For whom the eye cries: memory, monumentality, and the ontologies of violence in Peru

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This paper explores the polemic that erupted in early 2007 in Peru over the monument called The Eye that Cries (El ojo que llora). This monument, which commemorates the victims of Peru’s recent political violence, has become key to Peru’s ongoing ‘battles for memory’ or ‘memory struggles’, struggles that pit opposing memories of the decade and a half of violence in the 1980s and 1990s. I argue that this polemic offers a privileged perspective from which to consider the ways in which two opposing interpretations of Peru’s recent violent past have emerged in the last few years.

On the night of 23 November 2007, under the cover of darkness, a group of people entered a small gated section of Lima’s Campo de Marte (Martian Field). 1 One of the few green areas in a city of some eight million people, the Campo de Marte is also the scene of military parades on 28 July, Peru’s national day. The intruders were carrying buckets full of paint and sledgehammers. They had beaten and then tied up a municipal policeman guarding the area. They approached a central section of the gated area and proceeded to attack and throw the paint over a large rock jutting out of the ground. The following day, the attack’s symbolic content was plain for all to see. The paint used in the attack, a bright orange, is the colour associated with former president Alberto Fujimori and his ten-year rule of the country (1990–2000). 2 Only two days earlier the Chilean authorities had extradited Fujimori to Peru, where he is now standing trial for a range of charges, including corruption and human rights abuses. The rock that the attackers defaced is the central piece in a larger monument to the victims of Peru’s recent violent past. 3 This monument, called The Eye that Cries (El ojo que llora), has become key to Peru’s ongoing ‘battles for memory’ or ‘memory struggles’, struggles that pit opposing memories of the decade and a half of violence in the 1980s and 1990s.

The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación – CVR) published in 2003 laid bare the trauma of Peru’s internal war. The violence, the report revealed, had left a far greater number of victims, some 70,000, than had until then been assumed. 4 Although the report established that the responsibility and culpability for the violence lay ultimately with Shining Path, it also blamed the forces of order for the various abuses that they committed. More importantly, the report framed its analysis of the direct causes of violence in a broader socio-historical analysis which underlined the ways in which the violence reflected and reproduced entrenched and intersecting class, ethnic and gender inequalities that separate the included few from the excluded many in Peru. As Salomon Lerner,
the president of the CVR, noted in his speech of 28 August 2003, the report reveals that Peru is ‘a country where exclusion is so absolute that tens of thousands of citizens can disappear without anyone in integrated society, in the society of the non-excluded, noticing a thing’. The report was met with intense hostility by various sectors of Peruvian society and its recommendations have for the most part been ignored. The report of the CVR, and is part of a broader attempt by human rights organizations and civil society in Peru to keep open the debate on the broader reasons for Peru’s descent into violence; a debate that the report sought to initiate and that many, including the present administration of President Alan García, seek to silence. In February 2009 it emerged that the Garcia government had rejected a two million dollar donation from the German government to build and maintain a Museum of Memory that would have housed the Yuyanapaq photographic exhibition on the years of violence.

The Eye that Cries monument, as we will see, was inspired by the report of the CVR, and is part of a broader attempt by human rights organizations and civil society in Peru to keep open the debate on the broader reasons for Peru’s descent into violence; a debate that the report sought to initiate and that many, including the present administration of President Alan García, seek to silence. In February 2009 it emerged that the Garcia government had rejected a two million dollar donation from the German government to build and maintain a Museum of Memory that would have housed the Yuyanapaq photographic exhibition on the years of violence.

The attack on the monument was expressive of a desire to silence, indeed destroy, debate. But it was also expressive of the fact that Fujimori and his associates, now standing trial for historical misdeeds, could not erase history. As Slajov Zizek has recently noted: ‘The Chinese Cultural Revolution serves as a lesson […]: destroying old monuments proved not to be a true negation of the past. Rather it was an impotent passage à l’acte, an acting out which bears witness to the failure to get rid of the past’ (2008: 176). Indeed, the attack was a telling colophon to the polemic surrounding The Eye that Cries that erupted in early 2007 and which I discuss below. This polemic offers a privileged perspective from which to consider the ways in which two opposing interpretations of Peru’s recent violent past have emerged in the last few years. These interpretations are not necessarily identifiable with specific viewpoints or ideological stances (although there may be some coincidences). They do not correspond necessarily to a right-wing and a left-wing position. They do correspond to underlying ideas, assumptions perhaps, that shape particular analyses. I have no intention of providing a detailed study of these analyses. But I think it is useful to consider these underlying ideas; ideas that are often not fully articulated by those who draw upon them in their analyses. I argue, in the final section of this paper, that these ideas produce different conclusions about the causes of the violence that Peru experienced, about the responsibilities and culpabilities of the violent and non-violent actors, and about the ways in which Peruvian society should confront its recent violent past in a post-violent context. However, before briefly retracing the steps of the polemic that surrounded the sculpture, I will consider in a first section the ways in which the sculpture’s function, the memorialization of violence, inserts it into broader global processes of memorialization.

