

# MENTAL ILLNESS IN PERUVIAN NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE AFTER THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

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*Abstract: This essay examines the influence that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru (TRC, 2001–2003) had in the recent novels *Abril rojo* (2006) by Santiago Roncagliolo, *La hora azul* (2005) by Alonso Cueto, and *El camino de regreso* (2007) by José de Piérola. In particular, I focus on how the TRC's treatment of mental health issues have provided these writers with new ways to approach violence and social justice after the twenty years of terrorist and state violence (1980–2000) that cloud Peruvian history. As part of its investigations, the TRC paid close attention to the mental health of the victims and the psychosocial effects of violence. Its investigation influenced the writers I study, who use representations of mental illnesses to allegorize the country's situation after the years of violence and to imagine processes of justice and reconciliation that will reestablish a healthy national community.*

The influence of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, active 2001–2003) on cultural and political debates regarding the recent years of terrorist and state violence (1980–2000) sparked a shift in the representation of violence in Peruvian narrative. One of the most notable expressions of this change has been the appearance of more main characters that are mentally disturbed, which disrupts the discourses organizing the fictional worlds. Before the TRC's final report (August 2003), most protagonists in different novels about the years of violence are "coherent" subjects who attempt to offer a logical or affective interpretation of the events. Although these events can be horrendous and perplexing, the characters never lose their minds in the wave of violence. This does not mean that there is an absence of mental illnesses in these fictions. On the contrary, there are many mentally ill characters, but they are mainly framed within discourses of otherness that do not disturb the organizational coherence of the narratives. After the report, however, most protagonists have diverse degrees of mental disorders. Their mental disorders mirror those studied by the TRC as a legacy of violence, but with an important difference: the characters are not direct victims of the armed conflict but bystanders or outsiders who belong to the criollo elite and whose mental health issues stem from recognition of their own guilt or responsibility during those years. In this essay I examine how the TRC report, and especially its chapter about the psychosocial effects of violence, have influenced

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recent Peruvian narratives set in those years. I focus my analysis on three novels: *Abril rojo* (2006) by Santiago Roncagliolo, *La hora azul* (2005) by Alonso Cueto, and *El camino de regreso* (2007) by José de Piérola. As Efraín Kristal states, the birth of the terrorist group Shining Path problematized the way in which violence was represented in Peruvian narrative because questions were raised about its use as a political tool to emancipate the oppressed—as different Marxist Peruvian intellectuals had proposed (Kristal 2004, 343). I argue that the TRC, as a parastatal institution, and its report offered writers new approaches to establish political and affective bonds with the oppressed. I focus on how this shift in the treatment of violence implied not only an examination of the responsibility of the ruling class in the perpetuation of structures of discrimination but mainly an exploration through mental illnesses of a way to overcome these structures and to reimagine an affective bond among social classes.

After twelve years of dictatorships, democracy was reestablished in Peru in 1980. In May of that same year, in protest of the political system, the Shining Path (Partido Comunista Peruano Sendero Luminoso) made its first public attack in Chuschi, a very small village in Ayacucho. The attackers burned all the electoral materials and equipment in Chuschi, calling for a boycott against that year's elections. That day the Shining Path began a war against the government and everyone who disagreed with their ideas. The new democratic government did not pay close attention to the events unfolding in Ayacucho. Consequently, the Shining Path was able to gain control of other provinces throughout Peru. In December 1982, the government sent the army and the marines to the Andes to fight against them. This event marks the beginning of a period of extreme, widespread violence, with massacres leaving more than sixty-nine thousand people dead or disappeared, three-quarters of whom were Quechua-speaking peasants.<sup>1</sup> The capture of the leader of the Shining Path, Abimael Guzmán, in September 1992 would put an end to this period of extreme violence.<sup>2</sup> However, then-dictator Alberto Fujimori had broken the democratic system with a coup d'état and formed a paramilitary group (Grupo Colina) that tortured, disappeared, and killed innocent people in the fight against terrorism. With a triumphant official discourse that emphasized the state's victory and the end of terrorism, Fujimori established a pact of silence regarding the years of violence.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, he called for elections,

1. See Salomón Lerner's speech delivering the TRC's final report (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2003a).

2. Guzmán's imprisonment was not the end of terrorist violence in Peru. In fact, there are still active members of the Shining Path in the south central Peruvian forest.

3. The pact of silence under Fujimori's rule was successfully carried out due to patronage and a culture of fear that had a "demobilizing effect on civil society" (Burt 2006, 34). According to Jo-Marie Burt, "the Fujimori regime . . . deployed a series of mechanisms designed to keep civil society fragmented and disorganized. Patronage was one of these mechanisms. . . . Such clientelistic forms of domination and control helped build support for the regime even as they marginalized those who refused to abide by the new rules of the game, contributing to the fragmentation of civil society. Another key mechanism of social control . . . was the instrumentalization of fear, which had at least two dimensions. The regime was itself an agent of fear, deploying state power to silence and intimidate opponents. At the same time, it sought to discursively exploit existing fears in society in order to maintain a disorganized civil society unable to articulate its voice" (Burt 2006, 41–42).

which he won; but instead of restoring the rule of law, he established an authoritarian, pseudo-democratic regime. Through the use of bribes, he kept control of the Congress, the army, the Supreme Court, and the press. Illegally, he presented his candidacy for a new presidential term in 2000, which he won again. But this time, the suspicions of fraud were very strong and thousands of people went to the streets to protest. A few months later, videos of Fujimori's main adviser, Vladimiro Montesinos, bribing politicians, broadcasters, and businessmen became public, which led Fujimori to flee the country for Japan and to resign there. In June 2001 the transitional president, Valentín Paniagua, decreed the formation of a Truth Commission to investigate the last twenty years of terrorist and state violence. The next president, Alejandro Toledo, would add the concept of reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or TRC), following the model of other countries, thus emphasizing the need to seek conciliation among the different social groups that took part of those twenty years of violence.

