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## **“HOW WE LEARNED TO KILL OUR BROTHER” ?: MEMORY, MORALITY AND RECONCILIATION IN PERU**

Kimberly THEIDON\*

### **Abstract**

In this article we explore how *campesinos* in Ayacucho (Peru), understand both the political violence that has contoured daily life since 1980 as well as the mandate to kill that arose within the context of the armed conflict between the Shining Path guerrilla, the Peruvian Armed Forces and the peasant civil defense patrols. Since 1995 we had conducted anthropological research in various rural communities in Ayacucho. We investigated how war shapes moral life, challenging concepts of acceptable human conduct and the very sense of what it means to live in a human community. We utilized a genealogical approach to analyze the origins of moral interpretations that are forged in specific contexts. Indeed, the moral frameworks that villagers recount syncretize elements of militant Christianity, psychocultural themes, and the appropriation of extra-local discourses in the process of both militarizing and demilitarizing daily life.

**Key words:** *Memory, Morality and Reconciliation in Peru, Political violence, Collective memory, Morality, Ethnic identity, Reconciliation.*

### **“¿CÓMO APRENDIMOS A MATAR A NUESTROS HERMANOS?”: MEMORIA, MORALIDAD Y RECONCILIACIÓN EN EL PERÚ**

### **Resumen**

En este artículo, exploramos cómo los campesinos en Ayacucho (Perú) entienden tanto la violencia política que ha moldeado la vida cotidiana desde 1980, como el mandato de matar que surgió dentro del contexto del conflicto armado entre Sendero Luminoso, las Fuerzas Armadas Peruanas, y las rondas campesinas. Hemos estado llevando a cabo una investigación antropológica desde 1995 en varias comunidades en el departamento de Ayacucho. Pretendemos explorar cómo el contexto de guerra moldea la vida moral, desafiando concepciones de la conducta humana aceptable y el sentido mismo de vivir en una comunidad humana. Utilizamos un acercamiento genealógico para analizar los orígenes de interpretaciones morales que surgen dentro de contextos locales específicos. De hecho, los marcos morales que los campesinos recuentan, sincretizan elementos de un cristianismo militante, temas psicoculturales y la

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apropiación de discursos extralocales, tanto en el proceso de militarización como en el proceso de desmilitarizar la vida cotidiana.

**Palabras claves:** *Violencia política, memoria colectiva, moralidad, identidad étnica, reconciliación.*

### **“COMMENT AVONS-NOUS APPRIS À TUER NOS FRÈRES ?” : MÉMOIRE, MORALE ET RÉCONCILIATION AU PÉROU**

#### **Résumé**

Dans cet article nous nous demandons comment certains paysans d’Ayacucho (Pérou) analysent à la fois la violence politique qui a façonné leur vie quotidienne depuis 1980 et l’ordre de tuer qui a pris forme dans le contexte du conflit armé entre Sentier Lumineux, les Forces Armées Péruviennes et les rondes paysannes. Depuis 1995, nous conduisons à cet effet une recherche anthropologique dans diverses communautés du département d’Ayacucho. Nous cherchons ici à voir comment le contexte de guerre structure la vie morale en défiant les règles élémentaires du comportement humain et le sens même de la vie en communauté. Nous avons recours à une approche généalogique pour analyser les origines des interprétations morales qui surgissent dans des contextes locaux spécifiques. Aussi bien dans le processus de militarisation et de démilitarisation de la vie quotidienne, les cadres moraux qui transparaissent à travers les récits des paysans s’avèrent être un mélange synchrétique de christianisme militant, de thèmes psycho-culturels et de l’appropriation de discours extra-locaux.

**Mots clés :** *Violence politique, mémoire collective, morale, identité ethnique, réconciliation.*

“There has always been violence in the mountains, since the time of the Incas  
and the Spaniards. Mutilating bodies, constant fighting —this is natural—.  
How can we have peace with these Indios?”

(Comandante Vásquez, Castropampa, Perú, marzo del 2000)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My purpose in this essay is to explore the place of lethal violence and traumatic political events in the contemporary history of villagers in the highland department of Ayacucho, the region of Peru most heavily affected by that country’s internal war. Since 1995 I have conducted ethnographic research in a variety of villages throughout Ayacucho, focusing on psychosocial trauma, memory, religious movements, and reconciliation.

Central to my research has been the following questions:

- How do people make and unmake violence in a particular historical context?

- How do people collectively militarize their daily lives and, conversely, demilitarize them in post-conflict situations?

- What happens to social relations and group identities in the process?