Memorializing the violence in Peru

On 3 January 2007, Peruvians woke to the news that a monument to terrorism existed in the country. The headline of the newspaper Expreso left no room for doubt: ‘There is a monument to terrorists!’ A brief article informed the newspaper’s readers, in a language that has sadly become rather common in some of the printed press in Peru, that the monument had been built ‘by the dreadful Truth Commission created by the champagne socialists (izquierda caviar) who rose to power in the shadow of Valentin
Paniagua and Alejandro Toledo. According to the article, the monument consisted of a ‘sculpture surrounded by circles made up of little stones which have been inscribed with the names of terrorists mixed in with the names of innocent victims’. The article further indicated that Luis Enrique Ocrospoma, the mayor of Jesus María, the district where the monument is located, had declared that the neighbours of the district ‘are outraged by this situation’ and that it was necessary to ‘safeguard the interests of the neighbours, and this implies their right to life. We are against all acts of violence, and for this reason we reject tributes to terrorist delinquents who committed execrable crimes’.

What was odd about this headline is that the monument in question was none other than *The Eye that Cries*, created by Lika Mutal, a Dutch sculptor residing in Peru. The monument had been inaugurated more than a year earlier, on 28 August 2005. According to the webpage of APRODEH, a human rights organization, the *Yuyanapaq* photographic exhibition organized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had inspired Mutal to design a sculpture that ‘in addition to being a tribute to the victims, will be an efficient instrument to make the population gain greater awareness of what happened in Peru during the years of internal armed conflict and to promote reflection and invite the memory and construction of a more just, democratic and solidary Peru’. The sculpture, which consists of a large rock from which water spurts surrounded by small pebbles inscribed with the names of some 30,000 victims of the violence, had been conceived as ‘a space whose purpose was to pay tribute to and preserve the memory of all the victims and to bring to light Peru’s recent history’. The sculpture is the centrepiece of a larger project, called *La alameda de la memoria* (*The Boulevard of Memory*), which was to incorporate ‘additional spaces whose function will be to provide information on the internal war [...] and to present the “Quipus of memory” elaborated in 2005 as part of the effort to raise consciousness and as a symbolic reparation to victims of political violence’. The webpage adds that the sculptural project ‘brings together the efforts of a range of civil society institutions and the Municipality of Jesus María, which agreed to bring the proposal to fruition in the Campo de Marte’.

*The Eye that Cries* monument presents a departure in terms of Lima’s monumental and sculptural landscape. The expansion in public sculpture which occurred in mid-nineteenth-century Lima, as documented by Natalia Majluf, produced monuments that were ‘like disciplinary lighthouses, an attempt to create and shape a collective memory and to create a national spatiality’ (1994). This project failed, Majluf concludes, because the elite vision it sought to project was overtaken by the ‘irruption of the popular’. The elites’ projected cultural hegemony failed to become dominant and the monuments today stand as ‘exclusive and exclusionary spaces’. It would be unfair to accuse Mutal of having created a ‘disciplinary lighthouse’ (for one thing hers is a wounded piece of art, an art of suffering, not of domination), but she evidently shares with her predecessors the belief in the sculpture’s capacity ‘to create and shape a collective memory and to create a national spatiality’. But I would suggest that the monument does more interesting work than its sculptor herself recognizes since it invites both a collective memory and an individuated memory as part of, but not subsumed within, the collective. The pebbles inscribed with the names of the victims of the violence both help remember (in a cognitive sense) those who died but also help re-member (in an embodied sense) those whose bodies were dis-membered by the violence. The monument serves not simply to remember the past but more importantly to inscribe literally into the most basic stuff of Peruvian territoriality
(its pebbles) the names of those who were erased from it by the violence. In fact, by virtue of the marginality of the vast majority of those who died to official Peruvian nationhood, the inscription of their names in the pebbles should be seen not as a recording of their death but as their coming into being as actually existing, if dead, Peruvians.

In short, the function of *The Eye that Cries* is the memorialization of the violence that Peru experienced as a tribute to its victims. As suggested by the name of monumental complex in which the sculpture is located, *The Boulevard of Memory*, the civil society organizations that backed the construction of the monument sought to privilege memory as the concept through which to confront collectively the past and, concretely, the political violence that the country experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. In this way, the sculptor and promoters of *The Eye that Cries* inserted it into a broader phenomenon: the rise of the ‘culture of memory’, the ‘industry of memory’ or even the ‘empire of memory’ in Peru, which, in turn, inserts Peru into a far broader process. In order to get a sense of the memory phenomenon in Peru it suffices to note the number of recent local publications that have the word ‘memory’ in the title. This raises the question: where does this interest in memory come from? Why is memory favoured over other concepts related to the past (such as history)? What consequences does the focus on memory (some would say the obsession for memory) have?

It may be worth briefly examining the rise of memory as a cultural and political phenomenon in the last few decades. According to Andreas Huyssen, the source of the memory phenomenon is to be found in the decolonization processes and in the social movements of the 1960s, as well in the rise of the ‘Other’, but even more so in the debate surrounding the Holocaust that occurred in the 1980s in the light of various media events (such as the TV series *Holocaust*) and the anniversaries of a series of key events in the rise of the Third Reich. In the 1990s, the genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo contributed to extending the memory discourse on the Holocaust beyond its original point of reference. In Europe and in the United States, Huyssen argues, memory has developed unusual commercial dimensions, in evidence in the rise of the nostalgia industry, the interest in the construction of museums, and what Huyssen calls ‘self-musealization’, that is, the popular obsession for video cameras, life memories and confessional literature (a phenomenon increasingly subject to technological transformation as witnessed by the rise of personal blogs and cyberspaces such as Myspace and Facebook) (2000: 22–25).

