

# How to Display Absence:

## Museographic Representations of the Disappeared in Peru<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* How to give presence to a body that has been exposed to violence until it disappears? How to exhibit its absence? This paper focuses on the representation and commemoration of victims of forced disappearance in the national memorial museum of Peru: the Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion (LUM) in Lima. By tracing the collaborations between the museum and the relatives of the victims and by examining the practices of collecting and displaying testimonies and artifacts, I aim to unveil the power relations that take place in this museum setting, as well as the agency of the victims.

*Keywords:* Memorial museums, forced disappearance, Peru, contact zone, agency

## Introduction

In Latin America, forced disappearance was a widely used method of repression by authoritarian regimes, not only as a form of state violence against political opponents but also because of gender, ethnic, and racial prejudices. Due to its systematic and massive practice in recent history,<sup>2</sup> the term *desaparecidos* has become a

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- 2 With some antecedents much further back in time, such as in El Salvador during the 1930s, the method as described was first deployed in Guatemala in the 1960s. As the Cold War heated up in Latin America during the 1970s, the tactic was extended, being widely used by military dictatorships

distinctive category on the continent. In Peru, according to official data, more than 20,000 people were victims of forced disappearance during the internal armed conflict (1980–2000).<sup>3</sup>

The most serious human rights abuses in Peru did not occur during a dictatorship, but under the subsequent democratically elected civilian governments. On 17 May 1980, one day before the first elections after 12 years of military dictatorships, a polling station in a small Andean community became the scene of a subversive attack, whose authorship was attributed to the self-styled “Partido Comunista de Perú – Sendero Luminoso”. This date is considered the beginning of the internal conflict in Peru. *Sendero Luminoso*, inspired by a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, sought to defeat the official government and its democratic institutions, and establish a revolutionary communist peasant regime. To achieve its political objectives, it made ruthless use of terror. The Peruvian State, for its part, reacted to this threat through the constant use of states of emergency and placing the Armed Forces at the forefront of the anti-subversive strategy. The official suspension of constitutional rights led to severe human rights violations, such as numerous extrajudicial executions, torture, sexual assaults, and the “disappearance” of thousands of people.<sup>4</sup>

Although there were some terrorist attacks and other atrocities that continued until the mid-1990s, the final phase of the conflict begins with the arrest of Abimael Guzmán, *Sendero Luminoso*’s leader, by a special unit of the Peruvian secret police in September 1992. However, the political violence did not end with the military defeat of *Sendero Luminoso*. The enforced disappearance of people “suspected” of belonging to illegal armed groups continued under the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000).

At the end of 2000, Fujimori left office due to serious allegations of corruption. During the subsequent transition government, a commission was created with the main task of investigating the crimes and human rights violations committed by the armed actors of the conflict (1980–2000), as well as the possible causes. In its final report, delivered after three years of intense work, the “Truth and Reconcilia-

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in the Southern Cone. This tactic was not limited to dictatorships, however. Countries with elected civilian governments, such as Mexico and Colombia, have also been and continue to be scenarios of forced disappearances.

3 Much has been written about the Peruvian conflict. Here I will only refer to two books: Steve Stern (ed.), *Shining and Other Paths. War and Society in Peru 1980–1995*, Durham 1998; and Carlos Iván Degregori, *Qué difícil es ser Dios. El Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso y el conflicto armado*, Lima 2011.

4 Apart from the Armed Forces and Sendero Luminoso, two other armed actors participated in the conflict: the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement – MRTA, a guerrilla group inspired by the Cuban Revolution, and the Self-Defense Committees, rural organizations that were legitimized by the government of Alan García and, under the government of Alberto Fujimori, were equipped as paramilitary organizations by the state security organs.

tion Commission” (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación – CVR) made a series of proposals for the reparation of victims and for institutional reforms to prevent new outbreaks of violence. According to numerous testimonies collected by the CVR (almost 17,000), both sides operated with great cruelty, with *Sendero Luminoso*, however, responsible for 54 per cent of the deaths. The CVR concluded that the conflict was the “most serious, extensive and prolonged episode of violence in the history of the Republic.”<sup>5</sup> The CVR also revealed a notorious relationship between a situation of poverty and social exclusion and the probability of being a victim of violence. The ethnic, racial, and cultural discrimination against Andean and native populations played an important role: 75 per cent of the fatal victims of the conflict had the Quechua or other native languages as their mother tongue.<sup>6</sup> However, the CVR conclusions and recommendations have been the subject of much controversy and criticism. For a part of the population – the Armed Forces, conservative sectors, and Fujimori’s supporters, among others – the findings were and are an obstacle to national reconciliation, a throwback to the past, and a stumbling block for the future.<sup>7</sup>

More than 69,000 Peruvians lost their lives as a result of these twenty years of violence.<sup>8</sup> This figure also includes the disappeared, most of whom are assumed to be deceased. It is important to mention that in Peru, the disappeared are generally perceived as a group of victims who are diluted in the social imaginary, within the wider group of mortal victims. The presence of their absence is minor and mostly confined to the domestic space, unlike other countries in the region, such as Argentina, where they are probably the most important symbol of the struggles for memory and have often been thematized in the public space (street art, memorials, performances, etc.).

According to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED, Art. 2):

“[E]nforced disappearance is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.”<sup>9</sup>

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5 *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*, CVR 2003. The Final Report is available here: <https://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/> (12 October 2021).

6 *Ibid.*

7 For the critics and their relation to the LUM, see: Fabiola Arellano Cruz, *Politische Gewalt ausstellen, Nationale Erinnerungsmuseen in Chile und Peru*, Bielefeld 2018, 176–184.

8 CVR, Final Report, <https://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/> (12 October 2021).

9 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/ced/pages/conventionced.aspx> (10 October 2021).

In concordance with international law, Peruvian law typifies forced disappearance by naming a “public official or servant” as the person executing the crime.<sup>10</sup> But the Commission’s own definition of forced disappearances adds also “non-state agents” as perpetrators:

“The CVR understands forced disappearance of persons to be the disappearance and deprivation of liberty of one or more persons committed by agents of the State or by those acting with their authorization, support or tolerance, *as well as* [emphasis added] by individuals or members of subversive organizations.”<sup>11</sup>

The CVR was a transitional justice instrument, without legal or punitive faculties. Nevertheless, by expanding the definition of enforced disappearance, within the context of the internal armed conflict, it aims to give visibility and recognition to the victims of disappearances whose perpetrators were members of subversive groups. The Law on the Search of Disappeared Persons (2016) understands a “disappeared person” as one “whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her relatives or about whom there is no legal certainty of his or her location, as a result of the period of violence 1980–2000”. The focus of the law lies above all on the search of the body, its identification, and restitution, rather than on the identification and clarification of a crime and the responsible agent.<sup>12</sup>

According to the CVR, enforced disappearance was used systematically by the Peruvian State agents as a counter-subversive mechanism, especially between 1988 and 1993.<sup>13</sup> It was carried out clandestinely: bodies were thrown into the sea or hidden in remote mass graves so that all evidence of their existence disappeared and the crime could remain hidden. Or they were burned: this was for example the case in the military base “Los Cabitos”, the largest secret detention, torture, and extermination centre in Ayacucho, the birthplace of *Sendero Luminoso* and the epicentre of the conflict. The existence of a crematorium oven near *Cabitos* to incinerate the bodies of executed detainees has been confirmed.<sup>14</sup> Many testimonies indicate that

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10 Peruvian Penal Code, art. 320.

11 *Ibid.*, 58.

12 <https://www.leyes.congreso.gob.pe/Documentos/Leyes/30470.pdf> (20 April 2022).