How are categorical distinctions of “us” and “them” manipulated in the construction of the “enemy”, and when do these categories become permeable?

- Finally, when is someone my neighbor, my fellow villager, and how do they become someone that I will track down and kill?

Rather than assuming the answers lie in the distant colonial past—or in primordial ethnicity—I have explored how villagers understand and narrate the political violence of the 1980s and 90s.

Clearly these concerns are fundamentally related to questions of memory and morality. Memory and issues of accountability figure prominently in the construction of identities, both individual and collective. Memory is central to questions such as who are we? What have we done and why? What sorts of stories do we tell ourselves and others about our past? These are questions that look not only to the past, but squarely to the future as people determine what sort of human community they reconstruct after sustained political violence. As Lambek states, “Memory is never out of time and never morally or pragmatically neutral” (1996). Thus, the histories elaborated by villagers about the war are strategic, mutable, and context-specific—much like the moral codes that were also contoured by the vastly shifting social landscape of years of armed conflict—.

## 1. BACKGROUND

“During the years of violence, we lived and died like dogs.”

(A leitmotif heard throughout the highland communities of Ayacucho)

From 1980-1992, an internal war raged between the guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso*, the *rondas campesinas* and the Peruvian armed forces (1). The Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) began its campaign to overthrow the Peruvian state in 1980 in a calculated attack on the Andean village of Chuschi. Founded by Abimael Gúzman, this band of revolutionaries positioned themselves as the vanguard in a revolution to usher the nation toward an imminent communist utopia (Degregori, 1990; Palmer, 1992; Starn, 1995a).

Drawing upon Maoist theories of guerrilla warfare, they planned a top-down revolution in which *Sendero Luminoso* would mobilize the peasantry, surround the cities and strangle the urbanized coast into submission. However, the relentless march toward the future was doubly-interrupted: The initial governmental response was a brutal counter-insurgency war in which “Andean peasant” became conflated with “terrorist”, and many peasants themselves rebelled *against* the revolution (Starn, 1995b).

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(1) *Rondas campesinas* are armed civil defense patrols composed of male community members.

While some communities remained *in situ* and organized into *rondas campesinas* to defend themselves against the *Senderistas*, many others fled the region in a mass exodus (2). Indeed, an estimated 600 000 people fled from the south-central sierra, devastating over 400 *campesino* communities (Coronel, 1995). By the time the Peruvian state declared “victory” over the *Senderistas* in 1992, 30 000 people had been killed and another 5 000 disappeared (Americas’ Watch, 1992).

In addition to the statistics that bear witness to the impact of the war in rural Peru, I want to emphasize the extent to which the war was experienced as a “cultural revolution” —as an attack against cultural practices and the very meaning of what it means to live as a human being in these villages—. Under continuous threat of *Senderista* attacks, communal life was severely distorted: Both family and community celebrations were suspended, villagers sporadically attended their weekly markets due to the danger of travelling on remote roads, and many lament how they were forced to leave their dead loved ones wherever they had fallen, “burying them hurriedly like animals”. Additionally, the *Senderistas* routinely burned Catholic churches and their saints, blocking social reproduction in both this world and beyond.

I realize the phrase “dehumanizing violence” has been reduced to a cliché in the media; however, attentiveness to the language villagers use indicates just how appropriate the term is. To “live and die like dogs”, to insist that *ya no era vida* —it was no longer life— underscores the extent to which the political violence surpassed any form of acceptable force. Indeed, the violence of the guerilla exceeded anything villagers could imagine. As many campesinos have told me:

“The Senderistas killed people in ways we do not even butcher our animals. They smashed people’s head with rocks, just smashed them as though they were frogs.”

Other villagers have described how they would go out with large burlap bags and collect the body parts of their dead loved ones, trying to reassemble the pieces into something resembling a human form.

It is important to understand the role of violence in the grand historical project of *Senderismo* in order to understand the course of the war. In this rigidly authoritarian movement, violence was not instrumental but rather an end in itself. As Degregori notes, “Blood and death must be familiar to those who have decided to ‘convert the word into armed actions’. The evangelical allusion to the Redeemer —‘the word made flesh’— is fully recognizable and not at all gratuitous. It announces Guzman’s and Sendero’s attitude towards violence. She is the Redeemer. She is not the midwife of history, she is the Mother of History” (Degregori, 1997: 67). Indeed, as Abimael Gúzman insisted, each village would be required to pay its “quota of blood”, and a million lives would be the price of the war *Sendero* waged.

