• E-MISFÉRICA 7.2 AFTER TRUTH

PHOTO: OSCAR RETTO

Memories of Reconciliation: Photography and Memory in Postwar Peru

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Abstract:
This article takes the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) photographic exhibit, *Yuyanapaq*, as a site from which to think about the place of photographs in projects that aim to reclaim collective memory in "post-conflict" settings. We start with a critical examination of the Peruvian TRC's proposal that the act of looking at images of past violence and suffering contributes to the formation of a shared, collective, and consensual memory concerning the origins and causes of violence and war. We suggest that this approach to memory is facilitated by an understanding of photographic images as self-evident, historical, and perceptual grounds from which individual emotions and feelings can be interpolated as part of a collective moral engagement with the past. The article argues for a critical consideration of how photographic technologies have been used to both sustain a series of partial and shifting truths about violence and to validate stereotyped visual perceptions.

To say that photographs lie implies that they might tell the truth; but the beauty of their nature is exactly to say nothing, neither to lie nor not to.
—Stanley Cavell (1985, 1)

Seven years after the Peruvian Truth Commission (CVR) presented its Final Report to then President Alejandro Toledo, the question of memory continues to be anchored in a logic of war.

Despite the CVR's concerted efforts to convince Peruvians that a democratic future is possible only if we first arrive at a *consensual* understanding of the past, many on the right suggest that the solution for moving ahead is plain old forgetting. Examples of the hatreds and misunderstandings stirred up by this battle over memory abound. They range from death threats and violence against the CVR's director, to the seemingly endless rightwing chorus that denounces any attempt to document or prosecute former human rights abuses as an "apology for terror." The fears mobilized by any gesture towards the recuperation of memory can be gauged by the García government's recent attempts to legislate blanket immunity for all government and military personnel charged with human rights violations, including President García himself.1

In the field of culture, this struggle to control memory in Peru also explains the García government's polemical rejection of the German government's offer in April of 2009 to pay for construction of a Museum of Memory. At first, García simply rejected the US$ 2 million project outright on the grounds that it did not reflect a true national memory: "Memory is national—he said—and not the province of just one political sector."2 Subsequently, García grudgingly agreed to accept the donation only after Peru's most famous public intellectual, Mario Vargas Llosa, accused the government of "intolerance and lack of culture" (2009). More recently, during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Museum, García made clear that it would serve to put behind this episode of Peruvian history and to eradicate (terrorist) violence. "This place will be a school of thought, García proclaimed, "so that Peruvians can reflect and uproot intolerance, which always leads to violence and death…Here, they will meditate how, at a certain moment, the destiny of our fatherland was changed. This will be a temple for thought."3 At the heart of the polemic—including García's initial refusal—was the fact that the Museum's advocates envisioned using photographs drawn from the CVR's earlier photographic exhibition, *Yuyanapaq*, to teach about the material and moral devastation of the war. More specifically, they proposed—in the words of Vargas Llosa—to extend the visual project of the CVR using photographs as "genuine, didactic and encouraging" documents that communicate the need for "reconciliation, peace and democratic coexistence."4

But how do photographs teach and "encourage"? Is it enough just to show photographs of the war to people who may have no memory of it? How do people navigate the tension between photographs that propose a particular purchase on truth, with their own, more dispersed and contingent memories and truths? In this article, we take the original photographic exhibit of the CVR as a site from which to think about how photographs do—and at times, do not—contribute to the collective project of reclaiming both memory and the dreams of a different future in Peru. Specifically, we take a critical look at the ways in which photography was appropriated as a source of collective memory in the CVR photographic exhibit that was mounted in Lima in 2003. We focus in particular on the two theses animating *Yuyanapaq*: (1) that our incapacity to *see* the suffering of others contributed to the proliferation of violence in the 1980s, and (2) that, for this reason, the act of looking now at photographs of the suffering caused by violence in the past will lead us to share a collective, consensual memory concerning the origins and causes of a war that must not be repeated.

Three questions will serve to center our analysis of the photographs and exhibits: the first asks how individual and deeply personal confrontations with photographs of violence and suffering come to be articulated as expressions of collective memories and national belonging. The second asks how the material qualities of the photographic image shape understandings of the temporality of violence and war as both a future threat and settled past. The third interrogates the assumptions about knowledge and agreement underlying the CVR's universalizing language of moral responsibility, visual truth, and national reconciliation. With respect to the historical traditions of Peruvian photography and visual culture, our particular interest is to understand how the CVR's visual project rubs up against two historical traditions. The first pertains to a deeply rooted visual economy in which, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon, photography functions as a medium that "fixes" the human subject "as an object in the midst of other objects" (1982, 109). At stake here is the extent to which, in their failure to reference this deep historical genealogy of racial "fixing," the photographs that are

meant to elicit an acknowledgement of suffering in *Yuyanapaq* also end up providing perceptual validation for the sorts of cultural stereotypes and racial divides that the CVR itself strives to condemn and undo. The second, more recent tradition relates to the war and immediate post-war years when visual images provided the empirical evidence for truth claims that were widely understood to be inherently unstable and subject to change. Rather than drawing on this historical experience in which photographic technologies were used to sustain a series of partial and shifting truths, the CVR presents photographs as self-evident, historical and perceptual grounds from which individual emotions and feelings can be articulated in terms of a collective moral engagement with the past.