13 Desaparición forzada de personas por agentes del Estado, CVR 2003, 78–79, <http://cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/pdf/TOMO%20VI/SECCION%20CUARTA-Crimenes%20y%20violaciones%20DDHH/FINAL-AGOSTO/1.2.%20DESAPARICIN%20FORZADA.pdf> (10 April 2022).

14 Valeria Reyes, Justicia para las víctimas de Los Cabitos, un análisis del fallo, in: IDEHPUCP (21 August 2017), <https://idehpucp.pucp.edu.pe/notas-informativas/justicia-las-victimas-los-cabitos-analisis-del-fallo/> (10 April 2022). There was also another crematorium oven found in Lima in the Pentagonito (headquarters of the Army Intelligence Service), see: IACHR Judgment, Anzualdo Castro v. Peru, in: [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_202\\_ing.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_202_ing.pdf) (28 December 2022).

they began their search in this place, but when they tried to obtain information, facts were denied or they were only given confused and distorted versions of what had happened. Witnesses could hardly ever be found or no physical evidence remained. As a result, in many cases, the circumstances of the disappearance and the whereabouts of the prisoners could never be clarified and no trace of them could ever be found. Coming to terms with the loss under these circumstances is very difficult, as funeral rituals or traditional mourning practices – and thus closure – are obstructed. This situation of uncertainty is perceived as aggravating for family members: on the one hand, as long as death is not yet clearly proven one does not give up hope and the search continues. On the other hand, no one can be held responsible. That is why forced disappearances are among the few crimes considered to be “continuous”, as they only end when the state acknowledges the detention or discloses information on the fate or whereabouts of the missing person.<sup>15</sup> As Devin Finn argues, forced disappearance is a “double crime”: “It is committed, first, against the abducted individual, and second, against the relatives and loved ones who do not know what happened to their family member.”<sup>16</sup> Under the CED, “any individual who has suffered harm as the direct result of an enforced disappearance” is considered a victim of the crime. The status of the relatives of disappeared persons as victims *per se* has also been stated by Peruvian jurisprudence. Thus, the Constitutional Court points out the feeling of uncertainty caused by the forced disappearance of a person turns their relatives into “direct victims” of this serious crime.<sup>17</sup>

Far from being a single event, forced disappearance was the final episode in a sequence of crimes, such as kidnapping, torture, rape, etc., in which members of the Peruvian Armed Forces participated. The Armed Forces have not yet officially admitted their responsibility for these crimes, or rather, they denied that it was systematic practice, so the legitimate questions of the family members “what happened to them and where are they?” are still pending.

This paper focuses on the representation and commemoration of precisely this group of victims in the national memorial museum of Peru: the Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion (Lugar de la Memoria, Tolerancia e Inclusión Social – LUM) in Lima, inaugurated in 2015.<sup>18</sup> I examine the curatorial strategies

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15 Polly Dewhirst/Amrita Kapur, *The Disappeared and Invisible. Revealing the Enduring Impact of Enforced Disappearance on Women*, in: International Center for Transitional Justice (2015), 2.

16 Devin Finn, *The Political Agency of Victims Through Transnational Processes of Forensic Anthropology and Memory Construction in Latin America*, in: Aline Sierp/Jenny Wüstenberg (eds.), *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics*, New York 2020, 135–154, 137.

17 Federico Andreu-Guzmán, *Enforced Disappearance and Extrajudicial Execution: Investigation and Sanction. A Practitioners Guide*, International Commission of Jurists, Geneva 2015, 48.

18 My doctoral dissertation analyses the genesis, memory discourses, and permanent exhibitions of two national memorial sites: the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* in Chile and the *Lugar*

and exhibition techniques implemented to display the memories of the disappeared at the LUM. For this purpose, I first trace the collaboration between the museum and the relatives of the victims of enforced disappearance. Building on James Clifford's notion of the museum as a "contact zone"<sup>19</sup>, I emphasize the idea of the museum as an interactive and intercultural place, in which tensions, as well as productive dialogues, coexist. This perspective unveils those power relations that take place in museum settings, but also the agency of the victims. Second, I analyse what it means to display violence in a memorial museum when this is primarily about exhibiting absence, the void the disappeared left. I, therefore, examine the practices of collecting and displaying testimonies and artefacts, with particular attention to one medium: personal relics and artefacts that both somehow substitute the missing body while also embodying that absence. Finally, I discuss the recent implementation of "testimonial guided visits" performed by survivors and victims' relatives. Based on institutional statements and in-depth interviews with relatives of the disappeared, museum staff, artists, and activists linked to the LUM,<sup>20</sup> this article aims to thoroughly investigate these experiences whilst taking into account the diversity of all those involved in this museographic project.

## Short history of an eventful project

By way of introduction, it is necessary to contextualize the museum project itself. As recommended by the CVR, the LUM was conceived as part of a range of measures for symbolic reparations toward the victims of the conflict. It is a cultural, learning, research, and commemorative space that aims to reflect on the period of violence and its consequences for today's society to promote a culture of peace and democra-

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*de la Memoria* in Peru. As part of this research work, I conducted several interviews in both countries between 2012 and 2016. The interviews in Peru included representatives of two of the three High Level Commissions (responsible for the organization, creation, and management of the museographic project), the director of the LUM project, members of the curatorial team, the authors of the first script for the permanent exhibition, and the former president of the Truth Commission. My research work was published in 2018 as a book under the German title "Politische Gewalt ausstellen" (Exhibiting Political Violence), see: Arellano Cruz, *Politische Gewalt ausstellen*, 2018. For a more recent study on the same topic, see, for example: Joseph P. Feldman, *Memories before the State: Post-war Peru and the Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion*, New Brunswick 2021.

19 James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 1997.

20 In this article, I quote some of the interviews I conducted in 2016 with the curators of the LUM project as part of my PhD dissertation. In order to learn about the ways in which the relatives of the victims of enforced disappearance collaborate with the museum, I contacted the current president of the organization ANFADET, Luyeva Yangali, who also brought me into contact with two other members. The in-depth interviews took place between October and December 2021 via Zoom.

cy.<sup>21</sup> Originally it was attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as it was the International Community that pushed for its creation. Subsequently, there were discussions as to whether it should belong to the Ministry of Justice, due to its quality as a transitional justice measure. Finally, given its status as a cultural institution, it was attached to the Ministry of Culture. Since this ministry tends to be less politicized than others, it allows, from a strategic perspective, to create better links between survivors, victims, victims' relatives, and the LUM.

Even though relatives of victims and human rights movements have long demanded the creation of a place to remember the victims of the conflict, the museum's concrete creation stems from a proposition of the German government, which donated funds for its construction back in 2008. This idea arose after a German delegation of the Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation visited the exhibition *Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar* (To Remember) in Lima; a photo exhibition, compiled by the CVR, which for the first time visualized the magnitude of the conflict. Initially, this offer was rejected by then-president Alan García (2006–2011). In connection with this decision, it is important to mention that serious human rights violations were committed during García's first government (1985–1990), which were explained as unavoidable as part of anti-subversive measures.<sup>22</sup> After national and international pressure, the government accepted the offer and the project started. Over the years, the museum project had three different "museum commissions" (Comisión de Alto Nivel – CAN), appointed by the presidents in office, whose major tasks were to set up the narrative guidelines and develop a concept for the permanent exhibition. This not only shows how unstable the work of these commissions was but also points to the volatility of their conceptual guidelines and political directives. Moreover, it reveals the complexity involved in trying to address the issue of the armed conflict in a society as fragmented as the Peruvian. In Peru, there is no historical, social, or political consensus regarding the conflict. And there are no sustainable public memory policies either. In other words: the idea of the creation of a national memorial museum did not emerge from society at large or from the Peruvian state as it does not seem to be a priority in the agenda. From its conception to date, the museum has been the subject of several criticisms from a conservative sector in favour of the so-called *Fujimorismo*<sup>23</sup> and the Armed

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21 The LUM guidelines can be found under: [https://lum.cultura.pe/sites/default/files/rm\\_247-2018-mc\\_-\\_anexo.pdf](https://lum.cultura.pe/sites/default/files/rm_247-2018-mc_-_anexo.pdf) (10 April 2022).

