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Gender in Transition: Common Sense, Women, and War

KIMBERLY THEIDON

On August 28, 2003, the Commissioners of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (PTRC) submitted their Final Report to President Alejandro Toledo and the nation, thus joining the growing list of countries that have implemented truth commissions as a means of transitioning from a period of armed conflict and authoritarian rule towards the founding of a procedural democracy. The PTRC shared several features with the Guatemalan and South African commissions that preceded it. All three commissions were considered “gender sensitive” because they actively sought out women’s experiences of violence. This focus reflected the desire to write more “inclusive truths,” as well as changes in international jurisprudence. In this paper, the author draws upon research she has conducted since 1995 in Peru to explore the commissioning of truth and some implications in terms of women and war. She examines what constitutes “gender sensitive” research strategies, as well as the ways in which truth commissions have incorporated these strategies into their work. Truth and memory are indeed gendered, but not in any common-sensical way. Thus the author hopes to offer a more nuanced understanding of the gendered dimensions of war.

“Common sense is not what the mind cleared of cant spontaneously apprehends; it is what the mind filled with presuppositions. . . concludes.”(Geertz 1983: 84)

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On August 28, 2003, the Commissioners of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) submitted their Final Report to President Alejandro Toledo and the nation. After two years of work and some seventeen thousand testimonies, the Commissioners had completed their task of examining the causes and consequences of the internal armed conflict of the 1980–1990s. Peru thus joined the growing list of countries that have implemented truth commissions as a means of transitioning from a period of armed conflict and authoritarian rule towards the founding of a procedural democracy.

The Peruvian TRC shared several features with the Guatemalan and South African commissions that preceded it. All three commissions were considered “gender sensitive” because they actively sought out women’s experiences of violence. This focus reflected the desire to write more “inclusive truths,” as well as changes in international jurisprudence.

In this article, I draw upon research I have conducted since 1995 in Peru to explore the commissioning of truth and some implications in terms of women and war. I am interested in examining what constitutes “gender sensitive” research strategies, as well as the ways in which truth commissions have incorporated these strategies into their work. Truth and memory are indeed gendered, but not in any common-sensical way. Thus I hope to offer a more nuanced understanding of the gendered dimensions of war. Appropriately enough, I begin with a memory of my own.

Peru, February 2003

In Accomarca they told us about Eulogia, a young woman who died long before our arrival, but who continues to appear in the memories of various women we spoke with. Eulogia was mute and lived during the time when the military base sat on the hill overlooking the community.

The soldiers came down from the base at night, entering the house Eulogia shared with her grandmother. They stood in line to rape her, taking advantage of her inability to verbally express her pain. Her female neighbors told us, with a mixture of compassion and shame, that “We couldn’t do anything—we were afraid they would visit us as well.” So they listened to her at night, along with her grandmother who sat across the room, unable to do anything to protect her granddaughter.

Eulogia’s muffled, guttural sounds still resonate in her neighbor’s ears. “We knew by the sounds—we knew what the soldiers were doing. But we couldn’t say a thing.” The soldiers succeeded in depriving everyone of their capacity for speech.

There are two versions of how Eulogia died. Some told us she had fallen, walking down the steep cliffs toward Lloqlllepampa. Others insisted she threw herself from those cliffs, unable to bear her pain.

Elaine Scarry has argued that pain and torture seek to “unmake the world” and to rob a human being of her capacity to speak and to make sense—a sense that one can share with other human beings (Scarry 1985). Eulogia could not resort to language: she could not put words to her pain; she could not denounce injustice. She also appears in my memories: it is impossible to erase the image of a young woman screaming with all her might, unable to say a thing.

When people talk about rape, they talk a great deal about silences. What to do with these silences—how to listen to them, how to interpret them, how to determine when they are oppressive and when they may constitute a form of agency—is a subject of much concern and debate.¹ Clearly, if there is a theme capable of imposing silence, it is rape. Women have many reasons to hide that they have been raped and, with justice a very distant horizon, few reasons to speak about a stigmatizing, shameful experience.

My goal is not redundancy. It is clear that rape is a strategy of war, and recent developments in international jurisprudence have finally recognized it as such.² I am also not interested in presenting a list of horrors—a list of graphic details that may resemble a pornography of violence, and that may well be yet another violation of the women with whom I have worked. Rather, I want to share some of the conversations that my research team and I have had with women in postwar Peru, addressing a series of themes that left a deep impression upon us.

First, I want to explore the historicity of memory, discussing how certain victim categories become “narrative capital” within the context of a truth commission. Second, I turn to what women talked about, and how their narratives are “thick description” in the best anthropological sense of the term. Drawing on their thick descriptions, I want to examine some assumptions about what constitutes a “gendered perspective” on armed conflict. In doing so, I discuss how women talked with us about rape, and the emphasis they placed on how they had attempted to defend themselves and their family members. Third, I examine how women were coerced into “bartering” sex to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones. I want then to discuss how rape between men and women—and between men—was a form of establishing relations of power and “blood brothers.” I conclude by considering some of the legacies of the massive sexual violence that characterized Peru’s internal armed conflict, reflecting on the possibility of “reparations” in the aftermath of great harm.³ But let me begin with a brief discussion of Peru’s internal armed conflict and then address some “common sense.”

Sasachakuy Tiempo: The “Difficult Years”

From 1980–1992, an internal war raged between the guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso* (SL), the *rondas campesinas* (armed peasant patrols), and the Peruvian armed forces. Founded by Abimael Gúzman, the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) began its campaign to overthrow the Peruvian state in 1980 in an attack on the Andean village of Chuschi. This band of revolutionaries positioned themselves as the vanguard in a revolution to guide the nation toward an imminent communist utopia (Degregori 1990; Stern 1998; Starn 1999). Drawing upon Maoist theories of guerrilla warfare, they planned a top-down revolution in which the cadres of *Sendero Luminoso* would mobilize the peasantry, surround the cities and strangle the urbanized coast into submission. However, the relentless march toward the future was doubly interrupted: The initial governmental response was a brutal counterinsurgency war in which “Andean peasant” became conflated with “terrorist,” and many peasants themselves rebelled *against* the revolution (Starn 1995).

While some communities remained *in situ*, many others fled the region in a mass exodus. Indeed, an estimated six hundred thousand people were internally displaced, devastating over four hundred campesino communities (Coronel 1995; TRC 2003). Although the guerrilla war spread from the countryside to the capital city of Lima, it was the rural population that suffered the greatest loss of life during the internal armed conflict. As the TRC’s Final Report states, seventy-five percent of the dead and disappeared spoke Quechua or another native language as their mother tongue, and three out of four people killed lived in a rural region (TRC 2003). An epidemiology of political violence in Peru demonstrates that death and disappearance were distributed by geography, class, and ethnicity.

As late as 1991 there were concerns that *Sendero* would indeed topple the Peruvian government. However, in September 1992, the Fujimori administration located the leader of Shining Path hiding in a “safe house” in Lima. The arrest of Abimael Gúzman decapitated the guerrilla movement; although various would-be successors have vied for power, *Sendero*

Luminoso remains an isolated group pushed into the jungles of the interior. Peru is a case of a triumphant state: unlike Guatemala, for example, there were no negotiations between the government and the guerrilla because *Sendero* had been largely defeated.

The man credited with “pacifying” the country was former president Alberto Fujimori. Elected in 1990, he campaigned on a platform of ending hyperinflation and defeating the guerrilla movements that had been waging war for a decade.⁴ In fulfilling his promises, Fujimori used Draconian measures, staging a self-coup that shut down a recalcitrant Congress, rewriting the constitution and dismantling political parties and other institutional intermediaries in the development of his self-described “direct democracy.” Popularity and a vast patronage apparatus enabled Fujimori to handily win reelection in 1995; however, his authoritarian tendencies increased during his second term. To remain in power, he removed members of the Constitutional Tribunal who blocked his illegal run for a third term and reinterpreted the constitution to allow for the perpetuation of his presidency.

Following a highly tainted presidential campaign in 2000, Fujimori fled the country, faxing in his resignation from Japan. The massive corruption of his two administrations had become increasingly visible. Indeed, visibility was a key component in his downfall and the subsequent political transition: thousands of videotapes were discovered, showing both Fujimori and his crony, former head of internal intelligence Vladimiro Montesinos, bribing a cast of characters that ranged from congressmen to talk show hosts to body builders. It was the corruption charges that forced Fujimori from office and provided the political opening for the establishment of the TRC. Interim president Valentín Paniagua created the truth commission by executive decree in 2001; it was his successor, President Alejandro Toledo, who added the word “reconciliation” to the commission’s name and mandate. That mandate was to clarify the processes, facts and responsibilities of the violence, and human rights violations attributable to the terrorist organizations as well as to agents of the state from 1980–2000.

It was within the context of collaborating with the Ayacucho office of the TRC that I directed a research project on community mental health, reparations, and the micropolitics of reconciliation practiced at the communal and intercommunal levels (Theidon 2004). In this article, I draw upon that research as well as research I have conducted in Peru since 1995 to think a bit about common sense, women, and war.

