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Art from a Fractured Past

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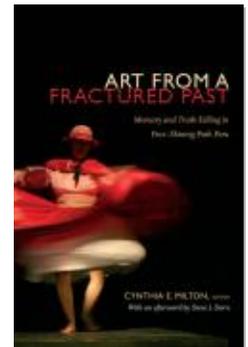
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It was Friday, August 29, 2003. For the previous five days almost fifty people had worked to build a stage on the main plaza of Huamanga, Ayacucho.¹ Just the day before, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación; CVR) had submitted its *Final Report* in Lima. The following morning, August 29, the twelve commissioners and the philosopher Salomón Lerner Febres (who presided over the commission) traveled to Huamanga to present their report describing twenty years (1980–2000) of Sendero violence, military repression, and authoritarianism. As a crowd began to gather in Huamanga's central plaza, waiting in the hot sun, a kind of anticipation and excitement brewed in the air that stood in contrast to the previous night's solemn candlelight vigils there. Though some minor confrontations took place with groups who contested the work of the CVR, for the most part the occasion seemed festive, with bottles of water and ice cream being sold to keep the crowd cool. By midday, the commissioners solemnly took the stage and presented their report in both Spanish and, through the help of a translator, Quechua.² Lerner began his speech with a reference to reciprocity: he said that for the past two years the commissioners had received the testimony of Ayacuchans and other Peruvians, and now the CVR was returning to give "testimony of their own journey" as commissioners.³ Lerner thus handed the CVR's report to the people of Ayacucho, those Peruvians who had suffered most during the years of political violence and repression.

The place where the CVR commissioners chose to present their *Final Report* is of more than symbolic importance: the Maoist Communist Party of Peru, Sendero Luminoso, had begun its armed struggle in 1980 here in the department

of Ayacucho, and Ayacucho alone accounted for 40 percent of the victims of the ensuing conflict. Yet the CVR's choice of stage for the purposes of this public homage was symbolic: set designers—including members of the theatre troupe Yuyachkani—built a two-story triptych box with open doors, known in its smaller format as a *retablo*. The commissioners transformed this highland artform of the *retablo* into an enormous stage on which to present their own work, the CVR's *Final Report*. By doing so, the commissioners and set designers expanded the use of the *retablo* as a regional artform that spoke of regional issues to a national platform for a discussion of the war years. While novel in its size, the use of the *retablo* by the CVR as a medium for truth-telling was not unique: Ayacuchoans had been using *retablos* (along with other highland artforms) as a means to recount experience, in particular political transformations, since the 1970s.⁴ It is interesting, however, that the CVR chose to frame their ceremony of the handing in of the *Final Report* within a monumental *retablo*, a regional artform, for a national effort at truth and memory.

Why was a *retablo* used as a national platform for truth-telling? The *retablo*, both literally and symbolically, set the stage for addressing contemporary politics and culture in Peru. Yet what makes *retablos*, an expression of highland, traditional art, and in particular Ayacucho art, so special as to be employed in this important symbolic act? Are *retablos* malleable enough for addressing a national audience, especially since for most of their history they have been deemed “popular” (meaning “folk”) rather than “fine” (implicitly “national”) art? Most important, what does the use of the *retablo* for the purposes of truth-telling tell us about political struggles in the construction of social identities taking place in Peru today? By addressing these questions, this chapter attempts to problematize the polarity between “folk” and “fine” arts in order to contribute to the debate on the construction of memory through visual art.

The Transformation of *Santeros* to *Retablos*

The *retablo* has a long history as a cultural practice that seeks to speak to highland audiences. The origins of the *retablo* date back to Spanish missionaries' efforts to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity through the use of images.⁵ In his work on colonial Mexico, Serge Gruzinski studies the ways priests used paintings, sculptures, and engravings to communicate the central tenets of the



FIGURE 3.1. Setting up the retablo stage for the symbolic ceremony for the release of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Final Report*, August 2003. Photograph by Cynthia E. Milton.

Christian faith.⁶ One visual form employed in the Andes was the Santero chapel, a single-level wooden altar with the central image of a saint or virgin. Andean artists later transformed Santero chapels into Sanmarcos chapels, which positioned the patron saint, Saint Mark, in the center of the first level of a two-tiered box. The people of Ayacucho also refer to the Sanmarcos box as *misa* (mass), a term from colonial times when these boxes traveled to highland villages as representations of the Catholic mass. Sanmarcos boxes have also been used in two other contexts, continuing to this day: the ritual branding of animals (known in Spanish as *herranzas*) and the healing ceremonies of *wamani* (a mountain deity or spirit).