22 Hatun Willakuy, Versión abreviada del Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, Lima 2008, 242.

23 "Fujimorismo" refers to the political "ideology" and policies of former President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori. Economically, it is based on neoliberalism; socially and culturally, it is characterized as deeply conservative, with strong alliances with both the military and the Catholic Church. For many Peruvians, Fujimori's anti-subversive strategy was the main responsible for the pacification of the

Forces. These discrepancies have already led, for example, to the censorship of one of its directors for an exhibition with which conservative elites disagreed.<sup>24</sup> But at the same time, it has also been criticized by a sector of the human rights movement that considers the LUM to be too “lenient” on the responsibility of the state and its actors during the conflict. It should be noted that the free development of the museum is subject to the mercy of the will and political inclination of the minister of the day. In this sense, the museum is actually in a very fragile position, and its actions and programmes are subject to these limitations. However, as I will show throughout the article, an organized sector of the victims’ relatives does support its existence. Therefore, collaboration with victims is fundamental to achieving social and political legitimacy.

### The concepts of “contact zone” and “contact points”

First introduced by Mary Louise Pratt, and then applied by James Clifford to the museum studies, the “contact zone” was originally conceived as a space in which – not without contestations and asymmetries – diverse social and cultural positions interact and enter into dialogue and negotiation in different ways. Clifford describes the museum as a contact zone as an ongoing process: “When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* [sic] becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* [sic] – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull.”<sup>25</sup> Although, as an historian and postcolonial theoretician, Clifford elaborated his reflections on ethnographic museums and trans/cross-cultural settings, the idea of the contact zone can be also productive for the present case study. Being aware of the different contexts, geographical and thematic, I use the concept carefully and critically, and not simply as a synonym for “participation” or “inclusion”. Instead, I focus on the (unequal) power relations inherent to the concept, but also on the potential for agency, without ruling out the potential for conflict. On this subject the art educator and curator Nora Sternfeld argues:

“Th[e] possibility of agency is available to all participants in a contact zone – albeit in different ways against the background of existing asymmetries of power relations. Contact zones are thus power-charged spaces of agency [...],

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country. However, Fujimori is currently serving a 25-year sentence for human rights violations committed during his term in office (1990–2000). Nevertheless, the party led by his daughter, Keiko Fujimori, still has the support of a sector of the population and a big influence on Peruvian parliament.

24 Fabiola Arellano Cruz, Die politische Dimension der nationalen Erinnerungsmuseen in Lateinamerika, in: *neues museum*. Die österreichische Museumszeitschrift 18/1, 2 (2018), 44–49.

25 Clifford, *Routes*, 1997, 192.



in which different social struggles are reflected as ongoing processes of fighting for the power of interpretation.”<sup>26</sup>

Following this line, I emphasise the museum as both a dialogical space and a space of negotiation, in which notions of power, authority, and representation play an important role. Although the concept of the contact zone has not yet been sufficiently addressed in relation to memorial museums, I consider that its use allows us to imagine connections between apparently different positions, without assuming a priori dichotomies or binary modes of thinking.

Another useful concept for this analysis, as it critically points to questions regarding representation, violence, absence, and embodiment, is that of “contact points”, developed by Jeffrey David Feldman: “a general category of object that results from physical contact with the body, and then the subsequent removal or destruction of the body”.<sup>27</sup> He critiques the centrality of seeing and looking in museums and considers that the use of contact points as an analytical category has the potential to include other types of sensory experiences.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the representation of disappearance, in which the body is absent and literally cannot be seen, museum objects become contact points precisely because they focus on the processes by which the thing as an object replaces the body as a subject, opening up to a broader discourse of embodiment and representation. For him, “contact points [...] are the sensual products of unequal encounter that materialize in the contact zone”.<sup>29</sup>

As the cultural anthropologist Natalie Bayer mentions in her co-edited book *Kuratieren als antirassistische Praxis*, it is important to take into account the triad of questions of postcolonial theory: Who speaks about what and for whom? Who and what can be canonized under which conditions? And in addition to these, I am also interested in the question of “how”.<sup>30</sup> Given that the very nature of museums implies a hierarchy between those in charge of display and those whose lived stories are on display. By what strategies does the LUM attempt to balance the scale, if at all? How are factual and moral authorities being balanced? How is the interaction between

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26 Nora Sternfeld, *Memorial Sites as Contact Zones. Cultures of Memory in a Shared/Divided Present* (translated by Aileen Dering), in: European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (2011), <https://eipcp.net/policies/sternfeld/en.html> (4 October 2021).

27 Jeffrey David Feldman, *Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem*, in: Elizabeth Edwards/Chris Gosden/Ruth Phillips (eds.), *Sensible Objects. Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, Oxford 2006, 245–267, 245.

28 *Ibid.*, 251–253.

29 *Ibid.*, 247.

30 Natalie Bayer/Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński/Nora Sternfeld, *Wo ist hier die Contact-Zone?! Eine Konversation*, in: Natalie Bayer/Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński/Nora Sternfeld (eds.), *Kuratieren als antirassistische Praxis*, Berlin/Boston 2017, 23–52, 30.

victims/relatives and the institution? And finally, how do the relatives appropriate this space themselves?

“This is a space that belongs to us from the very first stone”<sup>31</sup>:  
tracing interactions between family members and the LUM

As mentioned above, the relatives of victims have been demanding and pushing for the creation of spaces for the commemoration of the conflict. With international support, the National Association of Relatives of Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared of Peru – ANFASEP,<sup>32</sup> for example, built its own small museum in Ayacucho, the Andean department most affected by the violence. But it would be years before a national museum was created, and it was obvious and necessary for the last group of experts charged with the implementation of the memorial site that the victims had to be consulted in these processes in some way.

In 2013 the public policy specialist Denise Ledgard was appointed as national director of the *Lugar de la Memoria* project. Her team focused on the discussion and conception of concrete contents for the permanent exhibition. For this purpose, a participation and consultation process took place from October 2013 to February 2014 in three cities of the three different regions of the country: Lima (coast), Ayacucho (Andes), and Satipo (rainforest). Different actors of society were invited to comment on and discuss a museographic script designed by theatre researcher and director Miguel Rubio and artist Karen Bernedo.<sup>33</sup> Representatives of the security and armed forces and victims’ associations (civilians, military, and police) participated, as well as journalists, intellectuals, artists, representatives of industry, and human rights organizations.

This process was logistically supported by the *Instituto de Estudios Peruanos* (IEP) and its *Grupo Memoria*, an interdisciplinary group of experts on the topic of memory in Peru. The dynamics had a workshop character. All participants were given the museum script to read in advance. This was then presented at the beginning of each session, and afterward, questions were answered, impressions were collected and opinions exchanged; there was also intensive discussion. A total of 14 meetings took place in Lima, Ayacucho, and Satipo, which were recorded and doc-

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31 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 8 October 2021, via Zoom.

32 *Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Secuestrados, Detenidos y Desaparecidos del Perú*. Founded in Ayacucho in 1983 by Quechua-speaking women, this association was the first of its kind.

33 Rubio and Bernedo’s script was generally sensory-based, appealing to visitors’ emotions through complex staging and the use of new media. Their proposal was eventually discarded and is not part of the permanent exhibition narrative.

umented accordingly. The entire consultation and participation process as well as all memoirs were summarized in a book published by the LUM.<sup>34</sup> In this way, an attempt was made to collect different interests and expectations regarding the permanent exhibition and – as far as possible – to integrate them into the presentation. The purpose was to seek legitimacy both from those sectors that were involved in the conflict in various ways (for example, armed forces, victims' associations), and from society in general. However, the members of the museum's commission (Comisión de Alto Nivel – CAN) always had the last word.