Commissioning Truth: A “Gendered Perspective”

One explicit goal of truth commissions is the writing of new national narratives that are more inclusive of groups that have been historically marginalized within the nation-state. In her influential discussion of postconflict issues, Minow writes: “The most distinctive element of truth commissions, in comparison with prosecution, is the focus on victims, including forgotten victims in forgotten places” (1998: 60). There is a hope that democratizing history may exert a positive influence on the future, and that truth commissions may be a better format for writing that inclusive history. In contrast to legal proceedings and the aggressive questioning that characterizes them, truth commissions are considered “victim centered” or “victim friendly” because they include empathic listening rather than an adversarial hermeneutics of suspicion.⁵

One group frequently included in the forgotten-victims category is women. Indeed, the word victim conjures up a highly gendered set of images when the topic is war. However, although allegedly victim friendly, parallel with the rise of truth commissions in postconflict settings was the lament that “women don’t talk.” There are different reasons for this, but in her review of truth-seeking mechanisms, Hayner determined that “Most truth commissions

have not been active in seeking out, encouraging or facilitating testimony from women” (2001: 78). Additionally, the early commissions in Argentina and Chile assumed a gender-neutral approach to truth—an approach that has been criticized for overlooking the ways in which gender neutrality frequently defaults into a perspective that privileges men and their experiences.

A concern for the lack of “women’s voices” prompted the commissions in Guatemala and South Africa—and subsequently Peru—to actively seek out testimony from women. These more recent commissions have argued that truth itself is gendered and thus have actively sought to incorporate a “gendered perspective.”⁶ In terms of sheer numbers, they were successful: in both South Africa and Peru women provided the majority of testimonies given to their respective commissions.⁷ In all three commissions women described in detail the harm done to their family members and to their communities, testifying to the ways in which armed conflict affects every aspect of daily life, frequently exacerbating the underlying structural injustices of their societies. However, they overwhelmingly did not talk in the first person about rape. Thus the lament that “women don’t talk” shifted to the concern that “women don’t talk about themselves.”

The concern that women do not talk about themselves but rather focus on the suffering of family members and the harm done to loved ones has prompted a variety of “gender-sensitive” strategies aiming to capture women’s experience of violence—generally defined as rape and other forms of sexual violence. That women do not talk about rape is thus posed as the problem that a gender-sensitive approach is designed to resolve. From this perspective, the incitement to speech is well intentioned. The problem may be the sort of speech that commissions “common-sensically” seek.

The Peruvian TRC was given a gender-neutral mandate, but feminists were successful in insisting the commission think about the importance of gender in their work.⁸ Drawing upon the earlier commissions in Guatemala and South Africa, they argued for proactive efforts to include women’s voices in the truth-seeking process. Thus, the Peruvian TRC decided to include sexual crimes in its mandate because of the broad language used in the Supreme Decree, the importance of the topic, and “the need to recover the voices of women affected by such crimes” (Mantilla 2005a: 2).

Additionally, the TRC’s *Línea de Género* (Gender Program) persuaded the commission to adopt a broad definition of sexual violence that reflected changing international norms. Rather than strictly investigating rape, the commission used a broad definition of sexual violence in its work: “Sexual violence is a type of human rights violation, and includes forced prostitution, forced unions, sexual slavery, forced abortions, and forced nudity (TRC 2003, vol. VIII: 89).

In light of concerns that “Perhaps the most commonly underreported abuses are those suffered by women, especially sexual abuse and rape” (Hayner 2001: 77), there were efforts to encourage women to come forward. As the head of the Gender Program wrote, “To encourage victims of sexual violence to participate in the [Peruvian] TRC’s investigation, the PTRC developed a series of training documents that included communication strategies on how to conduct investigations in the country’s rural areas and provided guidelines for the interviewers. The PTRC also organized a public hearing on women’s human rights” (Mantilla 2005a: 2). Thus “gender-sensitive” strategies were employed with the goal of soliciting women’s testimonies about rape and other forms of sexual violence. What were the results?

Of the 16,885 people who gave testimonies to the TRC, at the national level fifty-four percent were women and forty-six percent men; in the department of Ayacucho, women provided sixty-four percent of the testimonies (TRC 2003, vol. VIII: 64). Thus women

certainly did come forward to provide their testimonies: they spoke a great deal, but not necessarily about sexual violence—at least not in the first person. Indeed, the total number of reported cases of rape was 538, of which 527 were committed against women and 11 were crimes against men (TRC 2003, vol. VIII: 89). There are different ways to interpret this statistic. Perhaps Peruvian soldiers and police were a gentlemanly lot? Or maybe not. Of the reported cases of rape, eighty-three percent were attributable to armed agents of the state (TRC 2003, vol. VIII: 89).

If legal standards of proof are the measure of success, these numbers are grim. Overwhelmingly, women refused to speak about rape in the first person. However, a potential strength of truth commissions is their blurring of genres—both discursive and practical. While legal standards of proof might disallow “hearsay” or “anecdotal evidence,” truth commissions can work with other evidentiary standards to establish “historical truths.” This is indeed what the preponderance of “third person” testimonies permitted the Peruvian TRC to do. As they state in their Final Report, if indeed they could not quantitatively demonstrate the extent of sexual violations, the qualitative and tangential information collected allowed the commission to assert that sexual violations against women were a generalized practice during the internal armed conflict.⁹ These findings are important, and the Peruvian TRC’s Final Report is a tool in the struggle for gender justice.

But I want to consider those statistics a moment longer. When discussing the under-reporting of sexual violence, the primary factor cited is shame. As Mantilla explained, “According to the PTRC, the number of cases of sexual violence against women was significantly less than the number of other human rights violations; however, the PTRC recognized the statistical under-representation of these cases. The same type of under-reporting occurred in Guatemala and South Africa due to the victim’s feelings of guilt and shame” (Mantilla 2005a: 3). She also notes that in Peru the idea persists that rape is not a human rights violation but rather collateral damage of war. Additionally, acts of sexual violence frequently occurred within the context of other human rights violations—massacres, tortures, arbitrary detentions—and such violations overshadowed the reporting of sexual violence. For example, in many massacres the women and girls were separated out and raped first; however, the incident may only have been reported as a massacre.¹⁰

However, there was the “historical truth” I mentioned. I do not find it surprising that many women provided testimony about sexual violence in their capacity as witnesses rather than as victims. While shame is certainly a factor that influenced this, I think it also reflects the gendered nature of memory specialization. There is a gendered division of emotional labor, as well as a gendering of memory.¹¹ Women narrate communal suffering and the quotidian impact of war: thus it is not so strange that they are the bearers of these collective memories as well. And it is to women’s memory work and the gendered dimensions of war that I turn now.

In her research on the South African TRC, Ross argues that the commission essentialized suffering and gender, focusing on harm as the violation of bodily integrity. Thus the “rape victim” narrative was constructed and prized. In the Public Hearings, via the questioning process, narratives of rape were elicited—extracted from broader testimonies—and became emblematic of “women’s experience” of apartheid (Ross 2002). As Ross poignantly demonstrates, women had so much more to say.

Yes, the PTRC adopted a broad definition of sexual violence, thus including forms of abuse extending beyond rape. This was laudable. However, even a broad definition of sexual violence may result in a narrow definition of the gendered dimensions of war. In the thick description women provided, they narrated a much broader set of truths about systemic injustice, the gross violations of their socioeconomic rights, the lacerating sting of

ethnic discrimination, and the futility of seeking justice from the legal systems that operated nationally and locally. When women talk about the suffering of family members and of their communities; when they recall the long daily walks to the river for water and the hours spent scrounging for bits of kindling; when they tearfully recall their children's gnawing hunger that they tried to calm with water and salt; when they remember with outrage how they were subjected to ethnic insults in the streets of the very cities in which they sought refuge—they *are* talking about themselves and the gendered dimensions of war. And, beyond the list of dangers that engulfed them, they have much to say about the actions they took in the face of those challenges. They also give us much to consider regarding common-sense notions of a gendered perspective on war.

Memory Projects

I mentioned earlier that to talk about rape is to talk about silences. When I first started my research in northern Ayacucho in the summer of 1995, it was not just the women who maintained silences regarding sexual violence. Communal authorities—all male—routinely denied that the women in their communities had been raped. I was unanimously informed that of course there had been *abusos*—but always somewhere else, an index finger pointing in the direction of some neighboring community. If we think a bit about militarized masculinity, for communal authorities to admit that rapes had occurred in their pueblos would mean admitting they had been unable to protect “their women.” Shame thus cuts a broader swath.

However, in the context of the TRC something changed. There was a preponderance of witness testimony about rape and sexual violence. While much of this testimony came from women, men made up the other forty-six percent of those who gave testimony to the Commission. Moreover, communal authorities did talk about the sexual violence that had occurred in their own communities. Why the shift?