In the transformation from Santero chapels to Sanmarcos boxes, artists adopted Catholic religious imagery while also altering the meanings and uses of the object. In this process, the Sanmarcos boxes became something else, different from their original form, endowed with both new content and purpose.⁷ In form, Sanmarcos boxes have two levels. Several scholars consider this spatial scheme as a metaphor for the division between an upper or heaven world and this world, drawing on the Andean notion of a three-world system: the upper world, or *hanan*, this world, and the underworld, or *hurin*.⁸

In content, images of the patron saints of animals accompanied by a condor representing the mountain deity *wamani* (sometimes perceived as a foreigner) decorate the first level of the Sanmarcos. Similarly, patron saints and their animals adorn the upper level: Saint Mark, patron saint of bulls; Saint Inés, patron saint of goats; Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of sheep; Saint Lucas, patron saint of lions; Saint Anthony, patron saint of horses, mules, and travelers; and sometimes Saint Santiago (James), patron saint of thunder and owner of cattle.⁹ While the patron saints inhabit the upper level, the bottom level of the Sanmarcos may show religious stories such as “The Passion” or may recreate different stages of the *herranza* or branding ritual.

As a fluid artform that continued to respond to the artists and their communities’ realities, Sanmarcos came to incorporate scenes beyond agricultural and religious practices and became vehicles for the communication of other cultural practices (marriage, marketplaces, fiestas, etc.) and for the expression of political opinions. Thus, Sanmarcos transformed into *retablos*. This three-stage process—

the movement of Santeros to Sanmarcos and then to *retablos*—illustrates Andean cultural adaptation to socioeconomic and political changes, both locally and nationally.

The *Retablo* as an Object of “Folk” Art

Retablos initially captured national attention as Joaquín López Antay, the first *retablista*,¹⁰ gained notoriety beyond the highlands. In 1941, López Antay met the *indigenista* painter Alicia Bustamante, who introduced his *retablos* to Lima’s art scene. Up until this point, these two-story wooden boxes inhabited by figures of saints and animals could only be found in the Andes. Their introduction to Lima marked an important turning point in this artform.

Changes in the *retablo* and the struggles of *retablistas* mirrored, in part, larger national transformations in Peru. The emergence of *retablos* in the Peruvian art scene occurred simultaneously with the government’s quest for modernization in the 1930s and 1940s, migration from the rural areas to the coast, and *indigenismo*, an elite intellectual movement that sought to vindicate the presence of the “Indian” in the Peruvian nation.¹¹ Historian Carlos Contreras describes the period between the end of the War of the Pacific (1884) and the economic crisis of the 1930s as one of modernization of export agriculture and mining. Contreras describes how, with the exception of the trade of wool and rubber, other production sectors also began to operate under a capitalist logic. This affected local populations in various ways: urbanization (between 1876 and 1940 urban populations grew from 17 percent to 27 percent), modernization of urban services, the expansion of state institutions, and the introduction of immigration laws to draw foreign migrant workers to haciendas.¹² Through various means, the state attempted to change and reach local communities: by promoting education as a civilizing mission,¹³ and by expanding road construction and infrastructure, thus facilitating greater communication between the highlands and the capital.¹⁴ The historian Paulo Drinot considers Augusto Leguía’s presidency (1919–1930) a period of an attempted renaissance of the Peruvian nation, as indicated in Leguía’s concept of a “Patria Nueva.” For Drinot, Leguía incorporated *indigenismo* in an instrumental way, selectively considering the past that offered a golden and glorious Inca empire while at the same time developing

paternalistic cultural policies through institutions like the Sección de Asuntos Indígenas (Indigenous Affairs Division) and the Patronato de la Raza Indígena (Trusteeship of the Indigenous Race).¹⁵

This process of modernization indirectly influenced the commercialization of Sanmarcos. Prior to the 1930s, only traveling merchants (*arrieros*) sold Sanmarcos, along their routes between towns. The building of roads, the emergence of new markets, urbanization, and migration weakened the role of these traveling merchants as the distributors of Sanmarcos, in turn affecting the production of Sanmarcos and other religious images (*imaginería*) that artists like Joaquín López Antay made.