In the Lima meetings, among others, the guests were groups of victims from the Armed and Police Forces (at the hands of subversives) and civilian victims (at the hands of state representatives), the latter mostly invited individually. Few organizations participated, for example representing displaced persons. With specific regard to the victims of enforced disappearance, according to the current president of the National Association of Relatives of Disappeared, Extrajudicially Executed and Tortured Persons (ANFADET)<sup>35</sup>, Luyeva Yangali<sup>36</sup>, this group of victims was not invited by the commission to discuss the museum script in Lima. However, they found out in other ways that the participatory process mentioned above had taken place without them being consulted, which caused huge disappointment. Finally, they managed to arrange a meeting, at which the curators presented them the museumgraphic script, so that they could make comments and suggestions. On another occasion, members of ANFADET were introduced to other groups of victims, namely those affected by *Sendero*, in order to discuss the script. These meetings were not free of tensions, as Luyeva Yangali remembers: “One day Rosa<sup>37</sup> came out crying because inside there were representatives of the police who had called her a ‘terrorist.’”<sup>38</sup> This is a frequent problem that the families of the disappeared have to deal with. In addition to loss and pain, ambiguity, and impunity, they also face indifference or, even worse, stig-

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34 Ponciano del Pino/José Carlos Agüero, *Cada uno, un Lugar de la Memoria. Fundamentos conceptuales del Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social*, Lima 2014.

35 *Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Desaparecidos, Ejecutados Extrajudicialmente y Torturados*. ANFADET, together with ANFASEP and CONAVIP (*Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones de Afectados por la Violencia Política del Perú*), participated in drafting the public policy for the search for missing persons in Peru. (See Iris Jave (coord.), *Organizaciones de Víctimas y Políticas de Justicia*, Lima 2018.) Unlike ANFASEP, whose leaders are mostly located in Ayacucho and have their own museum, the leaders of ANFADET live in Lima and can visit the LUM more frequently. As an organization they have been collaborating with the LUM in recent years, for example in the form of “testimonial guided visits”. That is why, for this paper, I chose to speak with the president of this organization and two other members.

36 Luyeva Yangali, accountant and mother of a teenage son, is the current president of ANFADET. Her father, Fortunato Yangali, was disappeared by police officers in 1983 in Churcampá, Ayacucho.

37 Rosa Pallqui Medina was the former president of ANFADET. Her husband, the journalist Jaime Ayala, disappeared on August 2, 1984 in the province of Huanta, Ayacucho.

38 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 8 October 2021, via Zoom.

matization of being a relative of a “potential terrorist”.<sup>39</sup> The artist and once coordinator of the curatorial team, Eliana Otta, describes some of these meetings as “difficult”.<sup>40</sup> There were always disagreements and arguments during the discussions with members of the police forces and the military. As Ponciano del Pino, one of the curators of the LUM, recounts: “Armed forces representatives appeal to the importance of preserving the ‘image of the state.’ They did not want the state to be perceived as the enemy or the ‘bad guy.’”<sup>41</sup>

Luyeva Yangali, however, expressed her ideas on how she thinks the museum should address the question of the responsibilities: “I wanted them to put up huge photos, at the entrance, of Alan García, Fujimori, Belaunde [the then presidents in office], Abimael Guzmán [leader of *Sendero Luminoso*] and the [founder of the] MRTA.”<sup>42</sup> The LUM today displays important dates, facts, and graphics right at the beginning of the permanent exhibition in an attempt to put the conflict in chronological order. Small portraits of the presidents in office can be seen alongside photos of terrorist attacks, photocopies of newspaper articles, and news of anti-subversive government measures. But Yangali had a more concrete idea on how this should look like: “My idea, until now, is that they should say: ‘These are murderers’ and that on each of the photos they should put the number of deaths they have been responsible for, in each government.”<sup>43</sup> For her, openly denouncing the responsibility of the most powerful, as well as making it clearly visible, is an important part of truth-telling and compensation.

The processes of musealization of memory do not occur in a vacuum, but rather in contexts *more* or *less* favourable for their establishment. They are affected by real pressures of different kinds, such as public support or political circumstances. For example, former president Fujimori’s daughter, Keiko Fujimori, has come close to becoming president of Peru three times. She and her party oppose many of the approaches of the permanent exhibition at the LUM. If she had come to power, the

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39 There is a rumour circulating among some sectors of society that people were “disappeared” for “some reason”, i.e., for being a member of, or sympathizing with, a terrorist group. It is an attempt to justify the unjustifiable and is called colloquially “*terruqueo*”. It comes originally from *terruco*, a derogatory term used in Peru to refer to Shining Path members or collaborators. *Terruqueo* is the act of accusing someone of being linked to a terrorist organization. More recently, this political insult has been widely directed at left-wing politicians, activists, or people close to the human rights sector, and unfortunately also widely to family members of victims of state violence. Even the current government is branded as “*terruco*”. The latter is because, for example, one of the premiers (there have been four so far) is being investigated for the alleged crime of “apology of terrorism” or because a former labour minister allegedly belonged to *Sendero* during the 1980s.

40 Interview with Eliana Otta, artist and coordinator of the curatorial team of the *Lugar de la Memoria* project, 26 January 2016 in Lima.

41 Del Pino/Agüero, *Cada uno*, 2014, 47.

42 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 8 October 2021, via Zoom.

43 *Ibid.*

existence of the LUM could have been jeopardized. Therefore, the success or failure of each project will depend on the socio-political situation in which it is developed. In this sense, while community consultation is very important and brings benefits, contact work in a museum, as Clifford says, goes beyond that. It should become an active collaboration and an exchange of authority.<sup>44</sup> After the inauguration of the LUM, the collaboration with the relatives continued and in the following section, I aim to evaluate how the families appropriate this space to articulate their own message and make their struggles visible.

### The place for the *Desaparecidos* (“Cubo”)

In this section, I examine the space at LUM dedicated to the victims of enforced disappearance and address some of the challenges, not only curatorial but also political-historical, that the museum has faced and continues to face with regard to exhibiting absence in general and the disappeared in particular. My focus lies on one particular medium for the conception and presentation of a biographical approach: personal relics. By this, I mean former possessions of a victim, objects that record individual lives and function as “authentic testimonies with historical testimonial value.”<sup>45</sup> There are other objects in the exhibition that account for the crime of forced disappearance. For example, three pieces of clothing found in the exhumations carried out in Putis.<sup>46</sup> But here I concentrate on those objects in whose collection and/or exhibition the relatives actively participated. In addition to this, I will analyse another strategy pursued by the curatorial team: the use of drawn portraits. Finally, I will discuss the recent implementation of “testimonial guided visits” performed by survivors and victims’ relatives.

The LUM has been a place of dispute. The responsibility of *Sendero Luminoso* as the initiator of the conflict is broadly acknowledged within society and it is also clearly stated in the exhibition. But on crimes by the state, there is still no consensus. Taking into account the national character of the institution and its public funding, it was not easy for the curatorial team to push through the idea of a space to remember the disappeared victims, since this crime is one of the matters in dis-

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44 Clifford, *Routes*, 1997, 210.

45 Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis. Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*, München 2007, 155.

46 In the Putis massacre (Ayacucho, 1984), at least 123 men, women, and children lost their lives at the hands of soldiers. Despite the exhumation procedures (2008), no one has been charged so far as the Army alleges that all documentation related to the case was destroyed in a fire. In August 2009, a mass funeral was held for 92 victims of the massacre.

pute.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned above, this exposes the evident responsibility of the state in crimes that remain unsolved. But despite these difficulties, the curatorial team succeeded in creating a space in a central place on the first floor of the LUM, that thematizes the disappearance of thousands of people during the conflict. It consists of a big cube-like construction whose outer walls are fitted with 500 cube-shaped transparent boxes that serve to display artifacts.