In August 2003, the TRC delivered a final report with its conclusions. The document, which collects 16,986 testimonies, analyzes in detail the particular events of the years of violence but also underscores the structures of "social, cultural, and economical discrimination that are widespread in Peruvian society," and which foster terrorist and state violence against the most deprived members of the nation (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2003a).<sup>4</sup> In his presentation of the report, Salomón Lerner, president of the TRC, highlighted the shared responsibility of Peruvians who were not directly affected by the armed conflict regarding the spread of violence throughout the country: "The Report we hand in—he said to President Toledo—contains a double outrage: that of massive murder, disappearance and torture; and that of indolence, incompetence and indifference of those who could have stopped this humanitarian catastrophe, but didn't" (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2003b).

Lerner points out that Peru is a country where exclusion is so absolute that the disappearance of tens of thousands of citizens went unnoticed by the dominant society (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2003a). For the purpose of my analysis, I would also like to emphasize the first chapter of the report's third part, which focuses on the psychological effects of violence on the victims, many of whom describe themselves as "not the same [ya no somos los mismos]." The extreme violence that surrounded the death and disappearance of thousands of people (with bodies mutilated, burned, detonated, abandoned in the middle of the road, and stacked in mass graves), in addition to the unwritten pact of silence imposed by the government, prevented many survivors from carrying out appropriate tasks of mourning in order to regain their emotional balance and to re-establish their everyday lives. The years of violence denied the capacity of mourning to thousands of Peruvians, leading many victims to alienation.<sup>5</sup> "Being crazy" and "being traumatized" are common expressions used by victims to refer to the huge impact that violence had on them. The extreme violence produced in them

4. All translations from Spanish editions and sources are mine unless otherwise noted.

5. *Informe de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*, 2003, Tomo 8, p. 206, <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/peru/libros/cv/>.

states of absolute confusion and disorientation, which they describe as states of mental disturbance because they felt that during those times they could not recognize themselves, as if they were strangers in their own bodies. In her groundbreaking book *Intimate Enemies*, Kimberly Theidon has studied the cultural clash between the medical discourses about posttraumatic stress disorder and the *comuneros'* own elaborations about their physiological and psychological sufferings caused by the armed conflict.<sup>6</sup> Theidon underscores how the medical system read the *comuneros'* sufferings within a Western scientific frame without making an effort to expand its cultural horizon in order to integrate the *comuneros'* own knowledge. She also studies how some *comuneros* reappropriate medical terms such as "trauma" in order to find the recognition of the medical institutions or to distinguish themselves socially within their communities.

The mental illnesses of most characters I study are framed within discourses on posttraumatic stress disorder; however, some of them move beyond this frame to use other medical illnesses or sufferings that mirror those studied by Theidon. Considering that most characters are not direct victims of violence, what I have found is that some fiction writers have appropriated the mental health issues of the actual victims in order to articulate the responsibility of the *criollo* elite and middle class during the armed conflict as well as to advance a new national imaginary in which these social classes take an active role in rebuilding the nation. The protagonists' mental disorders are produced by the guilt that smothers them after personal investigations unveil obscure secrets about themselves or their relatives related to the years of violence. Essentially, their guilt mirrors Lerner's words regarding the indifference of the dominant members of society during the armed conflict, and their mental disturbance is a strategy to deal with their guilt. If the TRC focuses on the direct victims of violence, these novels portray mainly upper-class and middle-class subjects who are guilty of having been indifferent to the suffering and disappearance of thousands of Peruvians, and who recognize their role in the perpetuation of the structures of discrimination that fostered violence during the armed conflict. According to Víctor Vich:

In recent years, a sector of the Peruvian middle and upper classes has been building an exculpatory narrative of political violence. "We did not know, we did not want to know" have become commonplace phrases and can be extended to the behavior of the state itself, which has come to treat the violence as an exclusively military problem. "Not knowing" and "not hearing" are thus phrases that reveal what has come to be called the "differential impact" of political violence. (Vich 2014, 128)

In contrast, these novels attempt to raise awareness of the differential impact of political violence. Through the feeling of guilt and subsequent mental illness these fictions mediate between an upper- or middle-class reader and his or her social class's responsibility during the armed conflict. Thus these novels articulate a fictional contract in which the *criollo* elite and the middle class reimagine their social function in the years after the violence.

6. Theidon's *Intimate Enemies* is a revised translation of her book *Entre prójimos*, published in Peru in 2004.

Before analyzing the novels, I will explain briefly how violence and madness were represented before the TRC using the illustrative example of Mario Vargas Llosa's *Lituma en los Andes* (1993; *Death in the Andes*, [1996] 2007), in which the protagonist, Corporal Lituma, relates to Andean characters through discourses of otherness.<sup>7</sup> The plot follows Lituma's investigation of a series of forced disappearances in Naccos, a fictional small town in the Peruvian Andes. In the first part of the text Lituma thinks that the Shining Path is behind the disappearances, but in the second he believes that the perpetrators are actually a couple of mystical fanatics—owners of the town's bar, whom he erroneously associates with Andean culture. Gareth Williams states:

The novel presents itself as an active engagement with the notion of cultural difference in contemporary Peru. . . . *Death in the Andes* is a novel that presents itself as a representation and reproduction of the problematics underlying the Andes/coast interface. . . . Yet it systematically steps back from considering the hybrid/transcultural interface as a specific space of reflection and representation. Quite literally, the novel signals the problematic of cultural ambivalence yet quickly displaces it (actively strives to forget it) in favor of the maintenance and order of identity/difference investments. (Williams 2002, 239–240)

The maintenance of difference is a result of the emphasis the novel gives to Lituma's perspective on the narrated world, which is clearly exemplified in the ending. A construction driller tells Lituma the truth about the disappearances: the fanatics and a group of their customers had cannibalized the victims' bodies as part of rituals to keep violence away from Naccos. The protagonist—in shock—stops the driller's speech and states that he would rather not have known the truth, thus establishing an affective and ideological distance between himself and the events. He imagines those cannibalistic rituals as part of a premodern Andean culture in spite of the driller's attempt to explain the opposite. He is not keen enough to distinguish the contact zones between the Andean and Western worlds and prefers to withdraw into his prejudices. Vich (2002, 71) points out that "Lituma is not interested in undertaking any transcultural adventure. His lack of interest to understand differences reveals his fear of relativizing his worldview." The protagonist wants to be identified as part of a liberal modernizing project (even though his idea of it is a caricature of Western society: one essentially reduced to people in suits) and prefers to keep his distance from everything he considers premodern or uncivilized. It is ultimately his adherence to his own image of modernity that produces a discourse of otherness that distances the "reasonable" subject of knowledge from the "senseless" Andean people.

