terrorist Violence), AFAVIT warned that such a march risked confusing matters. One should not march to save this monument, cautioned the president of AFAVIT, Mercedes Carrasco, but rather in solidarity with the victims. She convened a similar march on Friday January 19th to remember and to defend the victims of terrorism, and in support of the death penalty for terrorists –similar to the *senderistas* killed in Castro Castro prison, one presumes.

This CIDH ruling over placing the names of Shining Path members killed in the Castro Castro raid among the victims of the internal conflict might have been the incentive for the present García government to launch an initiative to name the “heroes” of these twenty years. On March 31st, 2007, President García introduced a law –*Decreto Supremo*– ordering that the members of the armed forces and the national police who died because of the violence were to have their names published in *El Peruano* as “new heroes of the nation”, and that the streets in Peru’s cities that are presently designated by numbers be replaced with the names of these “heroes” (*El Peruano*, 2007).

It was a simple decree but one with large ramifications in Peru’s ongoing attempt to write an historical narrative of the past. Just as naming the victims of the violence in *El ojo que llora*, naming the “heroes” is equally contentious. Naming is part of “truth-telling” and part of establishing the different actors in this historical narrative (Milton, 2005). By choosing to name the armed forces and national police as “new heroes”, their human rights abuses and excesses documented in the CVR *Informe final* are greatly diminished in importance, if not completely erased. As a consequence of García’s decree, speaking about the violations committed by the armed forces has become unpatriotic for it means speaking against the nation’s heroes. This selective naming also excludes the participation of others who died during the conflict, and who defended their communities, such as the *ronderos*. García’s effort to name the

18 Ley 19679. The television program “Presencia Cultural” brought to light this issue two years earlier, and again in 2007 upon the recent controversy. A video of this program is available at <http://www.presenciacultural.com/blog/2007/01/14/el-ojo-que-llora-y-el-area-verde-intangible-del-campo-de-marte>. Date accessed November 15, 2007.

“heroes of the nation” reinforces a national narrative that makes Shining Path the clear villains and the military the nation’s saviors. It is a simplistic narrative that pushes to the margins other memories and narratives: for instance, this narrative ignores the question of why Shining Path initially held wide appeal among poor, highland communities, ignored and isolated from the Peruvian state; it effaces attempts by affected communities to defend themselves; it suppresses inter and intra-community conflict; it radically transforms the role the armed forces played in committing and exacerbating violence into the nation’s unquestioned defenders; and this narrative further absolves the responsibility of democratically elected governments in not responding to –and permitting– human rights violations by state agents.

By choosing to place the names of victims of subversive groups, the military, police, or self-defense groups, as gathered by the CVR, *El ojo que llora* memorial had taken a more open approach to naming. This site hoped to represent a broad spectrum of Peruvians who were victims of human rights violations. The intention of Mutal and supporters of this memorial project was not to manipulate select aspect of the past for a certain historical memory, but rather to create a space that would encourage a “culture of peace”, and condemn all crimes that led to death and disappearance of those named, no matter who committed them (Para que no se Repita, 2007). Additional names were later added after the unveiling of the monument, but the reasons appear affective rather than political: for instance, one schoolgirl visiting the site in December 2006 did not find the name of her father, a policeman. She added his name to one of the blank stones (*El Comercio*, 2006).

El ojo que llora is one of the few state-sanctioned memorysites in Peru. Though the funding came from private sources, it had the support of the Toledo government. Perhaps because it is alone in Lima, *El ojo que llora* has become such a “memory knot” for Peruvians, a meeting point for Peruvians to peacefully debate, and unfortunately violently confront, different interpretations over the past. Vargas Llosa in his opinion piece published in *El País* and *El Comercio* after the CIDH’s ruling encouraged Peruvians and tourists to come and see the monument soon. “Hurry”, he wrote, “because it is not impossible –Peru is a country of all possibilities– that a peculiar plot of ignorance, stupidity, and political fanaticism could do away with it” (Vargas Llosa, 2007).