*Figure 1: Cube-like construction with cube-shaped transparent boxes, LUM, photo by Adrián Portugal.*

The LUM does not have a collection and/or conservation area. A simple reason could be the fact that the building does not have adequate infrastructure for the storage of objects. Considering the location of the building on the coast of Lima, where humidity is extremely high, this would require costs and resources that are not available. Therefore, its collection activity has been limited to specific actions, as is the case with “the cube”.<sup>48</sup> The idea was to fill them with personal relics of the missing victims. But collecting the belongings of missing persons has been a complex task. In 2015, the museography department organized a first campaign for the delivery and reception of objects. Yet the response has since then not been as widespread as expected.

<sup>47</sup> This is my conclusion after interviewing the curatorial team of the LUM project on several occasions in the context of my doctoral thesis (2014–2016).

<sup>48</sup> Because of its shape, the space of the disappeared is colloquially known as “the cube”.

The reasons why some relatives decide to donate or not to donate objects are diverse, but there are converging points that I have been able to identify thanks to my interviews with relatives. Some of the objects carry a very strong emotional and symbolic charge for them, being the only thing they have left of their loved one. Therefore, the idea of giving them up is very difficult. In addition, trust in state institutions has been severely affected by the experienced terror. The fact that the LUM is part of the state apparatus, a state that does not fulfil its obligations or gives them satisfactory answers to their demands, creates suspicion among some relatives. As a result, many of them feel that there is no guarantee that these objects will be safeguarded in a rigorous and respectful manner. Moreover, the political and social division regarding the conflict creates a sense of uncertainty about the handling of the LUM. The relatives fear that their precious objects could be at risk under the museum's care, for example in case a right-wing government appoints a pro-Fujimori director. But on the other hand, for many relatives, it is important for people to know what happened. When they choose to share the stories of their loved ones in a museum setting, victims take on agency, contributing to the search for the truth and thus resisting social and political structures that question or delay knowledge of their loved ones' disappearances.<sup>49</sup> Also, considering the absence of the remains, having an object of their loved one in a physical space that they can attend is very important, according to testimonies of members of the ANFADET association, such as Alex Huamani<sup>50</sup>, a young man whose father disappeared during the Fujimori regime. He gave the LUM a copy of the only picture his family owns to be displayed in the "cube". He tells: "Every Father's Day we go to the LUM to be there for a while. What can we do? [...] When my son was born, I said to him: 'Every Father's Day, you will spend with me there together with your grandfather!'"<sup>51</sup>

Exhibition objects are stripped of their original functionality and deposited in a new temporal and spatial context in the museum display. Due to their narrative power, they act as carriers of information. Through their display, they are given a new meaning that only emerges through the museum context.<sup>52</sup> However, the new meaning must first be determined and correspond with the goals of the institution in which the objects are exhibited. The philosopher and historian Krzysztof Pomian called them *semiophores*. These are traditional carriers of meaning for something that is not itself visible. Their task is to enable communication between the visible and the invisible. More closely linked to a history of violence, as is the case with the objects that are the subject of this case, the concept of "contact points" pro-

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49 Finn, Political Agency, (2020), 148.

50 Alex Huamani, building technician, lost his father, Modesto Huamani, when he was only 3 years old.

51 Interview with Alex Huamani, 14 November 2021, via Zoom.

52 Krzysztof Pomian, Der Ursprung des Museums. Vom Sammeln, Berlin 1988, 49f.

vides other angles, also beyond the visibility of museum settings. Then the mere act of looking at them is often insufficient to understand them because the complexity of contact points plays out at the present/absent intersection and in the haptic contexts of their production and the circumstances of their display.<sup>53</sup> The key factor that delimits the contact points as a museum object category is its material reference to the process of body removal, and its discursive link to museum practice.<sup>54</sup> “They are vestiges of the violent act [...] layered onto history, and a material journey from personal belonging to museum piece.”<sup>55</sup> Their museality is not determined by their materiality or value, but by the extent to which they are evidence and documentation of a violent ended life. As Feldman argues: “They are vestiges of the violent act [...] layered onto history, and a material journey from personal belonging to museum piece.”<sup>56</sup> For the artist and LUM-curator Natalia Iguñiz, these objects “temporarily replace the bodies that have not yet been found.”<sup>57</sup>

For many of the relatives, this space should be more prominent. “There are so many stories to put, many emblematic cases, but they are not there.”<sup>58</sup> Luyeva Yangali suggests that while it is impossible for 20,000 to be represented in this space, at least the 500 “vitrines” should be filled. Therefore, members of ANFADET organized, with their own efforts and means, but in coordination with the LUM, a collection of personal belongings to be donated. A handover ceremony was held on 30 August 2019, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.<sup>59</sup> Donors signed an agreement, which specifies that the object will be kept for a minimum of two years, with the possibility of returning or renewal after this period.

In general, photographs of missing persons play an important role among the donations an important role – or rather copies of such photographs, as originals are barely on display in the museum, as families prefer to keep the originals with them. Frontal photographs of victims have become internationally established as a central design and narrative principle in memorial sites. In many museums, they welcome visitors in the entrance room, they can be found at key points of the permanent exhibition or in the last rooms as an epilogue.<sup>60</sup> In the Peruvian case, identity card photos have a special meaning: on one hand, possessing an identity card was by no means a

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53 Feldman, *Contact Points*, (2006), 246.

54 *Ibid.*, 264.

55 *Ibid.*, 263.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Adriana Arista Zerga/Carolina Garay Doig, *Museos, arte y memoria en el Perú: entre la controversia y la reparación simbólica*, in: *Notas de Antropología de las Américas 1* (in press).

58 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 8 October 2021, via Zoom.

59 *Ibid.* and interview with Diana Liz Trigueros, Coordinator of the Recognition and Dignification area at the LUM, 30 November 2021, via Zoom.

60 Arellano Cruz, *Politische Gewalt ausstellen*, 2018, 239.



matter of course in some remote rural areas. Not being registered anywhere, a person's identity could not be officially accredited. In the case of a disappeared, whose death is difficult to prove, photographs at least prove the previous existence of a person. At the same time, such a document creates a formal affiliation with civil society, as museologist Paul Williams points out: "[...] the frontal photograph is credited with being able both to describe an individual and to inscribe them with certain social identity."<sup>61</sup> In many cases, the identification photo is the only remaining image of a person. Thus, these types of photographs became a personal memory and a symbol of the human rights movement, especially in rural areas, and an element strongly associated with the search for missing persons throughout Latin America. As these photographs are powerful tools for political mobilisation, they are used to "[...] induce politicians to take action and demand that the whereabouts of these people be ascertained."<sup>62</sup>

But in the Peruvian case, not all families possess items that belonged to their missing loved ones. Out of fear or for security reasons, many families had to leave their hometowns and leave everything behind.<sup>63</sup> Many of them did not even have a photograph or even ever owned one. This, for example, applies to several relatives of the victims of the massacre of Accomarca (Ayacucho, 1985), where a group of soldiers killed 69 people, including more than 20 children. Between 2006 and 2009, several bodies were exhumed, and a large number of skeletal remains and various items of clothing were recovered from eight graves. At the initiative of the High Level Multisectorial Commission (CMAN)<sup>64</sup> of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, and in response to a relatives' request, the cartoonist Jesús Cossio was asked to draw portraits of the people killed in this massacre. The project *Retratos para la Asociación Hijos de Accomarca* (Portraits for the Association *Hijos de Accomarca*) originally emerged in 2016 and was again taken up by the LUM in 2018. The portraits were offered to their loved ones in a ceremony held at the museum. Then, several digital copies of these portraits – most relatives preferred to keep the originals – were placed in the niches of the space for the *Desaparecidos*. To carry out this project, Jesús Cossio and Alejandro Olazo took photographs of the relatives and, from them, made first sketches of the faces, which were then improved based on the fam-

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61 Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums. The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Oxford/New York 2007, 63.