For many villagers, the price was far too high. Rather than being helplessly caught “between two armies”, rural villagers began to organize and negotiate alliances

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(2) The use of the term “exodus” is quite deliberate and reflective of the Biblical narrative structure that shapes many villagers accounts of the war. This narrative structure is clearly informed by the massive conversions to Evangelical Christianity that characterized the region during the 1980s and 90s. See Del Pino & Theidon, 1999.

as protagonists in their own right. In their *rondas campesinas*, villagers began killing the guerrilla and suspected sympathizers. When villagers in Huaychao killed seven *Senderistas* and brought their bloody heads in a bag to the local police, national attention turned toward *los olvidados del país*—the “forgotten inhabitants” of Peru’s highlands—

## 2. OTHER PATHS

It was early in the course of Peru’s internal war when eight journalists headed out for the highland village of Huaychao, located in the department of Ayacucho. The men had arrived from Lima to investigate rumors that the “Indians” had been killing the *Senderistas*—the guerrillas who had positioned themselves as the vanguard in a revolution ostensibly waged on behalf of the rural poor—. In 1983 the war in the interior still had a mysterious quality, due to the profound cleavages that characterize Peru. Indeed, in part because the war was still a mystery to many Peruvians, the journalists fashioned their trip as an expedition in search of the “truth”.

They spent the night in the city of Huamanga before heading out at dawn for the lengthy trip to Huaychao. Their route took them through Uchuraccay, where the journalists arrived in the village unannounced, accompanied by a Quechua-speaking guide. Although the sequence of events remains debatable, the photos taken by one of the journalists as he and his friends were dying established one thing: The villagers surrounded the journalists and began killing them with rocks and machetes. After cutting out their tongues and eyes, the bodies were buried face down in shallow graves in the ravine which runs the length of the village.

In the aftermath of the killings, the government established an investigatory commission to determine what had happened and why. Headed by the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, the commission was sent to study Peru’s “ethnic other” and the circumstances of the journalists’ deaths.

The authors begin by reviewing material on the history and ethnography of the Iquichanos, an ethnic group allegedly comprising the villages of Carhuahurán, Huaychao, Iquicha and Uchuraccay, among others (3). As they summarize:

“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.” (Vargas Llosa *et al.*, 1983: 38)

The belligerence of the Iquichanos forms a central component of the history presented, as does the notion of “ethnic latency”:

“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

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(3) For a fascinating analysis of the role of colonial records and social scientists in the construction of the “Iquichanos,” see Mendez Gastelumendi, 1996.

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: 45)

Thus the report the commission produced insisted on two key explanatory factors: The primitiveness of the highlanders, who allegedly lived as they had since the time of the conquest, and the intrinsically violent nature of the “Indians” (Vargas Llosa et al., 1983). Drawing upon a substantial body of literature which emphasizes the “endemic violence of the Andes”, the members of the commission attributed the killings to the pervasive “culture of violence” that characterizes these villagers. In the widely circulated *Informe de la Comisión Investigadora de los Sucesos de Uchuraccay*, the commission suggests that one could not really blame the villagers—they were just doing what came *naturally*—. In underscoring the role of cultural incommensurability as the real culprit, the authors state that the death of the eight journalists in the Iquichano territories provides the most conclusive evidence that even after 400 years of contact between European culture and Andean culture, it has still not been possible to develop a true dialogue (Vargas Llosa et al., 1983: 77).

The report is redolent with what Paul Gilroy has termed “ethnic absolutism”. As he defines it, ethnic absolutism is “a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable” (Gilroy, 1990: 115). From this perspective, “cultural barriers” can be explanatory of events such as the murders at Uchuraccay, and it is reasonable to suggest that these villagers are living as they did 500 years ago rather than as our contemporaries. While time marches on for many, these villagers would be the exception: “‘survivors’, not products (still less producers) of history” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

As one might imagine, the ensuing debates were vociferous. In response to the endemic violence arguments, a more *indigenista* perspective was elaborated. This view insisted upon the harmonious nature of the villagers, and the peaceful quality of “*lo andino*”—a cultural essence that imbued the lives of the villagers and their *mentalidades*—a sort of Durkheimian collective conscience that subsumed individuality to the greater good (Burga, 1988; Flores Galindo, 1987).