Alongside the commercialization of memory, we are witnessing the increasing political use of memory, ‘ranging from a mobilization of mythic pasts to support aggressively chauvinist or fundamentalist politics (e.g., post-communist Serbia and Hindu populism in India) to fledgling attempts, in Argentina and Chile, to create public spheres of “real” memory that will counter the politics of forgetting pursued by postdictatorship regimes either through “reconciliation” and official amnesties or through repressive silencing’. But as Huyssen points out, ‘the fault line between mythic past and real past is not always that easy to draw – one of the conundrums of any politics of memory anywhere. The real can be mythologized just as the mythic may engender strong reality effects. In sum, memory has become a cultural obsession of monumental proportions across the globe’ (2000: 26). Pierre Nora may be right to argue that the memory discourse is an attempt to confront the anxiety produced by a threatening globalization by anchoring lived experience in the local, the intimate,
and the community-based.  

But, insists Huyssen, ‘securing the past is no less risky an enterprise than securing the future. Memory, after all, can be no substitute for justice, and justice itself will inevitably be entangled in the unreliability of memory’ (2000: 37).

One of the most salient aspects of the memory phenomenon has been the new interest in what we could call monumentality, that is the cultural and political use of public monuments. The memorialization of the Holocaust in particular, but also of the slave trade, of the two World Wars, of decolonization in Africa and Asia, and most recently of the attack on New York’s Twin Towers, among other historical traumas, has generated a series of debates on monumentality and memory that cannot be properly addressed here. However, it is important to recognize that these debates on (historical) monumentality, commemoration, collective remembrance and ‘sites of memory’ represent a broader frame of reference within which the polemic surrounding The Eye that Cries can be understood.

Although that polemic reflected in some ways local – Peruvian – prerogatives, the ways in which Peruvians confront the past, as well as remembering and forgetting, echo global processes and have a global resonance.

The focus on memory in the Peruvian context is intimately, although not exclusively, linked to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As Carlos Iván Degregori, one of the former commissioners (and one of Peru’s foremost anthropologists), notes in a recently published article, the ‘genealogy’ of the CVR points to an attempt, beginning in the mid 1990s, on the one hand, to counteract the forgetting of the violence that Peru had experienced, a forgetting that was being imposed by the Fujimori government (a forgetting, moreover, that appeared consecrated by the amnesty law of 1995) and, on the other, the official fujimorista narrative, that presented itself, as the official pinochetista narrative in Chile had done, as a ‘memory of salvation’. According to Degregori, despite the attempts, from within the corridors of power, to impose both forgetting and a ‘memory of salvation’, ‘there existed always [...] narratives that questioned that official history. The most visible were those produced by human rights organisations or the opposition press. But there were also the silenced memories, reduced to the local or family context, out of fear or and because of a lack of channels of expression in the public sphere’ (2004: 76).

In this interpretation, the ‘official history’ of the violence is expressed as a product of a dialectic between two memories in struggle with one another: one, from above, produced by fujimorismo, and the other, from below, produced by the human rights organizations, democratic civil society organizations and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which formulates it most clearly. The armed conflict is replaced by another conflict over how to comprehend the past. ‘To remember’ and to make audible the ‘silenced memories’ thus becomes the fundamental challenge that the CVR sets itself and more importantly, proposes to Peruvian society. As Degregori makes clear: ‘to move from a vague passive sympathy to an active memory, not only showing solidarity with the victims, but also capable of formulating new meanings of the past and a new political proposal for the future, is the difficult challenge of the years to come’ (2004: 85). It is no surprise then that the activities organized by the CVR, as well as their publications, reprise and celebrate this idea: hence the organization of the photographic exhibition Yuyanapaq – Para recordar (In order to remember); hence the title of the book that compiles Salomon Lerner’s speeches: La rebelión de la memoria (The Rebellion of Memory); hence the projected construction of the Boulevard of Memory.
It is easy to understand the use (indeed, perhaps, the abuse) of the memory discourse by the CVR and by post-CVR projects/initiatives. Memory, unlike history, and particularly ‘official history’, appears to be (although it seldom is) something more immediate, authentic, even more democratic. The idea, as Degregori notes, is to forge an ‘active’ collective memory, that is to say a memory that is politically and culturally usable. Degregori understands well that, as Joanna Bourke has pointed out, ‘the collective does not possess a memory, only barren sites upon which individuals inscribe shared narratives, infused with power relations’ (2004: 474). Collective memory, in other words, is as constructed or imagined as history; memory ‘is not “something” that exists in some ethereal sphere, beyond culture’ (Bourke, 2004: 484). To the ‘memory as salvation’ (memoria salvadora) constructed by Fujimori and peddled by his cronies is opposed a ‘democratic’ or perhaps ‘inclusionary’ memory, which posits a different reading of the past and a new vision of the future. And, as I discuss below, this is precisely the memory that The Eye that Cries seeks to promote. As Lika Mutal explains (to repeat), the monument was designed so that ‘in addition to being a tribute to the victims, it will [become] an efficient instrument to make the population gain greater awareness of what happened in Peru during the years of internal armed conflict and to promote reflection and invite the memory of and construction of a more just, democratic and solidary Peru’.19

However, although it is easy to share the desire to forge a collective memory, or, better still, a historical consciousness, that can help create a ‘more just, democratic and solidary Peru’, it is important to reflect upon the limits of memory projects. 20 Wolf Kansteiner is not wrong when he argues that those peoples who have lived through traumatic war experiences ‘only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their visions, and if their vision meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups, for instance, political elites or parties’ (2002: 187–188). It is therefore in the political sphere and not merely in the symbolic or monumental sphere that the struggles for memory must be conducted. Again, as Huyssen argues, ‘memory, after all, can be no substitute for justice’ (2000: 37). It is most likely the lack of any real political power that forces those who share the ideas reflected in the report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission to act primarily in the sphere of representation. But it is important to recognize that as long as the ideas about the past and about the national project included in the CVR report and in The Eye that Cries are not expressed and represented in a concrete political project it is unlikely that this inclusive memory will become the national memory. This is precisely what the polemic over The Eye that Cries demonstrates.