62 Katherine Hite, *Política y Arte de la Conmemoración. Memoriales en América Latina y España*, Santiago de Chile 2013, 21.

63 That was the case for two of my interviewees, Luyeva Yangali and Alex Huamani.

64 The *Comisión Multisectorial de Alto Nivel* – CMAN is the body in charge of monitoring the actions and policies of the State in the areas of peace, collective reparation and national reconciliation. It is also the coordinating and supervising body of the Comprehensive Reparations Plan (Plan Integral de Reparaciones – PIR).

ily's oral descriptions. They also made portraits based on original photographs that were badly damaged or whose image was barely recognizable. The aim of the project, according to Cossio is to:

“[m]ake the disappeared present, it is to contribute to the struggle against invisibility and impunity. It is not that we are going to solve it with a drawing, of course, but rather that it adds to all the efforts so that all these people do not literally disappear, not only from existence, but also from history, and are totally denied.”<sup>65</sup>

As Laura Antona points out, using drawings as a method to illustrate the invisible engages in new kinds of dialogues and knowledge (co-)production. It attempts to “understand fears, violence, emotion, pain and other often intangible feelings.”<sup>66</sup> In addition to this, Devin Finn indicates: “These interactions create a social and political space that empowers victims to seize political agency in fora—funeral processions and cemeteries, massacre sites, and courtrooms—where community members voice their political needs.”<sup>67</sup> I would argue that this kind of political agency can be extended to spaces such as memorial museums, as demands for public recognition, dignity, and symbolic reparation are also expressed in this arena. In the Peruvian context, it is important to remark that this agency was conducted by mainly Quechua-speaking peasants, a population group that has historically faced cultural, social, and institutional marginalization and discrimination. And there were mostly women who took up the search for the disappeared victims. Their family structures and their roles within them had to be transformed, taking on not only this painful search but also household management, economic support, and child-rearing. In their efforts to continue remembering the victims of forced disappearances, some relatives have relocated their memories from the intimate to the public space in order to make their struggles visible. The absence of a body leads them to consider alternative mourning strategies. For example, as Lady Yauri, the daughter of Pedro Yauri, a journalist who disappeared during the government of former President Alberto Fujimori, recounts: “We don't have an exact place to go to mourn him, to pray to him, to be close to him, but there [the LUM] you go and find an image, a garment, an object, and in some way it symbolically repairs.”<sup>68</sup> Next year marks the

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65 The anthropologist Carolina Garay documented this project through interviews with the cartoonist Jesús Cossio. For her reflections see the article: *Museos, arte y memoria en el Perú: entre la controversia y la reparación simbólica*, in: *Notas de Antropología de las Américas 1* (in press).

66 Laura Antona, *Making hidden spaces visible: Using drawing as a method to illuminate new geographies*, in: *Area 51/4* (2018), 697–705, 698.

67 Finn, *Political Agency*, (2020), 147.

68 Interview with Lady Yauri, 12 November 2021, via Zoom.

30th anniversary of her father's disappearance and to commemorate this date, Lady Yauri is coordinating with the LUM to hold an event to pay homage to his memory and his work. When family members decide to collaborate with the museum, they re-significate the museal space by depositing their memories and grieving.

## Biographical approach: testimonies

Personal relics need, for the most part, a context so that their meaning can be deciphered by audiences. Thus, donors provide the museum with (auto)biographical information that not only contains pure facts but is also highly emotionally-charged. These narratives, especially when they describe traumatic experiences, also possess moral authority.<sup>69</sup> The biographical approach is part of the collecting activities and presentation of the majority of memorial museums, and the LUM is not an exception. Two narrative levels can be identified here: a subjective level, in form of personal memories, and a historical-abstract level, in form of facts and dates displayed in the exhibition. The combination of both levels is at the core of the narration of larger historical contexts. It is important to mention that the CVR report was an attempt to produce the "official truth", but the very state itself, including many of its institutions and representatives, did not accept and even denied it. The same is true of parts of the population. This is why the curators' main concern was not to construct an "official truth" about the conflict and to ensure that no official narrative is constructed to replace another.<sup>70</sup> Rather, they attempt to construct a non-homogenizing national history of the conflict, which allows the inclusion of different perspectives. However, this process of musealizing memories, selecting themes and objects, and spatially arranging and contextualizing them always leads to highlighting some themes and actors over others, which are only mentioned in passing, ignored or even deliberately silenced.

In order to communicate these testimonies in a museographic setting, the use of media is required, and one of the forms used in the LUM is videographed interviews. Video excerpts of different actors talking about their direct experiences from a current perspective are found across the entire exhibition. For example, in the room called *Una Persona, Todas las Personas* (One Person, All Persons): eighteen hanging flat screens show a life-size person recounting their individual experience

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69 Katja Köhr, *Die vielen Gesichter des Holocaust. Museale Repräsentationen zwischen Individualisierung, Universalisierung und Nationalisierung*, Göttingen 2012, 113.

70 These have been, in short, the main concerns of the curators (Natalia Iguñiz, Ponciano del Pino, José Carlos Agüero and Eliana Otta), whom I interviewed for my thesis in 2015, before the inauguration of the LUM.

of violence. The visitor listens to these stories “face-to-face” through headphones. The disposition of the screens allows the visitor to move in the space, creating the impression of “interaction” between the public and the victims and between them and each other. In this space the museum tries to give voice to the divers and complex spectrum of victimhood: victims (civilians, military, and police) of the terror perpetrated by *Sendero Luminoso* and MRTA, as well as human rights violations and other types of crimes through state agents and paramilitary groups. Unlike other countries in the region, a rigid classification of groups of *perpetrators* and *victims* is difficult in Peru, as boundaries were often vague and fluid. One reason for this might be the large number of actors and their different participation and involvement in the conflict, or in some cases even their change of role during the course of the conflict, especially in rural communities. Among the testimonies displayed in this space, one is particularly well known: the story of “Mamá Angélica”. Angélica Mendoza, a peasant woman and founder of ANFASEP, lost her son at the hands of the military and died in 2017 without being able to recover his body. ANFASEP in particular is also mentioned later. On the way up to the first floor you can hear voices singing a song about children, husbands, and brothers who are gone. An image on the wall shows a photo of the members of ANFASEP together with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, an Argentine human rights activist, from when he visited Ayacucho. These peasant and Quechua-speaking women came together in 1983 in order to search for their missing relatives.

The above-described space dedicated to the *Desaparecidos*, also known as the “cube”, can be entered. Inside the “cube”, the biographical approach at LUM reaches its climax: a dark room originally conceived as a sound installation, in which the visitor hears the voices of family members telling the fates of their loved ones, the circumstances of their disappearance as well as further information about who they were. The change in sensory experience is important, as explained by one of the curators of the permanent exhibition, Natalia Iguíñiz:

“[T]his space had to be a sound space because, at this point, one has already seen in the *Lugar de la Memoria* many images, one has read many texts, so we also wanted to make a sensorial and perceptive rupture. By making it so that there is nothing on the walls [...]. Precisely, as there is no body, we didn't want to put the photo, the name, but the voice of the relative remembering the absent person.”<sup>71</sup>

Previously, there was a box in the middle of the room, illuminated by a single light source, with small booklets. These booklets were reconstructed based on photo-

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71 Arista Zerga/Garay Doig, *Museos* (in press).

graphs of memorable moments, such as baptisms, birthdays, and hobbies (similar to a family album) and also included short biographical texts on the (life) stories of victims.

