



## “Terror’s Talk: Fieldwork and War”

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**Abstract.** My purpose in this essay is to raise some questions about what is involved in research on political violence. Since 1995 I have conducted ethnographic research in rural villages throughout Ayacucho, the region of Peru most heavily affected by the war between the guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso*, the *rondas campesinas* (armed peasant patrols) and the Peruvian armed forces. A key factor motivating my research was a desire to write against the culture of violence arguments that were used to “explain” the war. The concept of a “culture of violence” or “endemic violence” has frequently been attributed to the Andean region, particularly to the rural peasants who inhabit the highlands. I wanted to understand how people make and unmake lethal violence in a particular social and historical context, and to explore the positioning and responsibilities of an anthropologist who conducts research in the context of war.

### Introduction

My purpose in this essay is to raise some questions about what is involved in research on political violence. Since 1995 I have conducted ethnographic research in rural villages throughout Ayacucho, the region of Peru most heavily affected by the war between the guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso*, the *rondas campesinas* (armed peasant patrols) and the Peruvian armed forces.<sup>1</sup> I have focused on psychosocial trauma, religious movements, human rights and reconciliation.

A key factor motivating my research was a desire to write against the culture of violence arguments that were used to “explain” the war. The concept of a “culture of violence” or “endemic violence” has frequently been attributed to the Andean region, particularly to the rural peasants who inhabit the highlands.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Malcolm Deas has noted, “The excavation of past conflict, preferably violent, has been the dominant mode in Andean history locally and abroad to such a degree that it is widely accepted as natural even by historians who would regard such dominance with suspicion if they found it prevailing elsewhere”.<sup>3</sup>

I was committed to looking beyond essentializing arguments, whether such arguments invoked a biological or cultural imaginary. Thus, central to

my research has been the following questions: How do people make and unmake lethal violence in a particular historical context? What happens to social relations and group identities in the process? What is at stake in the construction of “community” as a strategic identity both during war and in the transition to a tentative peace? These questions lead me to study social life and sociability in the context of armed violence.

As I will argue, there is no “observation” when people are at war and you arrive asking them about it. You are, whether you wish to be or not, a participant. When terror weaves its way through a community, words are no longer mere information – words become weapons and posing a question must mean you plan to do something with the response. So I want to discuss the challenges and importance of fieldwork amidst “terror’s talk.”

### **Sasachakuy: “The Difficult Years”**

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. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, an estimated 600,000 people fled from the south-central sierra, devastating over 400 campesino communities.<sup>7</sup> By the time the Peruvian state declared “victory” over the *Senderistas* in 1992, 30,000 people had been killed and more than 5,000 disappeared.<sup>8</sup>

However, aggregate statistics obscure the intensity of the political violence in the department of Ayacucho. For instance, of the 7,000 cases of forced disappearances currently under investigation by the Defensoría del Pueblo,

60% occurred in Ayacucho.<sup>9</sup> As Rojas notes, the key characteristics of the disappeared in Peru are: young, Andean, campesino and Quechua speaking.<sup>10</sup> Thus, an epidemiology of political violence in Peru demonstrates that death and disappearance were distributed by class, ethnicity and gender.

In addition to the statistics that bear witness to the impact of the war in rural Peru, I 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 heads with rocks, just smashed them as though they were frogs." Other villagers have described how they went out with large burlap bags to 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".<sup>11</sup> 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 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.

### **Making War**

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 composed of three anthropologists, a psychoanalyst, a jurist and two linguists who were sent to study Peru’s “ethnic other” and the circumstances of the journalists’ deaths.

In their report, 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.<sup>12</sup> 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”.<sup>13</sup> 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 high degree of regional solidarity. It is probable that the circumstances of the month of January precipitated a new manifestation of these latencies.<sup>14</sup>

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".<sup>15</sup> Drawing upon a substantial body of literature emphasizing 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".<sup>16</sup> They grounded their findings in the assertion that two irreconcilable worlds coexist in Peru: modern/civilized/coastal Peru, with Lima as its center, and the traditional/savage/archaic Peru, mapped onto the highland communities, particularly Ayacucho. Somehow, in a perverse twist on John Murra's concept of *pisos ecológicos* (ecological niches), civilization had never found a way to scale up the steep mountain slopes of Peru's interior.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in a subsequent interview with the journal *Caretas*, Vargas Llosa elaborated on the notion of "the two Perus" consisting of "men who participate in the 20th century and men such as these villagers of Uchuraccay who live in the 19th century, or perhaps even the 18th. The enormous distance that exists between the two Perus is what lies behind this tragedy." As such, these highland villages were akin to museum exhibits, frozen in time and placed outside of history, resulting in an "Andean world that is so backwards and so violent".<sup>18</sup>