What do we make of this polarized debate? If we move beyond “essences”—whether rooted in biology or in culture—what can we learn about the making and unmaking of violence in Peru? I turn next to the communal histories I have listened to, with a focus on the village of Carhuahurán and its eleven annexes. As we shall see, history here is used and not merely recounted: Indeed, the (imaginary) ethnicized history that influenced the *Informe Investigadora sobre los Sucesos de Uchuraccay* is appropriated and reworked by the villagers as a key resource in the construction of community and the militarization of daily life. As Malkki argues in her research with Hutu refugees in Tanzania:

“One of the central conclusions to be drawn from this case, then, is that nationness and historicity are produced and elaborated as a result of

exigencies of everyday practice. In other words, collective histories flourish where they have a meaningful, signifying use in the present... In contrast to the evolutionary view of historical consciousness as a capability typifying a particular stage of development, it is being argued here that actors produce historical consciousness where they need it ‘for the sake of life and action’” (Malkki, 1995: 242).

### 3. THE MAKING OF VIOLENCE

“... *every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats*” (White, 1987: 14).

As I have mentioned, the extreme violence of the *Senderistas* was a key factor in alienating the campesinos. Although villagers initially approved of *Sendero*’s “moralization campaigns” when limited to sanctioning cattle thieves and adulterers, once the violence became lethal —once villagers were being randomly targeted for death on accusations of spying for the military— villagers began to rebel *against* the revolutionaries (Berg, 1994; Isbell, 1994).

Additionally, we must understand why villagers allied with the military. In my interviews, villagers recount that the *compañeros* came to *concientizarnos* —to “raise the consciousness” of the campesinos—. As Marcos, the Teniente Gobernador of Carhuahurán told me, the *Senderistas* arrived with flyers explaining the *Ley de Común* —how everyone was going to live as equals once the state was overthrown—. All of the village’s agricultural products were to be placed in a large storehouse and distributed equally to villagers according to need. This idea certainly did not impress Marcos or any of the other villagers with whom I have spoken. Marcos continued:

“The *Senderistas* told us we would fight with slingshots and rocks. What were they thinking? The soldiers had long-distance rifles and helicopters —how were we going to win with slingshots—?”

Thus, at the height of the violence (1981-1984), the villagers of the *Consejo Menor de Carhuahurán* (Lesser Municipality of Carhuahurán) petitioned for the installation of a military base in their midst. I suggest that villagers, as a dominated group, are very sensitive to shifts in power and surmised that the military was clearly stronger than the insurgents.

For security purposes, villagers also began to live in a nucleated settlement comprised of the *comunidad madre* of Carhuahurán and its eleven annexes. At this juncture, the challenge was to submerge old conflicts —and new tensions regarding allegiances— in the name of constructing “community” as a strategic identity in the service of survival. The production of community relied on two key components: Narrative and death.

Although I never met Mario Quispe, the president of Carhuahurán during the 1980s (he was “disappeared” in 1990), I have read the written records of the general assemblies held during those years, and have certainly spent much time with the current mayor who fashioned himself in Mario’s mold. Feliciano Rimachi is recognized as a true hero of the war. Indeed, his body bears the proof of his heroism: Instead of ten



fingers, his hands end in scarred stumps, the result of a *Senderista* grenade that exploded in his hands when he tore down a red flag planted in the *puna* above Carhuahurán. Mayor Rimachi has used his status as a war hero to construct an authoritative voice in the forging of communal history and identity.

For example, in *fiestas patrias* (Independence Day celebrations) in the community of Carhuahurán in 1998, the mayor addressed all of the *ronderos* present during the raising of the flag. In this raising of the Peruvian flag—a practice carried out every Sunday in rural villages throughout Ayacucho—Mayor Rimachi spoke to the crowd which had formed in rows and columns, rifles slung over their shoulders:

“Today is the anniversary of our country, and all of us as Peruvians should celebrate with pride, affection and respect. It was on a day such as today that we freed ourselves from Spanish domination, just as we fought against Sendero to defend what it means to be Peruvian. This feeling of having fought should be present in us so that we feel proud and remember that the struggle has not ended but could start anew at anytime. For this we must be ready for the task and not lose the fervor that we have had.”

I note the glorious history of struggle that Mayor Rimachi relates, weaving together two centuries of resistance in the name of *La Patria*. This reappropriation of the past is even more striking in the written history that he wrote as part of a competition sponsored by a nongovernmental organization in 1997. The competition was directed towards community presidents, so that they would write the history of their community during the war, with prizes to be awarded for the “best history”.

In a text called “The Problem of the Resisters: A History that Repeats itself after 182 years”, Mayor Rimachi chronicles the principal *Senderista* attacks that the community of Carhuahurán and its annexes endured, the number of deaths that resulted from said attacks, and how the “rebellious campesinos” overthrew the guerrilla. He finishes his history stating that “One can say that the best campesino is the Peruvian one for his resistance, capacity for recuperation and adaptation to inclemency, disasters and civil problems that have endured for the 14 years of the war against the subversives and how he demonstrated before history his capacity and recuperation from bad elements.”