Yuyanapaq: To Remember (Through Photography)

While public hearings and statistics have been widely used by truth commissions elsewhere, the Peruvian Truth Commission was the first to make extensive use of photographs as a vehicle for eliciting sentiments of shame and national solidarity. The principal theme of the CVR's visual project was, in their words, to bring the "faces of suffering" before the collective gaze of the Peruvian nation (Lerner Febres 2003a). Inspired by the dramatic images encountered by its researchers in press and police archives, as well as in the personal archives of Peruvian war photographers, the CVR looked to photography as a means to stimulate private reflections on suffering and violence. More specifically, they hoped that photography could lead people to reflect on the ways in which their *personal* "failure to see" had contributed to *collective* moral failures in the past.

But what was it, exactly, that the CVR was asking us to see? As a truth commission, their mission was to collect documentation for the twenty year period of the war; to discover when, and how violence unfolded within those twenty years; who the victims were; and who ultimately was to be held responsible for the more than 69,000 deaths and disappearances that resulted from the war (PCM 2001). It is towards this end that the CVR compiled the photographic archive that would later inspire them to mount a comprehensive public exhibition.5 In the transition from evidentiary archive to public exhibit, however, photographs underwent an important shift. Images that were initially collected as supporting documents for the reconstruction of historical events, were now recruited as the script for a "visual story of Peru's armed internal conflict."6 As Roland Barthes and others have argued, however, photographs are a "message without a code" (Barthes 1980, 199). Our shared, culturally embedded knowledge of how a photograph is produced tells us that the photograph bears a necessary, "factual" relationship to the object, person, place or event it shows. This relationship is what we talk about when we refer to the "realism" of photography. Yet this material or indexical relationship of the image to its subject does not imply that the image will be interpreted (or "read") in any particular way. Rather, photographs have as many *meanings* as they have viewers. Indeed, as numerous critics from Barthes to Cavell have noted, what draws us to the photograph is the way it speaks to us of the simple (yet elusive) fact that the person or event it shows once existed. How we interpret this uncanny temporality of the photograph as a document that reveals presence in the past is, however, completely up for grabs. "A photograph," writes Stanley Cavell, "emphasizes the existence of its subject. .[. . .] The beauty of their nature is exactly to say nothing" (1985, 4, 1).

The goal of the CVR's photographic project, however, was precisely to make photographs say *something*—and to make them say that something in the collective sentimental register of national memory. Photographs were to be made to tell a story that would "open people's eyes," "to make them see" what they had not, presumably, seen before. As Lerner Febres said in the inauguration of Yuyanapaq in Lima:

these images of pain challenge the logic of time—which is to pass and vanish—to achieve an always intriguing permanence. They are, thus, an expansion of time, a past that imposes itself upon our present, so that it calls out and awakens us. To say wake up is not an inaccurate way to define

the service the CVR wants to offer to Peruvian society. We want to shake it up [Peruvian society], to open its eyes and begin to recognize itself in the facts we have to tell" (2003a).

Yet the exhibit came on the heels of a war in which images of violence not only circulated widely, but were also widely debated. During the war, photographs of bloodied bodies, accused "terrorists," bombed sites, and masked military operatives literally saturated the national press. They circulated endlessly, claimed by all sides in the conflict as evidence of the brutality of the other sides. Photographs of the killings of eight journalists in Uchuraccay—photographs which we discuss in more detail later on—and of the carefully arranged bodies of dead MRTA in *Los Molinos*, for example, were heavily scrutinized from the very beginning, not as evidence of transparent historical facts, but rather as suspect documents that spoke of the performative staging of history for political ends.7 Most famously, the Fujimori regime made extensive and notorious use of visual technologies, including "doctored" photographs, to blackmail its opponents, to construct fictions and partial truths about the war, and finally, in a video-taped suicidal orgy, to document its own proliferating spheres of corruption (Poole, 2001, 4-6, 47). In such a context, most—if not all—Peruvians learned to read photographs—including and especially those which showed the actors and victims of the war—with at best a certain degree of suspicion. In such a context, what does it mean to speak, as did the CVR, of using photographs to make people see violence *as if for the first time*?

The Exhibition in Lima

As if to anchor the proliferating sense of a meaningless violence that otherwise might have emerged from the photographs, the CVR recruited photographs to tell a story of the nation's descent into—and escape from—the violence of civil war. By eliciting agreement as to the facts of suffering and war, photographs were made to speak not of specific historical "truths," but rather to the forms of agreement and moral community that framed the CVR's story about collective failure and what a nation should be. It is on these two, related, registers of history and nation that the exhibit deploys photographs as sites from which personal memories are to be given voice in the form of a collective *moral* experience of shame. As windows onto a past that has already happened, the photograph's relevance to the individual viewer in the present is not problematized, but rather assumed insofar as that viewer is always already positioned as part of the *nation* which is the subject of this story. Conversely, the viewer's relation to the subject of the photograph is framed *not* as an experience of either encounter or disorientation—as what we might think of as an *ethical* engagement with the humanity and/or horror of which the photograph speaks—but rather in terms of a collective identity whose stability and cohesiveness remain largely unquestioned.

figure 1: Yuyanapaq Exhibit, Sala 4, lima.

Photo: Deborah Poole

A quick look at the carefully crafted physical layout of the Lima exhibit can give us a sense of how strongly this idea of nation comes to frame the experience of looking. The exhibit itself was initially housed in the once elegant home of one of Peru's most famous oligarchical families, the Riva Agueros.8 The curators used the building's semi-destroyed condition to make individual photographs intelligible as part of the complex architectural metaphors of a nation in need of rebuilding. Photographs mounted on (stabilized) crumbling plaster were, in many rooms, illuminated only by the natural light that seeped in through the half-destroyed roof. In this way, the decaying house was made to speak eloquently of both the effects of war, and its causes in a society whose ruling class had historically lived in ignorance of the poverty of the country's peasant majorities.