In an insightful article regarding the *Informe*, Enrique Mayer notes "the result was an anthropological text rather than a fact-finding report. Anthropological input into the Commission thus lent an aura of legitimate expertise concerning indigenous affairs".<sup>19</sup> However, although producing an "anthropological text" in tone, the Commission did so without utilizing the key components of anthropological methodologies – prolonged fieldwork and the embodied experiences of the people with whom we conduct our research.

Several years later, in the novel *Adiós, Ayacucho*, Julio Ortega provided a thinly veiled political commentary on these same events, suggesting that

anthropology as a discipline was one of the fatalities in the aftermath of Uchurraccay.<sup>20</sup> As he suggests, if all anthropologists can do is offer up a mirror in which the “primitive’s savagery” is reflected back to them, then it would be best to count anthropology among the dead at Uchurraccay.

These debates formed the backdrop for my research in Peru. I decided to work in the highlands of Huanta, the province of Ayacucho that encompasses Uchuraccay, Huaychao, Iquicha and Carhuahurán. I began my research in 1995, when burned out houses, toppled churches and fear still contoured the landscape. Indeed, the tidy categories of “conflict” and “post-conflict” seek to impose order on the flux of human experience: Daily life pressed up against the dichotomy. Although the official story is that the war ended in 1992 with the capture of Abimael Gúzman, the leader of *Sendero Luminoso*, to this day these villages are armed and all adult men – and in some villages, women – are required to serve in the defense patrols. For these villagers, the possibility of future attacks remains a palpable concern.

### **Terror’s Talk**

It was 1996 and I had been in the village of Carhuahurán for a few weeks when I finally met Michael, the commando of Los Tigres – a special self-defense unit that was paid to stand watch each night. I was interested in why the villagers had added this additional unit and expense to the pre-existing *ronda campesina*. I approached Michael with my hand extended, commenting on how happy I was to meet him and eager to talk with him. His feet shifted into a broad stance, his rifle was hoisted more firmly over his shoulder and he looked me straight in the eyes: “Why do you want to talk to me?”

I began to explain, feeling more nervous with each awkward word that came out of my mouth. I reminded him that I had been introduced by the village president at a general assembly sometime before – certainly he remembered? I tried to explain my research and why I was there. I told him I was interested in the history of the villages, how they had lived during the years of the war, and were now rebuilding their communities. He gave me a quizzical look. Finally I felt rescued by a group of small children who approached – I noted how adorable the girls’ hats were, rimmed with flowers and ribbons. I made “small talk,” not understanding just how oxymoronic the term would be.

That evening in my room, I began mulling over what was happening. My experience with Michael was not unique. When I first arrived, many people invented names for themselves when we met. My earliest fieldnotes are peopled by a phantom cast of pseudonyms. As I would learn, for years the guerrillas had arrived in the village with lists of names. The list was read,

those villagers would be separated out, there would be a “popular justice” trial, followed by the killing of everyone whose name appeared on the list. The soldiers also arrived with their lists of supposed Senderista sympathizers; many of those named were arrested, killed or disappeared. Giving one’s name was to place oneself at risk.

But it was not just war that made naming so powerful. In any village, enemies and ex-enemies live side by side – suspected Senderistas, ex-Senderistas, ex-soldiers, women widowed during attacks – this is a charged social landscape. Added to the political violence are long-standing practices of *hechicería* – witchcraft. These long-standing practices are mobilized at times to new uses, as concerns about suspicious alliances during the war give rise to concerns about wrong-doing and revenge in the present.

A key figure in diagnosing witchcraft and settling accounts is Don Teofilo, the *curandero*. Teofilo is a tiny man – indeed, his nickname is El Piki (Quechua for “flea”). Teofilo is called upon to read the coca leaves and bodily symptoms; to name a perpetrator when witchcraft is determined; and to head out to the mountains and speak with the *apus* – the mountain gods who are very angry that the villagers forgot them during the years of war, causing the gods to ally with the Senderistas.