In this glorious history of a “rebellious people”, we witness the construction of an imagined identity that spans two centuries and revindicates a population long marginalized as mere *chutos* (savages) of the highlands. In this seizing of the public space of the flag-raising they reinscribe this nationalist act with their own meaning—as not only members of the nation but heroes of *La Patria*—. In Feliciano’s written history and the rallying speeches addressed to the villagers who gather every Sunday to raise the Peruvian flag, he makes use of the history of *una gente rebelde*—a rebellious people—. This is historicity—the conscious production of historical narrative—as an empowering mode of social action (Malkki, 1995). This history is equally ethnicized, yet to vastly different ends: Indeed, the villagers perform the “warring Indians” role, but do so strategically, not “essentially”.

If, as I have argued, narrative played a key role in producing communal sentiment, words were also central to committing acts of lethal violence. Certainly there were *Senderista* sympathizers in Carhuahurán and its annexes—sympathizers who

were not swayed by appeals to patriotism nor the recounting of a glorious history—. Other words would prompt other actions. As David Apter states:

“People do not commit political violence without discourse. They need to talk themselves into it. What may begin as casual conversation may suddenly take a serious turn. Secret meetings add portent. On public platforms it becomes inflammatory. It results in texts, lectures. In short it engages people who suddenly are called upon to use their intelligences in ways out of the ordinary. It takes people out of themselves” (Apter, 1997: 2).

Words are central to constructing categories, defining the enemy and practicing violence.

#### 4. PRACTICING VIOLENCE

In 1992, a leading Peruvian anthropologist, Carlos Ivan Degregori, argued that rural justice in Ayacucho was characterized by a long-standing proscription against the taking of human life. Indeed, the repertoire of rural justice consisted of corporal punishment, economic sanctions and, in extreme cases, the infliction of “social death” via expulsion of the guilty party. However, the use of the “death penalty” was virtually unheard of, a rarity Degregori explained by a frequently heard expression “castigar pero no matar” —“punish but do not kill”—.

Degregori’s insightful yet synchronic argument underscores the importance of using a genealogical approach to analyzing memory and morality. I suggest that both arise from practice—from material engagement in the world—which molds the ideas people have of the world and their place in it.

From the fieldwork I have done, it is clear that killing prior to the internal war was very rare, reserved exclusively for *abigeos*—cattlerustlers who refused to cease and desist—. Indeed, many villagers in Carhuahurán can easily recall the communal decision to kill several *abigeos* in the mid-1970s, a decision made after the rustlers refused to accept banishment from the village. The deaths of the Quispes was so exceptional that it is recalled precisely for the singularity of the event.

However, war may be a form of bracketing off normal conduct from the exceptional, as indeed the villagers suggest. To capture this transformation, I want to begin with an emblematic memory, to borrow a term from the historian Steve Stern (1998). He suggests the concept of emblematic memory to refer to collective memories that condense important sociocultural themes and take on a certain uniformity. Additionally, I suggest the following is a foundational memory which villagers cite as indicative of the establishment of a new moral order.

“We knew the Cayetanos had been giving food and lodging to the *terrucos* (Senderistas). In their house up on the puna, they let the *terrucos* spend the night. We knew what the soldiers would do if they found out. We knew we had to stop that. So we rounded up the family one night, all but the youngest child, and took them down to the river below. We hung them all that night and dumped their bodies in the river. That’s how we learned to kill our *prójimo* (brother/fellow creature).”

(Interviews, Carhuahurán, 1998-9)

The decision to kill *Senderistas* and their suspected sympathizers was discussed at length in general assemblies prior to any action. To quote again from Apter:

“When people do try to take control, and by means of interpretive action, then the iconography of violence, the choreography of confrontational events, the planning of actions based on interpretation and interpretations deriving from actions becomes a process. The process enables one to shuttle back and forth between violent acts and moral binaries” (Apter, 1997: 4).

In the context of these rural villages, the moral binaries consisted of constructing the *Senderistas* as radically, dangerously Other.

I have found that conceptions of the “enemy” drew upon psychocultural themes, extralocal discourses and militant Christianity. Among the terms used to describe the *Senderistas* are: *terrucos*, *malafekuna*, *tuta puriq*, *puriqkuna* and *anticristos*. Each term reflects the condensation of concerns regarding evil and monstrosity, also captured by the many villagers who told me the *Senderistas* had “fallen out of humanity”.