Within the context of the truth commission, communal authorities set about developing their own “memory projects.” In every community with which I have worked, there were assemblies held to discuss what would be said to the TRC’s mobile teams when they arrived to take testimonies. There was an effort to close the narrative ranks, prompted by the many secrets people keep about a lengthy, fratricidal conflict as well as the expectations a commission generates. I attended numerous assemblies in which authorities reminded everyone what they had decided to talk about and reminded the women not to start talking about “things that were not true.”

Let me provide an example that allows us to tease out several of the issues with which we are concerned. The truth commission conducted focus groups—in addition to taking individual testimonies—as part of their work on regional histories (*estudios en profundidad*). In June 2002, the TRC team held two focus groups in the same community, one with men and women, and the other comprised of only women. The transcripts from these focus groups provide an opportunity to situate truths within the dynamics of gender, and to think about both the gender and the historicity of memory. As part of their work, truth commissions construct typologies of victims—and of perpetrators. These categories inform the memory projects that people and communities develop.

There is much emphasis on the politics of memory, and on memory as a cultural form. I want also to consider the economics of memory: among the conditions of possibility for the emergence of “new memories” are changing economic circumstances and motivations. Commissions generate expectations. It did not matter how many times people were told they would not necessarily receive reparations for giving their testimony: giving one’s testimony

was in part instrumental and it would be disingenuous to think otherwise. While the giving of testimony can be prompted by various factors, the hope of some economic relief was a very important incentive. Memories were narrated with new possibilities and aspirations in mind.

The transcripts of the focus groups are lengthy, so I will briefly summarize the groups and the main themes addressed. I will not name the community, which had been one of Sendero's support bases. The groups were recorded and subsequently transcribed; I quote from the written transcriptions, in the present tense to preserve people's statements.

The meeting with men and women begins with the two facilitators introducing themselves; each of them are subsequently addressed as "Señor Comisión de la Verdad." To start the conversation, one of them asks, "How was it here when your paisanos lived—before there was so much death?"

One of the men replies: "Here we were, peaceful, without fights—without hating each other. During fiestas we drank, we ate. When someone died we visited them. When someone called, we answered. Then all of this Sendero Luminoso (SL) appeared. We've been innocent. They cut our throats because we were innocent."

The other men join in with details about when "Sendero arrived," talking animatedly about one of the teachers who was a local *cabecilla* (SL leader). A series of killings are detailed, followed yet again by the insistence, "All of these things they did to us, to innocent people." Another man adds, "The children trembled with fear. So did the women."

What follows in the transcript is the first attempt to quiet one of the women who tries to speak. The men admonish her: "You shouldn't talk unless you know [the story] really well or we'll vary the information. This machine [tape recorder] will tell everything just the way it is in Lima." She falls silent.

There is more discussion about their innocence, and then talk turns to a local massacre. Another woman tries to speak; she is also told to be quiet.

In describing the army massacre, one of the men notes: "We decided the men should escape. They hated the men—we didn't think they'd do anything to the women."

They were wrong in that assessment, and what follows is a description of how the soldiers began raping and killing the women. The details of the massacre are gruesome, and the actions of the soldiers despicable. Once again, a woman tries to speak up and the men tell her to be quiet. The men return to the theme of innocence, this time insisting, "Our pueblo was innocent."

Finally, one of the women is allowed to speak about the killing and the raping. She recounts how each woman was hauled off by three soldiers and raped. When the soldiers finished, they dragged the women back to the clearing.

Another woman softly cries: "To the women—the things they did. To innocent children, to old women without guilt, to useless married women like me—what possible guilt could we have had?"

The men provide more details about the raping and horrific deaths of many people who were burned alive. One of the men explains: "There were killings—over here, over there. So we requested a military base. First we were going to ask for a police station, but that was not enough to protect us. So we petitioned for a military base. We men built the base."

Aware that the women had been systematically told to stop talking, the mobile team decided to meet with a group of women alone. Again, the transcript is lengthy; I will summarize the conversation.

The facilitators welcome the women: "Here we are to have a conversation about different themes related to the war. The idea was to just get together as women—as one, small group. All of the information you give will be totally confidential and you don't

need to worry... feel complete *confianza* (trust).” The TRC team explains they are interested in knowing how life was before and during the armed conflict. To prompt the conversation, they begin by asking how the women are doing, and whether they are well organized.

One of the women replies “We’re still not organized—we, the women, we’re still not well organized. Before, we were totally disorganized. Before, we were in the dark. The men humiliated us—they said ‘oh what do women know!’ They even said—they still say—that we only go to meetings to sleep.”

Another woman adds, “We were marginalized by the men. Oh, even now—machismo shines bright! Now in assemblies we talk—more or less. For example, before there was so much illiteracy. There wasn’t education. People asked why they should educate girls when all they were going to do was herd sheep, take care of the house. Now, we want our girls to go to school.”

The facilitators pursue the topic of education, which brings the women around to lamenting their own interrupted studies. None of the women had finished primary school. Additionally, once SL began to proselytize the curriculum changed drastically. Once the conversation turns to the theme of Sendero, two of the women assure the facilitators that they feel so much better when they forget. There is a wave of affirmative murmurs. One woman assures the TRC team, “When I forget, I’m well. Remembering—even now, I just go crazy. I can hardly stand it. But I’m so-so when I forget. It’s so hard to answer your questions—so hard to go back and remember all that.”

The focus group facilitator is undeterred: “It’s necessary and very important to remember so that this never happens again.”

The women do go on to talk, almost always using the first person plural in their responses. They describe the key Senderista militant who took over the local school, and the threats used to make them participate in SL. They explain that for lack of money — with so many children to care for—they had been unable to flee to the relative safety of Lima. They stayed behind when their men fled to the coast or when they tried to send their sons beyond harm’s reach. Their children were always getting sick, particularly with *susto* because there was so much violence.¹² Their children’s illnesses were compounded by hunger: both the Senderistas and the army troops stole animals and destroyed crops. There was no food—at times nothing more than water flavored with salt. At this point one of the facilitators asks the women how the soldiers had behaved.

The first list of grievances includes family members killed by the soldiers. The women who lost husbands describe the enduring impact of their loss. In addition to the emotional toll, they insist on how different life would have been—would be—if only they had husbands by their side. They would not be so poor. The women repeatedly come back to how difficult it was to care for crops, livestock, for children. They were always on the run, waiting for the sound of gunshots, helicopters, and leather boots at the door.

“When the soldiers arrived here, we had to run and hide in the ravines. They would throw kerosene on the crops we had stored. They would shit on the wheat or barley that we were storing—they mixed their shit up with the *cereales* so there’d be nothing to eat. So we had to carry our *cereales* with us when we ran. Oh, we had livestock! They even stole them in helicopters. That’s why people here learned to drink. So much pain! So much fear!”

Once again one of the women insists, “Remembering that life, we just have such a sense of weight bearing down on us. We feel much better when we forget.”

One of the facilitators interjects: “It’s difficult to remember. It’s sad—it’s difficult. But it is so important to remember.”

The women do continue with their painful refrain.

One woman repeats, “They took our animals.”

“They destroyed our crops—we had nothing to eat.”

Another adds, “Many of the young women were left with children.”

And yet another: “They raped the young women. They stole from our houses. They took our animals in their helicopters.”

“Oh, life completely changed.”

Abruptly, one of the facilitators intervenes: “Bueno. Back then some women participated in Sendero. Were there any women leaders (SL) here?”

One of the women responds: “Oh no. Women here didn’t participate in Sendero—just women from other places. I saw some of them. But no women here—no.”

“No, not here,” adds another woman. “But there were some in other places. But not here.”

Another woman speaks up. “Well, it’s scary to talk. I personally am afraid to talk about this. They say that Sendero might start up again. Who knows—there might be some of them in this pueblo, no? What if they find out? I’m very afraid.”

“Is there resentment here among people in this pueblo? Do you want to talk about that?” the facilitator asks.

“No, there’s no resentment. We just want to forget. We never talk about those things with lots of people. Just in a family group—then we remember, then we talk. Not in a group like this.”

With that final line, the focus group draws to a close. One of the facilitators thanks the women for their participation, reiterating what she and her colleague had said before: “We know it’s hard to talk about these things, but it’s also important to do so. We hope we’ve helped you get a bit of relief by talking. Remembering all of this is hard for us too, but it’s not in vain—it *will bring something good*. So thank you all and also remember that you should always talk. Don’t be quiet. Don’t let this remain in your heart. That’s bad—we can even die from that. You have to talk so these things never happen again.”

I was struck by these transcripts for many reasons. This was one of the communities with which my research team and I had been working. Thus I was interested in the sorts of memories narrated in these focus groups because the context in which testimonies are given and received is central to the forms those testimonies take.

This community had been a support base for Sendero. However, the victim typology is important in terms of understanding the men’s emphasis on innocence. The heroic rondero identity is not available to men in this region of Ayacucho: their armed participation was on the losing side of this war. Thus the victim categories are an important source of “narrative capital” vis-à-vis the TRC and, metonymically, the state. The innocent dead, the trembling children, and the raped women are important categories of potential redress. Thus women were alternately silenced while their suffering was appropriated for “communal purposes.”