The physical layout and flow of the exhibit is built on this allegorical sense of space to create a particular story of the nation and its commitment to truth. From the entry on Calle Santa Teresa, a visitor to the exhibit passed through 27 thematically organized rooms covering the twenty years of armed conflict. The first four rooms set the stage for the images that follow. They present the "cast of characters" and they provide a detailed chronological framework for the rooms that follow. In the first room (Sala 1) twelve photographs of political events from the 1970s illustrated the "antecedents to war." The next three rooms chronicled "the beginning of the violence" with the early armed actions of the Shining Path in Ayacucho in the early 1980s. Little information was given to explain the genesis and nature of these activities or—more importantly—to differentiate the Shining Path's self-declared armed struggle from the mass left wing demonstrations and strikes of the 1970s, which were featured in photographs shown in Sala 1. In this sense, a first exclusion was set in place in that those visitors whose personal memories were themselves conjugated through the lived experience of the Peruvian Left were immediately placed on the margins of a national experience in which "the Left"—as an antecedent to violence—was, from the outset, part of the "problem." This slippage between Sendero and the rest of Peru's diverse democratic and unarmed left wing movement was further consolidated by setting up the "subversive" and "strategic" violence of the Shining Path as constitutively different from the accidental "excesses" committed by the Peruvian Armed Forces. No mention was made in the exhibit of the well-known fact that the armed forces, from the very early years of their intervention in Ayacucho, implemented a *strategy* of counterinsurgency. Instead, the text-board referring to armed forces violence explains simply that "the army and marines, in the absence of an adequate antisubversive strategy, committed terrible excesses against the civilian population."

figure 2: Floor plan for Yuyanapaq Exhibit, Lima

Credit: Museo de la nación

As historical anteroom for the exhibit, these rooms also oriented the visitor with respect to an interpretive strategy in which photographs were assigned meanings through texts that anchored the images to specific historical events or forms of violence. By thus providing clues as to how the images should be "read," the textboards seemed to suggest that photographs should be scrutinized

in terms of their specific, agreed upon “meanings.” Rather than acknowledge the open-ended character of the photographic image, textboards anchored interpretation in a moral story of violence and the wounded nation. The fragility of the photographic fact, however, emerged—inadvertently—almost as soon as the visitor passed into the next room (Sala 5) which showed photographs documenting the events and investigation surrounding the killings of eight journalists in the highland peasant community of Uchuraccay.9 There has been much speculation regarding the circumstances that led up to this tragic episode. One version places responsibility with the Armed Forces for deliberately inciting members of a peasant community (Uchuraccay) to eliminate all outsiders, under the assumption that they were terrorists. Another version, defended by the 1983 Investigative Committee headed by Mario Vargas Llosa, proposed that: “*the killings resulted from the ignorance and fear of peasants who mistook the journalists for Senderistas and their cameras and telephoto lens for firearms.*”10 Rather than focusing on this controversy, the textboards in Sala 5 carefully sidestep the debate concerning the role of the armed forces to emphasize instead how both sides coincided around the agreed upon “fact” that it was the deep divide within the nation that had produced, somehow, these “inexplicable” forms of violence.

On January 26, 1983, eight journalists who were investigating a confrontation between peasants and subversives [sic], were killed by a group of peasants in the community of Uchuraccay in the remote highlands (*puna*) of Ayacucho. The deed shook public opinion and made the profound social and cultural barriers in *the interior* of our country into front page news. In the initial press coverage of the killings, Retto’s photographs were endlessly scrutinized for evidence of this “profound social and cultural barrier” that pitted Andean peasants against the country’s modern criollo coast. The sequence of photographs moves from a landscape taken before the fatal encounter to different partial shots of the journalists’ encounter with the peasants of Uchuraccay. The most scrutinized—and, for some, damning—of these images shows a journalist kneeling as his companions stand around him [Figure 3]. On the ground, between them and the peasants is what appear to be their camera bags or backpacks. This position—which could, of course, be read in many different ways—was widely interpreted as a plea for mercy. Others read the gesture as proof that the camera equipment itself had incited the peasants’ suspicions and hence the deaths of the journalists. Yet others—including the Final Report of the Investigative Committee—cited it as evidence of the “magical and religious overtones” of the killings and the “deep cultural chasm” which Vargas Llosa (and his commissioners) believed separated the “Indians” of Uchurraccay from both modernity and the Peruvian nation.11 What is striking here is how the photographs’ “meanings” could only be deciphered because the narrative of events was already known. These “meanings” acquire the force of truth, however, through an affective charge that itself emerges only because fears of a dangerous cultural “other” *already* haunted the subject position from which Peruvians were being asked to scrutinize this visual evidence of the “cultural misunderstandings” that supposedly fueled violence in Peru.

figure 3: Uchuraccay. Last moments of the journalists.