*Terrucos* is a derivative of terrorists, and was borrowed from the military discourse regarding the *Senderistas*. The Peruvian armed forces conducted a classic counter-insurgency war during the first portion of the 1980s, and the notion of communist subversion as a cancer plaguing the national body was common.

Both *malafekuna* (the people of bad faith/conscience) and *anticristos* (the antichrists) elaborate upon the proselytizing of the war years and the massive conversions to evangelical Christianity characteristic of the region. With *malafekuna*, what is also implied is that the *Senderistas* lacked any conscience, being people who “nacieron solamente para matar” —were only born to kill—. Additionally, both terms are reflective of a strand of apocalyptic thinking that drew upon the Pentacostalized *evangelismo* developed by the villagers.

Also common in my interviews is *tuta puriq* (those who walk at night), which stems from long-standing fears of the condemned who walk this earth, inflicting their vengeance on the living. Another variation of the term is *puriqkuna*, which is a symbolically rich image. *Puriqkuna* are people who walk and never stay in one place —transgressive people who are out of place, belonging nowhere—. We will return to the centrality of this transgressive wandering later in the text.

In addition to these terms, villagers are quite consistent in asserting that the *Senderistas* “were gringos... they came from other countries”. Indeed, when I had recently arrived, many villagers were terrified of me. As I was told, “The *Senderistas* were tall Kimberly, like you. They also had green eyes.” Isbell has quite rightly suggested that villagers simply could not believe their fellow countrymen could be capable of such brutality (Isbell, 1994). However, I argue that this foreignness was also central to justifying the killing villagers themselves would commit.

However, sometimes “other countries” was not far enough away, and the origin of the *Senderistas* was considered (literally) otherworldly. As Jesús Romero told me:

“We killed them and saw their bodies. Some of them were women. They had three belly buttons and their sexo (genitals) were in another part of their body. You can tell just by looking at their bodies —they bear a mark on their arms—.”

Even Mayor Rimachi, a man who prides himself on not “believing all those things that campesinos tell you”, assured me he could always identify *Senderistas* by examining their bodies.

The rich elaboration of corporeal difference is central to the moral binaries characteristic of a wartime code of conduct. I underscore that these villagers are phenotypically homogeneous: Certainly there is social stratification, but there are no categorical physical differences. Thus, people felt the need to construct them. As Appadurai suggests, via the elaboration of bodily difference, political categories are given somatic force and identity can be rendered “dead certain” (1998). Given villagers’ worries that the *Senderistas* and their sympathizers *están de dos caras* (have two faces), bodies would be divined for a truth the face might hide. Examining the bodies of *Senderistas* was a technique of divination —reading the truth of their inner evil on the surface of their bodies—.

Additionally, the focus on genitals “out of place” warrants our attention. In addition to conveying a sense of monstrosity, I suggest it also reflects abnormal reproduction, be it blocked or gone mad. For the villagers, rituals central to social and cultural reproduction were casualties of war. Moreover, the *Senderistas* routinely forced children into their ranks, abducting them from the villages during attacks. Finally, in contrast to the villagers precarious reproductive situation, the guerrilla always swore “we multiply like the grains of sand”.

It is also common to hear that the *Senderistas* were *piojosos* —covered with lice—. In addition to illustrating concerns with categorical purity (Douglas, 1996[1966]), there is something else being referenced by this imagery. I recall many sunny afternoons in the villages, when long black braids would be unwound and washed. Family members would sit on sheepskins, picking the lice out of one another’s hair. These are intimate moments: Mothers work through their children’s and their husband’s hair, and the children gather a younger sibling in their lap, thick black hair giving way to busy fingernails. The idea that the guerrilla walked endlessly and had heads covered in lice suggests something fundamental about their lack of connection both to place and to other people. Humans live in families: What must that imply about the status of the *Senderistas*?

However, the *Senderistas* were neither foreigners nor “extraterrestrials” —they were brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and neighbors—. Now that the violence has subsided, interspersed with “alien sightings” is the recognition that “the *Senderistas* were poor campesinos like us (4)”. Somehow the “anticristos” of an earlier time can be, in the words of the villagers, “converted back into human beings”. In one of the clearest examples of this mutability, Doña Marcelina assured me that “the mark disappears as *Senderistas* return and convert into “runa masinchik” —people we work with—. Somehow even that which is considered the most “natural of all” —the human body— is culturally reinscribed to permit the “rehumanization” of ex-*Senderistas*. I turn next to the practice of making social beings and the reconciliation such practices permit.

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(4) Clemente Condorcai, Carhuahurán, 1999.