A similar approach is taken with the representation of madness in the novel. Lituma's character depicts two types of madness: one romantic and socially accepted, and the other irrational, a source of an ancestral violence that disturbs public order and that the protagonist identifies with Andean culture. Lituma identifies himself as someone who enjoys the romantic madness but disregards everyone who has any kind of relationship with the other kind of madness. Lituma

7. I use the term "madness" instead of mental illness because Vargas Llosa's novel does not use medical discourses to approach the characters' mental disturbances. The fiction is more concerned on por-

establishes this difference when he compares his subordinate Tomas Carreño's amorous adventures with the events in Naccos:

Everybody's crazy here. Aren't the *terrucos* [terrorists] crazy? Aren't Dionisio and the witch out of their minds? Wasn't that Lieutenant Pancorvo stark raving mad when he burned a mute to make him talk? Is there anything more insane than these *serruchos* [derogatory term for Andean indigenous] scared to death of *mukis* [evil spirits] and throat-slitters? Don't people have more than one screw loose when they make people disappear just to keep the *apus* [the spirits of the mountains] in the hills quiet? At least when you're crazy in love, you don't hurt anybody except yourself. (Vargas Llosa [1996] 2007, 246)

The protagonist relegates Naccos's political and cultural diversity to a realm of irrational violence destroying the nation, while describing love affairs as inoffensive to the public sphere and as a healthy way to relieve the psychological stress caused by irrational violence. The problem with his perspective is its cynicism: he purposefully omits that Tomás had killed a former lover of his partner out of jealousy. A cynical reading is necessary to hide the disruptive power that romantic madness can have over the public sphere. In his study of Vargas Llosa's erotic novels, Juan Carlos Ubilluz (2006, 136–137) explains that from the author's conceptualization of erotic love emerge the aspirations of a liberal market that would homogenize the polymorphic nature of desire through consumerism. While the whole novel cannot be reduced to the protagonist's perspective, I argue that Lituma's worldview—and specifically his approach to madness—fits into this homogenizing discipline of eroticism. For Lituma, there is only one “reasonable” project for the nation: liberal modernization (although as I mentioned before, he has his own peculiar understanding of this), which drives him to disregard any intercultural dialogue. Thus the formation of a subject of reason in the figure of Lituma is based on the disappearance of heterogeneity from the public sphere, for which he groups together everything he finds disturbing within the aura of irrational violence.

After the TRC report was published, however, this typical dynamic between the subject of knowledge and the object of violence/madness changed at a political and fictional level. As an example of this change, I would like to use the testimony of El Brujo (the Warlock), which was compiled by the TRC and partially published by Rocío Silva Santiesteban in her book *El factor asco* (The repulsive factor, 2008). El Brujo was a soldier during the years of war. In his testimony, he recounts the torture, rape, and atrocities committed by the military against imprisoned terrorists. My interest is to draw attention to one commissioner's reaction to El Brujo's account of the beheading of a captive woman in a military base. In the middle of his account, El Brujo says to this unidentified commissioner: “Don't look at me that way [No me vea mal]” (Silva Santiesteban 2008, 180). But how *not* to look “that way”? How not to feel repulsion for El Brujo and his narrative of violence? That repulsion was exactly Lituma's reaction to the driller's story in Vargas Llosa's novel, which at the end leaves the reader with no means to understand the events beyond the protagonist's perspective. But unlike Lituma, the commissioner keeps listening. He or she persists in trying to understand the Other even at the expense of his or her emotional peace, which may produce a psychological crisis. The characters in the novels that I study face the same process of hearing a repulsive truth,



and like the commissioner, they keep listening in order to understand. They take the step forward that Lituma did not dare to do; and it is a step that drives them mad. If irrationality is portrayed as otherness in Vargas Llosa's novel, in post-TRC fiction it is inserted into the protagonists' minds and in the organizational logic of the fictional world.

Santiago Roncagliolo's *Abril rojo* (*Red April*) fictionalizes the process of hearing beyond our psychological limits, which unveils pathological disorders at individual and governmental levels. The novel unfolds as a detective story set in Ayacucho during the elections of 2000, when Fujimori sought his second reelection. The novel portrays persistent violence in the region and accuses the government of allowing it. Using as an excuse the need to maintain a clean image of the country during electoral times and for tourism, the government justified a pact of silence regarding the armed conflict and the continuation of violence in the fiction's present. The governmental agents—military, police, and judicial—encourage bureaucratic inaction so that no case of violence is investigated and no bad news becomes public. As a consequence, there is no political recognition of the problems or the victims of violence in Ayacucho. The state is portrayed as historically disinterested in those living in the Peruvian provinces. Civil authorities have no real power to manage local governments; and control of the region rests in the hands of the army, which works only in the interest of Lima's upper class. The state is reduced to a powerful elite that lives alienated from the fate of the rest of the country. The inhabitants of Ayacucho are recognized not as citizens of the nation but as disposable bodies living under a state of exception whose power expands due to the distortion of reality—at national and individual levels—created by the pact of silence. According to psychoanalyst Saúl Peña (2003, 55–56), “The distinguishing characteristic of the pseudo-democracy that Peru experienced during Fujimori's successive governments was the dominance of a psychology developed to conceal and distort reality, which was instituted by an evil mind as a mechanism of power. This phenomenon expanded to envelop practically every sphere of the government.” Roncagliolo's novel mirrors Peña's conceptualization of Fujimori's government while exploring its effects on people.