Photo: Oscar Retto

By investing photographs with the power to act as witness, and by using this evidentiary force to channel intangible emotions of fear and alterity, the Uchuraccay case set two important precedents for how photographic images would circulate in the violence filled years ahead. On the one hand, Uchuraccay marked the inherent instability—and untrustworthiness—of the photographic image. Indeed, as the war escalated and spread, the evidentiary value of Retto's photographs shifted dramatically. In a context in which the geographical expansion of the war made it increasingly difficult to speak of a separation of the highlands from the rest of the nation, the photographs ceased to stand for the spatial and historical "chasm" separating Uchuraccay from the nation-state. Instead their evidential character as photographs fuelled an increasingly intense search for signs of the state's role in the villagers' lives and, hence, in the journalists' deaths. That evidence was found in the form of a hint of blue jeans peeking out from under a blurry poncho, an uncommonly tall peasant, and in the boots worn by one of the peasants. Subsequent judicial investigations found that the peasants had acted under orders of the state's own counter-insurgency personnel, although the actual presence of military personnel at the scene was neither confirmed nor disproved. In March of 1987, a Lima court convicted three *comuneros* [community members] from Uchuraccay for the murder of the journalists. In this sentence, the court also ordered an investigation of General Clemente Noel and other military functionaries, as intellectual authors of the assassinations and for obstructing judicial inquiries (Mayer 1991, 489).

figure 4: Yuyanapaq Exhibit sala 5, Lima.

Photo: Deborah Poole

Although Sala 5 omitted this postscript to a story in which photography itself played a crucial role in deepening public skepticism about the "facts" of war, it did suggest that within this story, there was only one subject: the nation. As historically excluded members of the nation, peasants act within this story of national recovery as gullible agents of military instruction, innocent savages who mistake telephoto lens for machine guns, or—crucially for the purposes of the CVR—as victims whose dignity can only be restored through the reciprocal gaze of the nation as a whole. This passive quality of the peasant subject, we suggest, is reinforced by a photographic tradition in which rural, indigenous subjects are rendered voiceless as anonymous, racial "types" (Poole 1997). In the context of a counterinsurgency war in which "subversives" were painted (somewhat ironically) with the features of the "passive" highland peasant, the mute (photographic) images of victims, bodies and mourners further stabilized *both* photography's historical grounding in the perceptual certainties of ethnic and racial "types," *and* the CVR's conviction that regional and social divides within the country could be overcome by eliciting the uniform voice of a nation in which shame and moral failure are shared, more or less evenly, across regional and class divides.

Iconicity and Voice

figure 5: Central patio “Homage to the Victims”, Yuyanapaq Exhibit

Photo: Deborah Poole

If the success of the Lima exhibit can be said to hinge in some respects on its creative use of architectural space to construct the subject position of a wounded nation, then the central patio with its large format “iconic” images and central reflecting pool can easily be said to have formed the heart of the exhibit [Figure 5]. As the visitor passed into the patio from the relatively small, often dark rooms that preceded it, the immediate effect was of an expansion or opening into air and light. Labeled in the exhibit guide as “Homage to the Victims”, the patio was also the only room in which the visitor was left to contemplate images more or less on their own. Indeed, the guards were instructed to allow only a few people at a time into the central patio. Explanatory textboards were also kept to a minimum, and in striking contrast to many of the smaller rooms where the temporality of the image was clearly marked as past or *historical,* and the visitor was encouraged to scrutinize images in relation to the information or details given in panel texts. The patio’s open space, large format and gauze panels (which allow light to pass and offer a blurred view of the rooms that lay behind) encouraged a more open engagement with the peculiar temporality of photography itself.

Taken as a group, the photographs in the central patio suggested a visual vocabulary of pain in which suffering is made recognizable through both a language of gesture and an engagement with faces that do not return our gaze. A photograph by Oscar Medrano, for example, shows the half covered face of an injured man, Celestino Ccente [Figure 5]. His right eye stares downward and in front of him at what we imagine to be an empty, unfocused space. Framed by the stone columns and cornice of an old door in the center wall of the patio, this portrait was the first image to confront the visitor as she entered the room. Ccente’s face was then repeated and refracted in the patio’s rectangular reflecting pool as the visitor moved around the room.

figure 6: "Denuncia".

Photo: Vera Lenz

The remaining images in the room—including two landscapes of destruction that hung on both sides of Ccente’s photograph—traced similar gestures of loss and despair. Chosen as the cover

image for the exhibit catalogue, Vera Lenz's "Denuncia," which shows hands cradling a small identity card photo, was universally praised as one of the most moving of these iconic images [Figure 6]. The idea of centering the exhibit around a small set of iconic images speaks to the CVR's understanding of how understanding gained though vision can be made to unify and incite memories, and with them the moral stance that is required to prevent the recurrence of war. As one CVR commissioner, Carlos Iván Degregori, notes, the iconic images were intended to provide "anchors for memory" (2002, 7, authors' translation). By speaking to the facts of history, photographs, in this vision of the exhibit, provide the stability and location through which memory can be both recovered and reinhabited as the grounds for reconciliation and healing. In this respect, the subject who reclaims voice through memory is clearly the nation. The fragility of the memory that is thus reclaimed, however, surfaces in the final room of the exhibit where suspended identity card photographs are accompanied by recordings of individual testimonials [Figure 7]. From the perspective of the room's center or periphery, the individual voices merge into an unintelligible murmur. Because the visitor is forced to place herself directly in front of the image in order to make sense of any one of the testimonials, the overall effect is to make it clear that a photograph on its own *cannot* serve as a site for the recuperation of memory. What pulls the viewer to the image—and the memory it contains—is the voice that must be actively sought out within the murmuring.12

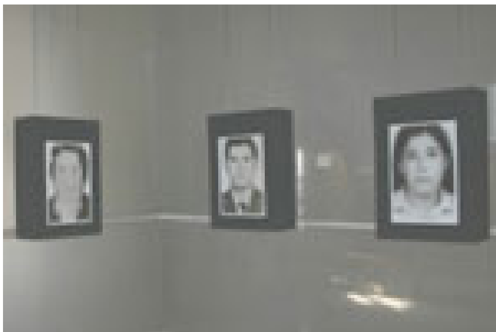
figure 7: "Testimonios", Yuyanapaq Exhibit, sala 27, Lima.