In a way, with changing means of distribution, the encounter between artist, Joaquín López Antay, and art collector and *indigenista* painter, Alicia Bustamante, was providential for this artform. *Indigenistas*, like Bustamante, praised the role of the “Indian” in the configuration of the idea of the Peruvian nation, a theme mirrored in the national politics of agrarian reform.¹⁶ This encounter not only brought attention to *retablos* but also completely redefined the art. *Retablos* and *retablistas* underwent processes of decontextualization. First, Bustamante changed the name of these boxes from Sanmarcos to *retablos*, the literal translation of which is “altars,” since they closely resembled church altars. Along with the new name a series of other changes arose: new topics and scenes were depicted; a monetary value was assigned; artists began to sign their pieces; and *retablos* were sold, commissioned, and exhibited. There was, however, a paternalism in the patronage of *indigenistas* like Bustamante; while she appreciated these highland boxes as art, she brought about and guided changes to this artform. And later, in 1977, she seemed to undermine the value she had helped to establish for them: she, along with other artists who had once praised López Antay’s art, deemed his work handicrafts and “folk art.” By positioning this art as “folk” and artisanal (as opposed to higher genre of “fine art”), Bustamante and others played down the skills and creativity involved in the creation of *retablos*.

Bustamante’s situating of *retablos* as “folk art” was in response to Joaquín López Antay’s winning of the prestigious Peruvian National Prize for the Arts, granted by the National Institute of Culture. Even though, in the context of the time, General Velasco’s (1968–1975) nationalist discourse promoted regional art, the established art community, headed by the Association of Professional Plastic

Artists (Asociación Profesional de Artistas Plásticos), tried to revoke the jury's decision to award this prize to López Antay. In a series of dissenting letters published in newspapers, they referred to his work as *artesanía* (handicrafts)—a term charged with pejorative and discriminatory connotations—and claimed that as *artesanía* his work lacked creativity and self-expression. As a maker of *popular* (meaning “folk”) handicrafts, López Antay was ineligible to receive an award for art, the Association argued.¹⁷

As García Canclini notes, no specific cultural or aesthetic distinctions exist between popular and fine arts, as their borders are porous and flexible and thus easily lend themselves to experimentation and to borrowing from each other.¹⁸ However, this debate revealed “popular art” in Peru as a terrain where both the emergence and negotiation of social conflict occurs. In fact, Alfonso Castrillón, a member of the jury, characterized this debate as a conflict between social (and racial) classes: a cultivated high elite on the one hand and an indigenous mestizo urban group on the other.¹⁹ While the Asociación Profesional de Artistas Plásticos claimed that they simply wanted to clarify the boundaries between these artforms, this debate resulted in an ideological discourse that served to worsen discrimination against the most socially marginalized—the mestizo and indigenous artists from rural regions.²⁰

Retablos' Adaptability to Local Transformations

Change did not come to *retablos* at the instigation of outsiders alone. By the time López Antay met Bustamante, *retablo* making had already been undergoing transformations. The processes of modernization of the early twentieth century provoked responses by rural folk, who saw education as a means for individual progress. This historical period coincides with the first migratory waves from the countryside to the cities—a national, physical reorientation in life that must be considered when contextualizing changes in the form and format of *retablos*.²¹ For instance, in a later wave of migration in the 1960s, the Jiménez family of *retablistas* left their village, Alcamenca, in search of education and better opportunities in the department's capital, Huamanga. Once immersed in urban life, Florentino Jiménez and his children returned less frequently to the village and thus seldom attended herding rituals.

With migration and fewer *arrieros* and herding rituals, the saints in the

retablos lost their original role as religious intermediaries in the middle to late twentieth century. Metaphorically, the box was emptied of content to make room for new central forms and topics. The techniques for creating *retablos* also changed: instead of using molds, artists started to produce handmade figurines. As a result of this new technique, they began to design more elaborate pieces and develop more intricate scenes.

These changes in technique invite us to consider how artists, in the process of making their objects, endow art with agency.²² That is, the artist is an agent in the *retablo's* production; he or she is an actor in the *retablo*.²³ Evidence of this role can be found in one of the last steps in the making of *retablos*, the *sombreado*, the stage when the artist adds small final details to the figures: expression to the eyes and gestures, wrinkles to the clothes, shadows here and there, and so on. The artist thereby gives each piece meaning through personal touches that reflect his or her tastes and skills. In fact, one can often identify a *retablo's* maker by taking note of these details.

The artist's agency is clear not only in the process of design but also in what inspires a *retablo* and the choice of topic. From the early days of the *indigenistas*, artists experimented with new themes and forms. Beginning in the mid-1970s, artists like the Jiménez family created a series of *retablos* dedicated to historical events and social commentary. Pieces made in the family's workshop in Huamanga during these years of changes in *retablo* form include *Cola de Kerosene* (*Waiting for Kerosene*) and *Batalla de Ayacucho* (*Battle of Ayacucho*). The artist Claudio Jiménez based the first of these *retablos*, *Cola de Kerosene*, on his personal experience of witnessing the long lines housewives had to wait in to buy cooking fuel during Velasco's military dictatorship. The *retablo* titled *Batalla de Ayacucho* was made by Florentino Jiménez and his children (Claudio, Nicario, Edilberto, Eleudora, and Odón) in response to a public competition. The municipality of Huamanga held a contest in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the battle near Ayacucho that had secured Peru's independence from Spain. The Jiménez family based their *retablo* on material culled from various sources: school textbooks, books, newspapers, and photographs all contributed as important sources of inspiration for their creativity. They won the contest.