The polemic

If the The Eye that Cries monument already existed in August 2005 and if the Municipality of the district had collaborated in its creation, how do we then explain the headline in Expreso (to recall: ‘There is a monument to terrorists!’)? The immediate explanation resides in the ruling of 25 November 2006 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CIDH), the highest judicial instance in the region, on the massacre that occurred in the Castro Castro penitentiary in 1992, when 41 inmates were executed
extra-judicially by police officers and soldiers sent in to quell a riot. The ruling, which runs to 200 pages, concludes that the Peruvian state violated the right to life of 41 persons, and establishes that the state has to provide indemnities to the relatives of the dead and that ‘the State must carry out, within a one-year period, a public act of acknowledgment of its responsibility in relation to the violations declared in this Judgment and as an apology to the victims and for the satisfaction of their next of kin, in a public ceremony with the presence of high State authorities and of the victims and their next of kin, and it must transmit said act through the media, including the transmission on radio and television’. At the same time, the CIDH established that ‘the State must guarantee that, within a one-year period, all the persons declared as deceased victims in the present Judgment are represented in the monument called “The Eye that Cries”, for which it must coordinate, with the next of kin of the mentioned victims the realization of an act in which they may include an inscription with the name of the victim as corresponds pursuant to the monument’s characteristics’.

The CIDH’s ruling caused consternation among the political class and public opinion in Peru. President Alan García declared that ‘it is indignant that a tribunal has reached a conclusion that harms a country that was the victim of the insanity and diabolic destruction of a sect that sought to destroy our Fatherland’. According to García, Peru would not accept the ruling since it made no sense for the victims to indemnify their victimizers: ‘if the court wants to punish those responsible, then it should go ahead and do it, but the people have been wronged and they cannot be forced to pay, with their taxes, hundreds of millions [of dollars] to those who destroyed the country’. Regarding the symbolic act that the CIDH ordered the Peruvian state to perform, the President, perhaps a little confused by the reference to Mutal’s sculpture in the ruling, suggested in a tone that mixed sarcasm and bravura, ‘I have to assume that the Court will have to come here in order to build it, because it will not find a single Peruvian willing to place a brick in favour of the assassins of Peru’.

The ruling unleashed a polemic that illustrated, and reflected, how different sectors of Peruvian society made sense of, and sought to represent, the recent violent past. The differentiated reactions to the ruling and, as we will see, to the Eye that Cries, arguably, are expressions of the differentiated interpretations that exist in Peru of the causes of, and nature of, the violence. As such, the polemics over the ruling of the CIDH, and over The Eye that Cries, illustrated and reflected the polarization of Peruvian society over the recent violent past, and, in particular, over the interpretation of the recent violent past that the CVR had put forward in its report. For those opposed to the CVR, the polemics were further evidence, and channels for demonstrating, that the final analysis the CVR was, in the best case, misguided or, in the worst, philo-terrorist. For those who supported the CVR, the polemics were further evidence of, and channels for demonstrating, the incapacity of conservative sectors in Peruvian society to understand the need to end the country’s culture of impunity for human rights violators and to uphold the rule of law.

Many viewed the ruling of the CIDH as a serious error and some as a pro-Shining Path act. The Peruvian representative to the OAS, Antero Flores Araoz, commented that ‘we know that many of them were terrorists, which means that to accept or decree that they be honoured and indemnified is, frankly, an excess’. According to Cardinal Juan Luís Cipriani, the ruling demonstrated that the CIDH espoused ‘a clear ideology in favour of terrorism’. The director of Correo, a right-wing daily, used the ruling as
an opportunity to engage in his favourite activity (to accuse the ‘caviar’ left of all the ills of the country) and published an editorial titled ‘The Eye that Cries is Hidrogo’s’ where he berated journalists and left-wing intellectuals for their silence regarding ‘the policeman called Hidrogo [. . .], the martyr, who during the prison uprising had his eyes gouged out by the senderistas [Shining Path militants] and who suffered a thousand other barbarities before he was rescued and before he died thanks, no doubt, to divine pity’.28

These views were countered by others, who defended the ruling, arguing that it was the duty of the State to always act within the law, which implied recognizing past errors, the jurisdiction of the CIDH on this matter, and the need to comply with its rulings. A communiqué published in various newspapers and signed by Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru’s foremost novelist and a former presidential candidate) and Gustavo Gutiérrez (a Dominican priest and one of the intellectual fathers of Liberation Theology) among others suggested that ‘just as it is necessary to carry out fair trials that result in severe sentences for criminals, it is equally necessary to recognize one’s errors and crimes, to sanction those responsible and to make reparations as mandated by law. To not do so would be to renounce the very rule of law that the terrorists sought to destroy. This does not imply an equivalence between the victims of Shining Path with the terrorist victimizers. It implies demanding of the State an ethical and legal behaviour that is consonant with democracy’.29

