

Memory Making in Contemporary Peru: El Santuario de La Hoyada

By Emily Fjaellen Thompson

Throughout Latin America, memory spaces like monuments, museums, and sanctuaries act as embodied interventions in the aftermath of violence. *Lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) are what French historian Pierre Nora (1989) defines as deliberate archives that are embedded within collective memories. These can refer to physical spaces, such as cemeteries or libraries, as well as other tangible traces, like images or artifacts, that both shape and carry shared memories.

In contemporary Peru, commemoration and remembrance practices are sustained and contested at these sites of memory. Diverse narratives often clash publicly at museums, memorials, and photography exhibits related to the internal armed conflict throughout the country, mirroring the tension and unrest that continues to this day.

Armed Conflict in Peru

In the wake of five conservative and unstable governments from 2016 to 2021, Peruvians elected their first Indigenous and Marxist president, Pedro Castillo, in July 2021. Twenty years after the internal armed conflict, this rupture has reignited disparate memories in opposition to the state's prior insistence on a cohesive "post-conflict" narrative.

Peru's internal armed conflict (1980-2000) was the longest, most violent period in the country since its independence, resulting in the death of nearly 70,000 people. The hardline Maoist guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) led by Abimael Guzmán, a philosophy professor at the Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho, was ultimately culpable for more than half (54 percent) of the casualties. Government security forces, military, and police

Memorial stones list the names and ages of the murdered and disappeared in *El Ojo que Llorra* (The Eye That Cries), a monument in Lima.



Photo by Christiane Wilke.

were responsible for another third, with much smaller percentages attributed to *rondas campesinas* (autonomous peasant patrols) or to the *Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru* (MRTA, Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement), a Marxist-Leninist rival of Sendero. Three out of every four people killed were native speakers of Quechua or another Indigenous language (CVR, 2003).

In 2001, the Peruvian government established the *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* (CVR, Truth and Reconciliation Commission) to investigate the violence. The CVR spent two years collecting 17,000 testimonies and holding 229 public hearings throughout the country. In August 2003, the commission turned in a several-thousand-page, nine-volume report to President Alejandro Toledo.

The *Informe Final* (Final Report) charts an extended chronology of inequality leading to the eve of the 1980 presidential elections, when Sendero Luminoso burned 11 ballot boxes in Chuschi, Ayacucho. As Sendero turned to more overtly violent tactics in the following years, the Peruvian government authorized the intervention of the armed forces by declaring a state of emergency in a third of the country. In the name of combatting Sendero militants, government troops and police also perpetrated extensive abuses, including extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and the systematic use of rape and torture (Robin Azevedo, 2021; Degregori, 2003).

A photo of a 1985 protest displayed outside the Museo de la Memoria in Ayacucho.

In the early 1990s, Sendero changed tactics and carried out car bombings, kidnappings, and assaults on the capital. Shortly thereafter, President Alberto Fujimori suspended the constitution and dissolved parliament in a self-coup in April 1992. In September of the same year, Peruvian intelligence forces captured Abimael Guzmán in Lima, where he remained imprisoned until his death in 2021. Although the CVR traces most murders and disappearances to the first decade of violence, attacks and casualties continued throughout the 1990s.

Sites of Memory in Lima

In Peru, various registries of *espacios para la memoria* identify between 24 and 101 physical sites throughout the country (Reátegui, 2010; Garretón Kreft et al., 2011). Most scholarly attention, however, has been dedicated to three specific memory spaces in Lima: the photography exhibit *Yuyanapaq: Para Recordar* (“to remember” in Quechua and Spanish), the monument *El Ojo que Llora* (The Eye That Cries), and the museum Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia, y la Inclusión Social (Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion, known colloquially as “the LUM”).

Yuyanapaq is a robust collection of 300 documentary photographs originally released as part of the CVR’s *Final Report*. In its entirety, Yuyanapaq consisted of a small



Photo by Emily Fjellien Thompson.



Photos by Emily Fraellen Thompson.

The Eye That Cries labyrinth. Right: Damage done by vandals, who stole memorial stones and defaced a plaque written in Quechua.

traveling exhibition, a digital image bank, and a limited-edition publication. The permanent exhibit is now housed on the seventh floor of the Museo Nacional in downtown Lima. Guido Bellido, President Castillo's first Prime Minister, was forced to resign shortly after opponents uncovered a years-old photo of him at the art exhibit. The image of Bellido at Yuyanapaq confirmed for many that he was in fact guilty of the crime *apologia al terrorismo* (apology for terrorism).