## 5. THE UNMAKING OF VIOLENCE: THE MICROPOLITICS OF RECONCILIATION

*“Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.”* (Hannah Arendt, 1958).

In her book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, Martha Minow analyzes societal responses to collective violence. She discusses at length the concept of restorative justice, suggesting it is based upon Christian notions of forgiveness and the reclaiming of humanity (Minow, 1995). However, rather than suggesting this as a model to be applied in all places and at all times, she notes that restorative justice presumes the presence of a community of interest and of relationships worthy of repair. Her arguments have tremendous resonance with the practices of *arrepentimiento* (repentance) and reconciliation as practiced in rural villages in Ayacucho.

I underscore that the processes I will discuss are not about forgetting, but about pardoning transgressors. Indeed, forgetting is not the goal. Here we must consider cultural concepts of personhood —of being *runakuna*— which include memory as a central human characteristic. A key stage in children’s development is the acquiring of *uso de razón* —the capacity to reason—, which is intricately linked to memory. *Uso de razón* allows children to enter communal life as accountable members of the collective, as more fully human. Consequently, villagers insist that forgetting would mean “becoming animals” —perhaps reverting to the “little creatures” very small children are considered to be before making this transition—.

Thus the emphasis is on punishment and pardon. This prompts several questions: What counts as a good reason to forgive? When is memory placed in the service of repairing social relations? When can people remember shared interest and not just enmity?

I suggest that material conditions play an important role in these practices. Tamayo Flores, in her study of customary law in Peru, notes the importance of communal forms of work such as *faenas* and *ayni* (Tamayo Flores, 1992). These communal forms of labor establish interdependence among the villagers who participate in them, and they are practiced due to the harsh geography of the region, which makes the introduction of technology almost impossible. Thus the recourse to communal labor is a necessity for survival, requiring cooperation between families and villages. Recall Marcelina’s term for the ex-*Senderistas* who have been incorporated into the village: *runa masinchik* —people we work with—.

Additionally, I emphasize another theme voiced in many interviews. For example, Don Teofilo, the *curandero* of Carhuahurán, is frequently called upon to read coca leaves when there are interpersonal conflicts and determine who is the perpetrator. In one of our many conversations, we talked about the theme of reconciliation. Teofilo told me:

“We can accept *arrepentidos* (the “repentant ones” —ex-*Senderistas*—) back into the village. As long as they act like people, they can come

back. We have to forgive or we would hate them. God says we must pardon them so that we may live with a tranquil heart.”

The notion of *Senderistas* “becoming human” is central; indeed, even during the war years, villagers state they went out into the hills to look for the *Senderistas*, talk to them and try to “convert them into human beings again”. In addition to going out in search of the *Senderistas* to “convert” them, *Senderistas* also came to the village, confessing and asking for forgiveness.

This is a most delicate subject, one that is denied in the “official story” that Mayor Rimachi recounts to those who come around asking. Indeed, he consistently denies that any *arrepentidos* live in Carhuahurán, indicating “that only happened in other villages, not here”. Given the military presence in the zone and the ongoing fear of being labeled a “red zone” (sympathetic to *Sendero*), the conversations I have had regarding these practices were few, private and in hushed tones.

One such conversation was with Doña Marcelina. She is an elderly widow who remained in the village during the years of fighting. We spent many hours sitting and talking in her small store. The shelves were lined with blue and green Bolívar soaps, stacked next to the white food groups that villagers absolutely crave —sugar, noodles and rice—.

Marcelina was amazingly candid with me from the first moment we met; this was quite unusual and surprised me. As she explained the first time I visited, her deceased husband had appeared in her dreams the previous night, indicating that a gringa would be coming to see her. He assured her that even though most gringos are dangerous, I was a *gringa cariñosa* —an affectionate member of the species!—

Marcelina did not merely tell her stories, she performed them. Spindles became knives, held to the throat to demonstrate how the *Senderistas* had threatened her. She wrapped my scarf tightly around my head to show me how the guerrilla had hidden their faces with masks, leaving only their evil, squinting eyes shining out from the depths. *Hacendados* who had left the zone after the Agrarian Reform of 1968 were resuscitated in her store, screeching “Indios, indios!” in an imperious tone.

She told me about the *arrepentidos* who had found their way to Carhuahurán:

“They repented for the suffering they endured there in the mountains. Day and night, in the rain, they just kept walking. They would start to think about coming down from the hills, ‘Surely the villagers won’t kill me’, they thought. They would arrive telling us they had been tricked, forced to kill, always walking —‘pardon me’ they would plead—. ‘Pardon me’, they would beg the community. We would ask them over and over ‘Are you going to let the *Senderistas* in?’ They would promise not to. And so they came, like *común runa igualña* —like common people, like us—. ”

I wanted to know more. Were they punished? Were they beaten with whips when they came to repent?