Others, though they recognized that the ruling had to be observed, disagreed with its essence. Martin Tanaka, a political scientist and former director of the prestigious Institute of Peruvian Studies, declared that ‘the ruling contains elements that are highly objectionable’ and ironically commented on the idea that Peru should ‘apologize to the members of the Central Committee of Shining Path’. Regarding the suggestion in the ‘concurring opinion’ of Judge Antônio Augusto Cançado Trindade, one of the five judges of the CIDH, that ‘many of the victims bombed in the brutal armed attack of the Castro Castro Prison resemble Joans of Arc of the end of the [twentieth] century . . . [like] the historical character, they had their ideas to free the social environment, for which they were imprisoned, some submitted to a trial without means of defence, and some were not even given this opportunity’ 30, Tanaka retorted: ‘although the crimes of the forces of order are reproachable, this does not turn the murdered senderistas into saints’.31 Finally, Tanaka objected to the recommendation of the CIDH regarding Lika Mutal’s sculpture and argued that ‘with regard to this, I subscribe entirely to the statement issued by the promoters of this project: “It is inadmissible that The Eye that Cries be used for acts that aim to forget [as was indicated by the Truth and reconciliation Commission] that the internal war that began in 1980 was caused by the criminal decision of Shining Path to destroy the State and society in Peru”’.32

It is interesting to note that this last opinion was shared by the sculptor of the monument. Asked by Doris Bayly of El Comercio newspaper whether she would include the names of the 41 assassinated senderistas in the monument, Lika Mutal answered: ‘I would not. They were criminals, murdered outside the rule of law, but criminal nonetheless. If some form of reparation needs to be paid, perhaps it could be focused on putting right what they damaged’.32 Similarly, Salomón Lerner, the former dean of the Catholic University and former President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, indicated that the monument did not include the names of terrorists: ‘any person who has taken the trouble to visit The Eye that Cries will have been able to
confirm that the names are those of the victims of the violence that devastated Peru. There are the names of months-old children who have died, of old women, and also of members of the forces of order who sacrificed their lives. Not of terrorists’. As this shows, the polemic over the CIDH ruling brought to the fore a key question that divided how Peruvians understood the recent violent past: who were the victims and who were the victimizers of Peru’s recent violent past? Or, to be more precise, under what circumstances could victimizers be considered victims?

The polemic over the ruling of the CIDH dovetailed with the polemic over The Eye that Cries when, on 11 January, Correo announced on its front page: ‘Terrorists in the Eye that Cries – Unbelievable! The 41 senderistas from Castro Castro have already been honoured!’ During a visit to the monument, two of the newspaper’s reporters had found ‘the inscription of Carlos Aguilar Garay and Roberto River Espinoza, whose names appear on two separate stones (several rocks [sic] have been wiped out by the sun) next to the inscription of the year they died: 1992. They died in Castro Castro’. This discovery, according to the newspaper, established that the ‘obviously unjustified’ homage/tribute ordered by the CIDH ‘has already been performed by those who built the monument’ and that these people ‘will have to answer to the nation for an action as unjustified as it is absurd’. Meanwhile, the mayor of Jesus María declared that he would forthwith remove the names of the senderistas from the monument ‘[to preserve] national dignity and out of respect for the [district’s] neighbours’.

Many agreed that the senderistas should not be included among the victims of the violence memorialized in The Eye that Cries. Lika Mutal herself declared that she had had no knowledge of the presence of their names. She declared: ‘The Eye that Cries was created as a space to awaken the consciousness of all Peruvians. I have only now realised that the lists of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Human Rights Ombudsman contained the total register of victims. They gave me the lists to use as I saw fit. We included all the names in what amounted to a mystical action’ [‘casi como una actitud mística incluimos todos los nombres’]. In other words, according to Mutal, the inclusion of the names of the senderistas had been a mistake. At the very least, it was a consequence not of a conscious decision to include the names of the senderistas, but rather of the fact that they had been considered victims of the political violence by the CVR and the Ombudsman’s Office. But as I have already pointed out, Mutal believed that their names should not figure in the monument, because she considered them to be criminals. In a sense, Mutal agreed with Aldo Maríategui when the journalist berated her: ‘No, señora Mutal. Don’t come to me with poems about reconciliation and articles by Mario Vargas Llosa (geniuses also can slip up), there are dead people and then there are dead people. One thing is the victim and another thing is the victimizer. Take those assassins out of there’. However, not everyone agreed. Carlos Tapia, a former member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, declared around that time that he believed that the senderistas’ names should be included in the monument because he considered them to be victims of the internal violence.

The discovery of the presence of the names of murdered senderistas in the monument sharpened the controversy. The mayor of Jesus María declared that he would put a halt to the projected phases of the monument and that 200,000 soles destined for the construction of the Quipu of memory would be used for children’s playgrounds. He also suggested that the offending stones should be removed. This provoked a series of public reactions, including that of Francisco Soberón, the director
of APRODEH, a human rights organization, who declared: ‘we believe that no discriminations should occur because all the names that appear [in the stones] are of victims of terrorism or of extrajudicial killings’; and that of the artist Victor Delfín, who suggested that the mayor’s proposal was an act of ‘ignorance’. Around that time, marches and pickets in favour and against the monument were organized.