The protagonist is Associate District Prosecutor Félix Chacaltana Saldívar, who is introduced as a bureaucrat obsessed with correct legal proceedings. Born in Ayacucho, he left as a child for Lima, where he was raised and educated. Consequently he avoided the worst years of violence in his hometown. Aside from a few references to a failed marriage and his early work as a prosecutor, the narrator provides almost no information about the protagonist's life in Lima. Chacaltana returns to Ayacucho, where he has no family left, to work and to live in his deceased parents' old house. The memory of his dead mother haunts the character throughout the novel. Whenever he is at home, Chacaltana enters his mother's old room and tells her details of his day-to-day life as if she were there. What looks like an innocent scene of a son keeping alive his mother's memory becomes a sick image when the reader discovers Chacaltana's secret: when he was a child he decided to avenge his father's abuse of his mother by burning down the house with his father inside, but in the fire his mother died, too. It becomes clear that a

profound feeling of guilt and a mental disorder motivate the character's conversations with his mother and the erasure of his father from his memories. This image reaches a new level of perversity when, at the end of the novel, the reader discovers that the protagonist had taken his mother's corpse from her grave to lay it on her bed. The revelation of the protagonist's secret explains the character's *machista* manners toward women. Although he seems inoffensive most of the time, he always refers to women as objects to be satisfied by men's desire. He even rapes Edith, a young woman he thinks he is in love with, when he finds out that she and her family used to be terrorists. Chacaltana's own pact of silence toward his father's memory has led him to take his father's place in society as an abusive paternal figure, perverting all professional and personal relationships he has with women.

The main plot line focuses on Chacaltana's investigation of a series of murders. Even though each corpse shows different techniques of assassination, all of the victims suffered brutal torture and the mutilation of some part of their bodies. The police are unwilling to investigate these killings because of the institutional pact of silence. They strive to slow down any important criminal investigation until everyone forgets about it. Chacaltana, obsessed with following the proper proceedings, does not obey the pact of silence and takes the case into his own hands. The clues left by the murderer confuse him and lead him to formulate different hypotheses. At first he blames the Shining Path for the killings. But then, when the new victims are people with whom he had recently been in contact, he realizes that the murderer is trying to frame him, and he feels guilty about the homicides. He actually thinks that he is the one causing them. As Fernando Rosenberg (2010, 101) notes, "[Chacaltana's] legal proceedings trace the path to violence."<sup>8</sup> Chacaltana's only interlocutor within the government is Commander Alejandro Carrión, head of the army in Ayacucho, but an argument with him reveals that he is the assassin and that part of his plan was to frame Chacaltana. The commander began killing in order to protect the governmental pact of silence: his first victim was another military member who could not stop talking about the massacres during the armed conflict. The subsequent killings were a consequence of his strategy to leave no trace of his undoing. Through a series of notes spread throughout the fiction, the reader realizes that Carrión is mentally disturbed. The brutality of his techniques of assassination responds not only to his logic of hiding his crimes but also to a distortion of reality: his mind is plagued by memories of war and an imaginary of Andean mythical violence. Fearful memories haunt the commander because of his responsibility for unlawful killings in Ayacucho during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, he imagines dead people harassing him. I argue that the character is suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, which is manifested through delusional paranoia. When Chacaltana confronts him, Carrión exposes

8. I would like to suggest that Roncagliolo's portrayal of legal procedures tracing the way of violence reflects what happened in Uchuraccay after the visit of the commission presided over by Vargas Llosa to investigate the murder of eight journalists in January 1983. One hundred thirty-five *uchuraccainos* were assassinated by terrorists, military, and *rondas campesinas* (autonomous peasant patrols) during the following nineteen months.



the prosecutor's secret about his parents' assassination in order to prove that both are murderers and mentally disturbed. The Commander's mental disorder cannot find relief under the discipline of the pact of silence imposed by the government, and Chacaltana's own symbolic pact of silence breaks down when he has to face the truth about his parents' deaths. Throughout the novel Chacaltana has many nightmares that involve fire, blood, his mother, and his own image (never his father). Once his secret is revealed, the reader can understand his nightmares as unconscious symptoms of his sickly denial: not just about his feelings of guilt for his mother's death, but more crucially for his perverse desire to kill his father (a case of Oedipus complex without closure).

The exposed truth makes visible the protagonist's "psychological and moral deterioration" (Roncagliolo 2009, 270). He kills the Commander and flees to Ayacucho's mountains. The novel's conclusion contains a fictional report of the events written by a member of the National Intelligence Agency blaming Chacaltana for the series of murders. In addition, the report recognizes that there are "documents referring to disappearances, torture, and mistreatment engaged in during the period of the state of emergency" by some military and police members. However, it continues, these documents will not be brought to the public opinion so that they will not be used to damage "the image of our nation abroad or obscuring the significant achievements of the government with regard to the countersubversive struggle" (Roncagliolo 2009, 270).

If Chacaltana is compared with Vargas Llosa's character Lituma, the former's investigation reaches psychological and political spaces that the latter does not. When Lituma hears the horrifying truth about the forced disappearances he investigates, he stops the narration, fearing for his psychological health. Chacaltana, however, persists, even at the expense of his own mental health. His investigation leads him to discover the cause of the murders as well as to uncover his insane inner self. While for Vargas Llosa's character irrationality is the origin of violence, Roncagliolo's character delves into irrationality to look for the source of violence: in his case, his own pathological Oedipus complex, which mirrors the governmental pact of silence, and its advances to deteriorate people's minds (as with Carrión). The novel exposes how the pacts of silence actually drive people, in particular victims of violence, into mental health disorders. Because they cannot speak about their suffering, they cannot heal their psychological wounds.<sup>9</sup>

Like *Death in the Andes*, *Abril rojo* has also been criticized for its portrayal of Andean culture.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the novel it seems that the origin of violence comes from the premodern condition of the Andes (like Lituma believes in Vargas Llosa's work). However, the end unveils that the supposed relation between the Andean world and violence is a strategy developed by Commander Carrión to cover his own crimes. Thus Roncagliolo's novel exposes how the barbarization of the Andean (*lo andino*) is a strategy of power to justify the use of violence over

9. At the level of the micro politics of reconciliation, Theidon (2004, 86) has stated that mental disturbance was a socialized experience in some communities in Ayacucho, one that helped many members in those communities to recover their sanity.

