



VIOLENCE IN THE ANDES

Peru in Focus

Abstract

The article looks at Peru's recent history of violence and explores some of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR), with a focus on the City of Ayacucho which was the epicenter of operations for the insurgent group Sendero Luminoso.

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Background

Nestled amidst the snow-capped mountains of the Andes, is the sleepy City of Ayacucho which is also the capital of the south-central province of Huamanga. Today in the tourist route, its best known for its Easter week festivities and the beautiful thirty-three churches, each representing a year in the life of Jesus Christ. The deeply religious inhabitants who are predominantly of indigenous origins are Quechua speakers. The monotonous serenity characterised in both its ambience and lifestyle of the City is rudely disturbed every Saturday morning with loud police/military training that takes place at the *Zocalo* or the town centre. As a local said *'it's reminiscent of a past memory that's made alive through the military marches on a lazy weekend, almost as a warning'*.¹

Nearly four decades ago, Ayacucho was the epic centre of the *Sendero Luminoso* or the insurgent group known as the Shining Path, who made the City its base. Plagued by years of violence and a myriad of atrocities committed by both the insurgents and the Peruvian army, the City came to be known as the valley of the dead. Ironically as a local mentioned, *'the City got its name centuries earlier by the great Latin American freedom fighter Simón Bolívar, to mean the death corner in Quechua, and the City has not failed to keep to its reputation over the years....'*²

The origins of this wave of violence that eventually encapsulated the whole of Peru dates back to May 1980 when the Sendero Luminoso initiated an armed struggle in small and impoverished localities in the Andes such as Ayacucho. Soon their struggle extended to the national level although in its initial years the focus was on the rural areas of the country³. Sabotage, assassinations, extortions and punitive campaigns were some of the methods of violence and terror that both insurgents and the Peruvian armed forces resorted to.⁴ Why was Ayacucho such fertile ground for the emergence of a group that was remarkably rigid in its ideology, violent in its methods and appeared disinterested in the burning issues of the very people they seemed to represent? The city of Ayacucho, is among the poorest and most deprived in Peru. It is also a place where the presence of the state was historically weakest, both in terms of service delivery and political jurisdiction. In the beginning of its insurgency, Sendero Luminoso preferred to function from the remotest areas where state institutions were almost absent and where their gradual advance would encounter minimum obstacles. Importantly it also chose to operate in an area such as Ayacucho where the traditional system of land holding had remained largely intact regardless of the agrarian reforms of the 1960s and 1970s (Peru Support Group, 2004).

In a deeply stratified society such as Peru, where stark inequality prevails, violence also affects people differently. For instance among the lowest strata of the country – the Quechua speaking peasants who live in impoverished communities in the highlands of the Andes, often forgotten by the state, ignored when not despised by the Peruvian big city dwellers - were the key target groups⁵ of the Sendero Luminoso who appointed themselves as the very saviours of these people and claimed to fight for their very rights. At the same time, those same impoverished citizens, harassed and extorted by

¹ Open ended interview with the author in October 2016, name of the interviewee withheld on request.

² Open ended interview with the author in October 2016, name of the interviewee withheld on request.

³ See General Conclusions 12, 13, 20, 21 and 29/30 of the Final Report of the TRC. On the political and military logic of Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL)

⁴ On the classification of crimes committed by agents of the State see: Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume I, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 232-241 and 247-257.

⁵ On the profile of the victims of violence period, see: Commission of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Volume I, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 163-202.

