

## Complementary Discourses of Truth and Memory: The Peruvian Truth Commission and the *Canción Social Ayacuchana*

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On December 21, 1982, in the city of Ayacucho, Peru, two Shining Path guerrillas entered the regional office of the National Institute of Culture (INC) and shot and killed its director, Walter Wong. As was typical of many Shining Path assassinations, no *communiqué* or other public statement was issued by the guerrillas to justify the killing, leaving the public (and later, historians) to ponder the exact reasons behind his murder. Beyond a bureaucratic association with the state, and perhaps more obliquely, his promotion of “folklore” that stood in opposition to the Maoist Party’s Cultural Revolution-inspired dictums on such matters, Wong did not appear to have committed any specific infractions against the Shining Path.<sup>1</sup> Rather, his was simply the latest in a string of “selective assassinations”—the third in the city of Ayacucho that week alone—meant to “decapitate” the government at the local level and leave a power vacuum that would be filled by the guerrillas.

For the administration of President Fernando Belaúnde, the assassination of Wong marked a significant turning point in the government’s response to the insurgency. After two and a half years of increasingly brazen and troublingly effective attacks on local authorities and infrastructure, the killing of this minor official of cultural affairs was the final straw, prompting the reluctant Belaúnde to at last place the Ayacucho region under military control.<sup>2</sup> Within weeks, deaths, disappearances and other human rights violations skyrocketed, as both the military and the guerrillas ratcheted up their campaigns of violence and terror. The death toll increased tenfold in the following year, and Ayacucho was soon immersed in a bloody and protracted conflict that would persist for more than a decade, claiming nearly 70,000 lives and uprooting much of the local population.<sup>3</sup>

In the midst of the explosion of violence in 1983, one of Wong’s colleagues, a fellow cultural activist, veteran folk musician, and later director of that same regional office of the INC, Carlos Falconí, penned a song simply titled “Ofrenda” (“The Offering”) that also marked an important milestone in the war. Written in Quechua and composed in the regional, guitar-based style of the mestizo *wayno*,<sup>4</sup> the song quickly gained a wide audience through local performances by Falconí, as well as recordings in the following year by two prominent artists within the national folk music circuit, Nelly Munguía and

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<sup>1</sup> A matter that I have discussed at more length elsewhere (Ritter 2002: 25-28).

<sup>2</sup> Gustavo Gorriti narrates a more complete version of these events in his excellent history of the early years of the internal war, *The Shining Path* (Gorriti 1999: 260).

<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive study of the war, appropriately enough, is found in the final report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR 2003), which concluded that nearly 70,000 people were killed by political violence within the country between 1980-2000.

<sup>4</sup> The *wayno* is the most widespread genre of music and dance in Peruvian Andes. Though marked by significant regional variations in instrumentation and stylistic features, all waynos are based on a characteristic duple meter rhythm (an eight note followed by two sixteenth notes), paired musical phrases (usually AABB), and strophic form.

Manuelcha Prado. In contrast to the typically romantic, forlorn, or nostalgic lyrics to mestizo waynos from the region, the opening lyrics to “Ofrenda” painted a bleak scene of death, devastation, and wanton abuse:

<i>Huamanga plazapi</i>	In the plaza of Huamanga <sup>5</sup>
<i>bumbacha tuqyachkan</i>	bombs are exploding
<i>Huamanga kallipi</i>	In the streets of Huamanga
<i>balalla parachkan</i>	it is raining bullets
<i>Karsil wasichapi</i>	In the little jail
<i>inusinti llakichkan</i>	the innocent are weeping
<i>Huamangallay barriu</i>	the barrios of Huamanga
<i>yawarta waqachkan</i>	are weeping blood
<i>Huamanga llaqtaypi</i>	In my town of Huamanga
<i>sinchi sinchi llaki</i>	there is tremendous suffering
<i>Huamanga llaqtapi</i>	In the town of Huamanga
<i>hatun hatun llaki</i>	there is a great sadness
<i>Muru pacha runa</i>	The soldiers
<i>wirayakullachkan</i>	are getting fat
<i>Kantinakunapi</i>	In the cantinas
<i>warmita rantichkan</i>	they are buying women

“Ofrenda” was the first in a body of new songs in urban and rural folkloric styles, collectively referred to today as *canciones testimoniales* (“testimonial songs”) or as the *canción social ayacuchana* (“Ayacuchan social song”), that were written explicitly in response to the events of Peru’s “dirty war.” By the end of the 1980s, this testimonial repertoire comprised literally hundreds of such songs, all bearing witness to the traumatic experiences of the war and creating, through live performances and recordings, a needed and often singular social space for political protest, social commentary, and collective remembrance of those lost in the violence. It was, and remains to this day, one of the most dramatic and powerful artistic movements in modern Peruvian history.