10. See Rosenberg (2010) and Vich (2009).

Andean communities and their territories. Following in part the TRC's conclusions, most of the responsibility for violence in the fiction lies with the political elite that perpetuates structures of power that alienate individuals and communities. The novel exposes mental illnesses as a legacy of the armed conflict but also uses them to articulate the historical responsibility of those who perpetuate structures of discrimination: Chacaltana's denial allegorizes the state of denial of those who benefit from these structures.

Alonso Cueto's *La hora azul* explores how mental disturbance opens a space for the affective recognition of citizenship while also dealing with its political limitations. The novel portrays an allegorical encounter between the agents of violence and their victims in the years of postviolence, which is possible to imagine thanks to the political and cultural framework promoted by the TRC. The plot follows Adrián Ormache, a successful attorney in Lima, through his personal investigation into his father's life during the armed conflict, when he was a military commander in Ayacucho. The story begins with his mother's funeral. Her death "plunged [him] into a grief that [he] will never get over" (Cueto 2012, 7). After her funeral, Adrián talks about his parents with his brother. Within these conversations, his brother reveals to him that their father, who died years earlier, committed systematic tortures and rapes in Ayacucho. Adrián pays special attention to the story of a young female captive with whom his father fell in love. He asks for more information about her, but his brother tells him that he only knows that she ran away. Later, while going through his mother's belongings, Adrián is shocked to find a letter from a Mrs. Vilma Agurto blackmailing his mother, threatening to make public his father's abuses in Ayacucho, particularly the rape of Agurto's teenage niece. He is intrigued with the possibility that those two women—Agurto's niece and the captive his father fell in love with—were actually the same. He decides to carry out his own investigation to discover the truth behind the letter and the identity of that woman.

Since his parents' divorce, Adrián grew up in his mother's house and never had a good relationship with his father. His mother's family never wanted her to marry his father because they came from different social classes. She was part of a wealthy family, and he was a navy cadet at that time. The social condition of Adrián's parents represents both groups of official power responsible—directly and indirectly—for the violence that spread through the country in the 1980s and 1990s. While his father embodies an agent of violence working for the government, his mother represents the social elite that benefited from the historical structures of discrimination that fostered violence. Throughout the novel, the protagonist gradually gains awareness of his ethical and social responsibility as a privileged and complicit member of society.

In his inquiry, Adrián discovers that even though the blackmail was a scam, Agurto's niece actually exists, and her name is Miriam. His father had taken her prisoner in Ayacucho and had fallen in love with her immediately. Although it is never clear through the novel if his father raped her, the protagonist imagines that he did. Because of this, Adrián feels that his father's guilt transfers to him. As a way to be at peace with himself, he searches for Miriam in Lima and Aya-

cucho, without a clear purpose of what to do or what to expect. He finds her in Huanta Dos, a shantytown on the outskirts of Lima founded by Ayacuchans who fled their homes during the armed conflict. Miriam is portrayed as a victim of violence suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder: every day, during the wee hours, she goes to run, in a simulacrum of horror that reproduces the way *comuneros* ran away to the mountains when the terrorists and soldiers entered their towns. She has a child, Miguel, whom Adrián suspects is his half-brother, but he is afraid to ask for that information. Rosenberg (2010, 106) states that the protagonist can never formulate to Miriam his questions about her relationship with his father. He experiences distress when approaching Miriam. He confuses his concerns for her condition with love because the only way he knows to approach her is through a relationship of power between a man and a woman—in other words, by taking the place of his father. He becomes her lover with the intention of compensating her for her suffering, taking her on walks and to restaurants in exclusive parts of Lima. In doing so, Adrián also attempts to transgress the upper class's imaginary boundaries.

In talking to Miriam, the protagonist learns about the traumatic experience of thousands of Peruvians to whom he had been indifferent so far. She, on the other hand, is worried about passing on her trauma to her child. She does not want her child to know about the massacre of their relatives. Miriam's concern mirrors that of many Quechua-speaking women registered in Theidon's study. In her book she pays attention to *males del campo* (rural afflictions), in particular *la teta asustada* (the frightened breast), about which she states:

There is another reason people, particularly women, attempt to forget and spare their bodies further martyrdom. Not only do toxic memories torment them; they also pose a danger to their children. Quechua speakers have elaborated a sophisticated theory regarding the transmission of suffering and *susto* from mother to child, either in utero or via mother's breastmilk. . . . *La teta asustada* conveys how strong negative emotions and memories can alter the body and how a mother can transmit these harmful emotions to her baby. Quechua speakers insist the frightened breast can damage a baby, leaving the child slow-witted or predisposed to epilepsy. (Theidon 2012, 43–44)

Although Miriam does not explain in detail how her suffering and memories would be transmitted to her son, she is sure it will happen. In that sense, her fear and certainty are similar to those of the women interviewed by Theidon. However, Cueto takes his character a step further: she strongly believes that if she dies, the link will be broken between her trauma and her child, and that all her memories will die with her. Although this is an idea that Miriam has apparently been elaborating for a while, it is Adrián's arrival into her life and the possibility of him taking care of her child that allows her to pursue it.