Photo: Deborah Poole

Comments from Yuyanapaq's visitors' log in Lima provide some insights into how individuals received the exhibition's appeal to both visual truth and national belonging. Our first observation on reading the gallery books to which we had access concerns the scant references to the photographs themselves. No visitor, for example, made use of their comments to reflect on their reaction to any one image—or for that matter, to photography *per se*. Rather photography is invoked obliquely as that which allows us to "open our eyes" and to see things "we did not know before." In this respect, the CVR's claims that knowledge leads to personal awareness are vindicated. Indeed, the most common means of referring to this experience of revelation is through the verbatim repetition of the CVR's slogan that "A country that forgets its history is destined to repeat it."

But how does the act of looking at images of past violence lead to an awareness of the need to prevent them in the future? Many comments in the visitors' book refer to the sensation of "reliving" a past they had already known. More specifically, they thank the TRC for helping them "to relive" (*revivir*) the past. Here one might speculate that the temporality of photography, in which the past is experienced as presence, provides for the illusion of seeing again *as if* one were reinhabiting the past. Yet the comments also suggest that acknowledgement of the forms of suffering and loss that inhabit that past require a personal connection to, or memory of, the past as something other than fact and image. "[The exhibit] is impressive," writes one woman, "it shows many things that we lived from afar (*que vivimos de lejos*). It had an impact because it relives my livings (*revive vivencias*) when I was a girl."13 Here personal experience provides a window for interpreting the photographs as past experiences that present, nonetheless, the specter of repetition. In comments such as

these, the uncanny temporality of photography—as a making present of the past—makes its way into visitor's reflections on the show.

In other comments, personal experience provides grounds for questioning the CVR's claims that their photographs speak the truth. Thus, for example, one man writes:

General Manuel Delgado Rojas, who appears in a black sweater in a photograph with Alan García, in the room dedicated to the Molinos [killings], is responsible for the death of seven innocent people. He ordered that the surviving MRTA [militants] and seven peasants who had nothing to do with the affair . . . be thrown from a helicopter into the jungle. Here [In the exhibit] these peasants [are identified] simply as "disappeared."

In this and other comments, visitors voice their claims to knowledge based on personal experience as a counterpoint to the CVR's implicit claim to speak for the nation as a whole. "I am a survivor of the attack in Soras (Ayacucho) on December 12, 1981," writes another visitor. "Terrorists killed more than 82 community members; yet my *paisanos* who were victims of the massacre do not appear [in the exhibit]. I am just one more Soreño for the history of Ayacucho." Other visitors lament "the absence and forgetting (*la ausencia y el olvido*) of the cases of Cayara and La Cantuta." These massacres, though illustrated and briefly mentioned in Sala 21, were not featured as "exemplary" cases, and thus, for these visitors, they were not given their due justice in the exhibit. Moreover, as one visitor comments in the log of the exhibit in Ayacucho, there are forms of gendered violence ascribed to the state that the CVR's exhibit did not register at all: "The CVR is evidencing some isolated facts of the period 1980–2000, but there is much more that is not registered in the visual material such as sexual violations committed by soldiers (*cachacos*) against women, almost girls, who were only 14 or 15 years old."

It is important to note, however, that such forms of disagreement with the CVR's claims seldom go so far as to question the CVR's mission to prevent a recurrence of violence and to raise public awareness of the moral failings of the past. Rather the most frequent criticism leveled in the comment book we had access to is that of the "media verdad" or "half-truth." Such comments suggest, on the one hand, that people had become accustomed to viewing photographs with suspicion. On the other hand, however, the concept of the "half truth" also suggests an implicit acknowledgement that the forms of agreement that underlie moral agreement differ from the forms of agreement through which certain events or facts can be made to add up to a historical narrative or story about the war itself. In this sense, the notion of the "half truth" relegates the CVR's "rostros de sufrimiento" to a realm of empirical facts or "effects." At the same time, it also points toward the limitations of deploying such a form of narration or display as an invitation to moral consensus in that the facts of history do not necessarily shed light on the underlying questions of motive and blame. "Which were the causes?" asked one visitor. "We cannot remain in the effects." Others inquired, even more directly: "What is the truth of the CVR?"

Other memories

The CVR curators also prepared a traveling exhibit composed of 37 photos that would be shown in the *provincias* in which the CVR had established regional branches. Conceived as a "summary" of the larger Lima exhibition, the travelling exhibit respected the chronological ordering and made similar use of text panels to anchor photographs to a particular narrative of the war. To mark regional specificities in the experiences of the war, the curators selected one large format photo (70x150 cm) that would serve as the "opening photo," or iconic image, for each of the regions in which the exhibit would be shown. The remaining 36 small format (60x40 cm) photos served as illustrations of the historical narrative conveyed by the CVR.

The paradox here is that, as a “summary” of the main exhibition in Lima, the itinerant exhibition was sent to those regions most affected by the war as an example of how the war should be “seen.” The paradox goes beyond the obvious fact that such a move simply replicates the “profound social divides” which the CVR itself had identified as fuelling the violence. At stake here not only is the question of how the voice of those people the CVR claimed to speak for was heard and taken into account in the CVR’s visual project, but more importantly how the victims and survivors mobilized and made use of photography in their struggles against state terror and violence. The Ayacuchano reception of the itinerant exhibition of *Yuyanapaq* provides some insight into these issues.