Vargas Llosa’s words proved prescient. On September 22, Chilean courts extradited Alberto Fujimori to Peru to face charges of human rights violations and corruption¹⁹. The next day, some twelve to twenty –depending on

19 Fujimori seemed to gamble that Chile, a country that did not have a record of extraditing heads of state, would not send him to Peru. He came to Chile in November 2005 in order to presumably coordinate his political return.

the newspaper source— attacked and bound the park watchman, broke several stones including the central stone, “the eye”, and splashed the monument in neon orange, the color of the political movement “Sí, Cumple” that has kept Fujimori in the Peruvian political scene despite his absence. The supposed Fujimori supporters left behind a vandalized monument that now speaks not only of past violence, but its continued legacy in Peru (Fig. 7). According to an email that circulated among well-wishers a few days after the act of aggression, Lika Mutal wrote that the monument now looked like “Pachamama, the Mother Earth, is crying blood and this calls for reflection. This wound —impossible to restore— represents the wound which in Peru throughout its history was never healed and which during the years of terrorism became infested with evermore violence, intolerance and a dirty power game” (Mutal, 2007). It is difficult to state with certainty that the group who vandalized this site intended a message of wanting to “re attack and re murder the victims” of the preceding twenty years. Perhaps, more simply, they chose this site for a specific political statement: they contested Fujimori’s extradition to face charges for his involvement in the murder of nine students at La Catuta and for the murders at Barrios Altos, the victims whose names are among those inscribed in the stones of *El Ojo que Lloro*, and where their family members had celebrated the news of Fujimori’s extradition²⁰. What this recent act of vandalism clearly indicates, however, is that Peru is far from reaching a consensus over the past.

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CONCLUSION: PERU’S POLITICS OF TRUTH-TELLING AND MEMORIALIZATION

The present socio-political climate in Peru poses challenges to memorialization of the preceding two decades (1980-2000). The recent attacks on *El ojo que llora* show that there is very limited room and public space in contemporary Peru to talk peacefully about the past. Peru suffers from “long period of forgetting, or, better said, custom of repressing subaltern memories” (Degregori, 2004: 84). The conflict over *El ojo que llora* seems to confirm this practice of suppressing memories. According to the artist Natalia Iguíñez, calling the *El ojo que llora* a monument to terrorism “is to continue to generate confusion

He was detained at the request of the Peruvian government, and on September 21, 2007, the Supreme Court of Chile overturned an earlier decision thus approving Fujimori’s extradition. As the present García government has the support of *fujimoristas*, headed by Fujimori’s daughter Keiko, some analysts worry that a kind of García-Fujimori *entente* might result in a mock court case and minor punishment of Fujimori (Zibechi, 2007). Fujimori is presently serving a six-year sentence for abuse of power while being tried for his involvement in two massacres.

²⁰ A video of the meeting of Families of the Victims of La Catuta and Barrios Altos to celebrate the extradition of Fujimori is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw1pUjrhb28>.

over what happened, attempting to make a blank slate about everything and our [*limeños*'] complicity in the conflict that we have lived" (Bayly, 2007). In response to the vandalism of *El ojo que llora*, Gisela Ortiz Perea, sister to one of the student victims of La Catuta, said "not only did they end the lives of our family members, now they try to end our memory" (*Prensa Libre*, 2007; *La República*, 2007).



Figure 7. *El ojo que llora* after vandalism. Photo by Yael Rojas, Peru21 (With permission of photographer).

In the aftermath of violence, where the blame is spread widely and few social groups are willing to acknowledge the CVR's findings, competing narratives and memories jockey for primacy as "truth". The CVR report was one effort to create a public forum for discussion of the past and to establish a complex national narrative. Other public spaces include the public performances during the submission of the *Informe final* and the memorysite *El ojo que llora*. They are efforts to bring private and collective memories into the public

sphere, and in so doing create inclusive national narratives. García's plan to rename Peru's streets after select "heroes of the nation" presents a contentious "truth", one that excludes the possibility of a different interpretation of the role of the armed forces in the conflict and other possible heroes. Likewise, the recent vandalism of *El ojo que llora* attempts to close down the complex truths told by this memorysite: that the victims of Peru were many, from many different social groups, where the boundary between victim and perpetrator is, at times, far from clear.

Peru is presently engaged in the difficult task of establishing overarching narratives that provide frameworks for organizing personal and collective memories in the few public spaces open for the discussion of Peru's recent past. The conflict over *El ojo que llora* and García's recent decree point to a worrisome use of violence to contest opposing "truths", and the privileging of certain interpretations of the past at the expense of others. These interpretations stand in stark contrast to the memories and experiences painfully documented by the CVR, or publicly displayed in Ayacucho during the submission of the *Informe final*, or the names carefully engraved, painted, and repainted on the stones of *El ojo que llora*. —

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