Indeed, pressing demands as innocent victims play with the dualism that informs the logic of law and these commissions charged with historical clarification. In the assemblies held in this community prior to the arrival of the TRC, it was decided that people should only talk about those who died at the hands of the soldiers. As explained to me, the concern was twofold: when authorities convened the assemblies and began forging their memory projects, they told people that widows and orphans were groups of interest to the commission. As the president of this community told me, “One of the orphans stood up and said he was ready to tell the commission about his father’s death. ‘I’ll tell them how Antonio Sullqa and Clemente Gamboa killed him—how they slit his throat. . . .’ Well, there were Antonio and Clemente standing right there across from him! We knew we couldn’t talk about it like that

or everyone would be killing each other again.” Thus communal authorities decided that only certain deaths would be talked about with the TRC—those that occurred at the hands of the armed forces. Additionally, they were concerned that if people began talking about killings within the community, it would be taken as proof of Sendero’s presence and their sympathies during the war. Thus the memory project focused on “innocent victims,” and the women were consistently told to be quiet for fear they would “vary the information.”

Additionally, as happened in many communities, authorities petitioned for the installation of a military base for “protection.” This irony repeats in so many pueblos: which was the greater fear, the soldiers or the neighbors? And once that decision was made, whose security and at what price?¹³ Let’s juxtapose the first group with the second one held with only women. The storylines are striking: the men narrate the battles and attacks while women tend to focus on the everyday aspects of life during war. Women’s unpaid—and frequently undervalued—labor becomes even more burdensome during war: “Remembering that life, we just have such a sense of weight bearing down on us.” As we know, women were involved in defense activities in their communities; they also remained responsible for maintaining the home in the face of the dual challenges of political violence and the poverty that was sharply exacerbated by the war. Although survival may be “less dramatic” than armed struggle, an analysis of the domestic economy of war reveals the extent to which survival itself becomes a daily struggle. Living in caves for months and sometimes years, moving from one place to another on a daily basis, cooking and caring for children under harsh conditions—these women did not limit their protagonism to epic masculinist models.¹⁴ All women struggled—some were armed.

Additionally, the focus group was guided by some common-sense assumptions about women and war. Convening a random group to talk “as women in total *confianza*” resonates with well-intentioned feminist and therapeutic impulses. The incitement to speech hinges on a belief that talking is intrinsically healing, and thus participating in the focus group would provide the women “some relief.” This was at odds with the women’s insistence on forgetting, and certainly at odds with the woman who finally told the facilitators that she was “afraid to talk.” She called into question the gynofest premise of “talking as women.”

In the context of civil conflict, one can only assume that the random assembly of a group of women is unproblematic if women are first defined as peripheral to the conflict. By defining women as noncombatants—by assuming women are a homogeneous group of apolitical bystanders or victims—one has the illusion of yielding a group with shared interests based upon their identity as women. This is a questionable assumption in many cases, and most certainly in Peru where an estimated forty percent of Shining Path militants were women.¹⁵

I mentioned that my research team and I worked with this community and, thus, learned the names of some of the women who participated in the focus group. One of the women is the wife of a local Shining Path (ex) militant and we were assured she had been just as ruthless as he had. Thus, rather than a therapeutic environment, several of the women sitting in the group were very concerned about the consequences of anything they might say in front of someone they held responsible for lethal violence in their community.

Before moving on, I hope to have demonstrated the complexity of women’s experiences, and the multiple subject positions they assumed during the internal armed conflict. Women in the focus group insisted life had changed completely and referred to both the destructive and transformative consequences of political violence. As Rehn and Sirleaf note, “Conflict can change traditional gender roles. Women may acquire more mobility, resources and opportunities for leadership. But the additional responsibility comes without any diminution in the demands of their traditional roles. Thus, the momentary space in which women

take on non-traditional roles and typically assume much greater responsibilities within the household and public arenas does not necessarily advance gender equality” (2002: 2). This paradox resonated throughout my research. Parallel to the many losses and injustices they experienced, women also referred to the liberating aspects of the internal armed conflict and how much the years of war had “opened up their eyes.” And there was another set of parallel narratives that impressed me: women’s stories about rape.

The Other Heroes

... women’s agency is recognized only when women act in ways which resemble traditional male behaviour. This restriction of the meaning of agency does a profound injustice to survivors of sexual violence, and to feminist research, practice and activism which have consistently sought to make visible the actions involved in surviving, coping with and resisting victimization.¹⁶

In both South Africa and Peru, the truth commissions held a series of public hearings, and women were invited to speak about violations of their human rights. Ross has demonstrated how the South African hearings essentialized suffering and gender, focusing on sexual violence and rape rather than the systemic injustice of apartheid or women’s roles in resistance efforts (2002). In Peru’s Audiencias Públicas, several women talked about their experiences of rape, one introducing the audience to her six-year-old daughter, born as a result of the woman’s gang rape in prison. For each viewer who squirmed in discomfort, there were others applauding the bravery of these women for coming forward and talking publicly about “their rapes.”

These are troubling displays.¹⁷ By constructing these few women as courageous for speaking out, the implication is that only those women who choose a public forum to talk about rape are counted among the brave. Obscured are other forms of courage that women practiced on a daily basis during the internal armed conflict and, importantly, other messages are also transmitted in the broadcasts of these public displays. The audience is told war stories replete with heroes and victims—a gendered dualism that is too familiar.

I want to foreground the protagonism of women confronted by sexual violence, motivated by a desire to question war stories that keep reproducing the heroism of men and the victimization of women. This dualism even informed the work of the TRC. For example, during the Public Audience with the *ronderos*—a group that has elaborated a collective identity as heroes of *La Patria* and key actors in the “defeat of subversion”—not a single woman was invited to give her testimony even though there are women who not only participated in the *rondas campesinas* but even rose to leadership positions (Theidon 2003). In those Public Audiences in which women did participate, they were included as victims: Las Lloronas in contrast to the heroes of *La Patria*.

However, as I have been told in every pueblo with which I have worked, women participated in the defense of their communities, their families, and themselves. War stories influence the public policies implemented in the postconflict period: these histories are a form of political action. Consequently, I want to explore multiple forms of heroism—not all of which are “male.”¹⁸

“I Armed Myself with Courage”

I have already referred to the thick description women offered regarding the gendered dimensions of war. I turn now to the conversations my research team and I had with

women who chose to talk with us about rape. We spent months living in the communities with which we worked, and this may explain why some women sought us out to talk about their own experiences of rape and sexual violence. We never asked a woman if she had been raped. The question seemed ethically unacceptable to me given that we were not in the position to offer these women any form of justice or sustained counseling. These conversations had a common format: “Come back tomorrow.” Women needed time to prepare themselves to talk about this issue and to prepare an environment of complete privacy. None of these women had spoken before about having been raped and felt they had much to lose if their husbands or children heard them.

What was striking to me was the insistence on context: when women spoke to us about rape, they located that violation within broader social dynamics. They detailed the preconditions that structured vulnerability and emphasized their efforts to minimize harm to themselves and to the people they cared for. With their insistence on context, women situated their experience of sexual violence—those episodes of brutal victimization—within womanly narratives of heroism.

“I Armed Myself with Courage”: Cayara, February, 2002

Elizabet was seated in the door of her aunt’s house. Several years earlier her aunt had placed her in charge of taking care of her home when she left for the relative safety of the coast. Leonor sat down with her to talk. While they were talking, Leonor noticed her face was bruised, and her nose was raw with scratches. Her left eye was covered over with a flap of skin, and Elizabet struggled to raise her eyelid against the weight of the stringy mucous that clouded her vision. Her voice sharpened with rage: “My eye—the soldiers did this to me. Those *qanras*, *allqus* (filthy, dogs). They’ve ruined my life. They’ve done me harm, and now I can’t see well. Sometimes in the darkness, I fall. The last time I was carrying two buckets full of water when I fell, and I scratched my face. The soldiers came to my house calling me ‘*terruca*’ (terrorist). ‘*Terruca*’ they keep shouting while they beat me, abused me. Until one day—I armed myself with courage and I grabbed one of them by the chest and hit him with a trunk of wood. I threw him out. From there I went to Ayacucho, leaving all of my things abandoned. I had no husband to protect me, to take care of me, to make them respect me,” her voice rising with each word. “When you have a man at your side, somehow there is more respect.”

As Elizabet made clear, the most vulnerable were the widows and single women—women without a man in the house to provide at least a form of symbolic protection. Several women candidly told us they had married in order to have access to this protection. Indeed, in contrast with long-standing patterns, women began to take younger partners due to the lack of mature men in their communities.

Elizabet was not alone in “arming herself with courage”: many women described how they had tried to defend themselves, with sticks, teeth, screams, and fists. However, they did not only fight to defend themselves; many women fought to protect their loved ones. Other women told us how they had padded their skirts with wadded up clothing, pretending to be pregnant in hopes of dissuading potential rapists. Still others smeared blood on their underwear, hoping their bloodied state would dissuade the soldiers. And still others resorted to “strategic pregnancies” to exercise some form of control over their bodies, as Maricela Tomayro told us.