When we first visited the exhibition in Ayacucho, we met Rosa, a woman in her late thirties who was volunteering for the CVR as the exhibition’s overseer. Rosa was playing an active role in drawing people into the otherwise poorly attended exhibition. Rosa’s own reactions to the photographs suggest how the CVR’s language of visual awakening is reconciled with deeply personal memories of the war. “Hemos vivido como ciegos” [we have lived like the blind] is what Rosa says when we asked her for her opinion regarding the exhibition. She walked around the room and stopped before various photos to emphasize her thoughts. “I did not know that all these things had happened,” she said. Then she stopped in front of a photograph of a *botadero* [a place where corpses were thrown out by the army] and said “I have been in a place like this.” She then told us how she had had to wander through the “botaderos” in search of her missing father who had been disappeared by the armed forces. She recalled with intimate detail how she had finally found her father’s corpse in one botadero similar to the one shown in this photograph. She described the position of the body when she first saw it; how he was dressed; what the surroundings were; even the expression on his face. She also recalled how his body had been partially eaten away by animals and vultures when she returned later with help to recover the body. It seems that for those who have witnessed such events, death fixes memory, as if the motion of life had literally become still. Is not this in a sense related to how photography in its stillness speaks of death? More importantly for our purposes here, does this mnemonic flow linking the intimacy of death perceived, to the distance of death recorded, differ in the exhibitions in Lima and Ayacucho? Indeed, one might argue that the exhibit’s poor attendance in Ayacucho reflects the fact that death, having been seen, is not something that someone seeks out to look at again and again.

Another CVR volunteer, Félix, worked with both national human rights organizations and the CVR in Ayacucho. Félix, however, did not want to visit the photographic exhibition. When we asked why, he said, “I am not interested in remembering. I experienced all this directly and there was too much suffering. It is not news for us [ayacuchanos].” When we asked him if the war, the suffering, would be news for anyone, he replied:

There are people who only now seem to realize what happened in Ayacucho. Here we cannot say: “look, I did not know that this had happened.” People know, people have seen [...] we just do not want to remember. There has been too much suffering and awful death [muerte terrible]. Every single day dead people appeared in the streets. That was not news anymore. What made the news was when no bodies were found dead in the streets. Killed people were left in the streets. Their bodies were mutilated. Other bodies were left hanging on electrical posts, without eyes, with their tongues cut, with their genitals mutilated [...] They used to throw the bodies everywhere. I have seen directly how people were killed. In front of me, three guys shot another guy dead and then ran away. Why should I look again at what I have already seen with my own eyes?

For Félix, then, the exhibit served to mark the breach that separated those, such as he, who had lived through the war in Ayacucho, from those who had watched it from Lima.

Comments left in the gallery album by visitors to the exhibit suggest that other Ayacuchanos had similar responses in that photographs are interpreted in these comments not as “news,” but rather as confirmation of stories and memories that come from their more personal experience with the

war in Ayacucho. As in the Lima book, this act of bringing personal memories to bear on the institutional discourse of the CVR most frequently takes the form of noting its "partial truths." Unlike in Lima, however, several visitors to the Ayacucho exhibit go so far as to question the very existence of the photographic exhibition. "The content of these photos about the events that took place during the political violence is really disturbing [desgarrador]. We should stop showing these events. Let's leave them for history." Or: "What do you want to show? Perhaps you want to frighten people with what might happen if there is a resurgence [rebrote] of the Shining Path, or do you really want to show why it happened?"

figure 8: Consejo Municipal de Huamanga, July 1985.

Photo: Ernesto Jiménez.

The politics of the gaze implied in these comments can be also seen in the ways in which victims of state violence and terror mobilized photography both during and after the war. The "iconic image" chosen for the Ayacucho exhibit, for example, shows a group of peasants in a municipal building in Ayacucho [Figure 8]. In the background, portraits of national and military heroes who were born in the region suggest how public spaces and national memory are actualized by specific visual technologies. Yet the presence of these peasants in this space suggests how national memory can be disrupted and occupied by memories other than those officially sanctioned. Moreover, these victims mobilize photographs that were made by the state itself as a ritual of granting rights and citizenship to its subjects. The demand that accompanies the photographs—"*Tal conforme aparezca vivo."* ("He should [re]appear just as he was.")—is a clear demand for justice, as well as a demand that the state look at these photographs of those it has disappeared. Clearly, if the TRC is concerned to readdress a historic refusal to see, then the subject who "does not see" violence in this photo, is not the citizen but the state.

Conclusions

Yuyay is a Quechua verb meaning to think or to remember. As a verb, it is an act that unfolds, like thought itself, over time and in relation to the individual who performs the act of thinking. With the addition of the suffix –*ri*, the verb acquires a reflexive connotation, and a more limited sense: No longer used to refer to thinking in general, *yuyariy* refers to a form of thinking that involves remembrance, or the reflective act of thinking about the past. With the addition of the suffix—*na, yuya* becomes a noun: "thought" or "memory." With the additional suffix, -*paq,* meaning "for" or "in order to", *yuyana* acquires a somewhat different temporal spin. Less oriented to the past that is remembered, than to the future for which that past bears meaning, the reflective activity of thinking is transformed through these three suffixed letters—this one small, and ever so slightly glottalized syllable—into an intentioned and purposeful act in which memory becomes a noun, a thing that can be claimed, provoked and incited. As such, *yuyanapaq* is both a peculiarly apt name for an exhibition that was crafted and designed to provoke and preserve *a* collective memory of the war that can then be constituted as *the* national memory of the war, and a telling symptom of the forms of social anxiety that haunt the CVR exhibit. Alan García's idea that the Museum of Memory should

be a “school of thought” resonates with this anxiety of controlling the past, and what can be said about it, not only in terms of constituting particular truths—and silences—about the war, but also in terms of imagining a (neoliberal) future for the political community. In his rather cryptic formulation, García seems to be suggesting that the only possibility of preventing the repetition of violence in the future is for the nation as a whole to embrace his neoliberal project.