Teofilo was very wary of me when I first arrived, wondering what I was going to do with what I learned. During one of our first conversations, Teofilo issued a thinly veiled challenge to me: “So you want to know what I do? The words I use are so powerful that I could destroy you just by speaking them. Do you want me to speak them right now? Do you really think you have the power to handle my words?” He began to laugh, clearly pleased by my discomfiture. I felt very small indeed. He was, after all, the man who knew the language that allowed him to climb the sharp peaks surrounding Carhuahurán and converse with the mountain gods, soliciting advice and appeasing their anger.

I am arguing that the methodological challenges of conducting research during war go far beyond the “normal” concerns of establishing trust. During my research, I was told of killing suffered, and killing done. I knew who the ex-guerrillas were, and why they had been allowed back in, their secret kept from the soldiers in the base. I knew what happened to Don Mario Quispe, the village president who demanded that the soldiers stop abusing the women – his body was never found, his widow went mad with grief. And there, in the freezing puna, I thought about Jeanne Favret-Saada and the French peasants with whom she had worked.

In her book *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, she sets off to study witchcraft in the provinces of France. As she writes, “In the project for my research I wrote that I wanted to study witchcraft practices. For more than

a century, folklorists had been gorging themselves on them, and the time had come to understand them. In the field, however, all I came across was language. For many months, the only empirical facts I was able to record were words".<sup>21</sup> As she comes to realize, "witchcraft is spoken words; but these spoken words are power, and not knowledge or information".<sup>22</sup> "In short, there is no neutral position with spoken words: in witchcraft, words wage war".<sup>23</sup> And in war, words trigger terror. Rumor about who was seen where and doing what becomes a matter of life and death.

I reflected upon her assertion that language is an act – the word is an act. Ethnographers frequently rely upon the spoken word as conveying information; however, witchcraft is spoken words as action. Informing the ethnographer for the sake of knowing is a contrary idea because a word can fix a fate and whoever puts herself in a position to utter the words is formidable. Knowledge is not neutral and insisting that one is simply there to "study" keeps people guessing what purpose lies behind wanting to know.

The parallels were striking. Both witchcraft and war involve social relationships that are tense, dangerous, occult, violent and potentially lethal. Again, there is no neutral place from which to ask "What happened here – tell me a bit about the war?" I simply could not be a neutral person in such a charged context. Without meaning to, I had entered into terror's talk.

### **Signs of the Times**

Surely it is in the coils of rumor, gossip, story, and chit-chat where ideology and ideas become emotionally powerful and enter into active social circulation and meaningful existence.<sup>24</sup>

Violence is frequently described as senseless, and it may well be that horrific violence destroys accepted meanings, shared vocabularies, and assaults the sensory organs. Allen Feldman has referred to a "sensorium of violence" to capture how one's perceptions are altered by armed conflict and fear.<sup>25</sup> Certainly many villagers told me they had cried until they had lost their vision – assured me that bodies that carry so much sadness are bodies that ache and age before their time. The lived body is plagued by "llakis" – the pain and intrusive memories that unsettle the soul.

This world of altered perceptions and ruptured symbolic systems has been described as the "space of death".<sup>26</sup> In the "space of death" the signified and signifier come unhinged – the structuralist dream of a chainlink fence of order is disrupted and the surplus meaning unleashed gives rise to tremendous portent. Everything becomes what it is and yet something more. The wind rustling through the laminated steel roofs of rural houses presages

an imminent *Senderista* attack. A hollow in the mountain signals the opening in which the guerrilla slip out of view and disappear into the earth itself. Indeed, villagers assured me that it took the security forces so long to capture Abimael Gúzman because he could transform himself into a rock, a tree, a spring – and the soldiers had only searched for a man. Events, sounds, images – these become signs that are read for the warnings they offer or the evil they index.

The surplus of meaning also gives rise to duplicity and doubling. Villagers learn that survival may well depend on showing one face to the soldiers, and another to the guerrillas. People live their public and secret lives, masking their torn allegiances. I was told that the guerrillas “están de dos caras” – they are “two-faced” and one can never know which way they may turn. Duplicity gives rise to rumor, and rumor is divisive. As Luise White notes, “. . . if we can historicize gossip, we can look at the boundaries and bonds of a community. Who says what about whom, to whom, articulates the alliances and affiliations of the conflicts of daily life”.<sup>27</sup> As villagers attempt to forge community as a strategic identity that allows them to make demands upon the state – to suppress internal conflicts in order to present a unified front to state and nongovernmental organizations – gossip becomes explosive. Indeed, village authorities passed a *Ley Contra Chismes* (Law Against Gossip) in an attempt to control the power of words to rip the village apart. Authorities tried to control the verbal economy, recognizing that words wound.