“Oh yes, the authorities whipped them in public. They were whipped with *chicotes*, warning them what would happen in they decided to go

back. Whipping them, they were received here. They would confess. They would come, asking to bring their families. They always escaped as couples, man and woman. If they came alone, we turned them over to the soldiers. If they came alone (single), there was more distrust. ‘What if they are just here to plan how to attack us’, we thought. When they came as families, we had more trust. They could be *runakuna* (people) again.”

Again, the idea of “being people” is central. So, what constitutes being *runakuna*? The central features revolve around land—both working it and being “*of a place*”—as well as family. Indeed, in the *Actas Comunes*, the records of the general assemblies held in the villages, the redistribution of land was a practice that called my attention long before anyone had confided in me about the *arrepentidos*. Land is scarce and key to survival—and *arrepentidos* were given land to work as a component of their reincorporation into communal life—. Via *faenas* and *ayni*, interdependence is established and social relations are developed and sustained.

Additionally, the emphasis on family is decisive. *Arrepentidos* were accepted—rather than turned over to the soldiers—when they came as family units rather than single guerrillas. As suggested above, humans live in families; indeed, villagers are only considered fully social beings once they have a partner and children.

However, one can imagine that friction remained—and remains—. We are, quite literally, dealing with issues of life and death. In tracing various cases of *arrepentimiento* in these villages, I have also noted an impressive repertoire of mechanisms designed to minimize the friction and patrol for both internal and external threats. For instance, the *rondas campesinas* clearly watch for danger not only in the *puna*, but within the villages themselves. Participating in the *ronda* is a requirement of all adult males; in addition to guarding against *Senderista* attacks, performing one’s duty is also a means of manifesting allegiance to the community.

Additionally, in settling conflicts, communal authorities use binding agreements called *actas de conciliación*. All parties to the conflict are required to present their cases, call their witnesses, and abide by the decision that is made. They kneel before the authorities, and the agreement is sealed with alcohol, prayer and the sign of the cross. The sacramental nature of conflict resolution is highly syncretic, demonstrating that religion is not a finite sphere within these villages but rather an aspect of daily life.

In sum, I emphasize the importance of understanding the micropolitics of reconciliation—the ways in which the practices of daily life are mobilized to reincorporate former enemies into the social body—. These cultural resources are central in the process of reestablishing a moral order, and a humane community. Clearly conflicts still exist, but parallel with a system of restorative justice which takes into account what the community signified prior to and during the political violence, and reaffirms the value of reconstructing communal life in the present. I emphasize that in a post-war context, it is not only political institutions and economic systems that must be rebuilt—a central concern is the reconstruction of human life—. This process touches on several key questions: Who were we before? What have we done and why? Who are we now? These are profoundly moral questions, and the collective memories that villagers elaborate look not only to the past, but to the future as well.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In closing, it strikes me as useful to think about why the image of the “intrinsically violent other” is so prevalent in public culture, the social imaginary, as well as the social sciences. What do we, as academics, think we are explaining when we locate the etiology of violence in ethnic identity? As I have discussed, for rural villagers in Ayacucho, the *Senderistas* who were “foreigners” and “radically other” in one context are recognized as neighbors and relatives in another. Their ethnic identity changed according to the context, more a result of the course of the conflict than the cause of it. An attentiveness to the history of ethnic identity allows us to de-essentialize ethnicity and better understand how ethnic identities are constructed at certain junctures.

Additionally, I have sought to decentralize memory production by analyzing the communal histories elaborated by subaltern sectors —rural peasants in Ayacucho, Peru—. Clearly their narratives are political instruments, and vehicles for the production of meaning rather than merely a means of conveying information. These campesinos are “a people” reinventing themselves via the histories they construct; they narrate as an empowering social action. Moreover, these communal histories give the political violence a meaning that stretches back in history as well as forward with precepts for ethical behavior. They are reconstructing a moral community.

Finally, many studies of peace processes and reconciliation remain at the macro level. Certainly the importance of such studies is undeniable. However, it is difficult to legislate peace from above or at a distance. I suggest that the practices of restorative justice that influence the lives of campesinos in Peru have their homologues in other post-conflict societies. Thus, these villagers offer something more than a glimpse of political violence in a remote “corner of the world”. Rather, their cultural practices and local initiatives offer an example of the reconstruction of society and sociability, family by family and community by community.

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