‘Is there a way of solving this impasse?’ asked Mario Vargas Llosa in an article published in the Spanish daily El País and reproduced in El Comercio. ‘Yes’, he answered, ‘Turn the stones with the names upside down, concealing them temporarily from public light, until time heals the wounds, appeases the tempers and establishes the consensus that will allow us all to accept that the horror that Peru lived as a consequence of the attempt of Shining Path – to repeat a Maoist revolution in the Peruvian Andes – and the terrible abuses and wickedness that the forces of order committed during the struggle against terror, stained us all, by commission or omission, and that only with this acceptance can we start to build a democracy worthy of the name, where disgraces such as those that soiled our eighties and nineties are inconceivable’.

Vargas Llosa’s proposal was met with approval in the media. El Comercio declared that ‘Vargas Llosa’s proposal to turn around some of the stones while tempers calm down is sensible’.

Reading the polemic

As I suggested in the previous section, the polemic regarding The Eye that Cries monument was framed by a broader debate that resulted from the ruling of the CIDH. It also coincided with a debate regarding a proposal put forward by the government to establish the death penalty for child rapists and for terrorists. At the time, many observers concluded that the debates over the CIDH ruling and the death penalty proposal were, in effect, political manoeuvres. Some suggested that what the government wanted was to avoid paying the reparations indicated by the CIDH to the victims of violence caused by agents of the state. Others argued that what was sought was to favour the fugitive former president Alberto Fujimori, and more broadly a supposed alliance between Apristas and Fujimoristas, by forcing the country into a situation where it would have to leave the jurisdiction of the CIDH (which was convenient for Alan García, Fujimori and all those who sought to re-establish a Mafioso order in the country). Others, still, argued that what was sought was to discredit the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

All of these interpretations have some or a lot of truth in them. But I think that if the debates discussed above hide political manoeuvres they also reflect, more interestingly, conflicting interpretations regarding Peru’s recent violent past. In this section, I will attempt to elucidate these interpretations, focusing first on how the causes of violence are understood, then turning to examine how responsibilities and culpabilities for the violence are assigned, and, finally, evaluating what post-violent panoramas present themselves in the light of these interpretations. I think it is necessary to understand these different and, as we will see, irreconcilable interpretations in order to get a better understanding of the current debates. As I noted in the introduction to this paper, these interpretations do not correspond strictly to ideological positions or political interests, even when coincidences exist. They are
extrapolations from the debate whose function is to establish the outside boundaries of the debate; its extreme and containing limits but also, for this very reason, its enabling limits. As the analysis below suggests, the polemic I have narrated in the first section reveals, beyond particular ideological positions or political interests, two distinct ontologies of violence, that is to say, two underlying discourses on the nature or the very essence of violence in Peru.42

Let us examine the interpretation of the causes of 'the violence' in Peru. According to a first interpretation, the violence was a product of the actions of a criminal gang of terrorists. Although this interpretation admits that some of the violence can be attributed to the actions of the State, actions that in some cases were framed within the legitimate exercise of state violence and sometimes not, in the final analysis, according to this view, there would not have been political violence in Peru had it not been for the fact that Shining Path initiated an armed struggle in 1980. The violence was caused therefore by the decision of Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán, seconded by his followers, to initiate a revolution in the country. The causes of the violence must therefore be sought with Shining Path itself, i.e. in its ideology and in its military-political structure, which are understood as expressive of the personalities of the members of Shining Path, and in particular, of that of its leader. According to this interpretation, violence is, in its nature or essence, a product of the very nature of the violent actors: that is to say, this interpretation suggests that violence was a product of the inherently violent character of those who perpetrated that violence. If there was violence in Peru, this interpretation suggests, it was because, in their very essence, the senderistas were violent.

This interpretation is contradicted by a second interpretation which argues that violence was a consequence of the unresolved rifts that divide Peruvian society. Violence according to this interpretation is expressive or indeed a product of structural conditions intrinsic to Peruvian society, perhaps its very 'mode of production'.43 Violence can only properly be understood within a broader analytical framework that necessarily takes into account factors such as economic inequality, racial and gender discrimination, the weakness of the nation-state, the predisposition to authoritarianism, among other factors (to some extent this interpretation aligns political violence with other forms of 'daily', 'common', 'endemic' or 'unbound' violence) (Moser and McIlwayne, 2004: 3).44 In its most extreme formulation, this interpretation suggests that had Shining Path not emerged when it did, the prevailing conditions in Peru would have brought about the emergence of another organization with similar goals to those of Shining Path with similar consequences for the country. The violence, this interpretation suggests, was not a consequence of the fact that the senderistas were in essence violent but of the structural conditions that were favourable to the emergence of a violent order. Although this interpretation allows for a differentiation with regard to the legitimacy of senderista violence or state violence, in the final analysis it sees both as a product of a structure favourable to the expansion of violence as the grammar of social relations in Peru.

From these two interpretations of the causes of political violence result two understandings of the responsibilities and culpabilities of the violent and non-violent actors. According to the first interpretation, the responsibility and culpability lies entirely with Shining Path, since this organization, and this organization alone, initiated the violence. If the state, through the armed forces, committed acts of violence that led
to the death of innocent people in the context of the war against Shining Path, then the responsibility for these acts also lies with Shining Path since these deaths would not have occurred had it not been for the need to combat the senderista insurgency. The responsibility and the culpability for violence lie exclusively with one of the violent actors. The non-violent actors, according to this interpretation, are mere victims while the non-senderista violent actors (the forces of order) are also victims.