Retablos as Visual Narratives

After López Antay received the Peruvian National Prize for the Arts in 1976, government officials from the National Institute of Culture introduced a new category eligible for prizes, that of “popular arts,” thus separating “popular” from “fine” arts and avoiding future debate.²⁴ Nevertheless, not all pieces made by *retablistas* were accepted under the new category.²⁵ For instance, in some national contests, such as *Grandes Maestros* (Great Masters), jury members would not consider pieces depicting violence or social commentary to be part of the national repertoire of popular arts, effectively denying the presence of conflict in Peruvian society. Unfortunately, the pieces excluded from national contests depicted particularly interesting representations of the internal war that raged in Peru during the 1980s and early 1990s.²⁶

As the historian José Luis Rénique points out, some Peruvians perceive themselves as a *sociedad desmemoriada*, a society with no historical memory, in terms of inscribed or written memory.²⁷ This idea of the importance of written texts in establishing a national memory supports Anibal Quijano’s notion of the “coloniality of power,” whereby the present-day exercise of power and social hierarchy maintain certain colonial ideas that effectively discriminate against others.²⁸ Indeed, among those who embrace the notion of *sociedad desmemoriada*—some journalists, politicians, and members of the Peruvian academia—memory (as knowledge of the past) is to be found mostly in the written press and political debates on national television rather than in popular narrations, festivities, or art. The privileging of certain venues for memory discriminates against the vast majority of the population who favor oral and artistic modes over written expression.²⁹ *Retablos*, thus, are largely excluded from mainstream memory debates and the transmission of knowledge and ideas.³⁰

One can contextualize the production of *retablos* by analyzing their depictions as visual narratives, in the sense of created and recreated discourses that show, for example, how violence was experienced and digested by artists—and later expressed in their social commentary and their representations of violence. If we follow Nelson Manrique’s argument that many different crises (i.e., economic, social, colonial heritage, representation, etc.) produced violence during

the 1980s and 1990s, we could contend that violence itself became a pervasive “object” with which Peruvians had to negotiate.³¹ Some responded by denying the facts surrounding the violent conflict that was occurring in Peru, others by protesting, and many more by rejecting any kind of political involvement.³²

Retablistas negotiated with violence by converting their *retablos* into vehicles for communication of their experiences and memories of the violence. Yet artists could only represent violence in their *retablos* once they had introduced the new techniques of making figurines inside of the box and once they had already started to introduce historical themes (such as the lines for cooking gas and the Battle for Ayacucho) as the *retablo*'s subject matter—changes that had occurred in the 1970s. The main difference between the pieces made in the 1970s and those made in the 1980s was the violence. In the 1980s *retablos*, the violence is represented in its many forms: political (the armed conflict), and social and cultural (in the form of discrimination, racism, poverty, and marginality).

Thus, in the 1980s, *retablo* art transformed into a political tool capable of conveying ideas about both the past and the present of a fragmented, unequal country. The events depicted were recreated and depicted from the artists' points of view, which were influenced by what was happening in Ayacucho and in the nation during the 1980s. In the process of imbuing *retablos* with social commentary, a historical consciousness developed that was based mainly on the artists' lived experiences—individual and collective—and recollection of daily events. Through irony, irreverence, realism, and religious symbolism, *retablistas* created *retablos* that became “an alternative source of representation of reality and models of society.”³³

Retablos of the Political Violence

As if a great cataclysm (known as *pachakuti* in Quechua) had befallen Ayacucho, Claudio Jiménez depicts the fracturing of time produced by the many years of civil war, authoritarianism, and military repression beginning in 1980 in his masterful piece *No me destruyas* (*Don't Destroy Me*, Fig. 3.1). For this work, created in 2000, he broke with the traditional format of the *retablo*, a triptych box, and instead placed figurines on a piece of wood from Ayacucho.³⁴ He carved the central log in the shape of a cross, with the sorrowful face of a crucified Christ. The broken and leaning cross expresses Jiménez's experience of his life

in Ayacucho as one destroyed by violence. As he explained the year following the creation of this work:

Most important is the social situation in which [we] lived at the time: it was conflict. But this conflict was based on the power of domination. Because of this, the Spaniards dominated us with our Christian faith. That's why [Senderistas] have to destroy it [our faith] in order to win the battle. For that reason, this cross [in *No me destruyas*] is a fracture of time.³⁵