The Eye That Cries is a memorial sculpture located in the Campo de Marte, a park in the Jesús María district of the capital and one of the largest green spaces in Lima. It was created by the late Dutch sculptor Lika Mutal and incorporates a rock fountain surrounded by a labyrinth. The center monument consists of a boulder from the Andean mountain Ausangate, meant to represent *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), which cradles a smaller, rounded stone. Water cascades gently from the sculpture to evoke an eye crying for the dead. Twelve concentric circles, alluding to four repetitions of the three world-levels in the Quechua belief system, surround the fountain. The pathways of the labyrinth are made up of thousands of small stones engraved with names of the murdered and disappeared. The stones are oriented to face the Southern Cross constellation in the night sky, and the negative space they create symbolizes the Huallaga River, where bodies were disappeared during the internal armed conflict (Hite, 2011).

The Eye That Cries opened to the public in August 2005, on the second anniversary of the CVR's *Final Report*, and the monument has been a microcosm of the convoluted memory debates in contemporary Peru ever since. It is cared for by human rights activists and family members of the disappeared and has faced repeated criticism and vandalism by extremists. A group of far-right Fujimori supporters, *La Resistencia* (The Resistance), splattered the memorial with bright orange paint (the color of Fujimori's campaign), ripped out the names of those they claim were Sendero members, and defaced a commemorative plaque written in Quechua. During my most recent visit on the 18th anniversary of the *Final Report*, the entire park was fenced off from the public.

Most recently, in 2015, the LUM was inaugurated in the Miraflores neighborhood of Lima, following years of intense debate. After a German cabinet member visited the Yuyanapaq exhibit, their government offered €2 million to help build a permanent memory museum in Peru. Alan García, then president for the second time, rejected the offer at first. Only after the proposal was leaked to several newspapers and the public spoke out against his decision did García concede.

Six years and several controversies later, the LUM opened to the public. It is an imposing, brutalist structure carved out of Lima's steep coastline. Visitors enter on the ground floor and gradually climb up three stories through

a series of permanent and temporary exhibits. The final floor is home to the permanent display titled *Ofrenda* (Offering), an open space meant to invite both introspection and participation with a dedicated wall for visitors to share their thoughts publicly. Three murals depicting the coast, mountains, and jungle of Peru lead toward the exit, which opens on to a wide esplanade overlooking a precipitous drop to the Pacific Ocean (Feldman, 2021).

La Hoyada in Ayacucho

Much less attention has been paid to memory spaces in the regions disproportionately affected by the internal armed conflict. In Ayacucho, where more than 40 percent of the deaths registered by the CVR occurred, the *Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú* (ANFASEP, National Association of Family Members of the Kidnapped, Detained, and Disappeared of Peru) established the country's first Museo de la Memoria (Memory Museum) in 2005. But unlike both *The Eye That Cries* and the LUM, ANFASEP's Museo de la Memoria is not incorporated into the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and receives no economic support from the state.

ANFASEP was founded in 1983 by three women searching for their disappeared sons in Ayacucho. Within a year, the organization had grown to include 800 members. In addition to demanding justice for their family members, ANFASEP also created a communal kitchen to feed hundreds of children displaced or orphaned by the violence. Now, the location that houses the Memory Museum also serves as their administrative office and includes a small memory park in the neighboring plaza. The outside of the three-story building is covered with a graphic mural by local artist Claudio Martínez that depicts scenes from the internal armed conflict.

Martínez was also commissioned by an affiliated human rights group to paint *La Hoyada*, a piece that in many ways has become the symbol of ANFASEP's current sanctuary project. The image of *La Hoyada* has been printed on publicity materials and displayed at commemorative events throughout the country. The painting depicts the land adjacent to the Los Cabitos military barracks, known collectively as La Hoyada, on the outskirts of the city of Ayacucho.

In the 1980s, La Hoyada was a place of illegal detention, torture, extrajudicial executions, and clandestine cremation and burial. Excavations after the internal armed conflict left the shallow valley crosshatched with hundreds of rectangular depressions marked with small white wooden crosses. A one-room, two-story concrete structure still stands in the middle of the field; it once stored gas tanks that fueled the incinerators. During an excavation process that has lasted several years in fits and starts and is still ongoing, the government's forensic team has found evidence of two

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Photo by Emily Fjællen Thompson.

Above: An altar for the disappeared at La Hoyada.