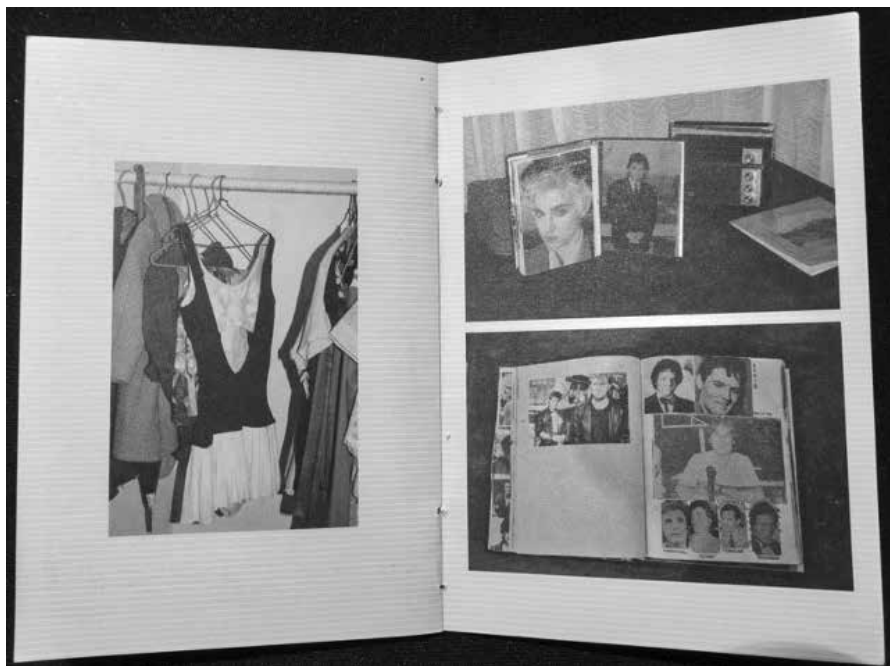


Figure 2: Booklet of victims, LUM, photo by the author.

The focus was on the lives of the victims rather than on their deaths. Only the last page of the booklet contained the key dates of a person's disappearance. Since the room was almost completely dark and offered few sensory stimuli otherwise, visitors could concentrate on their sense of hearing and follow the narrative attentively. By looking at the pictures and listening to the stories, visitors could put themselves in the position of the relatives, in other words, could feel empathy with them. At least this was the curators' hope. However, this strategy did not work as expected. Due to the lack of budget for constantly reprinting the booklets and repairing the sound system when it was required, the curators needed to adjust the installation.<sup>72</sup> Now there is a screen showing testimonies of family members; some of them retell the content of these booklets, while others are new.<sup>73</sup> Through the medium of

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Diana Liz Trigueros, coordinator of the Recognition and Dignification area at the LUM, 30 November 2021 via Zoom.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

video, testimonies are recorded, preserved, and thus made accessible to the audiences. These memories of violent pasts are highly subjective and can also be fluid and volatile. Yet the authority or authenticity of these statements is not deconstructed in the museum, most likely for ethical reasons.<sup>74</sup> The LUM does not explain its own stance on the fate of the victims, nor does it take a position on the conflict in general, but rather gives the victims the platform to tell their stories without commenting on them. Nor is the historicization of the institution or the curatorial and exhibition practice itself explained to visitors. It is up to them to form an opinion after hearing and seeing these stories. The historian José Carlos Agüero, who was co-responsible for the participatory processes, summarizes the curatorial team's vision as follows: "People are expecting narratives, positions: good, bad, right. You can't avoid making ethical judgements. But what we ultimately thought is that you could make that ethical judgement. We provide you with the instruments to do it. [...] My vision is that it should be a space for experiences to coexist."<sup>75</sup>

These personal experiences are also being shared in a recently introduced format: testimonial guided visits. In 2019 the Recognition and Dignification area of the LUM proposed to carry out these kinds of visits. The organizers of this area are in charge to coordinate actions in favour of the victims and maintain contact with human rights associations, acting as a bridge between the LUM and different groups of victims, as well as with institutions such as the United Nations or the Justice Ministry. Along with the organizers of the Education area, who are in charge of regular guided tours, they worked out the concept and structure of tours in which a victim guides the visitors. The implementation of testimonial guided tours coincided with the temporary exhibition *Suyay. Los desaparecidos, los que esperan, los afligidos* (Hope. The Missing, the Waiting, the Bereaved) by the artist Laia Abril. Through photographs, Abril explores the meaning of these absences and records the struggle of thousands of people to find justice. Testimonial guided visits took place once a month during the rest of the year 2019.

One of the first people to give her testimony in this format was Luyeva Yangali. For this occasion, she brought her teenage son, who did not know about his grand-

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74 Stefan Krankenhagen explains: "The renunciation of this deconstruction is even advocated as morally necessary, since any analysis and interpretation would risk diminishing the emotional and moral power of persuasion." (Stefan Krankenhagen, *Auschwitz darstellen – Ästhetische Positionen zwischen Adorno, Spielberg und Walser*, Cologne et al. 2001, 182, as quoted in Köhr, *Gesichter*, 2012, 153.)

75 Interview with José Carlos Agüero, historian and co-author of the publication that documented these processes, in Lima on 13 January 2016. Agüero is the son of *Senderistas*. His father died in a prison riot known as *El Frontón*, which was cruelly put down by the military, and his mother was found dead on a beach. Both were victims of extrajudicial executions. His reflections on living as the "son of terrorists" are summarized in the book: *Los Rendidos. Sobre el don de perdonar*, Lima 2015.

father's story. During the guided visit, Yangali not only shared the dramatic story of her father's disappearance with the audience but also used this moment and space to tell this family story to her own son for the first time.<sup>76</sup> After a pause due to the pandemic, these guided tours continued to be conducted virtually. This format serves to convey personal experiences and make tangible not only the story of the absent family member but also the consequences of this loss up to the present day, putting it in a broader context. For example, Lady Yauri made a strong statement about the culture of impunity in Peru. Her father's case has been brought to court. However, the court ruling of 2010, which provides for an investigation to find the whereabouts of the journalist's remains and a civil compensation, has not been complied with. Yauri asked the participants of the virtual guided tour: "What do we expect from our laws if they are not complied with?" After that, the LUM mediator asked us to give our definition of the word "reparation", to which Lady Yauri's mother, Liliana Coca Castro, who was participating in the visit via Facebook, responded: "Reparation for us would be to find Pedro's remains and give him the burial every human being deserves, so that my daughters have a place to mourn him and tell him about all the hardships they have been through."<sup>77</sup> As mentioned above, due to the lack of a place to mourn him, they frequently go to the LUM, where they have donated a photograph to the "cube". Yauri considers it a space where people can value what is being exhibited, bringing the public closer to the victim.<sup>78</sup> On the institutional side, the coordinator of the Recognition and Dignification area, Diana Liz Trigueros, concludes: "The testimonial visit, although we do not yet have evaluations, seems to me to be a good space for them [relatives of victims, survivors] to have the freedom to tell their memories and stories."

Taking into account the – sometimes – conflicting positions regarding the LUM, every visitor who wants to participate in these virtual visits must fill in a form with personal data and some questions about their motivation. By this means, the LUM team tries to "filter out" people who might potentially want to attack the mediators. On the two occasions that I participated in a testimonial tour, visitors were very respectful while the LUM mediator tried to make the visit as participatory as possible.

The collaboration between the museum and family members goes beyond curatorial issues and beyond the permanent exhibition. According to my interviews with family members, they all agree on the importance of the existence of the *Lugar de la Memoria*. Despite having many reservations about other state institutions, they see

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76 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 13 October 2021, via Zoom.

77 Comment of Liliana Coca Castro during the testimonial guided visit conducted by her daughter Lady Yauri, via Facebook. The visit took place on 27 October 2021.