During the first years of my research, I was repeatedly told “hay que imponer orden acá – “someone needs to impose order here.” I suggest this is a multidimensional lament. Certainly villagers were demanding that communal authorities resume their duties and restore some semblance of order to daily life. Sendero had targeted village authorities for death as a means of “descabezando” (beheading) local power structures that were viewed as barriers to their revolutionary project. However, I believe the desire for order indexed another plane as well. Given the precarious nature of life, the disruption of rituals, and the tense social context, systems of referents have been displaced: Villagers were also expressing a desire to fix meanings and to know that some meanings were both shared and stable.

### **Practicing Anthropology, Positioning the Researcher**

So, why should people speak at all in such painful and dangerous times? What is the researcher’s responsibility in light of how much is at stake? If I wanted to stay, I had to take a stand and make it explicit. I had to demonstrate that I would put the knowledge shared with me to good use, or get out.

Clearly I am not the first anthropologist to note the implausibility of neutrality in the face of struggle.<sup>28</sup> However, my goal is not redundancy. I am not simply noting the need to take a position as an ethical imperative; rather, I am arguing that one's presence, one's speech elide neutrality – we are, to paraphrase Favret-Saada, already “caught.”

Conducting fieldwork during times of armed conflict requires tremendous time – people will not speak with you if you arrive asking. Additionally, one simply cannot observe – you will not be permitted to if you ever intend to open your mouth. There will come a point when you must take a stand. People will remind you that you are far too implicated not to.

I was called out of my room by gunshots and shouting. A crowd had gathered outside of the *calabozo* – the room the *ronderos* used to lock up prisoners overnight. I made my way through the crowd and found soldiers using their rifles to push away the women who were attempting to shove past them into the *calabozo*. I saw mama Juliana and mama Sosima, shouting at the soldiers. As I made my way to Juliana, I learned that her partner Esteban was one of the young men locked inside. La leva had made its way to Carhuahurán – the illegal forced “recruitment” by the army of young and primarily undocumented men. However, “men” seemed a euphemism for the adolescent boys locked inside. Juliana was distraught: Although he was several years her junior, Esteban was a good partner for her, bringing bright pink plastic shoes to her little daughter Shintaca. He was a kind stepfather and a hard worker. Juliana was not going to allow these soldiers to take him away. The mothers of the other two young men were also protesting, and before too long the women were grabbing the soldiers' rifles and attempting to pull them out of their hands. People knew that I had a camera and told me to run and get it. Villagers began exhorting me to take pictures of the soldiers as they struggled with the women. I began shoving my camera up close and photographing their faces. I joined in the shouting and the grabbing. The soldiers began to back down: I imagine that being photographed shoving unarmed women around with their rifles disturbed them. The mayor came down and in front of the soldiers asked me to take the photos to the Defensoría del Pueblo and show them what had happened. Mayor Rimachi and the women succeeded in freeing the young men – the women simply refused to back down.

I had previously been hesitant in my dealings with the soldiers, always conscious that my actions might have unintended consequences for the villages in which I lived and worked. Although an airplane could deliver me to safety, for villagers flight would not be airborne. However, in this

situation, there was only one thing to do. Had I not stood side by side with the women as they grabbed those rifles out of the soldiers' hands, who would I have been in that context when the soldiers moved on? I had spent many evenings around small cooking fires and blackened pots, listening to how the soldiers had treated the women and young girls when the military base was fully operational and positioned on the slope overlooking the village. The panopticon had brought daily life under the power of its gaze. I had heard the stories; I could choose a side or have one chosen for me.