The *canción social* repertoire is not alone today, however, on the public stage of representing the violent past in Peru. Exactly twenty years after “Ofrenda” was written, and more than a decade after the capture of Shining Path leader Abimael Guzman that signaled the beginning of the end of the war, on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003, Carlos Falconí performed his song again, this time on a large stage set up in the very plaza referred to in its first line.<sup>6</sup> The poetic economy of the lyrics, evoking a now-past world of violent experience, resistance, and the hope of vindication, as well as the reconfigured space of

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<sup>5</sup> “Huamanga” was the colonial name for the city of Ayacucho, and it remains the name of the province that the city lies in today. It is often used in everyday parlance to refer to the city, and differentiate it from the department (state) also known as Ayacucho.

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank Kairos Marquardt, Cynthia Milton, Ponciano del Pino, Carlos Falconí, Nelly Munguía, and Manuelcha Prado for sharing their eyewitness accounts of the concert discussed in the introduction, and other events associated with the work of the Truth Commission. For a much more detailed account and analysis of the concert and other events in Ayacucho that day, see Milton 2007.

the performance, from site of trauma to site of memory, were made all the more poignant by the occasion that prompted the concert. Earlier that day, the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR, in its Spanish acronym) had presented its final report in the municipal hall just off the plaza, concluding more than a year and a half of work investigating and analyzing the causes and events of the violence of the 1980s and 90s.

Though Falconí and other musicians that night viewed their performances, billed as the last in a series of “Concerts for Memory,” as a fitting conclusion to the Commission’s work, public reactions to the Commission itself were decidedly mixed, and overshadowed the sense of bittersweet celebration that might otherwise have been present that evening. Protesters marched against the Commission for much of the afternoon, contesting its conclusions and demanding attention to other concerns, while a media smear campaign, orchestrated primarily by political parties that were implicated in the violence and thus sought to suppress its findings, had already robbed the CVR of a portion of its public support and legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Despite the controversy, for members of the Commission and hundreds of fans that evening, the concert marked a moment of closure, the end of one chapter in the ongoing struggle to come to terms with the violent past.

In this paper, I offer some preliminary comparative thoughts on the narratives and discourses of remembrance presented within these two sites of memory—the work of the Truth Commission, and the world of the canción social ayacuchana—that were so closely juxtaposed on that day. I am interested particularly in the rhetoric of what might be called “public speakability” that obtains to each, by which I mean the role that the very *possibility* of making public political statements about the violence played in how each was rationalized, and how “speaking the unspeakable” thus came to form a sort of mantra and mandate in the discourse surrounding each. The very similarity of those discourses raises interesting questions about the nature and value of their interventions in the public sphere. If the Truth Commission justified its mission in large part on the need to “speak” what had previously been “silenced,” it did so in seeming contradiction of nearly twenty years’ worth of songwriting, musical performances, and recordings that had regularly raised a public voice of protest and commemoration. Given that Commission members were certainly aware of—and several, in fact, known fans of—testimonial music about the war, how then are we to account for this apparent disparity in the relative power of music vs. more “official” public discourses to bear witness to the violence of the past? What truths were each telling, and to whom?

To be clear, my intent here is neither to laud nor criticize the work of the Commission, which carried out, in my opinion, a sincere and moderately successful effort to clarify the events of the past and move the country towards a more just future. Nor do I wish to promote testimonial songs as a sort of utopian alternative to the complex legal, juridical, investigative, and commemorative work done by the Commission. Testimonial songs cannot bear the full weight and responsibility of national memory, though I would argue that it is clearly impoverished without them. Rather, I see both, in their similarities and distinctions, as unequal partners and complementary resources in a common and ongoing

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the reception of the CVR nationally, see Degregori 2003b: 84-85. Theidon (2004) and Coxshall (2005) provide excellent discussions of how the CVR was perceived in rural areas of Ayacucho.

struggle to carve out a sustainable social space for collective remembrance of the years of violence in Peru.