Hualla, April 2003

“The soldiers dragged my husband out of the house, dragged him to the plaza. From there they took him somewhere and disappeared him. I followed them to Canaria to look for him. I demanded they give him back to me. Those soldiers beat me—my chest still aches from how they beat me. They wanted to abuse me [abusar, one of the terms used for rape] but they couldn’t. After everything they did to me, I don’t forgive them. It’s their fault my children never went to school. Let them come here and at least fix my house! I have three children. After my husband disappeared—well, the soldiers wanted to abuse me. They tried to and I knew I didn’t want to have a child from those devils. I decided it would be better to have the child of one of my paisanos. That’s what I decided. So I had the child of a widower so I could make sure those miserable pigs didn’t have that pleasure. They raped in groups—they raped in line. How could a woman tolerate so many men? Not even a dog could put up with it.”

There is so much condensed in Señora Tomayro’s words. It was overwhelmingly women who engaged in “la busqueda” — the search for the disappeared and the dead. That search took them to police stations, army bases, hospitals, and jails. For rural Quechua-speaking women the state was personified in the Spanish used to curse them; in the doors shut in their faces; and in the beatings and other forms of abuse they encountered as they conducted their searches for loved ones.

Additionally, access to reproductive health care and family planning was minimal prior to the war and further reduced by the destruction of hundreds of rural health posts during the internal armed conflict. Rape frequently resulted in unwanted pregnancies, bringing further pain and stigma to the mother as well as to her child. Within a context of minimal choices—and even less recourse to contraception—women sought to exercise some control over their bodies, even if the range of control was reduced to strategically getting pregnant by a member of their community rather than by a group of soldiers lined up for gang rape.

Finally, Señora Tomayro conveys the enduring economic impact of losing one’s spouse. Within a rural, agricultural economy, women need access to male labor to complement their own productive activities. It is also men, who more commonly engage in seasonal migration, earning cash to supplement the household economy. In her demand—or perhaps accusation would be a better word—that “It’s their fault my children never went to school. Let them come here and at least fix my house! I have three children,” she also conveys a vision of what might constitute a form of reparation for all she has lost and survived.

“Women Like Me”: Hualla, April 2003

Early one morning Dulia went out to walk the streets of Hualla, enjoying the silence that softened the edges of that conflictive town. As she reached the top of a hill, she met Prudencia Valenzuela Uscata. She waved her hand and called out “Señorita, come here. I want to talk to you. I want to tell you about my sorrows.” However, in the next breath Prudencia told her she did not have time to begin talking right then and asked Dulia to come visit her early the following day: “Come, I’ll wait for you. I’ll be preparing breakfast.” She grabbed Dulia’s hand: “Come back tomorrow.”

At sunrise the next morning Dulia gathered up her backpack and went to Prudencia’s house, only to find Prudencia surrounded by children. Prudencia gestured for Dulia to pass through to the room behind her kitchen, telling her “Wait here. We’re going to talk without my children listening. But you need to wait for me because the last time I was talking with my neighbor, my daughter heard me and she went out repeating everything to her friends. That’s why I don’t want anyone to hear us.”

Another half hour passed before Prudencia came back from her kitchen and sat beside Dulia. Hurriedly she pulled out her bag of coca and began *chakchando* (chewing coca leaves). With a sigh, she placed her hand on Dulia's: "Oh señorita, you've seen how much I suffer—alone. My sadness is so great because I have to take care of all of this alone." While she chewed more coca, she acknowledged it was very early to begin *chakchando*, but that she needed to do so before beginning to talk.

The two women were interrupted by steps and looked up to see that one of Prudencia's little girls was pushing open the door. Prudencia scolded her gently and closed the door, placing a rock against it to hold it shut. She sat again at Dulia's side and after several more sighs and a bit more coca, she began to talk: "My daughter is traumatized because the soldiers entered my house. It was October when they entered my house. My son was two years old then—I no longer breastfed him. My older daughter, she has a son now, and my other daughter, they were there—the older one is 22 and other 20. My older daughter—the soldiers tried to take my older daughter when they entered my house. I had a little store. I opened it when I came back from Lima. It was on the edge of the plaza, and the soldiers always bothered me because I was alone."

"Did you have a husband then, mama Prudencia?"

She nodded. "My husband was already very afraid. When the soldiers took men to the base, they made them lie mouth down like animals and walked on top of them—walked on top of them," she repeated. "They put hot iron on their genitals! They beat them on the head with the butt of their guns. That's why my husband left for Lima, disappearing. 'They may do something to me,' he said. He left from one minute to the next—the father of my children never came back. It was October when they entered my house. That day I had gone to my field to weed, so I came home tired. 'I'm going to sleep,' I said. And I told my daughter, 'Mami, go and close the door, close it tight. You're a big girl now.' She was eleven or twelve, the older one. But my daughter tied the door shut with a string—nothing more. She didn't close it tight."

Prudencia paused to add a bit more coca to the wad in her cheek, but the pause was brief. "They cut the string with a knife and entered. I was sleeping, but they shined the flashlight in my eyes. They had opened the door. How were they able to open it? Then they shoved a gun against my chest and a knife against my throat. There were five soldiers in my house. 'Give me a pill, give me a Mejoral. There was a confrontation today and there are many casualties. Give me a Mejoral or I'll kill you, I'll blow off your head.' But I didn't want to. I said 'No, no, I can't give you anything.' So one of them shouted at me, 'Where are the pills?' 'I don't know,' I said. So they kept shouting that they were going to kill me. They were grabbing me by the neck, and it hurt when they were grabbing me. My oldest daughter—they started to grab her to take her away."

Prudencia slowed her words down, each syllable loaded with defiance. "I told them, 'My daughter, no. Not my daughter, not even if you kill me,' I told them. My daughter was already twelve and we had heard about how the soldiers raped—people say they even raped dogs. That's what people said. I was so afraid, thinking that if they dragged her outside they could do just anything to her. I didn't want them to take her outside." Prudencia shook her head as she remembered that night. "Not my daughter! I was holding on to her so they couldn't take her. I was holding her tight," pausing to show Dulia how she had held on to her daughter with all of her strength even as the soldiers were beating her.

"That's how I was holding on to her, grabbing on to my bed frame with my other hand. The soldiers kept grabbing at her, trying to pull her away from me. So I put my daughter between my legs and covered her with my skirt, and the little one I grabbed with my free hand. My little boy was also in the bed, but they didn't pay any attention to him because he

was a boy. My two little girls, I kept holding on to them and to the bed frame. I didn't let go of my daughters. My older daughter, they just kept trying to grab her. So then, my little one was still drowsy, so I pulled her hair hard to make her scream—I pulled her hair until some of them came out. She screamed when I pulled her hair, and I hoped someone would hear. When she screamed, one of the soldiers said 'Damn it! What are you doing? Don't make noise!' Saying that, he punched me in the face. But when I still kept holding on, one of them said 'Come on, come with me now or I'll kill you. Nothing's going to happen.' They were pulling at my hair, my clothes, my arms. But I didn't want to, not for anything. I'd heard people talk, saying that with all sorts of tricks they (the soldiers) try to get you outside so they can rape and kill you. That's why I didn't want to go outside."

This time it was Dulia who paused, needing a minute to calm herself. The velocity, the intensity with which Prudencia spoke—Dulia also needed to breathe. Prudencia looked at her, waited a few moments as if to judge how much more her listener could take and began once again at full speed. "When I was holding on like that, that's when they hit me really hard, several times. Then they took my daughters from me. They carried the oldest one to the corner while one of them was standing guard outside. Inside, two of them, they tied me to the bed and one of them grabbed my braids. The others were pointing a gun in my chest, making noise with the trigger. Another held his knife to my throat. Then my son cried out 'Don't kill my mama. Here is the key,' he said. So they used the key to open up the store, while the others held back my daughter and me. And one of them also started to rape me while the others pointed their guns at me. This nobody knows—not my father, not my mother, not my littlest children. That's what they did to me. No matter how much I tried I could not get them off of me. There were five of them. The five soldiers left their guns in the corner. Then with their knives they kept threatening me. Then my daughter screamed and ran toward me—there were my three children. For holding on to my older daughter, they raped me. They raped me because I wouldn't let them rape my daughter. That's why my daughter says 'To save me, they raped you,' and that's why I suffer alone. Even my husband left me—because of this he left me. He left me because people say that the women in Hualla are the soldiers' leftovers. There was a lot of gossip because at that time the soldiers took the women away—married women, young women, they took them away to the base. Oh God, what sorts of things did they do to them in the base!" The tape goes silent.