Sendero Luminoso for not falling into line with their demands⁶, were also the main victims of the counter-subversive actions exerted by the Peruvian army and police forces. It is also worth noting that violence also affected other populations that were structurally marginalized: for instance the savagery of Sendero Luminoso towards an Amazonian people, the *Asháninka* nation⁷, according to the TRC, could have been termed as a genocide.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In the early 2000s, when violence had receded due to the military defeat of the Sendero Luminoso and the eventual imprisonment of its leadership, the country had an acute - but at the same time an inaccurate - sense of the magnitude of the catastrophe suffered (CVR, 2003). It was assumed that the number of lives lost reached 25,000 and that the number of missing people was around 6,000 (CVR,2003). The number of tortured, raped women, kidnapped children and people mentally broken by atrocities had not yet been estimated (CVR,2003). It was also estimated that around 600,000 people - mainly among the peasants from Andean regions - had to desert their homes and their scanty belongings to seek a precarious shelter elsewhere mostly in the cities where they continue to live to this day, in conditions of extreme poverty and, worse still, subjected to the scorn of the city (CVR, 2003). Finally, the measurable damage count indicated that material losses from the destruction of public and private property and the deterioration of the country's productive capacity amounted to approximately Peruvian Soles \$ 26 billion.(CVR,2003).

In this context of unenlightened crimes, unrepaired damages, non-sanctioned liabilities and social defects that were not examined or corrected, a strong urging request was made in Peru, mostly by organised civil society groups, to help the country clarify what happened in that period, so that Peru as a nation could commit to a genuine task of healing and peace-building.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Peru was created as a result on June 4th, 2001 by the transitional government of President Valentin Paniagua Corza. This commission consisted of locals who had earned their credibility and trust among the Peruvians as scholars, priests, sociologists, political scientists, artists, and civil society activists. It had expressed its mandate of "*clarifying the process, facts and responsibilities of terrorist violence and human rights violations that occurred from May 1980 to November 2000, attributable to terrorist organizations and state agents as well how to propose initiatives aimed at affirming peace and harmony among Peruvians*" (CVR,2003).

In addition to identifying facts and responsibilities, the State instructed the Commission to explain the social, political, institutional and other factors that had an impact on triggering violence. The TRC was also assigned the task of proposing actions to repair the damage caused to the affected population and was finally asked to recommend social, legal or institutional reforms aimed at preventing further cycles of violence (CVR, 2003).

Key Recommendations of the TRC Final Report

Among many recommendations and limitations that are well presented in the TRC Final report, only two recommendations is sighted here in this paper. First, the recommendation that is related to looking ahead and making reconciliation a sustainable process in the longer run.

⁶ See Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume II, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 23-137. On the qualification of the crimes committed by Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL)

⁷ TRC recommended investigating the Sendero Luminoso for the possible commission of the crime of genocide against the *Asháninka* people. . The actions of this organization against the said Amazonian indigenous people can be reviewed in: Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report Volume VI*, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 674-728.

1. Urgency to pursue vigorous citizen development policies

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presented the Final Report of its investigations on August 28, 2003. In this final report, the TRC gave an exhaustive presentation on the scope and limits of reconciliation in Peru. It suggested that true peace and democracy will be rooted in the country only if a vast process of transformation is implemented - institutional change and civic culture - that leaves behind the existing pattern of exclusion and discrimination. It further stated that reconciliation in Peru must be the result of full exposition of the truth and the exercise of justice in the form of reparations to the victims and punishment of the guilty with the implementation of deep Institutional reforms. The Commission noted how violence and the nature of violence had a significant effect on the shortcomings of Peru's political development. The original element of these inadequacies lies in the problem of citizenship⁸. In Peru, the status of a citizen, understood as the possession of civil, political and social rights and the capacity to exercise them effectively, is not a generalized situation, but rather a jealously guarded privilege of a small section of the population who belong to the ruling classes living in the cities.

It was understood that this great void is also at the root of Peru's continuing infuriations expressed by a majority. With a population that is generally not favored by the rule of law, since it favors only a minority, it is understandable that democracy in Peru was fragile and vulnerable to authoritarian political agendas. Therefore the urgency to pursue vigorous citizen development policies were put forward (CVR,2003). The government at the time firmly believed in the need to reconstitute a true memory that takes multiple narratives into account, as the fundamental prerequisite to comply with the recommendations that had been set forth in the Report. The concept and proposal of reconciliation presented by the TRC, in fulfillment of its mandate, appear as essentially moral tasks, oriented to the understanding of past and present and to one's self-recognition as subjects possessing a will to *discover* and above all to establish what "never again" means. This implies the creation of a superior social agreement inspired by practice of justice and solidarity and one that proclaims the absolute value and dignity of the human being.