Adrián later receives a call in his office from Miriam's uncle, who tells him that Miriam has died of a heart attack. Adrián imagines that she committed suicide so that her memories would not affect her son, but the fiction never clarifies how she dies. Her death disturbs Adrián. He fights with his wife, in-laws, and colleagues, confronting their classism and hypocrisy, and trying to burst their bubble of comfort. For example, when he tells his colleague Eduardo the whole story of his relationship with Miriam, he thinks: "I didn't know why I said this,

but suddenly I found myself telling Eduardo everything. . . . I think the truth is I wanted to hurt him. That's what it was: I wanted to upset him, to piss him off with my story. Wipe the smug look off his face" (Cueto 2012, 286). Adrián's own daughters call him "crazy." He states that he is no longer the same: "At the time, it was as though another man inhabited my body" (Cueto 2012, 302). His temporary state of mental disturbance is explained by two factors: first, Miriam's unexpected death does not allow him to close the task of mourning over his parents' deaths; and second, the memory of Miriam interpellates him ethically: he feels guilty for being part of a social class that promotes violence through its indifference. Adrián's mental illness is not a legacy of the war, but it articulates an imaginary promoted by the TRC about the privileged social classes' historical responsibility in the perpetuation of structures of discrimination as well as their indifference to the victims during the armed conflict. Cueto transfers the formula of the post-traumatic stress disorder to a social class that finally opens its eyes to the nation's history. Miriam's image becomes a specter that haunts the protagonist. He even refers to all the victims of the years of violence as specters that struggle to survive day to day. This representation of specters evokes Jacques Derrida's ideas on "hauntology" and mourning. For the French philosopher, the apparition of a specter constitutes a demand for justice that, at the same time, is never attainable because the condition of justice is itself a structure of messianic promise (Derrida 1994, 22–28). If justice loses "the chance of future, of the promise or the appeal," it stops being justice and becomes an act of "good conscience," reducing "the singularity and alterity of the other" (Derrida 1994, 28). In his momentary mental disturbance, Adrián breaks out of the bubble of prejudices and hypocrisies that shapes the criollo elite. He separates from his wife and establishes a paternal relationship with Miguel, Miriam's son, and among many things, he pays for Miguel's psychological therapy. At the end of the novel, three years later, Miriam's specter still haunts Adrián's mind, but the demand for justice has been appeased. He is able to restore his relationship with his wife and daughters, who accept Miguel's sporadic visits and come to care for him. In the last scene, Adrián goes for a walk with Miguel, and while taking a break, Miguel tells him: "I wanted to thank you. . . . That's all. I wanted to thank you" (Cueto 2012, 312). This display of appreciation completes the protagonist's mourning and relieves in some measure his feeling of guilt. While reaffirming the importance of reparations for the victims of violence as proposed by the TRC, the scene reduces the specter's alterity and displaces the fulfillment of the demand for justice to the protagonist's "good conscience."

Adrián's mental disorder disturbs the public sphere, especially those spaces that are related to the upper class, but it does not reorganize them in a more open or democratic way. As Rosenberg (2010, 107) points out, "The familial and social symbolic orders that seemed threatened are reorganized without major consequences [at the end of the novel]." The subaltern characters move throughout the once-forbidden social spaces of the upper class as long as a member of the upper class accompanies them. The obscene past of Adrián's father remains hidden, while the gossip about Adrián's relationship with Miguel spreads without actually threatening the social order. Because the public sphere remains intact, repa-

ration for the victims is carried out only in the affective realm, without political implications. This political limitation is a consequence of the deterioration of the state's public role in Cueto's fiction, which also reflects, according to Rosenberg, an important aspect of truth commissions' functions: "As organizations that are both inside and outside of the state, the work of the commissions evidences how the state has lost its central importance and legitimacy as the privileged realm of justice" (Rosenberg 2010, 96). Because of the state's failure, the novel seems to demand an ethical stance from civil society. However, this ethical demand is proposed on the condition that the public sphere remains unharmed, that is, without damaging civil society's self-image. Thus what the reader sees at the end is a kind of a continuation of the elite's bubble, tweaked to make room for political correctness.

Although it is clear that the reparations in Cueto's work—carried out within an affective realm—reflect the state's lack of legitimacy, how can we understand the public sphere's impermeability at the end, which implies a reconstitution not only of civil society's image but also of the state's political power? This dilemma can be explained by the paradoxical nature of truth commissions: while the commissions' role questions the state's legitimacy as the realm of justice, at the same time they attempt to restore its legitimacy (Rosenberg 2010, 96). Peru's TRC had no real political power to implement its own recommendations. It was ultimately the role of the state to implement them. Because of this political limitation, the TRC searched for and encouraged new ways to recognize and promote citizenship through the cultural-affective realm.<sup>11</sup> Rosenberg (2010, 107) underscores that "the intimate and affective nature of the reparation seems to be the condition of possibility so that the commission's symbolic intervention can materialize into an effective legacy." It is important to highlight that any recognition of citizenship has to be carried out not only at a political level but also at an affective level. As Eduardo Mendieta (2007, 1) emphasizes, "Citizenship is a political category that binds public affect . . . to a legal order. Citizenship is a bundle of rights and duties, but it is also a bundle of emotions, passions, desires, in short, affect." He adds: "Our moral excellence as well as the health and justice of our polities presuppose the solitude, beneficence, gratitude and self-less generosity of citizens who treat each other as friends" (Mendieta 2007, 19). This affective dimension of citizenship plays a crucial role in the reparations that Cueto's protagonist carries out. However, performing the reparations implies that a process of recognition has been put in place: in this case, the recognition between a member of a privileged social class and those more affected by violence. According to Horacio Legrás (2008, 22), "Although recognition seems to advocate the cause of the underdog, which to some extent it does, we must confront the fact that recognition is above all a strategy through which power reasserts itself in the minute details of the everyday." For him, recognition is linked to "the contractual notion of sovereignty . . . : recognition serves as the visible and pristine counterpart of this enigmatic, abstract process, through which the people is said to transfer its sovereignty to the state's sphere of action" (Legrás 2008, 22). Legrás's conceptualization of recognition

11. See Milton (2007, 2009).

serves to elucidate why, within Cueto's fiction, the affective recognition of citizenships opened by the protagonist's unfinished task of mourning and temporary mental illness ends up restoring the elite's and state's political power.