In our research team we talked at length about rape, and how raped women are repeatedly violated: the first time during the rape itself, and afterwards because of the stigma that marks them in their communities. As Señora Prudencia lamented, "women like me" have usually not confided in anyone—before their eyes they have far too many examples of the price women have paid for talking, ending up the target of cruel gossip. Not one woman with whom we spoke had achieved justice with respect to the man or men who had raped her. Among the greatest injustices of war are the stigma of the raped and the impunity of the rapists.

Moreover, once again there is the parallel narrative structure and the insistence on context. Señora Prudencia was relating much more than her victimization. It was important to her that we know there were five soldiers pinning her down, armed with guns and a knife. She still fought, even though they punched her in the face and clearly outnumbered her. Over and over again she returned to her resolve: they would not touch her daughters unless they killed her first. She may have been raped, but she succeeded in protecting both of her young daughters. In her subsequent actions, she successfully out-strategized the soldiers, moving to her small house in the hills at night and ultimately deciding to get pregnant with her neighbor rather than the soldiers. When we listen to what she foregrounds in her story, we hear pride in how hard she fought defending herself and her daughters. This cannot be

tidily compacted into the victim category without forcing her—and other women like her—to silence their courage. It may well be that courage that allowed her to preserve some sense of her self despite both the initial violation and the injustice of the events that followed.

Señora Prudencia sacrificed herself to save her daughters, an act that has had repercussions in the lives of all three women. Her oldest daughter has lived with the images, the screaming, the guilt produced that night in October. How many times has she asked herself why she didn't close the door tight? Why she didn't run for help? One aspect of the multiple violations I referred to is the guilt and self-interrogation—"if only I had done something differently." We cannot change the past, but one goal of any reparations program should be changing the present in which "women like me" live with shame instead of recognition of their struggles and heroism.

"Trading their Bodies": Tiquihua, December 2002

Edith and I walked out early that day in Tiquihua, enjoying the silence of the early morning. As we rounded the corner leading to the plaza, we heard a loud whisper. We turned to see Señora Edilberta Chocña Sanchez beckoning to us from the doorway of her house. She invited us in, pulling out two sheepskins for us to sit on. She brought her *manta* (shawl) full of wheat and sat beside me. We began separating out the wheat from the pebbles while Edilberta recalled the *sasachakuy tiempo* and what had happened to so many women.

"It was 1987, so all of the soldiers came back newly commissioned. The assholes—they abused the women indiscriminately, all of the women, even the married ones."

"So there were rapes here?" I asked.

Señora Edilberta threw her head back in disgust. "There was so much rape. They carried off a woman and this woman came back totally abused, dragging herself along. They say that the boss went first, and then all of the soldiers had their turn with her. They abused us so much, equally, equally—not only the communism (Sendero), not only from within this pueblo, but equally. Ay, Señor (God)! Oh the courage these women had! Oh the courage they had—how these women defended their character."

I was struck by the expression "defending their character." As Edilberta made clear, these women tried not only to defend themselves and their loved ones from physical harm but they also fought to preserve a sense of themselves—a sense of themselves that would not be sullied by rape.

"I don't know señorita," mama Edilberta continued, "but even the terrorists, those who were *pelotones* (commanders) abused the married women. For their husbands."

I looked a bit confused and she tried to explain. "When the *pelotones* said 'Kill him,' when they said this—well, the majority of women, the married women—well, they gave birth to the children of the *compañeros* (Senderistas)."

Edilberta was confirming what several other women had told us: women were forced to "barter sex" to save the lives of their loved ones.

"So they abused many women?"

"Oh many, señorita, one even tried to abuse my mama. My mama told him 'Either you kill me or I'll kill you.' He had told my mother to meet him in Santa Ana in the afternoon. 'Why am I going to go? Just because you're a *pelotón*? Either you kill me or I'll kill you.' That's what she told him. Ay, why did they abuse so many women? They abused them, señorita. They even abused elderly women. They left children here. My cousin—the soldiers took her brother, took him to the base. To save him, she surrendered her body. She had a child—Germán, with no last name. He's in Ica. Oh how many children did those

soldiers leave behind? A lot. That's why I'm telling you—the married woman have never said anything.”

Edilberta stood up to empty her *manta* full of cleaned wheat into a large basket in her kitchen. She came back with potatoes, still hot enough to burn our hands. She sat beside us again and kept talking.

“The soldiers—oh, there were so many of them. Watching, we listened to them with fear—there was so much fear. It's because they raped married women, young girls—the soldiers raped the women. They abused us. You think they didn't *señorita*?!” her voice rising to an indignant pitch. “It wasn't just the *compañeros*—the soldiers raped even more when they came here.”

Both Edith and I nodded in agreement, thinking about the other women who had talked with us. It was clear the Senderistas raped: equally clear was the consensus that the soldiers systematically raped as a weapon of war.

“Here they raped—and that needs to stop. They raped here, *señorita*. My cousin, they carried off her brother. You, having such grief for your brother—you'd save him, no? You'd do anything, no? Surrendering her body, well—she saved her brother. But she had a son, a son with no father. A son from the soldier. I don't know where he is, that filthy, slobbering soldier! Now my cousin has a son, so does Olga Morales. They say her son is the son of a soldier. She went to Hualla to sell oranges and they (soldiers) had her come in saying they wanted to buy oranges. That's how they raped her—raped her until she couldn't even stand up. Lots of soldiers, lots of soldiers raped her. Oh, in case it was just one, just two! No! There was a line of them raping her. She couldn't even stand up. Her legs couldn't even hold her up afterwards. There was so much fear! That's why women started getting together with younger men. I slept locked in the house so that they couldn't abuse me. Aquilina Loayza, she died—they also raped her until she couldn't stand up. They raped her in the school. They grabbed her and raped her. She also came back from Hualla—that's where they took the married women and ruined them. Those *sinvergüenzas* (without shame)! It was an awful life! Even with the children—after giving birth, the husbands would ask, ‘And I suppose this is mine?’ They accused their wives of giving birth to the soldiers' babies. It was an awful life, beatings and abuse. That's how it was, and the husbands were always becoming bitter. ‘That filthy woman, leftover from the soldiers,’ they said. ‘That woman, she's leftover from the soldiers.’ People here gossip—when it comes to gossiping, they're in first place for that.”

Forcing the women to “*entregar sus cuerpos*” (surrender or barter their bodies) was a widespread practice. In my conversations with ex-soldiers, they explained how they took advantage of their power to force young women to “barter sex” to save their loved ones. When the troops arrived in a pueblo, they would decide which of the young women were the prettiest. Their fathers and brothers would be rounded up and carried off to the base, denounced as *terrucos*. The women—a euphemism given the age of some of the adolescents—would head up to the base in search of their fathers or brothers. There was a form of exchange: sex could save the life of their loved ones.

This sacrifice had a price. Women who “have been with soldiers” are negatively viewed. Whether by rape or other forms of coercion, having been with a soldier carries its own stigma. In addition to stigma, several women assured us that husbands beat the wives they scorn as “soldier's leftovers.” Elsewhere I have argued that there has been a “domestication of violence” following the war; while dead bodies in the streets may be a things of the past, angry men and increased alcohol consumption are a nasty mix.¹⁹ One enduring impact of the militarization of daily life and the forging of militarized masculinities is an increase in domestic violence; a phenomenon noted in many postconflict settings.²⁰

Thus I turn now to the men, convinced that a gendered perspective on war should include an analysis of men and masculinity; “gender” is too frequently a code word for “women,” leaving men as the unquestioned, unmarked category.²¹ I want to discuss the rapists, convinced that gender-sensitive research should include studying the forms of masculinity forged during armed conflict as one component in reconstructing individual identities and collective existence in the aftermath of war.

Blood Brothers

In their research on sexual violence during the internal armed conflict in Peru, Falconí and Agüero found, “In almost every case, those responsible for committing rape were members of the armed forces, especially the army, and to a lesser degree the police and Sinchis” (2003:12). Similarly, in my research it became clear that although the Senderistas and in some cases the *ronderos* raped, the systematic use of sexual violence was a practice deployed by the “fuerzas de orden” (forces of order). In short, where there were soldiers there were rapes.

Also generalizable was gang rape. When women described their experiences with rape, it was never one soldier but rather several. “They raped the women until they could not stand up.” The soldiers were mutilating women with their penises, and the women were bloodied. I want to think a bit more about these blood rituals.

When talking about gang rape, we should think about why the men raped this way. An instrumentalist explanation would indicate the soldiers raped in groups in order to overpower a woman, or so that one soldier could serve watch while the others raped. However, it would be a very limited reading that attributes this practice to the necessity for pure force or standing watch. When a soldier pressed his machine gun into a woman’s chest, he did not need more force. When the soldiers came down from the bases at night to rape, “privacy” was not their primary concern. They operated with impunity.

Clearly there is a ritualistic aspect to gang rape.²² Many people told me that after killing someone, the soldiers drank the blood of their victims or bathed their faces and chests with the blood. I want to think about the blood ties established between soldiers, and the bloodied wombs that birthed a lethal fraternity. These blood ties united the soldiers, and the bodies of raped women served as the medium for forging those ties.