Coming as it did on the heels of a war in which the “truth of photography” had been destabilized by competing claims to both history and truth, the CVR exhibit presents a chronology of events and icons of suffering as part of a project to restore moral consciousness to the nation as collective subject. The nation that figures in this moral discourse, however, is one for which there can be only one truth—a truth that can be conveyed through a retelling (and revisualization) of the events, facts, and feelings that, together, constituted “the war.” What interests us here about this approach to truth telling is what it reveals about the power of photography as a medium that can so easily be assumed to convey the facticity of historical events. Like facts, the photographs in the CVR exhibition are credited with the ability to “speak for themselves.” Such an approach assumes, on the one hand, a certain uniformity or agreement in the ways in which the idea of history itself will be appraised and translated into the sorts of personal reflections that can produce a “national reconciliation.” As we have seen in the responses of just those few Ayacuchanos with whom we were able to speak, this assumption is not always warranted both because people’s personal experiences of the war varied, and because memory itself does not always carry the same weight for the ways in which different communities reinhabit the worlds they inherit from the violence of civil war. For those peasants and Ayacuchanos, for example, who need to engage and inhabit worlds where the divide between “terrorist” and neighbor, fact and suspicion are not so easily drawn, the value placed on remembering—as a dwelling in the past—is substantively different that for a young person in Lima for whom the photographs reveal the startling news that there were deaths, disappearances and widespread complicity in Peru’s counterinsurgency war.

Finally, as we have also suggested, the specific dynamics of a visual culture in which photography has been used, for well over a century, to stabilize the categories of race, ethnicity, and “otherness,” do not figure in the CVR’s humanist—and undeniably well intentioned—project of making the “rostros de sufrimiento” speak across the deep racial and class divides of modern Peru. Such assumptions about the universality of "the language of photography," we suggest, run counter to a world of language and experience in which “the other” is *first* recognized in ethnic or racial terms, and only then acknowledged as human.14

By embracing the illusory promise that the photography can, somehow, transcend both time and place, such assumptions about its universality or “facticity” also, however, rub up against the distinctive ability of photography to create a skeptical distance between viewer and viewed. For Martin Heidegger, this distance spoke to the distinctive ethos of modernity as a world in which our fate is to relate to the world as a “picture” or view (Heidegger 1977). Seen from such a perspective photography would seem bound inescapably to the dilemma of the modern subject as unable to respond to the world she inhabits in that the world is always perceived as a representation or picture of that which has already passed.15 Yet what the CVR would have us do is to use our reactions to photographs to rethink our ethical responsibilities in the present and to use them to rethink our relationships with the many different “others” who form the Peruvian nation. At stake here is a particular understanding of what constitutes the terms of moral or ethical engagement. By presenting photographs as facts and the “nation” as a singular historical subject, the CVR seems to be suggesting that our interpretations of facts and our interpretations of the moral grounds for building a (better) social collectivity are grounded on similar forms of agreement. What happens to this argument—this way of reading photography as icon of suffering and the nation—if we introduce the specter of disagreement and plurality as the grounds upon which reconciliation—and community—must take hold? More pointedly, how can disagreement be introduced into a photographic exhibit that seeks to create reconciliation and incite reflection on the relevance of recent events? These questions about disagreement and plurality are entirely pertinent for the

project of the Museum of Memory. While agreement—or consensus—may well be necessary to assess questions of juridical culpability and punishment, neither national futures nor the moral claims which will decide those futures can be staked in the evidential language of the "photographic fact," or, for that sake, any other language that similarly is made to claim agreement as to the "facts" of violence and suffering.

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Notes

1 The Legislative Decree 1097 passed by the government made crimes against human rights committed prior to 2003 subject to statutes of limitation. The decree was going to benefit people convicted or prosecuted for human rights crimes such as former president Alberto Fujimori and his right-hand man Vladimiro Montesinos. A widespread opposition forced the government to retreat and instead ask the Congress to repeal the decree in mid-September 2010. Former Defense Minister, Rafael Rey, was allegedly the mastermind behind this *de facto* amnesty. Rey and Vice-president Luis Giampietri have campaigned actively in favor of the military from their powerful positions in Alan García's regime arguing that the Armed Forces never committed any crime against human rights during the campaign against the Shining Path. They have also insistently said that the CVR had slandered the Peruvian Armed Forces. See "El Ejército Peruano no ha violado ningún derecho humano," *El Comercio*, March 15 2010, last accessed November 15, 2010.

2 Quoted in "García: Museo de Memoria no refleja la visión nacional," *El Comercio*, March 1, 2009, authors' translation, last accessed November 15, 2010.

3 "Este lugar será una escuela de pensamiento para que todos los peruanos puedan reflexionar y desterrar la intolerancia que conduce siempre a la violencia y a la muerte [...] Aquí meditarán cómo, en un momento, cambió el destino de la patria. Será un templo del pensamiento". Quoted in "Perú coloca primera piedra de Museo de la Memoria sobre Guerra Interna," *Agence France Presse,* November 4, 2010, last acessed November 15, 2010.