2. The need to reconstitute a true memory that takes multiple narratives into account

Thus, the first ingredient of reconciliation was the truth linked to the exercise of a *collective memory*. Only through the unveiling of a common past and the exercise of a memory that is full of shared meanings, of a memory that has all Peruvians as its subject at the core, will be a possible reconciliation. In fact, every community bases its present relations on the way it understands its past. Therefore, the more authentic the dialogue that materialises about this common past, the more genuine the tasks of reconciliation will be. For this reason, a collective memory deformed by a vested interest of the powerful, which falsifies or conceals the facts and thereby nullifies the first avenue for the recovery of the victims, was the first obstacle to overcome in this reconciliatory process. On the other hand, as the TRC has stated emphatically, the exercise of memory should not be confused with a culture of revenge, for such confusion, instead of liberating societies, makes them slaves of the past.

How do you get that dialogic, creative and liberating memory? In the case of the Peruvian TRC, this memory was sought through an opening to the experiences of those who suffered violence at first hand. The voice of the victims, who usually do not have a public voice, paved the way to an intersubjective encounter, to an act of voluntary integration - and therefore free - among all those

⁸ General Conclusion 77 of the Final Report of the TRC stated: " *The TRC has noted with regret that civilian governments were not alone in this concession to the indiscriminate use of force as a means of combating subversion. On the contrary, the tendency of these governments to the military solution without civil control was in consonance with a considerable sector of Peruvian society, mainly the urban sector moderately educated, beneficiary of the services of the State and inhabitant of zones away from the epicenter of the conflict . This sector looked mostly with indifference or demanded a quick solution, ready to face the social cost that was paid by citizens of rural and more impoverished* '.

who chose to remember. That remembrance is conceived as a non-transferable heritage: As mentioned by a local *'no one remembers in our place; our memory cannot be imposed from outside, but grows in us or between us. The past is recovering, but not as an exercise of power - control and domination - but as a founding act of the community. Looking back, we celebrate'*.⁹

While the truth is a condition of reconciliation, in the Peruvian experience it has also opened the doors to justice. Therefore justice is not only a condition but also a consequence of reconciliation and as Peruvian experience has well demonstrated it has to be understood broadly. In its judicial nature, it involves the action of the law on those guilty of crimes. This means an end to arbitrariness. On the other hand, a social and political justice demands the material and moral compensation to the victims. In any case, it is never to be confused with revenge as clearly mentioned in the TRC.

On the basis of these ideas, and bearing in mind the immediate history of violence, the TRC proposed a notion of consistent reconciliation in restoring ties between the State and the society. Such restoration - which takes the form of a new social pact - implies a transformation of the political community to make it a society of citizens. Civic ethics, policy dialogue with morality as it is implicit in this reconciliatory proposal seemed impossible and at times cynical and superficial. Yet as argued by many Peruvian political scientists and historians, it is not. Truth and memory as they point out have always been powerful instruments in human history, that have been effective as allies of justice and affirmation of democracy.

A Community Initiative to Memorialise

Peruvians who had been direct victims of violence are set on the ambition and the duty to build a just, peaceful and democratic society through memory. One such initiative is the *La Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú (ANFASEP)* in Ayacucho. Established in 1983, under the leadership of three women, this association for the families of abducted, detained and disappeared persons is today at the forefront of the national dialogue on reconciliation. One of the key motivations for the establishment of this association according to Sra. Adelina, the present President of the association *'a significantly high percentage of Quechua speaking women from the peripheries gathered and organized themselves to find the whereabouts of their children, siblings, parents and other relatives, who were taken by force or kidnapped by the armed forces. Among the approximated deaths over 69,280¹⁰ between the years 1980-2000, a staggering 40% are from Ayacucho alone....'*¹¹

ANFASEP gained momentum and national visibility during the visits of the Pope John Paul II and the Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel to Ayacucho. While the association succeeded in delivering a manifesto to the Supreme Pontiff, the Nobel Prize Organisation helped them to organize their first public march in 1985 demanding the whereabouts of their loved ones at Plaza Mayor of Huamanga.