### **The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the model of the “truth commission” emerged in a number of places in the world as a new outlet for addressing the difficulties of transition from a period of crisis, usually involving extreme and sustained political violence, to a new, more democratic, integrated and peaceful future.<sup>8</sup> Though each of the more than twenty truth commissions formed thus far has come about within a very particular set of national, political, and social circumstances that has determined its mandate and limitations, the model for all “truth commissions” is based on two key, often contradictory assumptions: first, that in the wake of crisis, a more thorough and “truthful” account of the past is needed to counter previous acts of distortion, silencing and omission; and second, that this truthful knowledge can serve as the foundation for national reconciliation and the construction of that new, collectively-imagined future (LeFranc 2003; Borer 2006; Payne 2008). Every commission has had to struggle with finding its own, locally-appropriate balance between these goals, weighing the need for justice and redress with the dream of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Peru’s Truth Commission did not come about as the organic result of a sustained popular outcry and a public demand for a new accountability to the past, but rather as the result of sudden and largely unforeseen political conjuncture, a fact which may help to explain some of the ambivalence many Peruvians felt and continue to feel about it. Throughout the 1990s, the country had lived under the quasi-dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori, a one-time Japanese-Peruvian agronomist turned classic Latin American *caudillo* (“strongman”). After being elected as a political outsider in 1990, Fujimori staged an *autogolpe* (“self-coup”) in April of 1992, disbanding Congress and the judiciary, and re-writing the constitution to give the executive branch greater power and allow himself the opportunity to run for office again. These steps were necessary, he argued, in order to more effectively “combat terrorism” in the country, a claim that was bolstered in the public eye by the capture of Guzman in September 1992.<sup>9</sup>

As Peruvian anthropologist and Truth Commission member Carlos Iván Degregori has argued, the capture of Guzman permitted the regime to “impose a certain narrative about the years of violence,” promoting a “savior memory” in which Fujimori and his administration appear as the heroes, solely responsible for finally putting an end to the

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<sup>8</sup> The study of truth commissions has become an interdisciplinary subfield of its own in the last decade, approached from perspectives across the social sciences. For more on the specific literature that has influenced this essay regarding the expanding “globalization of the right to truth,” as Eduardo González has called it (2003), see Hayner 2002, LeFranc 2003, and Wilson 2001, as well as the special issue of *Radical History Review* dedicated to the topic (Grandin and Klublock, eds., 2007).

<sup>9</sup> How much credit Fujimori can legitimately claim for the capture of Guzman is a matter of debate; the latter’s arrest was largely the result of long-term investigative police work by DINCOTE, the counter-terrorism police intelligence force, which had little to do with Fujimori’s *mano duro* (“hard hand”) policies that came to the fore with the *autogolpe*.

violence that had wracked the country for more than a decade (Degregori 2003b: 75-77).<sup>10</sup> The “savior memory” and the absolutist logic that accompanied it—a Peruvian equivalent to “you’re either with us or against us”—also served to discourage the expression of other versions of the past and/or dissent against the Fujimori administration in the public sphere.<sup>11</sup>

This climate of repression persisted until the fall of 2000, when the corruption of the regime was definitively exposed in a series of videotapes showing Fujimori’s chief of intelligence, Vladimiro Montesinos, paying off members of the main opposition parties. In December of that year, Fujimori fled into exile in Japan, where he remained until November 2005, and an interim government headed by centrist politician Valentín Paniagua was appointed by the Peruvian Congress to oversee the transition back to democracy. It was during Paniagua’s brief term in office in early 2001 that the first mention of a truth commission surfaced, and by the end of that year, under newly-elected president Alejandro Toledo, the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission had become a reality. Beyond investigating the crimes of the Fujimori era, the Commission’s mandate was also expanded to encompass the entire history of the war. Specifically, the CVR was asked to “clarify the processes, acts and responsibilities of terrorist violence and the violation of human rights occurring between May 1980 and November 2000, investigating terrorist organizations as well as agents of the state, and propose initiatives destined to affirm peace and agreement among Peruvians” (Decreto Supremo n. 065-2001-PCM, Artículo 1, quoted in Degregori 2003: 75).<sup>12</sup>