José de Piérola's *El camino de regreso* explores the doubts and possibilities of reconstructing a healthy national community after the years of violence through mental disorder and cultural difference. The novel has two main plots. The first, full of uncertainties, is about Fernando Robles, a young, upper-middle-class man from Lima whose father dies in the 1992 terrorist attack on Tarata Street in Miraflores, the commercial district of Lima. Members of the Shining Path planned to detonate a car bomb in front of the Credit Bank on Larco Avenue, but surveillance in that area did not allow them to park in the intended spot. The terrorists moved the car one block away into Tarata Street and let it explode in front of residential buildings. This event has been one of the most impressive in the *limeño* imaginary because of where it happened, the social status of the victims, and its dimensions.<sup>12</sup> In the fiction, Fernando moves to San Francisco after his father's death, where he resides until he finds out from a letter sent by his best friend Eva Franco that his former college friend, Antonio Toledo (aka *camarada* Abel), was involved in the terrorist attack that killed his father. He returns to Peru and looks for Antonio in order to avenge his father's death. The reader later discovers that it is possible that Antonio had saved Fernando's life the night of the attack: after leaving the car bomb, Antonio sees Fernando, who was going to meet his father in an exclusive restaurant nearby. Without offering a clear explanation, Antonio takes Fernando to a small restaurant away from the area and asks him to wait for him there. This is one of many stories that constitute the narrative about that day (another possibility is that Eva saved his life). The explosion and the incomplete task of mourning for his father's death have caused in him posttraumatic stress disorder, which prevents him from having complete certainty about the events of that day. Like Adrián's character in *La hora azul*, Fernando's character appropriates the posttraumatic stress disorder suffered by direct victims of violence in order to formulate his social class's responsibility during the armed conflict as well as its historical guilt in the perpetuation of structures of discrimination.

Fernando chases Antonio through the Andes and then in Lima, where he thinks he has finally found him. In the decisive encounter, which happens in Villa El Salvador (one of the poorest districts of Lima), Fernando is shot, but he claims to have wounded Antonio with his gun, too. Fernando faints and wakes up in a hospital surrounded by Eva and his uncle and aunt, with whom he has lived since he came back. Fernando recounts his encounter with Antonio, but Eva tells him that nobody was found with him. She adds that a body identified as Antonio's was exhumed in Huancashuasi, a small town in the Andes. Eva's words force

12. I would suggest that the fact that the victims did not belong to Quechua- or Aymara-speaking communities but rather lived in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of the capital allowed them to be recognized as grievable lives. As Judith Butler states, a grievable life is one that can be mourned because it counts as a life, because it has been framed as worthy to be grieved (Butler 2009, 13–15, 38–42), where these mediating frames are sustained by logics and exercises of power/knowledge in the public and private spheres.



Antonio (and the reader) to face the uncertainty of the events that he believes he has experienced and also the instability of his own mental health. The last days of Fernando's life are depicted as a hallucination produced by the effects of his posttraumatic stress disorder. Just like the victims of violence in the testimonies gathered by the TRC, Fernando is *not the same*. He has been living in a state of mental illness caused by the violence. This situation opens a state of uncertainty regarding reality in the character's mind, which reflects—at an allegorical level—a dubious future for the nation.

The narration does not offer any clarity regarding Antonio's character, either. His image functions as a haunting figure throughout the novel. He and his family are from a small town in the Andes. He enters a private college in Lima, where he meets Fernando, but he later drops out for economic reasons and transfers to a public one. He is a representation of the marginal subject who has been displaced from Lima's privileged spaces. Fernando regrets that he did not help Antonio financially when he could have and thinks that Antonio possibly came into contact with terrorists in the public college. If he had loaned some money to Antonio, he thinks, maybe his father would be still alive. While Fernando lies on the ground bleeding after his alleged encounter with Antonio, he imagines himself running in the parking lot of the college, chasing Antonio the same day they said goodbye. Fernando offers him money for his studies: "I can give you a hand, talk to my dad, and arrange a loan," but Antonio rejects his aid: "It is not that." Fernando insists to try to understand his former friend's intentions: "So, what is it?" His answer is simple and oblique: "Just me [Cosas mías]" (De Piérola 2007, 415). Antonio's words make him unapproachable for Fernando and the reader. The pronoun *me* (in Spanish, the possessive *mías*) is ultimately an empty and impregnable signifier. Instead of offering explanations for his actions, it closes any possible communication: an injunction to silence, that is, a "sign . . . of refusal to fit into a reader's agenda" (Sommer 1999, 4), a sign that ultimately underscores the difference between them.

Antonio's refusal makes the relationship between the two characters more spectral than emotional. Fernando is not sure what he should feel about Antonio: hate because Antonio killed his father, or regret because he did not help Antonio to stay in the "good" private college. Antonio's image haunts Fernando (and the reader) throughout the novel, demanding a moral standpoint from him (and us). Fernando's desire to chase and kill Antonio is a way to avoid the complexities of the ethical demand. Why is Fernando incapable of addressing these complexities? It is not as simple as suggesting that Fernando cannot make an ethical resolution because he has posttraumatic stress disorder or because he lacks certainty regarding the events and his former friend's intentions. No matter how certain he thinks he is, Antonio's image will always haunt him, demanding of him a permanent reevaluation of his ethical standpoint. De Piérola's use of Antonio's spectral image as well as of uncertainties and anachronisms in his narrative parallels Derrida's ideas on hauntology and mourning. But unlike Cueto's fiction, De Piérola avoids the disappearance of the messianic demand for justice through the persistence of Antonio's spectral condition. The strong presence of Antonio's subaltern and spectral condition makes Fernando incapable of producing a rational discourse

to monopolize the narrative of the events, which impedes him from completing the task of mourning for his father. De Piérola's novel does not reflect a positive or productive capacity coming from the process of mourning, but rather the emergence of unfinished mourning as symptomatic of postviolence Peruvian society. This is reflected, for example, in the main couple, Fernando and Eva, whose relationship is represented as unproductive and whose future is haunted by ambiguity. There is not exactly an allegorical failure of the nation, but its future is called into question.

The anachronisms that plague De Piérola's narration respond to the ethical demand of the other as Derrida explains it within the logic of the specter: "This spectral *someone other looks at us*, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute anteriority (which may be on the order of generation, of more than one generation) and asymmetry, according to an absolutely unmasterable disproportion. Here anach[r]ony makes the law" (Derrida 1994, 7).