I did indeed meet with the Defensor del Pueblo en Huamanga, and with the director of the Consejo Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CONADEH) in Lima. These groups knew that "la leva" continued despite official denial of the practice. Photos provided some proof and the events of that day could become something more than just the routine abuse of rural villagers in the countryside. The women had made the difference; the photos were testimony to that.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes has asked "What makes anthropology and anthropologists exempt from human responsibility to take an ethical (and even a political) stand on the working out of historical events as we are privileged to witness them?"<sup>29</sup> She discerns between the anthropologist as witness versus spectator. While I am uncomfortable with her call for a "womanly-hearted anthropology" – I know far too many fine men to cast the call for action in such gendered terms – I do agree with her insistence on our role as committed witnesses. To merely watch is to reduce the sensuous world and high stakes of events such as this to spectacle – the optic of the distant observer for whom the world is an intellectual project rather than a world in which one is engaged.

In 1999 the Fujimori administration proudly boasted of having achieved peace both within its borders as well as along them. The Senderistas were generally relegated to history – except when the specter of terrorism was a useful justification for authoritarian measures – and the truce with Ecuador had been signed. The militarized discourse of the state shifted to *La Guerra contra la Pobreza* – the War on Poverty. As part of the needs assessment phase of the poverty initiative, meetings were held throughout the country to determine where the state should focus its resources. One such meeting was convened in Huanta, a small city located in the valley below the highland villages in which I was living. Community leaders from throughout the zone headed down to Huanta, where they would make their case for inclusion in the program.

The mayor of Huanta, Milton Cordoba, gave a florid welcome, followed by the engineers from the state. Then the floor was opened to the 200 people present – they were encouraged to talk about their needs

and priorities. I saw many village authorities that I knew and I sat in the back of the room to listen.

Mayor Rimachi kept turning around and looking at me. I thought he must be trying to piece together the Kimberly he knew – generally covered in mud and sunscreen, making me an even brighter shade of white – with the groomed Kimberly sitting in the back, lipstick replacing chapstick. However, he was asking me to stand up and speak. I felt profoundly uncomfortable – the gringa anthropologist “giving voice” to the rural villagers. Oh no, my butt remained glued to my seat. Soon Mayor Rimachi was joined by the *promotor de salud*, both indicating with their heads that I was supposed to stand up and speak. They certainly understood racial and class politics: A white woman – an anthropologist from Berkeley – would be listened to. I could be useful. Mayor Rimachi finally whispered, but loudly from across the room: “You have lived with us for a long time. You know us – stand up and tell them. Tell them about our lives and why we need this program.” Taking a stand can be more than a figure of speech.

I am well aware of the growing criticism of NGOs, the humanitarian agenda, and the development discourse more generally.<sup>30</sup> I share these authors’ concerns regarding the need for alternatives *to* development and their caution that the development apparatus may depoliticize structural or political problems by imposing technical “solutions.” However, I am left with lingering doubts.

In the aftermath of Peru’s internal war, the state response has been pacification and reconstruction via a massive investment in infrastructural projects in the *Trapezio Andino* – the departments of Ayacucho, Apurímac and Huancaavelica. These projects have brought latrines, schools, health posts and highways to previously remote villages.

A cursory glance at the emphasis on public works would indicate a continuation of the well-worn tradition of clientelism. However, a statist perspective obscures the politics of perception and experience. Ana María Alonso has noted the pervasiveness of nationalism as a structure of feeling, and an exploration of local values and practices reveals a very different interpretation of development policy.<sup>31</sup>

A recurring theme in these villages is “Ahora vamos a vivir como civilizados” – Now we are going to live as civilized people. This phrase reflects both an intense internalization of racism on behalf of the rural population, as well as a desire to partake of the sorts of services that previously existed only in urban settings. Indeed, throughout the highlands villagers clamor for ‘el progreso y desarrollo del pueblo’ (the progress and development of our village). I suggest that a materialist reading of “public works” ignores the

symbolic value that infuses such projects. The right to demand such services and to see oneself as deserving of them indicates a new sense of national integration and citizenship on behalf of a traditionally marginalized sector of the population.

Certainly I am not suggesting that anthropologists return to being “handmaidens to development,” nor that we serve as “cultural brokers” counseling state and nongovernmental entities to be “culturally sensitive” and put a few brown faces on their brochures. However, I also know that people want those goods and services, and it would be equally paternalistic to “protect them” from these institutions.