This analysis is countered by a second, which argues that the responsibilities and culpabilities for the violence are broader. If the violence was expressive of structural problems intrinsic to Peruvian society, then it follows that, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the violence lies with Peruvian society. Given that the violence, in this interpretation, is seen as a grammar that articulates social relations, the violence perpetrated by Shining Path becomes one form of violence among many. However, this interpretation allows for a greater censure of senderista violence, because although it sees violence as a structural phenomenon, it does not fail to establish criteria for the legitimacy of different forms of violence. In other words, this interpretation does not justify senderista violence (as could be inferred) but rather inserts the censure of senderista violence within a broader censure of the society that produces this violence, establishing a differentiation as regards the severity of the violence but in no way minimizing it. At the same time, although state violence in this interpretation also appears as expressive of a violent structure, it is not for this reason justified or minimized.

At the same time, this structural interpretation of violence extends the responsibility and culpability for the violence beyond the violent actors to encompass Peruvian society as a whole. And this extension presents a very problematic ambiguity. On the one hand, the responsibility and culpability of non-violent actors is necessarily inferior stricto sensu to that of the violent actors. But, on the other hand, the responsibility of non-violent actors is absolute, given that it is society as a whole which produces the grammar of violence through its inability to resolve the problems that give rise to violence, that is, to repeat, economic inequality, racial or gender discrimination, the weakness of the nation-state, the predisposition to authoritarianism etc. In a sense, this interpretation posits that if violence occurred it was not because, in their essence, the senderistas were violent but rather because, in its essence, Peru is violent. In other words, what differentiates these two discourses is the identification of the individual social body (albeit limited to the senderistas) or the collective social body (extensive to all Peruvians) within which resides the source of violence.

Finally, two distinct conclusions regarding how Peruvian society must face up to the recent violent past in a post-violent context arise from these interpretations of the essence of political violence and the associated responsibilities and culpabilities for the violence. According to a first interpretation, given that the source of violence resides exclusively within Shining Path, the post-violent scenario is straightforward: the senderistas, who bear sole responsibility for the violence, must be subjected to judicial and moral punishment. According to a second interpretation, given that the source of the violence resides more generally within Peruvian society, the post-violent scenario is more complicated: on the one hand, all violent actors who perpetrated forms of non-legitimate violence must be subjected to judicial and moral punishment. But since the violence according to this second interpretation cannot be reduced to the violence of the violent actors, then it befalls upon the whole of society to take part, first, in a collective process of atonement, and second, in the development of a non-violent grammar to articulate Peruvian society.
I believe that this reading, whose purpose is to lay bare the ontologies of violence that underpin each interpretation of political violence in Peru, allows us to understand better the polemic that arose regarding the monument of Lika Mutal. Clearly, from the perspective of the first interpretation the presence of the names of senderistas among the stones that represent the victims of the violence is nonsensical. If the monument is a tribute to the victims of the violence, then it is absurd to include the names of the victimizers, of those responsible for and culpable of the violence. However, seen from the perspective of the second interpretation, the presence of the 41 stones with the names of the senderistas murdered in the Castro Castro penitentiary is insufficient. If the purpose of the monument is to pay tribute to the victims of the violence, then it follows that, from this perspective, the names of all senderistas, and not just those of the senderistas illegally murdered by the state, should be included. If the violence was structural, if the source of the violence resides within all Peruvians, then all Peruvians were both victims and victimizers. The degree of responsibility may have varied depending on the concrete actions perpetrated by each Peruvian but, in the final analysis, all Peruvians were both victims and victimizers.

Clearly, these are conclusions that arise from a somewhat abstract analysis and that reflect extremes that no do not correspond, as I have already noted, to actually existing interpretations (although, again, there may be some coincidences). It may be worth stressing that the second interpretation is not germane to the conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as some may hurriedly conclude. More generally, I agree with the anthropologist Kimberley Theidon that an effective approximation to the violence that Peru experienced requires us to abandon the binary logic that dominates both academic production and political activism and to, instead, listen to ‘the polyphony that interrupts the metanarrative’ (2003). The binary (re)construction of interpretations of violence performed in this section is not intended to suggest that these are the only possible or extant metanarratives on political violence in Peru. Doubtless, the vast majority of the Peruvian population interprets the violent past in ways that cannot be reduced to one or the other interpretation delineated here. But the analysis offered does allow a different and perhaps more complete understanding of the polemic that surrounded The Eye that Cries. In focusing exclusively on how the polemic reflected various hidden political manoeuvres, political commentators failed to see the deeper and more complex dimension of this controversy (at the very least they tended to fail to take it into account in their analyses or to articulate them in a sufficiently clear way): that is that the polemic reflected, and in so doing, (re)constituted, the differentiated and irreconcilable interpretations of the essence of violence in Peru.

Conclusion

In July 2008, as the Fujimori trial entered its eighth month, Vladimiro Montesinos, the former president’s intelligence chief and, for many, the mastermind of the regime’s repressive policies, was called to give testimony. After denying that his former boss had any responsibility for the human rights abuses of which he was accused, he responded to the questions posed by the prosecutor by saying that he could not remember every detail, ‘even though I have a great memory’. We should probably not read too much into this comment, but it does neatly illustrate how selective forms of remembering and forgetting are central to the ways in which Peruvians continue to engage the recent
violent past. Although Montesinos, who faces a long stint in prison, has personal reasons to favour forgetting, many in Peru share the idea that, as the polemic surrounding *The Eye that Cries* illustrates, the violent past is best forgotten. This is not as easy to achieve as some would like. In May, forensic scientists began to excavate a mass grave in the hamlet of Putis, in Ayacucho, where some 420 villagers, including a number of children, were executed by the armed forces after having been made to dig their own mass grave in late 1983. In June 2008, another mass grave containing 37 bodies was uncovered in neighbouring Huancavelica. Some had been executed by Shining Path and others by the armed forces in 1991. The current García administration, with various human rights abuses skeletons in the closet of its own (García was in power in the period 1985–1990 and various documented human rights abuses occurred under his watch), is doing its very best to hinder the work of human rights organizations in the country and, in so doing, is articulating its own project of remembering and forgetting. It is a project in which the memory promoted by *The Eye that Cries* has no role.