The central image of *No me destruyas* is a broken, bleeding cross. The choice of the cross probably resonates in Andean communities where the cross is commemorated every third of May. This annual celebration coincides with the harvest, in particular that of maize, since it is believed that crosses protect crops from bad weather by ensuring that the fields “don't get sick.” This belief effectively assumes that without crosses to protect the fields and the villages, the domestic economy of the household would be severely harmed. For this reason, villagers place crosses on top of nearby mountains. In *No me destruyas*, Jiménez placed a cross on top of a small log, similar in shape to a mountain, rather than inside a *retablo* box. By adapting the *retablo* artform, he converted the cross into a witness (sitting on the hilltop looking down) and a victim (bleeding) of the conflict. In addition, he depicted the violence as being a different type from that of other historical periods: this violence was of a kind that brought destruction to the villages. This violence destroyed the lives of the peasantry and led to the abandonment of their customs and religion.

Jiménez places the cross of *No me destruyas* on top of a mountain protecting crops and fields, where Senderistas—here local peasants co-opted by the Shining Path ideology—and military fight, destroying everything in sight. This piece presents an encounter tainted with blood. Jesus's heart (at the center of the cross), the stairs that take him to heaven, and the mortal wound that he exhibits on one side of his body all bleed. The cross is falling over, along with many of these peasants' villages. This scene represents destruction, death, and the social decomposition of the countryside. Without houses, without crops to harvest, without burying relatives and friends, and with no protection from God, peasants run away. Claudio Jiménez explains his complex motivations for making this *retablo*:



FIGURE 3.2. *Don't Destroy Me (No me destruyas)*, by Claudio Jiménez. Photograph by author.

In the countryside, crosses are like a source of hope for farmers; but, what happens is that the Senderistas have influenced the peasants. [Peasants' children] emerge from the universities prepared, since there they study materialism and dialectical materialism, the movement of change. But with dialectical materialism everything is left static since they [the university students or Senderistas] only think about [the problems posed by] religion. To dominate the masses [they think], [thus] the masses have to forget religion. So they [the peasants' children who went to university and return, or Senderistas] start thinking that the crosses have to be destroyed . . . In order to beat the military, the Senderistas think they have to destroy religion. In response, the military says: "Put them [the crosses] back in their place" and [in this way] they make the Senderistas disappear. And now, what is going to happen? It is the cross that the peasants are bringing down on themselves. So are the military. The peasants, they are the Senderistas, they are the ones who are destroying the cross. They say "To believe in God is a trick [engaño]." In one part of the Bible, it says "Do not kill," [but] they [the Senderistas] say that [this] is not necessarily [the case] . . . That is why they [the Senderistas] kill and in this way; they are destroying the cross, [which they] say is a deception [engaño]. For this reason, no religion.³⁶

In this *retablo*, Jiménez presents a critique of Shining Path's ideology. In his view, the materialism that rural students learned in university—in particular at the Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga, where he himself had been a student during the 1970s, and a bastion of Shining Path ideologues³⁷—represented another form of domination or colonization. He makes a comparison between the armed struggle carried out by Shining Path and the Spanish conquest of the Incas. When the Spaniards arrived in Peru in 1532, they aimed to evangelize and civilize the indigenous populations. For Jiménez, Shining Path also sought to "evangelize" through their own ideology. Thus, Jiménez compares the spread of the Shining Path version of Marxism to that of Catholicism (the colonizer's mission in the new continent), signaling how change and the destruction brought by violence have adversely affected Andean communities.

On first impression, Jiménez's cross could evoke the reenactment of old Andean stories in which new periods begin after a terrible cataclysm (*pachakuti*).³⁸

Jiménez's words suggest, however, that even if this violence inaugurated a new period characterized by change and massive migrations, it failed to bring about a new order of things. Shining Path aimed to transform Peruvian society, but in Jiménez's opinion Shining Path represented a continuity, just another process of colonization or totalizing project projected on the region by outsiders.

This *retablo* is a subtle plea for reconsidering the humanity of the people involved in this violent period. The anthropologist Kimberly Theidon has written that the context of war reshapes the moral lives of those in communities who have family members who killed or were killed. She suggests that due to violence, people can have contradictory ideas and feelings regarding the same event. On the one hand people "could see their relatives and neighbors in the guerilla columns that attacked them, while also insisting the Senderistas were not really human at all."³⁹ On the other hand the Shining Path ideology positioned Andean peasants as members of an amorphous mass that needed guidance and thus, neglected their identification as "real people," or *runa* in Quechua.⁴⁰ Identified as a mass rather than as individuals or distinct communities, the peasants felt as if they were also losing their status as human beings. As Jiménez's reflections suggest, the peasants thus experienced not only the loss of their means of subsistence (represented by the cross and the crops) but also the loss of their identity and historicity as distinct peoples.