In their analysis of rape during the 1992–1994 Bosnian war, Diken and Lausten offer a powerful assessment of the ways in which gang rape forges a “brotherhood of guilt” based in part upon the abjection of the victim (2005). For the authors, the men’s guilt is the key emotion: guilt unifies the perpetrators, and rape is a rite of initiation. Additionally, in tracing how women become “abjects,” they argue that shame resists verbalization while guilt incites it: “whereas guilt can be verbalized and can perform as an element in the brotherhood of guilt, shame cannot, which is why it often results in trauma. War thus both creates and destroys communities (of the perpetrators and the victims respectively).”²³

I advocate shifting the focus from guilt to shame and shamelessness. Gang rape not only broke the moral codes that generally ordered social life: the practice also served to eradicate shame. Committing morally abhorrent acts in front of others not only forges bonds between the perpetrators but also forges *sinvergüenzas*—shameless people—capable of tremendous brutality. To lose the sense of shame—a “regulatory emotion” because shame implies an Other in front of whom one feels ashamed—creates men with a recalibrated capacity for atrocity. Guilt unifies; shame individuates. Thus acts that obliterate shame also obliterate a sense of self, lending themselves to processes aimed at subsuming the individual to create group cohesion and “selflessness” in the service of a collective. Additionally, there is a

temporal aspect to understanding these acts and the men who engage in them—and to understanding why the solidarity of guilt may well give way to a deep sense of shame over time. In my research, I am struck by the fact that “men don’t talk”—at least not in the first person about their participation in rape.

But they certainly do talk during the act itself. Indeed, women emphasize what the soldiers said while raping them: “*Terruca de mierda*” (terrorist of shit), “*ahora aguanta terruca*” (now take it, terrorist), “*carajo, terruca de mierda*” (damn it, terrorist of shit), and “*India de mierda*” (Indian of shit). The soldiers were marking the women with physical and verbal assaults. For example, there was a military base in Hualla, and the soldiers took the women from neighboring communities to the base to rape them, returning them with their hair cut off as a sign of what had happened. In other conversations in Cayara and Tiquihua, people told us the women returned to their communities “scarred” after having been raped in the bases. The women’s bodies were made to bear witness to the power and barbarism of the “*fuerzas de orden*.”²⁴

However, one can imagine there were some men who did not want to participate in the raping. In my conversations with ex-soldiers and ex-sailors, they insisted that participation in the rapes was obligatory. It is possible that this fiction is a balm for their conscience; however, some men provided details about what happened to those soldiers and sailors who did not want to join in. Let me cite just one example from a conversation I had with someone who served in La Marina in Ayacucho during the early 1980s.

With the recruits, some of them were really young. They were just adolescents. They didn’t want to participate (in the rapes). If someone refused, the rest of the men would take him aside and rape him. All of them would rape him, with the poor guy screaming. They said they were “changing his voice”—with so much screaming, his voice would lower and he wouldn’t be a woman anymore.

Raping was a means of establishing hierarchies of power, between armed groups and the population, but also within the armed forces themselves. It was common to force men in a community to watch as the soldiers raped their wives, daughters, and sisters. And it is striking that the soldiers raped according to rank, beginning with the officers and finishing up with the recruits. There were multiple audiences for this violent sexuality, and the performance was intended at least in part to impress other men with whom one jockeyed for status within the battalion.

When we speak of militarization, we need to think beyond the stationing of soldiers in the bases. Militarization also implies changes in what it means to be a man or a woman: the hypermasculinity of the warrior is based upon erasing those characteristics considered “feminine” (Theidon 2003). This hypermasculinity is constructed by scorning the feminine, and one aspect of that scorn is feminizing other men by inflicting physical and symbolic violence.²⁵

Narrating Heroism: Huaychao, February 2003

Marcos caught my attention the first time I saw him in a communal assembly. He was a striking figure in khaki and black, his posture exaggeratedly erect. His black hair was cut short, and his black sweater alternated with his camouflage pants, finally ceding to his black leather boots. In the room he shared with his young wife, various pictures of Marcos with

his machine gun and belts of ammunition were hanging by nails from the wall. He told me about those pictures one evening.

“I was in the army when *las papas quemaban* (the potatoes were burning, referring the heat of battle), in ‘95 or ‘96. One time we were out on patrol near Pucayacu where we had a confrontation with the *terrucos* and killed six of them. We captured *una china* (a young girl). We were a total of twenty-eight soldiers, and everyone raped that poor *china*. I didn’t because she was fifteen and I was only seventeen—I felt like she was my sister. Afterwards we let her go because she begged us—she said she’d been forced into Sendero in the jungle. I wonder where that poor girl went? The officers in the army allowed all of that. They even told us ‘Those fucking *terrucos* rape your women. Is that all right?’ That’s why they told us, ‘I authorize you (to rape).’ They also made us eat gunpowder for breakfast. We weren’t afraid of anything.”

Not one man with whom I have spoken admitted to having participated in rape. I have had men tell me about having killed, but in no conversation has a man ever talked about participating in rape.²⁶ The same men who have described in detail the last minutes and expressions of a dying victim—the struggle that gives way to resigned limbs, to silence, to unblinking, glassy eyes—have always insisted it was other men who were raping. It is difficult to narrate one’s heroism when a man was one of twenty-eight soldiers standing in line to rape a young girl. I am not accusing Marcos, but rather noting that each narrator screens the facts he presents to his interlocutor, and the representation of self is a continuous negotiation between what to hide and what to reveal. But listening to Marcos, I heard the echoes of those hoarse recruits.

I have wondered many times where these former soldiers and sailors are now. How are these men after what they have done? I must assume they also carry the traces of the armed conflict and their participation in atrocities. When they caress their wives, when they look into the faces of their little girls, when they stare into a mirror—what do they see reflected there?²⁷ I see this as one legacy of the war that has not been studied, and obviously it would be methodologically challenging. However, I am compelled by the deep injustice of both rape and its narrative burden. It is, of course, women who are incited to speak about sexual violence; the silence of the gang rapists is left undisturbed. I have never heard anyone ask a man, “Did you have blood on your penis? Were you first in line, or tenth? Did you penetrate her vagina or her anus? Did you ejaculate? How many times?” I imagine we recoil just reading the questions, and yet women are routinely asked to narrate their experiences in an idiom of sexual vulnerability and degradation. What does it mean to be asked to narrate your life in an idiom that cannot possibly “do you justice?”²⁸

Conclusions

How are institutions implicated in allowing or disallowing voice? How does the availability of a genre mold the articulation of suffering—assign a subject position as the place from which suffering may be voiced?²⁹

I began by noting that truth commissions are considered “victim centered” in their approach to investigating the truth about periods of political violence and terror. This may be both a strength and a weakness. Michael Ignatieff has suggested that in part the work of truth commissions consists of “reducing the range of permissible lies” that can be reasonably told about the past. In their use of more flexible evidentiary standards, commissions are effective in offering alternative histories generally at odds with official versions of what

happened—particularly when agents of the state were key perpetrators. However, their focus on categories of victimization—combined with the highly gendered nature of victim imagery—may unintentionally construct other silences. By foregrounding suffering, they may obscure other relationships women have with their pasts. There is a bit of irony; commissions are charged with investigating the truth, and yet the broader truths that women narrated were too frequently reduced to the sexual harm they had experienced.³⁰ Clearly “gender crimes” are not only sexual. Rather, women spoke at length about multiple factors that structured vulnerability during the internal armed conflict. These factors tell us a great deal about underlying and enduring forms of inequality that remain intact during times of “peace.”

Additionally, in the conversations my research team and I had with women, they insisted on giving meaning to and exercising some control over their suffering *and* their protagonism in the face of danger. If it is true that “A gendered understanding of conflict remains conspicuous by its absence,” then commissions must move beyond their victim-driven logic to open up narrative space for women to provide testimony that is not limited to suffering and grief.³¹ Thus “gender sensitivity” would focus less on strategies designed to make women talk about “their rapes” and more on developing new ways of listening to what women say about war—and how they say it.

And there is what they do not say. Given that women overwhelmingly refused to talk about rape in the first person, then what might constitute reparations or redress? How does one attempt to “repair” the unspoken? I do not pose the question rhetorically: designing reparations programs that address the question of sexual violence against women is a challenge confronting many postconflict countries. I do not have the answer, but I am quite certain how *not* to go about it.

In his work on a consultancy with Sierra Leonean refugee women in northern Liberia, Mats Utas was surprised that every single woman they interviewed readily declared she had been raped during the Sierra Leonean Civil War. As he soon realized, presenting themselves as victims was a means by which women effectively established themselves as “legitimate recipients” of humanitarian aid (2005: 408). Testimony about rape was a ticket to aid.

What about the ethics of this trade? What about the coercive elements of “tell me your story of sexual victimization and you’ll receive a blanket and cans of food?” Or, in the context of a postwar reparations program, “provide graphic testimony about “your rape” and perhaps receive a stipend?” I cannot divorce methods from ethics: in this case, both are repugnant. There are questions that we do not have a right to ask, and silences that must be respected.