However uneasily, I tried to work as an advocate. When possible, I used my dissertation research to argue for where new schools should be built, and where bilingual education programs could make a critical difference. I used my interviews with children to demand that the particularly abusive teachers be replaced. I listened to villagers’ criticisms of the NGOs and their endless surveys and workshops. I suggested to the NGOs what “participation” might look like – distinct from the “top-down participation” that can amount to no more than a restructuring of control.<sup>32</sup> And, whenever possible, I provided communal authorities with copies of the reports and recommendations that NGOs produced so that the villagers could have some sense of what had been promised versus what was delivered. On the ground, these issues pull the anthropologist in many directions; the ethnographic particulars of the situation challenge one’s intellectual paradigms and theoretical constructs.

I began this chapter with a series of questions concerning violence. I would like to return to those now. As I write this essay, a Truth Commission is being formed in Peru. As the members of that Commission determine their composition and methodology, human rights activists have suggested they begin the work of truth, justice, and accountability in Ayacucho, the region of the country that bore the brunt of the internal war. Recent events have dislodged the political slogan on which Fujimori constructed his third and fraudulent victory: “Perú, un país con Futuro” – Peru, a country with a future. Increasingly it has been suggested that Peru is also a country with a need to examine its recent past and disrupt the official history that was forged.

Feldman has written that “Ethnographic representation can pluralize and expand what narrative genres and voices are admissible. This is particularly so when ethnography is practiced against monophonic, stratified information cultures and cultures of the state. Such multiplication of historical voice is not merely a matter of textual representation, for whenever the stratification of discourse in a society is interrupted by a previously canceled voice, we are witnessing the active and creative emergence of novel political subjects”.<sup>33</sup>

The novel political subjects with whom I worked may well provide the Commission with important definitions of both punishment and pardon.

In my research, I explored how rural villagers understand the political violence that has molded life since 1980, as well as the mandate to kill that arose within the context of the armed conflict. I explored how the context of war shapes moral life, challenging notions of acceptable human conduct and the meaning of living in a *human* community. I utilized a genealogical approach for analyzing how the origins of moral interpretations are context-specific rather than absolute. Indeed, the shifting moral frameworks villagers recount draw upon elements of Catholic and Evangelical Christianity, psychocultural themes and the appropriation of extralocal discourses both in the process of militarizing and demilitarizing daily life.<sup>34</sup>

Among the conflict resolution tools available to villagers are the public airing of grievances, *actos de conciliación* that seek compromise between aggrieved parties, laws to regulate divisive gossip, and the practice of *arrepentimiento* – the communal act of confessing one’s actions and requesting pardon from one’s peers. I traced the reincorporation of the *arrepentidos* (“the repentant ones” – literally, the ex-guerrilla) back into communal life. Additionally, I analyzed psychocultural themes which emphasize the mutability of individual identity, underscoring the possibility of reclaiming community members who have “fallen out of humanity.”

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*.<sup>35</sup> 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. Indeed, one term for the ex-*Senderistas* who have been incorporated into the villages is “runa masinchik” – people we work with.

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. In the midst of this charged social landscape, villagers sought and seek means to reconstruct human relationships and a moral community.

In his work on conflict resolution, Robert A. Rubinstein has noted that “A recurrent theme in the anthropological literature is that all social behavior has a symbolic dimension. Although warfare and the construction of peaceful

social relationships have much to do with considerations of economics and material forces, they also have symbolic aspects that must be taken into account in order to resolve conflicts, avoid war or maintain an established peace".<sup>36</sup> Thus the practices developed by these villagers to make and unmake violence provide both an important counter-discourse to the "endemic violence" arguments, as well as insights into regional notions of justice, accountability and reconciliation. Setting these local level processes into dialogue with national debates about these issues underscores the centrality of wedding political insights with cultural analysis. Entering into terror's talk and staying there in that ambiguous "space of death" may be the only way an anthropologist can begin to understand how people make and unmake war.

### Conclusions

I conclude by emphasizing the importance of anthropological methodologies for research on the themes I have discussed in this essay. Anthropologists working on the issues of political violence, reconstruction and reconciliation demonstrate the importance of longterm fieldwork in allowing us to understand the quotidian aspects of reconstruction – the microspaces in which a human way of life is reestablished after lengthy periods of dehumanizing violence. In the aftermath of war, it is not only political institutions and economic systems that must be rebuilt: People also rebuild social life and humane relationships. There is a role for anthropologists. Anthropology is, after all, the discipline which defines itself as the study of human life, and that is precisely what these villagers are reconstructing.