Over the years, support both in terms of technical as well as financial were obtained from various individuals and organisations that enabled the association to do many notable activities. For instance from the year 1984-1996 it ran a dining room for the children of the affected. Today the children who

⁹ Open ended interview with the author in October 2016, name of the interviewee withheld on request.

¹⁰ Using a methodology called the Multiple System Estimate, the CVR estimated that the most likely number of fatalities in the internal armed conflict was 69,280. A statistical explanation of this estimate can be found in Annex 3 of the CVR Final Report, "How Many Peruvians Died?".

¹¹ Open ended interview with the author in October 2016, name of the interviewee withheld on request.

were fed at this dining room have formed into a group called the Youth of ANFASEP and they continue to support the association.

The association is best known internationally for their Museum of Memory: Not to Repeat Itself (*Museo de la memoria Para que no se repita*). Located on the third floor of the premises of ANFASEP, it emerged from the initiative in the association to put the wooden cross and the association flag in a display case to keep them as symbolic representatives of their struggle. This in fact, led them to consider the idea of creating a museum of memory.

The museum was built between 2004 and 2005, with the support of foreign institutions such as the German Embassy, German Development Cooperation (GIZ), ZFD and national institutions, including the Ministry of Women and Social Development and the National Coordinator of Human Rights. The museum has three rooms including a space where the handicrafts store is located, where the members of the association sell their work. In the first room, the history of ANFASEP is explained through newspaper clippings, personal belongings of the disappeared, some dining utensils and photographs of the first public march.

The second room is illustrative of a torture chamber, through two life-size sculptures depicting a symbolic space. One can also see ceramics with representations alluding to the time of violence. In the third space, photographs and a chronology of the members and representatives of ANFASEP, as well as the new generation members, are exhibited.

Finally, there is the altar made by members of the association, showcasing the vision they still carry as a memory of what was experienced, 'still painful both physically and emotionally' which makes the over two hundred membership not rest their struggle to find their relatives.

One such ongoing struggle that keep the members on their toes, is the request to the government of Peru to declare the area of the *La Hoyada* as a sacred space. *La Hoyada* in Ayacucho then known as the '*La Casa Rosada*', under the purview of the General Clemente Noel was the main clandestine center for illegal detention, kidnapping, torture, extrajudicial execution and forced disappearance of people from all over Peru¹². In 1985 General Wilfredo Mori Orzo, the political and military chief of Ayacucho had ordered the construction of an oven for the incineration of corpses that had been buried at this site since 1983. It is nearly twenty years later, in January 2005 that exhumations began. The Specialized Forensic Team (EFE) carried out 3,031 units of archaeological excavation that covered the entire area of the site, constituting the largest exploratory excavation carried out worldwide in the search for missing persons¹³. This process lasted until 2010. A total of 58 mass graves, the foundations of the furnace, a fuel tank and its conduits were found during these excavations. (<http://anfasep.org.pe/>)

¹² On the classification of crimes committed by agents of the State see: Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume I, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 232-241 and 247-257. On the logic of the actions of the Armed Forces and National Police see Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume II, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 138-376. A journalistic version from the point of view of the perpetrators of human rights violations can be found in Ricardo Uceda, *Death in the Pentagonito. The secret cemeteries of the Peruvian Army*.