Memory and the practice of remembering are also fundamental aspects in the construction and recognition of identities.⁴¹ *Retablistas*—like Jiménez and his siblings—privilege the need to remember the past, especially moments of war and violence when things changed quickly and dramatically. They call for a historical awareness and sense of responsibility regarding the past. Not to forget implies not to repeat the same mistakes and the same violations of human rights.

Retablos and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The *retablistas*' desire to engage with and present the past mirrors the work of the CVR. The commission promoted the understanding that to (re)build a real democracy, Peru required a historical consciousness and a historical conscience. For instance, the CVR's public hearings (*audiencias públicas*) created an

opportunity such that some victims of violence felt that their stories were heard for the first time, and that both their humanity and their citizenship could be restored.⁴² The CVR thus initiated many important moments in fostering a politics of reconciliation.⁴³

Perhaps the similarity of the *retablistas*' and the commission's calls for a historical awareness explains, in part, the commission's decision to use a stage in the style of a *retablo* for the ceremony of commemoration of the victims of violence on August 29, 2003, in Ayacucho. The *retablo* stage was divided into two levels, with two condors placed between them, flying with their heads looking down at the commissioners, who stood on the first level, and two enormous plants of maize were set up on each side. Two doors decorated with Andean flowers, combined with the *escarapela* (the red-and-white insignia that symbolizes the Peruvian flag), further flanked the main box. Lerner and other CVR commissioners addressed the people of Ayacucho in the foreground, and schoolchildren sat in the background. This chorus of children sang the anthems of both the nation and the city, their voices joined by those of the commissioners and the people of Ayacucho in the central plaza.

The stage decorations changed for the evening events, long after the official symbolic ceremony with the presence of the CVR commissioners had ended. The figures of the condors remained, but other changes were made. Similar in style to the drawings of seventeenth-century indigenous chronicler Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (from Ayacucho), images of the sun, the moon, and the Virgin Mary decorated the upper level. The lower level remained the same and was opened for a public performance of musicians, singers, and dancers that lasted until the evening. In the central plaza, people danced, sang, and drank.

The giant *retablo* stage was not decorated with plaster figures but rather inhabited by living human beings who gave public speeches or performed for an audience. It became a space for a celebration of life and reconstruction. The people of Ayacucho, the commissioners, the thousands of dead, disappeared, and killed, and the victims' relatives became symbolically reunited in this new form of *retablo*. A *retablo* stage allowed for truths to be voiced, for people to claim justice, and for a region to vindicate its presence in the Peruvian nation. The stage revived participants' and spectators' memory during this night: as

seen in the emotional expressions captured in the eyes, laughter, and weeping of the people; in the public performances of the musicians; in the speeches of the commissioners; and in the testimonies of the victims.⁴⁴ A *retablo* united this conglomerate of human experiences, images, and feelings: not only shared violence but also the heterogeneous representations that showed Peru's diversity and commonalities simultaneously.

Such themes of celebration of diversity within a common stage of a nation-state also appear in the original smaller format *retablos*. For instance, in *Mi Perú*, Nicario Jiménez constructs different imaginary communities united within a *retablo* box (a metaphor for the country, the nation-state, that he called "My Peru, Fig. 3.3"). The box is filled with small scenes and images from coastal, Andean, and Amazonian markets and streets; yet not all is calm, for the figurines are also united in social protest and demands for justice for the victims of violence. In this *retablo* different characters occupy the scene, demanding recognition of their rights and of the porousness of Peru's ethnic, regional, and social identity boundaries. As with any *retablo* made in the intimacy of a workshop, the central concept, in this case "Peru," becomes imagined and reinvented through the virtuosity of an Andean artist. In *Mi Perú* lies a cry for people's participation as fully recognized citizens in a double sense: first, a call for the state to recognize these artists and their art, and second, a call for the nation to celebrate its diversity and multiculturalism.⁴⁵

As the anthropologist and truth commissioner Carlos Iván Degregori wrote, the weak presence of the state in the provinces and the lack of integration of all the different ethnic populations into a single movement (or paradigm of national integration) have led many groups to apply different meanings to the concept of "Peru."⁴⁶ Therefore, many amorphous senses of belonging, rather than a single totality, compose the idea of the "nation"—all products of human imagination associated with specific collectivities. Peru, however, remains a constant referent in these representations. The concept (Peru), like the *retablos*, is filled with the images, fragments, scenarios, and characters. As agents and products, *retablos* act not only as instruments that can transmit memory and in which different forms of memory interact, but also can serve as a metaphor for a wider idea: one that demands the constitution of a more diverse and egalitarian nation-state.