Of the many tasks initially undertaken by the CVR, including everything from forensic identification and exhumation of mass graves to determining feasible and just guidelines for reparations to be paid to victims and their families, two activities stand out for their contribution to the work of collective and private remembrance.<sup>13</sup> First was the collection and recording of nearly 17,000 individual *testimonios* (“testimonies”) about the years of violence, the majority of them personal stories of loss and abuse related by indigenous *campesinos*, or peasants. The Commission itself reiterated the central role of these testimonios in its final report:

The collection of testimonios has been perhaps the most important work undertaken by the Truth Commission, not only for the volume of personal

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<sup>10</sup> The original Spanish: “Pero se había impuesto, más bien, una cierta narrativa sobre los años de violencia política, [u]na ‘memoria salvadora’ en la que los protagonistas centrales de la gesta pacificadora eran Alberto Fujimori y Vladimiro Montesinos” (Degregori 2003b: 75-77).

<sup>11</sup> Ann Kaneko’s documentary, *Against the Grain: An Artist’s Survival Guide to Perú*, screened as a work-in-progress at this conference, powerfully illustrates the extent of the Fujimori regime’s efforts to control public discourse about politics and political violence within the country. Jo Marie Burt’s recent article “Quien Habla es Terrorista” (2006) also offers a compelling and somewhat chilling analysis of the instrumental use of fear by the Fujimori regime.

<sup>12</sup> The original Spanish: “esclarecer el proceso, los hechos y responsabilidades de la violencia terrorista y de la violación de los derechos humanos producidos desde mayo de 1980 hasta noviembre de 2000, imputables tanto a las organizaciones terroristas como a los agentes del Estado, así como proponer iniciativas destinadas a afirmar la paz y la concordia entre los peruanos.”

<sup>13</sup> For a complete list of projects and investigative tasks undertaken by the CVR, see <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/lacomision/balance/index.php>.

histories that we have gathered, but also because in this activity we have accomplished a deliberate goal of the Commission, arising from the moral aspect of our mandate: to recover, first and foremost, the voice of the victims.<sup>14</sup>

In the work of the Commission, testimonios functioned essentially as legal depositions, turning orally-transmitted memories into the transcribed documents of history—in Diana Taylor’s terms, turning the “repertoire” of memory, the living active present of the past, into the “archive” of the state (Taylor 2003). Edited, analyzed, and re-presented, these testimonios would in turn form the foundation of the Commission’s final report, a mediating process for the “voice of the victims” not unlike that associated with the eponymous Latin American literary genre (see Gugelberger, ed. 1996; Beverly 2004).

Second was the staging of public, nationally-televised hearings in several of the cities most affected by the violence, a tactic borrowed from the earlier South African Truth Commission. As Human Rights Watch noted:

These hearings...the first public hearings ever held by a truth commission in the Americas . . . [were] not meant to serve an investigative or judicial purpose. Rather, they serve, in the commission’s words, “as an act of dignifying and healing for the victims and those who can identify with the cases brought up” (HRW 2002: 3).

Put in different terms, the purpose and power of the hearings lay in their very performativity. Distinct from the legalistic and private testimonio recordings, they offered a chance for the *public* rehearsal of traumatic memories in a way that would, ideally, offer both catharsis for the victims doing the telling as well as elicit sympathy from others in the country, who would hear in the most dramatic fashion possible about the unknown horrors and tragedies of the war.<sup>15</sup>

The power of such testimonial performances was undeniable. As Albie Sachs has noted about the South African hearings upon which the Peruvian versions were modeled:

The strength of . . . [the] Truth Commission lay not so much in its microscopic truths, in its source of detail. It lay in that experiential dimension: the tears of those who suffered; the stiff body language of former police, their little mustaches trying to find a way of saying sorry. . . . It was a whole different kind of setting, where the human being with human emotions was at the core of everything. We could identify with somebody or another in the interaction. And that’s what drew the nation in. And that’s what gave it its power, its strength, and

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<sup>14</sup> The original Spanish: “El recojo de testimonios ha sido quizá la tarea más importante desarrollada por la comisión de la verdad, no sólo por el volumen de historias personales que hemos acopiado, sino también porque en esta actividad se expresa una opción deliberada de la comisión, que se desprende de la interpretación moral de nuestro mandato: recoger la voz de las víctimas en primer lugar.” This portion of the Final Report is published online at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/lacomision/balance/index.php>.

<sup>15</sup> See also Goodman 2007 for more on the performative aspects of truth commissions, and the powerful role they play in public perceptions of such commissions’ work.

its lasting impact. . . . It's not enough simply to have a commission of experts [looking] into what happened in the past. You need the tears, the anger, the emotion, the songs, the feeling... (Sachs 2002).