4 Following this controversy, García appointed Vargas Llosa as the head of the commission that would steer the Museum of Memory project. Vargas Llosa resigned in mid-September 2010, however, in protest of Executive Decree 1097. In his letter of resignation, Vargas Llosa said: "There is, in my opinion, an essential incompatibility between, on the one hand, promoting a monument to

pay homage to the victims of violence that the Shining Path unleashed in 1980 and, on the other, opening through a judicial ruse the prison door for those, who in the framework of this disastrous rebellion of fanatics, also committed horrendous crimes and contributed to sow anger, blood and suffering in Peruvian society." Quoted in La Mula, last accessed November 15, 2010.

5 This photographic archive was called the Image Bank, of which the CVR says the following, "Image Bank: nearly 1700 photographs form part of a complete archive which individuals, the State, the academic community, social organizations, churches, Non Governmental Organizations, and the entire population will be able to access through the web page of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," last accessed June 16, 2010, 4:30 pm.

6 The subtitle of the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition explicitly states this idea: "Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar. 1980–2000. *Relato Visual del Conflicto Armado Interno en el Perú*." (emphasis added). In the same catalogue, the CVR chair Salomón Lerner Febres states: "Ésta es pues, fundamentalmente, una documentación de la resistencia de miles de hombres y mujeres del Perú, en cuyos rostros de desolación y perplejidad ante la tragedia hallamos el mejor comentario moral—testimonio y enseñanza—y al mismo tiempo un mandato perentorio: el de no consentir el olvido indiferente o interesado, la obligación de escribir nuestra historia reciente con conocimiento de causa e integrando en ella la memoria de quienes la padecieron en silencio" (2003b).

7 In April 28, 1989, a column of MRTA guerrillas was ambushed by the Army in the hamlet of Los Molinos, Junin in the Peruvian central Andes. Reportedly, the guerrillas were on their way in two trucks to take control of the nearby city of Tarma. The ambush resulted in 62 deaths among the MRTA guerrillas. The fact that there were no wounded or prisoners led to credible accusations of extra-judicial executions on the part of the Army. Bodies of the 62 dead were carefully arranged for public display and photographs showing President Alan García inspecting the rows of bodies were widely circulated on national televised news program and in the print media.

8 The exhibition was inaugurated on August 9, 2003. The Casa Riva-Aguero was its venue for almost two years. Subsequently, the exhibition was transferred to the Museo Nacional del Perú (Peruvian National Museum).

9 The journalists, who had travelled from Lima to the Ayacuchano highlands to confirm government's allegations about peasants' uprisings against the Shining Path, were killed in February 1983. The government set up an investigatory committee headed by Mario Vargas Llosa. The committee issued iater that year a highly controversial report entitled *Informe de la Comision Investigadora de los Sucesos de Uchuraccay*. The photos taken by the journalist Oscar Retto as he and his friends were being killed were used by the Commission as primary evidence for the investigation. Subsequently, Vargas Llosa published a journalistic account of his own about the killings entitled "Inquest in the Andes," *New York Times Magazine*, July 31, 1983. On Vargas Llosa's image of Uchuraccay, see Mayer 1991 and Del Pino 2003.

10 Experts who prepared the reports for the commission pointed to such "cultural" factors as the Indians' ignorance of national law and morality, their differing sense of blame, and their deep conservatism, and traditional bellicosity. The legal historian, Fernando de Trazegnies, for example, observed in the account he gave to the commission in February 18, 1983 that: "The Uchuraccay peasants declared that they were in favor of (president) Belaunde and the government; and they repeated this statement several times. However, those were not the peaceful statements any other supporter, ally, or ordinary citizen mindful of his civil and legal duties could state. Rather, they were the statements of a tribe or a nation that decides to ratify its alliance with another tribe or nation involved in an ongoing war" (quoted in Vargas Llosa et al, 1983, 29). See also Vargas Llosa 1983.

11 “This history (of the ethnic group Iquichanos) is characterized by long periods of almost total isolation and by unseasonable warlike eruptions by these communities in the events of the region or the nation. […] It is certainly difficult to define the Iquichano group as a tribe in the strict sense of the word, but it seems evident, from the information examined, that the Iquichanos possess a latent ethnic intercommunal structure and organization, that constantly manifest in critical situations and mark a high degree of regional solidarity. It is probable that the circumstances of the month of January precipitated a new manifestation of these latencies.” (Vargas Llosa et al. 1983, 38–45).

12 Here we might compare the impact of voice with Derrida’s observations on how the status of the photograph as juridical evidence hinges on the requirement that it be accompanied in court by a human voice—usually that of the photographer (Derrida 2002).

13 These comments are taken from copies of the log of comments of the exhibition both in Lima and Ayacucho that are in the authors’ archives. Presumably these copies are also in the *Centro de Información para la Memoria Colectiva y los Derechos Humanos* of the Peruvian *Defensoría del Pueblo* in Lima. Authors’ translations.

14 On racial practices and language in Peru, see Callirgos 1993 and de la Cadena 2000. In another example of how strongly photography is tied to race, when the familias of the victims of Uchuraccay mounted an exhibit featuring Retto’s photographs in the city of Huamanga (Ayacucho), the Uchuraccay peasants objected strongly that the photographs and the exhibit more generally portrayed them as “Indians” living outside the modern nation state (del Pino 2003).

15 As a counterpoint to this vision of photography, we might turn to Cavell’s observation that the technological claims of photography are not so much those of the representation or “picture”, as they are of transcription. Unlike painting, the photograph, he argues, does not record a likeness or representation, but rather the fact of existence. At the same time, and especially in a context such as that of post-conflict Peru, we find unsettling the notion of transparency that seems to underlie his claim that photography allows the parts of the world “to draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight” (1979, 25; 1985).

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