FIGURE 3.3. *My Peru (Mi Perú)*, retablo by Nicario Jiménez. Photograph by author.

Perhaps it was this hope for the recognition of Peru's diversity within the singular nation, that of Peru, that the CVR commissioners chose to use the *retablo* stage for hosting the public presentation of their *Final Report*. The *retablo* might have been meant as a metaphor for the nation-state. Yet, despite the hoped-for national consensus about a common traumatic past, the choice of the *retablo* metaphor also illustrates the limits of united diversity in present-day Peru, and of an inclusive pannational remembering of the violence. The *retablo* stage was set up in Ayacucho, not Lima. Two events were held: the one in Lima was the official ceremony to conclude the CVR's work; the one in Ayacucho was a "symbolic ceremony."⁴⁷ These two events employed different registers to speak to their different audiences: for the first, the commissioners, the president of the Republic, and government officials were all solemnly present at the Government Palace;⁴⁸ for the second ceremony, the commissioners (with the president of the Republic noticeably absent) appeared in the center of a regional symbol, the *retablo*. The *retablo*, it seems, even when erected as an enormous stage for remembering a difficult national past, remains somehow "folk" art, despite such efforts to make it a national imaginary for all Peruvians.⁴⁹

Notes

Parts of this essay draw from Ulfe, *Cajones de la memoria*.

1. Huamanga is the colonial name of the capital of the department of Ayacucho. The current name is Ayacucho. Many people still use the older, colonial name to distinguish the city from the department, although I use the two names interchangeably. See also Huber, *Consumo, cultura e identidad en el mundo globalizado*, 37.

2. These events are described in Milton, “Public Spaces for the Discussion of Past Violence,” 153–156.

3. Lerner, *La rebelión de la memoria*, 163.

4. See also González, *Unveiling Secrets of War in the Peruvian Andes*, on the *tablas* of Sarhua as another example of traditional artforms changing to address the political violence.

5. A 1992 exhibition catalogue described *retablos* as a “Peruvian artform through which ‘all bloods’ are made evident.” See Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, *El retablo ayacuchano*,

3. “All bloods” in the title is a reference to the work of José María Arguedas on *mestizaje*.

6. Cited in Augé, *Las formas del olvido*, 36–38.

7. An opposing example is analyzed by Thomas Cummins, who studied *queros* (drinking vessels)—an Inca artform reinterpreted during the colonial period. See Cummins, *Toasts with the Inca*.

8. See Urbano Rojas and Macera, *Santero y caminante*; Mendizábal, *Del sanmarkos al retablo ayacucho*; and Razetto, *Don Joaquín*.

9. Quoted in Arguedas, *Todas las sangres*, 153–154.

10. The makers of *Sanmarcos* and other religious images and crosses were called *imagineros*, makers of images. Joaquín López Antay was first known as an *imaginero*, later as a *retablista*.

11. For instance, see de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*.

12. Contreras, *Aprendizaje del capitalismo*.

13. Contreras, *Maestros, mistis y campesinos en el Perú rural Siglo XX*. See also Glave and Urrutia, “Radicalismo político en elites regionales.”

14. Contreras, *Maestros, mistis y campesinos en el Perú rural del Siglo XX*.

15. Drinot, *The Allure of Labor*.

16. Ansión, *Anhelos y sinsabores*, and Lauer, *Crítica de la artesanía*.

17. Ulfe, *Cajones de la memoria*, 69–74.

18. García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*.

19. Castrillón, “¿Arte popular o artesanía?”

20. Castrillón, “¿Arte popular o artesanía?” 16–17.

21. On migrations from the countryside to the coast, especially to Lima, see Matos Mar, *Desborde popular y crisis del Estado*.

22. Gell, *Art and Agency*.

23. Most of this artwork is done by men, even though there are some female *retablo* makers, like Eleudora Jiménez (daughter of Florentino Jiménez), and female family members may help in the production.

24. Artisans can now win three national awards: the Gran Premio Nacional Amautas de la Artesanía Peruana (The Great National Amautas Peruvian Crafts Prize), Grandes Maestros de la Artesanía Peruana (Great Masters of Peruvian Crafts), and Premio Nacional de Artesanías Inti Raymi (National Crafts Inti Raymi Prize). Ulfe, *Cajones de la memoria*, 71–74.

25. For an excellent example, see Gonzáles Carré, Urrutia, and Lévano, *Ayacucho*. A section of this book is dedicated to popular arts, including *retablos*. Most of the illustrations show Nativity *retablos*, also called *retablos costumbristas* (*retablos* that depict traditional customs). The introduction only briefly mentions the period of violence, and no violence appears in the book's illustrations.