78 Interview with Lady Yauri, 12 November 2021, via Zoom.

the LUM as an important ally to articulate their demands. For instance, the mothers of ANFASEP asked representatives of the LUM to participate in a symbolic activity carried out by the United Nations in *La Hoyada* (Ayacucho).<sup>79</sup> In this area adjacent to the barracks known as *Los Cabitos* – a place of illegal detention, torture, and extrajudicial executions between 1983 and 1985 – lie the remains of victims of enforced disappearance. For years, the relatives of ANFASEP have been seeking approval for the construction of a Memorial Shrine there. The activity, a pilgrimage to *La Hoyada*, took place on 10 December, the International Human Rights Day. It was attended by representatives of the European Union, the United Nations, other national entities (Ministries of Justice and Culture), and also, by express request of ANFASEP, the coordinator of the area of Recognition and Dignification of the LUM.<sup>80</sup> The LUM, for its part, tries to continue to build trust with victims. Another example: during the first confinement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Peruvian state gave aid vouchers to the neediest families. As the procedures for obtaining this state benefit had to be carried out online, LUM's Reparation and Dignification department offered assistance in handling these bureaucratic procedures to victims' families, many of whom did not have a computer or internet access or were simply unaware of the existence of the "voucher programme".<sup>81</sup> Even when the museum was officially closed to visitors, it continued collaborating with victims' families. The LUM also benefited from this in terms of victims' trust: "for us, too, having their support has strengthened us."<sup>82</sup> Apart from the museum's commitment, all of this has also been possible thanks to political circumstances that have made it viable. However, there is still uncertainty about what will happen with the next change of government. For instance, when I started writing this article, the Minister of Culture was Gisela Ortiz, an activist and the sister of a disappeared person at the hands of the "Grupo Colina" – a death squad directed by the Peruvian National Intelligence Service. For the first time in Peruvian post-conflict history, a victim of the conflict had held a high-ranking public office. Her appointment was very promising for the LUM and for the human rights movement. But the council of ministers was reshuffled only months later. The current minister has no experience in the cultural sector and no expertise on issues related to historical memory or human rights.

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79 Interview with Diana Liz Trigueros, coordinator of the Recognition and Dignification area at the LUM, 30 November 2021, via Zoom.

80 Ibid. and <https://onuperu.exposure.co/como-escritos-en-piedra> (20 April 2022).

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.



“The LUM would not exist if the victims did not exist.”<sup>83</sup>

The focus of transitional justice lies on the victims and the survivors, for example through public recognition or compensation, and less on prosecuting the perpetrators. The Peruvian state has a humanitarian approach, coupled with a predominantly forensic strategy. The priority is to locate and exhume the remains of the disappeared, so that they can eventually be returned to their families and given a dignified burial. Identifying those responsible and accumulating evidence for (judicial) investigations is not the main focus. In other words: in some cases, the context of the disappearance might be reconstructed to some extent, but injustice and impunity remain. Nevertheless, families demand that the state not only find the bodies and pursue justice but also that their current economic and social needs, often derived from these losses, be addressed. “The experience of violence affected how these family members see themselves as citizens, the state as both a violent and pacifying actor, and their rights in an unjust system.”<sup>84</sup> In this context, the LUM being part of the policies of (symbolic) reparation, is a space for commemoration, but not for clarification and ascribing accountability.

The LUM acts as a bridge between the state and the victims, and this creates tensions, especially in two aspects: on the one hand, the internal armed conflict is not only a historical episode of the past but a constant political discussion that deeply divides society. And in these debates, the needs and rights of the victims are often secondary. The museum staff seems to be very committed to these issues. But at a higher level of decision-making, their hands are sometimes tied. On the other hand, for the relatives, although aware of the museum’s good intentions, the LUM is and remains part of the state apparatus, a state that does not always fulfil its obligations. Justice, or rather the lack of it, depends on the political will to deal with the recent past.

James Clifford, reflecting on his own concept of the contact zone, describes as “utopian” the idea of imagining museums as public spaces of collaboration, shared control, complex translation, and honest disagreement. Rather, he argues, these institutions “tend to reflect unified community visions rather than overlapping, discrepant histories.”<sup>85</sup> Applied to the present case study, it can be concluded that the group of victims attached to the museum have a sense of ownership and active participation, while the LUM makes genuine efforts to create a collaborative partnership, without pretending that these dynamics will always be free of tension or negotiations. Following the statements of Ponciano del Pino y José Carlos Agüero, directly

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83 Interview with Luyeva Yangali, 8 October 2021, via Zoom.

84 Finn, Political Agency, (2020), 148.

85 Clifford, Routes, 1997, 208.

involved in the consultation and participation processes, the LUM does not “seek to reach a consensus on the different memories. On the contrary, the conflict in the representation of that past is taken as a starting point. For this reason, this place does not pretend to be the expression of an official truth or of any hegemonic discourse.”<sup>86</sup> And such debates and negotiations are inherent in the contact work of museums.<sup>87</sup>

Regarding the consultation and participation processes for the conception and implementation of the permanent exhibition, two crucial themes emerged from the statements of the victims and their relatives. Firstly, the imperative need to prove the experience of violence as a historical fact and, secondly, that the value of proving and recognizing the violence experienced by so many Peruvians precedes any act of commemoration. That is to say, it is necessary to value this personal experience as worthy of being commemorated. In this way, the memory of violence becomes a strategy of the collective and individual struggle for recognition, inclusion, and citizenship.<sup>88</sup> In addition to this, perhaps the most revealing insight of this process was that victim groups (regardless of which side) did not want to be portrayed only as victims. Rather, the groups of survivors see themselves as citizens who, with courage and effort, persevered through the period of violence and today continue to fight for a better future. Since the different victim groups themselves had the chance to express their own wishes about how they would like to be perceived by museum visitors and how they see themselves today, the curatorial team had to channel their wishes, even though it was clear that it would not be possible to do justice to everyone. Due to state funding as well as current official memory discourses and politics, the interpretations of history presented at the LUM must somehow coincide – or at least not contradict – with the historical narrative of the government in power.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, the permanent exhibition and – with more flexibility – the temporal exhibitions, try to integrate victims’ demands. And in this sense, the representatives of the organizations I have worked with consider this space their own. The relatives of victims of enforced disappearance appropriate the space in two different ways that are intertwined: on the one hand, in a socio-political way by using this space to articulate their claims and making their own struggles for truth, justice, and reparation visible. And on the other hand, in a more intimate and commemorative way, they take over the LUM to remember and honour their loved ones in the absence of a place to mourn them. The museum, in turn, needs these alliances and collaboration in order to gain legitimacy and to fulfil, somehow, the state’s obligation of symbolic reparation.

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86 Del Pino/Agüero, *Cada uno*, 2014, 17.

87 Clifford, *Routes*, 1997, 209.

88 Del Pino/Agüero, *Cada uno*, 2014, 16–17.

89 Arellano Cruz, *Politische Gewalt ausstellen*, 2018, 65.

In the powerful words of Luyeva Yangali: “The LUM would not exist if the victims did not exist.” I consider this quote pertinent for three reasons. First, because it highlights the complexity and ambivalence of national memorial museums. On the one hand, their establishment shows a gesture of recognition and a way of symbolic reparation on the part of the state to compensate in some way for the damage committed. On the other hand, their very existence is the material illustration of the fact that this same state is also capable of committing massive crimes against a part of the population. In other words: if there had been no crimes, there would have been no need for such museums. Second, the quote demonstrates the resilience of the relatives and their struggles for justice. Their permanent work and agency led to the construction of a memorial space. And finally, once the space has been built – a space of conflict in itself and whose existence is always at risk and at the mercy of the authorities in power – they are the ones who keep it alive and give it continuity.