Moreover, if being a subject implies telling a story, then perhaps many women choose not to narrate episodes of victimization as the core of who they are today—the core of the self they live with and present to their interlocutors. The word *recover* has many definitions, among them “to take back; to get back what has been lost; to re-cover.” What if part of recovery is taking back some sense of the private, of the intimate sphere that was violated? In a woman’s refusal to make rape the narrative core of her subjectivity, might we see an insistence on the right to opacity in this era of confessional obsession and the tyranny of transparency?

And yet, the women I worked and lived with did talk in great detail about the gendered dimensions of war—and some talked about rape. There is a tacit agreement in the giving and receiving of testimonies, an implicit promise that some form of justice will be forthcoming. As I think back on the conversations we had, women consistently expressed a desire for redistributive justice: scholarships for their children, decent housing, potable water, food in the house, and crops and livestock in their fields. This is what women demanded over and over again—both the women who spoke with us about rape, and the hundreds more that

did not. I suggest we work with this vision of redistributive justice and expand it to include shame. One thing that could be redistributed is the shame that has been unjustly apportioned to women; this shame should belong to the rapists, who have to date enjoyed total impunity. Krog asks how maleness is to be reconstructed following periods of violence?³² How might masculinity be demilitarized following war? In Peru, there has been no discussion about the thousands of soldiers and sailors who systematically raped during the internal armed conflict. The *sinvergüenzas* forged during bloody acts of gang rape are not discussed in public discourse in Peru. This is indeed a troubling silence. Reparation should include the redistribution of goods and services; it should also include the redistribution of shame to those who earned it.³³

I have some final thoughts. When the survivors of sexual violence speak about their experiences, they place a responsibility on their interlocutors to respond to what they have heard. I repeat here what I have said in public forums, in my writing, and in my conversations with local and regional authorities. There is a need—and an obligation—for the Peruvian state to implement a reparations program for survivors of rape, and this should include material and symbolic components. Within the symbolic reparations, I argue for public education programs about the massive sexual violence that occurred during the internal armed conflict. Among the themes that should be included in these educational programs, I advocate focusing on the injustice of placing blame on these women for what happened to them “a la fuerza”—under force. Then—maybe then—we could begin to rewrite the war stories to include the heroism of so many women, just as I have attempted here. These women’s narratives force us to rethink common-sense notions of women and war, and lead me back to the words of Señora Edilberta Chocña Sánchez: “Oh, such courage! These women defended themselves with so much courage.”

Notes

1. Das, in her work on the partition in India, has suggested that women’s silence about rape may be a form of agency—perhaps the only form available to women—and thus silence does not necessarily signify the absence of linguistic competency but rather the active refusal to allow it (1997). See also Ross (2002) and Butalia (2000).
2. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 included sexual violence as a crime against humanity in Article 7 and a war crime in Article 8.
3. Even after the TRC gathered almost seventeen thousand testimonies, it is still impossible to determine the magnitude of sexual violence during the internal armed conflict. My research experiences resonate with a study carried out in Ayacucho by COMISEDH (Falconí and Agüero 2003) in which they determined that rape was systematically used as a strategy of war and that the number of rapes was massive. Ultimately this is what the Peruvian TRC argued, based upon the testimonies they received (TRC 2003).
4. The other guerrilla movement was the MRTA, Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru. MRTA was always considered a lesser threat, although the group succeeded in invading the Japanese Embassy and holding dozens of hostages for several months. When government troops stormed the embassy, members of MRTA were killed after they had surrendered. One of the images repeatedly shown in the media was Fujimori strutting through the rubble in a flak jacket.
5. See Hayner (2001).
6. I benefited from conversations with Roberto Garretón regarding the Rettig Commission in Chile, and Elizabeth Jelin has taught me so much about Argentina, past and present.
7. In South Africa, of the 21,227 testimonies given to the TRC, women accounted for fifty-six and half percent of the witnesses (www.peacewomen.org) and in Peru women accounted for fifty-four percent of the 16,885 testimonies at the national level, and sixty-four percent of the testimonies given in Ayacucho (TRC 2003, vol. VIII).

8. Mantilla Falcón (2005a and b).
9. TRC (2003, vol. VIII: 89–90).
10. I would add another explanation centered on the war-peace continuum of violence against women. In rural communities, wartime rape was a continuation of long-standing patterns, albeit exacerbated and “massified.” It was common practice in cases of rape for the family of the young woman to look for “un buen arreglo.” That is, a “good arrangement” that would entail the rapist marrying his victim or, in the case of pregnancy, at least recognizing the child with the father’s name on the birth certificate. Sexual violence was thus resignified within the idiom of kinship.
11. See Jelin (2002) for more on this topic.
12. *Susto* (fright illness) is the result of intense fear that separates the soul from the person’s body. See Rubel et al. (1984).
13. One thinks here of the impact of militarization and the new forms of security *and* insecurity that a sustained military presence implies. For interesting discussions on this issue, see Enloe (1988) and Jacobs, Jacobson, and Marchbank (2000).
14. 14 Theidon (2003).
15. See the TRC’s Final Report (2003, vol. 8), on women in Sendero Luminoso.
16. Kelly (2000).
17. In part I am troubled by the pedagogical use of another’s suffering or grief as a means of sensitizing those who do not recognize an Other as capable of pain. I think here of the African women in the film “Long Night’s Journey into Day,” whose legs gave way beneath them as they wailed in anguish at police photos of the mutilated bodies of their loved ones during the Amnesty Hearings. I imagine the goal was to teach white people that darker others also grieve (although in this film it is the death of one young white woman that is foregrounded).
18. Patricia Connell’s research on domestic violence was helpful to me as I analyzed what women talked with us about. In her work, she criticizes the use of agency and victimhood because they are too frequently conceived as mutually exclusive in relation to one another. She found that often women refused to characterize themselves as victims, leading her to argue that focusing on a woman’s status as victim “creates a framework for others to know her not as a person, but as a victim, someone to whom violence is done” (1997: 122).
19. See Theidon (1999).
20. See Rehn and Sirleaf (2002).
21. See Gutmann (1997) on the need for an anthropology of men and masculinity.
22. See Enloe (1988) for her discussion of war rape and male bonding.
23. Diken and Lausten (2005: 114). I thank Jean Franco for bringing this text to my attention.
24. In the TRC’s Final Report (2003), they also note the use of ethnic insults when raping and torturing both men and women. Fueling the violence was a sense that Quechua-speaking Others were semisavage, also captured by the term “chuto.”
25. In her analysis of the gendered dynamics of armed conflict, Cockburn argues that “. . . male-dominant systems involve a hierarchy among men, producing different and unequal masculinities, always defined in relation not only to one another but to women” (2001: 16).
26. The fact I am a woman may certainly contribute to men’s silence about rape; however, I have worked with several male research assistants and they did not find men forthcoming on this topic. This may be a more pervasive silence. For instance, in Jean Hatzfeld’s interviews with genocidaires in Rwanda, the men speak in a matter of fact way about killing and their participation in the genocide. However, as I read *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, I noticed none of the men included himself when describing the massive raping of Tutsi women and girls (Hatzfeld 2005). Kelly offers one way of understanding this: “Any ‘peace’ involves a reworking of power relations, not just between nations or parts of nations but between men and women. Attempts are made to conscript women into a ‘rebuilding the nation’ agenda in which their needs are subordinated to those of repairing the damage to men and ‘the society.’ One central, but universally neglected, element of this is that the violations women experienced during the conflict are silenced, since the male combatants need to be constructed as heroes

- rather than rapists” (2000:62). This comment is suggestive, but it also requires attentiveness to the nature of the armed conflict and the construction of winners and losers, heroes and victims.
27. The silence of the perpetrators is a theme worthy of further research. I was struck by Antje Krog’s comment that, to her knowledge, no rapist applied for amnesty from the South African TRC. See Krog (2001). As I completed revisions on this article, I also came across a fascinating piece by Roland Littlewood. In laying out a research agenda on military rape, he insists on the importance of understanding the motivations and experiences of the men, while acknowledging how difficult it will be to answer these questions given the “. . . near impossibility of research on humans. . . .and because of the post-conflict disgust, on the part of the principal and his surviving victim which prevents any sort of detailed contextual study (1997:13).
 28. For a thought-provoking analysis of theories of language, referentiality, translation, and radical incommensurability, see Povinelli (2001).
 29. Das and Kleinman (2001: 5).
 30. For a similar process in South Africa, see Ross (2002).
 31. Jacobs, Jacobson, and Marchbank (2000: 82). I focus on women in this conclusion but hope I have demonstrated the importance of “gender-sensitive” strategies that take all genders into consideration.
 32. Krog (2001).
 33. The Peruvian TRC designed the Program of Integral Reparations (PIR), one of the most comprehensive truth-commission reparations programs to date. One component of the PIR includes symbolic reparations, which would include public gestures, memorials, and media campaigns. See Guillerot (2006) and Laplante and Theidon (2007) for more information on the Peruvian PIR.

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