I tried to visit *The Eye that Cries* in mid April 2007. Looking for the monument, I was struck by the fact that when I asked people who were out for a stroll or simply resting in the Campo de Marte where I would find the sculpture the answer invariably was that they had never heard of it. After a short walk, I came upon an area closed off with six-foot-high railings and a padlocked door. Through the railings I could make out the large central rock and the labyrinth of small stones that surround it. I was unable to confirm whether the offending stones had been removed or turned over. A few months later, of course, the attack on the monument momentarily put *The Eye that Cries* again at the centre of public debate in Peruvian society. I suspect, however, that today, and despite the memory jolts that each new unearthed mass grave represents, most of the people out for a stroll or resting in the Campo de Marte still may not have much of an idea where the monument is located, let alone be concerned with what it stands for. *The Eye that Cries*, I would argue, seeks to promote a memory which some Peruvians reject as false and others admit as true but care little for. It is not so much a site of memory as a para-site of memory, both because it fails to function fully as a shared site of memory or remembrance, but also because for many its real purpose is to infect and weaken the collective body by promoting a collective memory that, so it is claimed, is tantamount to a eulogy for terrorism. But the Fujimorista attack on the monument of November 2007 suggests that in spite of this *The Eye that Cries* remains a threat to the politics of forgetting and the ‘memory of salvation’. It represents a kernel of a democratic and inclusive project that may still form the basis of a more solidary and just Peru. It is therefore a source of hope even as, or rather precisely because, it forces us to confront memories of violence that continue to divide Peruvians.

Notes

1 This is a revised and updated version of the article ‘*El ojo que llora*, las ontologías de la violencia, y la opción por la memoria en el Perú’, in Hueso Húmero 50 (2007), pp. 53 – 74.
2 On Fujimori’s government, see, among others, Conaghan (2005) and Carrió (2006).
3 On Shining Path and Peru’s recent violent past, the best introduction remains Stern (1998).
4 Until that point, most estimates suggested 20,000 to 30,000 victims.
7 For a different reading of the polemic see Hite (2007). For an intelligent analysis of the various ways in which Peru’s recent violent past has been represented, see Milton (2007).
8 Although the present Peruvian government and sectors of Peruvian society, and particularly the right-wing press, are broadly supportive of George Bush’s foreign policy, the use of the term ‘terrorist’ in this context has little to do with the post-9/11 ‘war on terror’. The use of the term ‘terrorist’ to refer to the Shining Path, the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA), or, indeed, to a number of other perceived threats to the status quo (such as human rights organizations, trade unions and students) has been a constant since the 1980s, as has resistance to its use by several Peruvian human rights organizations and left-wing intellectuals.
9 Expreso, 3 January 2007. I would like to thank Victor Vich, who made available to me his collection of press cuttings on this topic.
11 A quipu is an Inca tool, made up a series of knotted strings, which was used to keep record. On the quipu’s traditional use see, among others, Quiter and Urton (2002).
12 The concept ‘culture of memory’ is used by Huysen (2000); ‘industry of memory’, among others, by Klein (2000); and ‘empire of memory’ by Juliá (2006).
14 For a general perspective on the uses of ‘memory’ in the social sciences and in history, see, among others, Olick and Robbins (1998), Klein (2000), Kansteiner (2002).
15 This is the key idea contained in the concept lieu de mémoire introduced by French historian Pierre Nora and his collaborators. See Nora (1989) for an introduction to the broader project of historical re-writing of the French past through the lens of memory; a project which produced some 5000 pages of print, 133 articles, and involved 103 collaborators.
16 See, for example, Nelson and Olin (2003).
17 On Holocaust memorials, see Young (1993) and Carrier (2005). On the Twin Towers, see, for example, Zuber (2006).
18 As I have already remarked, one of the characteristics of this literature is a rather prolific generation of competing concepts. See, among others, Gillis (1994) and Winter and Sivan (1999).
20 On historical consciousness in Peru, see Drinot (2004).
21 A study of this massacre is included in the Final report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission; see: http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/pdf/TOMO%20VII/Casos%20Ilustrativos-UIE/2.68.%20Penal%20CASTRO%20CASTRO.pdf.
23 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of the Miguel Castro-Castro Prison against Peru, Judgment of November 25, 2006, p. 167. Available at: www.corteidh.or.cr.
24 Perú21, 31 December 2006.
25 Perú21, 10 January 2007.
26 Perú21, 2 January 2007.
27 Perú21, 31 December 2006.
28 Correo, 8 January 2007.
29 http://martintanaka.blogspot.com/2007/01/comunicado-de-responsables-de-el-ojo.html.
30 See ‘Concurring Opinion of Judge A. A. Cançado Trindade’. Available at www.corteidh.or.cr.
33 La República, 5 January 2007.
34 Correo, 11 January 2007.
35 La República, 18 January 2007.
38 La República, 17 January 2007.
43 On violence as a ‘mode of production’, see Taussig (1987).

References

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