In De Piérola's novel, this "absolute anteriority" is the historical structures of discrimination that have shaped Peruvian society from colonial times on. Antonio's character cannot be a solid and fixed image in Fernando's memory because he represents a long tradition of exclusion that looks at him (in a Derridean sense). Fernando's failure to respond to this historical demand symbolizes the difficulties that civil society has in overcoming it without a public institution that channels it politically or judicially. The TRC made visible the historical and particular causes of violence; but without any systematic politics of reconciliation promoted by the state, the social and psychological scars of (historical) violence cannot be healed. The uncertainty that dominates De Piérola's work mirrors the uncertainties and inconsistent practices that the state has developed regarding truth and reconciliation as they were formulated by the TRC report. Fernando cannot offer justice to Antonio, but he cannot receive justice for his father's death, either. This impossibility of justice reflects not only a theoretical approach followed by the author; it also reflects the political and social limitations of the TRC for the exercise of justice, and the state's incompetence to exercise it. Like *La hora azul*, *El camino de regreso* signals the divergence between culture and the rule of law.

Despite the image of an unclear future that dominates the novel's main plot, its secondary plot offers a positive perspective regarding the nation's fate. This plot deals with the Andean community of San Pedro de Ucumari, which is in conflict with the mining company La Merced. The company—property of Fernando's uncle Tato Roselli—has been contaminating the community's lake and harvest land. In addition, the company frames a group of comuneros to make them look like terrorists so that the police will imprison them. Attorney Romulo Cahuana, who is from San Pedro de Ucumari, goes in defense of the confined comuneros and the whole community. Cahuana seeks the help of Eva Franco, who works as a lawyer for a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that assists prisoners mistakenly incarcerated as terrorists. He contacts her knowing that she is a close friend of Tato Roselli's family. Eva asks Fernando for help in the case in a moment in which he is upset with his uncle because of a problem with his inheritance. He consents to help them and soon finds documents that prove his uncle's mining company's

guilt in polluting the land and water. With those documents in hand, Romulo Cahuana and Eva Franco face Tato Roselli and his lawyer. Roselli agrees to repair any damage caused to the community and pay them retribution. Nevertheless, nothing is said in the conversation about the imprisoned comuneros, who are going to be in jail for five years. Eva Franco asks Romulo Cahuana why he does not care about them. His answer—which stems from a historical perspective as well as underscores the characters' cultural difference—disconcerts Eva: "What are five years if there are communities still waiting for five hundred years?" (De Piérola 2007, 370). For him the most important thing is to protect the community: the value of individuals' lives depends on the community's survival, evoking in essence the spirit of José María Arguedas's character Rendón Wilka in *Todas las sangres* (1964), who posits the need to give one's life in the communal fight against the economic, political, and military power of the big mining companies. Thus De Piérola offers closure to the allegorical use of the mine, one of the most important allegories used in the history of Peruvian literature to condense the continuing conflict among civil society, the political and economic elite, and the state. This time the Andean community whose way of life is threatened by the mining company defeats its enemy with cleverness and help from an NGO.

To varying degrees, both plots reflect the dilemmas and possibilities opened by the TRC in the public sphere. Fernando's attempt to find out the truth about his father's death parallels the commissioners' work. But while the commissioners carried out a crucial process aimed at reestablishing a healthy national life, Fernando's posttraumatic narrative full of uncertainties darkens both his personal and the national future. If in the TRC report the posttraumatic stress disorder is a legacy of violence framed within the experience of victims, De Piérola's novel opens this frame to include part of the criollo elite that is facing its guilt and historical responsibility. The fictional ambiguity regarding the future of the nation responds to the difficulties of this process. Meanwhile, the secondary plot serves as a counterweight for the uncertainties of the first plot. The reader finds in Romulo Cahuana's collectivist perspective social and psychological tools to overcome the sufferings of unfinished processes of justice and mourning. The NGO and personal motivations take the place left by an inefficient state. Like *La hora azul*, *El camino de regreso* imagines the public recognition of citizenships (and tentatively the reestablishment of the nation's mental health) outside of the state, through the initiative of individuals or private institutions (in general, some kind of private investment). In both novels as well, even though with different results, unfinished tasks of mourning impel the protagonists to face the Other, which drives them to states of mental illnesses. Beyond the success or failure of these approaches, both novels articulate culturally the criollo elite's responsibility during the years of violence.

Despite their different approaches to violence, *Abril rojo*, *La hora azul*, and *El camino de regreso* respond to the political challenges proposed by the TRC, which are reflected in the protagonists' investigations, guilt, and mental health. In all these novels the state is represented negatively as an institution that does not care about the victims of violence and, in general, about the Peruvian lower classes.

For this reason the characters have to carry out their investigations personally, which alludes to the TRC's work and political origin: although the state founded it, the TRC was not considered a governmental institution. Rather, it was a supplementary, parallel institution.

Roncagliolo's, Cueto's, and De Piérola's mentally ill characters respond to the state's historical indifference to the victims of violence—as the TRC formulated it—but can also be seen as models (or counterexamples) for overcoming its indifference. If these characters become mentally ill it is because the government has not taken appropriate care of its citizens. Their mental disorders expose what is failing in the political system and what it takes to fix it. In Saúl Peña's (2003, 21) words, "Governmental politics and policies should try to balance citizens' psychic needs with the organization of society." *Abril rojo* teaches us through negative examples. We (the readers) learn that the pacts of silence, the barbarization of the Other, and the production of a state of exception only produce an alienated population. *La hora azul* attempts to offer us an example of what civil society should do when politics fail: to address the demand for justice that comes from the victims, without regard for the private and public cost involved. Our mental categories and social imaginary must be shaken up and reorganized before we can enact social change. Nevertheless, through the final reestablishment of the public sphere, Cueto's work explores the limitations of a cultural/affective approach that lacks a political scope. *El camino de regreso* exposes us to the political and cultural difficulties that must be addressed in order to build a more democratic state: the demand for justice cannot be reduced to civil society's good conscience. It must be a continuous drive demanding profound cultural and political changes, even at the cost of disturbing our mental health and worldview. The TRC has generated a social imaginary that has made it possible for writers to imagine a solution to violence outside of the state, but at the cost of a self-reflexive process of social guilt that immerses the Self in mental disturbance.

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