Below: Detail of La Hoyada, a painting by Claudio Martínez.



Photo by Emily Fjællen Thompson. Image courtesy of Claudio Martínez.



Photo by Emily Fjællen Thompson.

An offering for Arquímedes (son of ANFASEP founder Angélica Mendoza de Ascarza) at La Hoyada.

Mural at ANFASEP's Museo de la Memoria, painted by Claudio Martínez in Ayacucho.



Photo by Emily Fjællen Thompson.

adjacent crematories and the remains of 109 people, of whom only 14 have been identified to date. These remains belong to people disappeared toward the beginning of the internal armed conflict, in the early to mid-1980s. Although they have yet to find more identifiable remains, the forensic investigators estimate that another 500 individuals may have been killed and then burned there in later years (Vega & Matta, 2021).

Martínez's painting of *La Hoyada* is more than a commission, it is a testimony to his personal experience during the internal armed conflict. On November 5, 1983, Martínez's brother Luis Enrique, an anthropology student at the Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga, was disappeared at the age of 22. From his home studio a few blocks away from the school, Martínez explained to me why much of his artwork features mothers of the disappeared looking for traces of their family members. Martínez's mother, like many others at the time, would spend nights searching for remains by candlelight to avoid the incessant daytime military patrols. Martínez's mother passed away before she found her son. Finally, 29 years and 18 days after he was disappeared, Luis Enrique's body was recovered in a mass grave in the jungle, far from Ayacucho, and returned to his brother (Martínez, 2021).

The city of Ayacucho from Mirador Acuchimay.

La Hoyada tells an analogous story. In the painting, Martínez distorts the human body and employs color psychology to convey fear in darkness. He bears witness through symbolism and what he considers an explicitly Quechua emphasis on dualities—the moon and the sun, shadow and light—to create a distinction between the day's persistent violence and the night's endless searching. In the foreground, a woman uncovers a shred of half-buried clothing. Behind her are a *retablo*, a carved miniature altar from Ayacucho covered with photographs of the disappeared, and the emblematic wooden cross of ANFASEP, emblazoned with the phrase “NO MATAR” (DO NOT KILL) and draped in a white cloth.

Alongside other human rights organizations, the current municipal government of Ayacucho, and two Lima-based architecture firms, ANFASEP has been fighting illegal land invasion, airport expansion, and military opposition to converting *La Hoyada* into a federally recognized site of symbolic reparation. After years of setbacks, the design has been finalized, and the alliance hopes to secure funding and begin construction as soon as 2022. The proposal emerged collectively after a series of 90 interviews and community meetings.



Photo by Emily Fjællen Thompson.



Image courtesy of Juan Carlos Zapata, Awaq Estudio.

Architectural renderings of the proposed Santuario de la Memoria in La Hoyada.

The final configuration for the sanctuary includes a memory museum that integrates the fuel tank structure, remnants of the crematories, and the existing grid of 750 hollows where remains were uncovered. The architects stress the desire for the sanctuary to remain an open, dynamic space for family members to gather and commemorate their loved ones, in lieu of a physical gravesite, and for the architecture itself to physically embody the search for the disappeared. It is designed without an imposed timeline or trajectory through the space to allow each visitor to make their own intimate, unique way through the sanctuary.

The planners explain that through the ability to isolate and reorient, separate and connect, the built environment can intentionally accompany traumatic pasts and ongoing pain. The architects refer to a sense of “being there without being there” and a “presence through absence” in their attention to how things like shadows, reflections, silences, and echoes narrate living memory. With this effect in mind, they allow the landscape to intervene in the design process. For example, during the excavation, the forensic team uncovered foundations of pre-Inkan (Wari) canals. These low walls traverse the excavation site and led the designers to incorporate the natural flow of water as a symbol of moving

through space and time as the channels fill and drain with the seasons (Zapata et al., 2021).

Divisive memories of Peru’s internal armed conflict continue to reverberate, often with concrete consequences, albeit outside of “official” infrastructures. These memories are not something far away or relegated to an abstract past. They are here, now, constantly being “re-membered” in the current moment (Benjamin, 1969). As the coalition defending the sanctuary maintains, memory sites are never really finished. They argue that the symbolic reparation of La Hoyada will work not only to facilitate commemoration of the past, but also to tangibly imagine a different future.

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Members of ANFASEP after a pilgrimage to the future site of their Santuario de la Memoria in La Hoyada.
(Photo by Emily Fjaellen Thompson.)

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