¹³ On Exhumations see; Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Lima, CVR, 2003 <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/apublicas/exhumaciones/declaracion.php>



Inside the Memory Museum (pic from ANFASEP website)



ANFASEP members gathered at La Hoyada (pic from ANFASEP website)



ANFASEP Public March at the *Zocalo* on Mothers' Day 2016 (pic from ANFASEP website)

As a result of one of the recommendations in the TRC, which is the establishment of places of remembrance in view of the need for collective reparations to those affected by violence, the demand for the declaration of *La Hoyada* as a 'Sanctuary of Memory' was first initiated by ANFASEP. Along the way, many other organizations such as Paz y Esperanza, Loyola Center, Support for Peace, SER, Casa Mateo Ricci, as well as some state institutions, such as the Ombudsman's Office has joined ANFASEP on this demand. Of late there have been some advances made such as the transfer of the property to the Regional Government and the construction of a fence. However, prolonged discussions over the request to declare *La Hoyada* as a sanctuary in memory of the victims of violence continue to this day between the government and these civil society organisations that have come together.

Structural Violence that Persists....

While seeking the truth, reparations both at collective as well as individual level and restoring and recognising multiple narratives of memory continue to play a central role in the national reconciliation dialogue in Peru, the deeper seated socio-economic divisions that exist along racial lines too need to be urgently addressed, if a true and sustainable reconciliation is to be found¹⁴. The people of indigenous decent who were the primary group at the receiving end of violence, continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty and extreme poverty¹⁵. For instance, of the total Peruvians without access to health services, 60% speak Quechua, the ancestral language of the Inca (World Bank Report 2014). According to 2007 Census and Statistics of Peru, the discrimination continues to be so blatant that many Quechua speakers who are 13% of the population, opt not to teach their children the

¹⁴ The TRC gave an exhaustive presentation on the scope and limits of reconciliation in Peru. It can be seen in: Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume IX, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 23-115.

¹⁵ In connection with the relationship between violence and racial and ethnic inequality, see: Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, *Final Report*, Volume VIII, Lima, CVR, 2003, pp. 119-174.

language for fear of rejection, contempt and most importantly to ensure that their experiences of language barriers to effectively and efficiently access public services are defeated.

In the year 2009 UNICEF calculated that 78% of children whose first language was Quechua or Aymara continued to live in poverty, compared to 40% of those whose mother tongue was Spanish. Besides poverty, Peru's indigenous groups are also deprived by lower levels of education. While the government in principal acknowledges the right to bilingual and intercultural education, in practice however this is not usually provided. As a result of spatial marginalisation faced by many indigenous communities who tend to be in remote, isolated and marginal regions, the quality of material and human resources is meagre. In the judicial system too these groups continue to face further injustice. Regardless of provisions in the constitution, indigenous people taken into custody in Peru are often not provided with an interpreter. There is documented evidence of indigenous people who have been often convicted without them fully understanding what they are really being charged with.¹⁶

Nearly seventeen years have lapsed since the end of violence. Many Peruvians who had been direct victims of the violence continue their quest for the truth, acquainting themselves with the heart-breaking possibilities of the final days or hours of their loved ones, seeking forgiveness, but most of all coming to terms with their past and haunting memories of their past. The people from the City of Ayacucho are slowly standing up on their feet and getting back to their lives. Yet, Ayacucho remains the poorest city of Peru, best accessible via an hour-long flight from Lima on a ten to twelve hour drive on a semi-motorable, mountainous road that runs four to five thousand meters above sea level.

About the author

Sulakshana de Mel is a Social & Cultural Anthropologist. In October 2016, she visited GIZ Peru Project 'Apoyo Para la Paz' in Ayacucho and took part in a public discourse titled 'Todas las Memorias, Todas' at the Huamanga City Council, where she shared the GIZ FLICT project experience in working on the subjects of conflict transformation/ social integration / reconciliation for 15 years in Sri Lanka. See following link <http://ayacucho.memoria.website/conversatorio/>. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the opinions of GIZ.

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¹⁶ See Amnesty International Website <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/peru/>

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