### Notes

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2. Ralph Bolton, "Susto, Hostility, and Hypoglycemia," *Ethnology* 20(4): 261–276 (1981); Rodrigo Montoya, *Al borde del naufragio: democracia, violencia y problema étnico en el Perú* (Sur: Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1992); Vargas Llosa, Mario et al., *Informe de la Comisión Investigadora de los Sucesos de Uchuraccay* (Lima: Editora Perú, 1983).

3. Malcolm Deas, "Violent Exchanges: Reflections on Political Violence in Colombia," In David E. Apter, ed., *The Legitimization of Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
4. Carlos Iván Degregori, *Ayacucho 1969–1979: el surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso*, (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1990); David Scott Palmer, ed., *Shining Path of Peru, Second Edition*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1994); Orin Starn, "To Revolt against the Revolution: War and Resistance in Peru's Andes," *Cultural Anthropology* 10(4): 547–580 (1995).
5. Starn, "To Revolt against the Revolution."
6. 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 Ponciano Del Pino and Kimberly Theidon, "'Así es Como Vive Gente': Procesos Deslocalizados y Culturas Emergentes." In Carlos Ivan Degregori and Gonzalo Portocarrero, eds., *Cultura y Globalización*, (Lima: Red para el Desarrollo de las Ciencias Sociales en el Perú 1999).
7. José Aguirre Coronel, "Recomposición del Tejido Social y el Estado." Foro Nacional Sobre Desplazamiento Interno Forzado. Julio 13–14, Lima, Perú (1995).
8. America's Watch, *Peru Under Fire: Human Rights Since the Return to Democracy*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).
9. Isaías Rojas Pérez, "Informe Defensorial. Son Casi 7 Mil las Denuncias por Desaparición Forzada." *Ideele* 133: 63–65 (2000), 64.
10. *Ibid.*, 65.
11. Carlos Iván Degregori, "The Maturation of a Cosmocrat and the Building of a Discourse Community: The Case of the Shining Path." In *The Legitimization of Violence*, David. E. Apter, ed. (New York: New York University Press 1997), 67.
12. For a fascinating analysis of the role of colonial records and social scientists in the construction of the "Iquichanos," see Cecilia Mendez Gastelmundi, "Rebellion without Resistance: Huanta's Monarchist Peasants in the Making of the Peruvian State, Ayacucho 1825–1850" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook 1996).
13. Vargas Llosa et al., *Informe de la Comisión Investigadora*, 38.
14. *Ibid.*, 45.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 77.
17. John Murra, *Formaciones Económicas y Políticas del Mundo Andina* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1975).
18. *Caretas* (1983), 28–34. Author's translation.
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21. Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 9.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 10.
24. Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror – Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," *Comparative Study of Society and History* (1984), 494.

25. Allen Feldman, “Ethnographic States of Emergency.” In Antonius Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 243.
26. Taussig, “Culture of Terror,” 276.
27. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 65.
28. For example, June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology.” *Current Anthropology* 36(3): 409–420 (1995); Jeffrey A. Sluka, “Reflections on Managing Danger in Fieldwork: Dangerous Anthropology in Belfast.” In Antonius Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Kay B. Warren, “Death Squads and Wider Complicities: Dilemmas for the Anthropology of Violence.” In Jeffrey A. Sluka, ed., *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)
29. Scheper-Hughes, “The Primacy of the Ethical,” 411.
30. For example, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); William F. Fisher, “Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices,.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 439–464 (1997).
31. Ana María Alonso, “The Effects of Truth: Re-presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1988).
32. Fisher, “Doing Good?,” 455.
33. Feldman “Ethnographic States of Emergency,” 229.
34. Kimberly Theidon, “Memoria, Historia y Reconciliación,” *Ideele: Revista del Instituto de Defensa Legal* 133: 58–63 (2000); Kimberly Theidon, “‘How we learned to kill our brother’: Memory, Morality and Reconciliation in Peru.” *Buletin de L’Institut Français des Études Andines*, 3:29 (2001).
35. Ana María Tamayo Flores, *Derecho en los Andes: Un Estudio de Antropología Jurídica* (Lima: Centro de Estudios País y Región, 1992).
36. Robert A. Rubinstein, “Anthropology and International Security.” In Robert A. Rubinstein and Mary Foster, eds., *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 28.