26. Some art depicting escalating violence in the highlands did, however, appear in 1980s art contests meant to represent campesino life and customs. However, none of these pieces won a prize. See Milton's chapter here.

27. For example, see José Luis Rénique, *La batalla por Puno*, 20.

28. Quijano states that "coloniality of power" should be understood in relation to the development of capitalism, whereby race and the division of labor became structurally linked. Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder."

29. For example, Andean peoples privilege oral transmission over written texts. "This does not mean, as some books on orality suggest, that sound becomes the privileged vehicle for information, but rather that encoding is dispersed over a variety of actions and locations, which include ritual, theatre, music, pilgrimages, artefacts, narratives and all the ways in which the earth itself is perceived as patterned with lines and significant points. These patternings add up to a multitude of 'graphies,' of 'writings' available to be 'read,' and in which the native cultural 'archive' is stored." Rowe and Schelling, *Memory and Modernity*, 52–53.

30. The choice by the CVR to use the *retablo* as a stage for the symbolic ceremony of the CVR's *Final Report*, of course, show that there are efforts to incorporate other forms of memory work into national debates. Other attempts include the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos's project to preserve and digitalize Edilberto Jiménez's work, including his *retablos*. See <http://archivo.iep.pe/cid/galeria-cid/universos-memoria.php>, accessed July 2, 2013.

31. Manrique, *El Tiempo del miedo*, 41–64.

32. The 1990s were characterized as the decade of the "antipolitics." This meant the loss of trust in political parties, the approval of Fujimori's "strong hand" in government (1990–2000), including military repression, deaths, disappearances, etc. and acceptance of corruption as "part of our lives." This paradigm, however, changed in

September 2000, when a member of Congress released a video of Fujimori's security advisor Vladimiro Montesinos bribing a congressman to obtain his support for the ruling political party. See Degregori, *La década de la antipolítica*.

33. Rowe and Schelling, *Memory and Modernity*, 37.

34. Claudio Jiménez brought the piece of log from Ayacucho, reflecting his belief that an artist needs to innovate. In his words, "an artist has to live like this not to stay [behind]. I am like that; I travel. I look for novelties. An artist is nourished from that. We [artists] share these feelings." Author's interview with Jiménez, Zárate, July 23, 2001.

35. Author's interview with Jiménez.

36. Author's interview with Jiménez.

37. Degregori, *El surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso*.

38. A cataclysm usually causes the end of a temporal period (or cycle), which also signals the beginning of a new period. In Ayacucho, people tend to speak of the period of violence as a big cataclysm. See Allen, *The Hold Life Has*, 46–47.

39. Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*, 214.

40. *Runa* (plural *runakuna*) means "human being," or according to Allen, a "culturally Andean indigenous person." Allen, *The Hold Life Has*, 7–8, 276.

41. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

42. Ulfe, "Reflexiones sobre los usos del testimonio en la esfera pública peruana," 208–212.

43. Unfortunately, most of the recommendations made by the CVR are still pending. One recommendation was for reparation of victims. Ministerial Resolution 373–2006-PCM created the Reparations Council (Consejo de Reparaciones) to organize the Victims Registry (Registro Único de Víctimas), a national census of victims. Yet work has been slow. For instance, in 2009 its budget was cut, and none of the activities programmed to economically and symbolically repair victims of violence could be carried out. Nevertheless, the Consejo de Reparaciones continued with the help of civil society and local organizations to build the national census of victims.

44. Description of these events in Ayacucho on August 29, 2003, come from conversations with Cynthia Milton. See also Milton, "At the Edge of the Peruvian Truth Commission."

45. Telephone conversation with Nicario Jiménez, May 6, 2002. Also see Ulfe, *Cajones de la memoria*, 284–288.

46. Degregori, "Identidad étnica, movimientos sociales y participación política en el Perú," 127.

47. On different descriptions of events and how they were labeled, see www.cverdad.org.pe/pagina01.php, accessed June 2, 2013.

48. Given that this event was televised, it might have been difficult to stage the ceremony on a giant *retablo*.

49. Subsequent uses of the *retablo* as a stage to host events supports this interpretation of the continued association of the *retablo* with “folk” art: in 2004 and 2011 *retablo* stages were set up for “the dances of Peru,” as part of annual national celebrations (*fiestas patrias*). See the website of Leydy Castro García, <http://peruinfoperiodismo.wordpress.com/2011/08/07/el-retablo-de-los-suenos>, accessed July 2, 2013, and Radio Programs of Peru, www.rpp.com.pe/2011-07-12-trescientos-artistas-danzaran-en-megaretablo-por-fiestas-patrias-noticia_384034.html, accessed July 2, 2013.