In Peru, building a shared sense of loss and empathy across regional, class, and ethnic lines was crucial to forwarding the ultimate goal of national reconciliation. The fact that many of those who spoke at the hearings did so in Quechua, which had to be translated into Spanish for much of the rest of the country watching on television, underscored how distant that goal of “national” unity remained. Throughout the process, then, both the hearings and the collection of recorded testimonios constituted a powerful interjection of forgotten, erased, and suppressed memories into the national consciousness, a victory in itself over the enforced silences of the Fujimori era.

This, at least, was the dominant narrative that framed the work of the Truth Commission: a discourse of rupture and “breaking-through” the silences of the past, laying bare the atrocities committed by the military forces and guerrillas alike. This narrative relies, however, on a very particular notion of the public sphere, one limited to official statements, government decrees, and only the most prominent (and conservative) news media. Without denying the limited nature of discourse previously available through those powerful channels, or in anyway denigrating the very real power of the moments of private and public testimony that were sponsored and enabled by the CVR, I do however want to call into question this absolute rhetoric of “rupturing silence” that permeated and was used to justify its work. Too great an emphasis on such a rupture ignores or, at best, marginalizes the many alternate forms of narrative and testimony that were used throughout the violence to mediate the experience of trauma and commemoration for indigenous peoples, Ayacuchanos, and Peruvians more generally, and it risks overemphasizing the impact of the CVR along these same lines.<sup>16</sup> Though music was not the only such “alternate form” of testimony and remembrance, the kind of public intervention that it made via live performance and mass-mediated dissemination warrants special consideration, particularly in light of the preceding arguments about the otherwise limited nature of such public discourse.

### ***The Canción Social Ayacuchana***

The argument that narratives about past violence take many forms beyond official discourses is hardly a new one (e.g., Winter and Sivan 1999; Bilbija et al. 2005). Decades of research on “resistance” in the social sciences and cultural studies have documented the myriad ways in which people seek to bear witness to their suffering in ways that contest official or otherwise dominant narratives. Music occupies a uniquely powerful niche within the realm of possible acts of resistance, incorporating the creativity and personal recollections or experiences of individual composers, the expressive power and performance frame chosen by performers and producers, the potential for widespread dissemination of critical ideas via recordings and the mass media, and the ever-present ability of audiences (live or mediated) to interpret and re-frame what they are listening to.

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<sup>16</sup> See in particular Coxshall 2005 on this issue.

Music's status as event-in-time is also potentially one of its greatest strengths in advocating dissent or a particular narrative about the past, allowing for the real-time creation of a palpable community of listeners to engage with a given composition's message each time it is performed, broadcast, or played back. Political opinion and understanding of that message need not be uniform in such listening communities, but co-presence with other audience members, together with the pleasurable or otherwise emotional experience of the music itself, certainly combine for powerful effect in shaping how such messages are heard and internalized.

Bearing this in mind and returning our attention to the *canción social ayacuchana*, I want to argue here for a much less "silent" history of remembrance and resistance in Peru than that surrounding the CVR, one that recognizes the profound contributions made within an alternate discursive realm of musical composition, performance and listening. Following upon the heels of Carlos Falconí's song "Ofrenda," the latter half of the 1980s witnessed a tremendous outpouring of Ayacuchan testimonial music. During a period when so-called "Andean folklore" was in decline in the rest of Peru—the historic coliseums of Lima's Andean migrant community shuttered, and the wayno itself challenged by the popularity of *chicha* and other forms of contemporary popular music (see Turino 1988)—waynos re-emerged among Ayacuchanos as a popular genre among audiences of all ages. Old songs about pain, loss, and migration were given new meaning, and literally hundreds of new songs about the war, some full of oblique metaphor and others as direct as a gunshot, were written and many recorded. As Falconí remembers:

The wayno, the "testimonial song," emerged from the grassroots. Almost everyone from Ayacucho, almost everyone from the highlands, saw someone die, someone from their family, especially in the center-south of the country. As a result, there was this effervescence, on one side out of fear, and on the other out of indignation for everything that one had seen. That is why these songs began to spread. The work of the composers was to put a song on the lips of all of the people—for catharsis, on the one hand, or as a massive social protest, on the other.<sup>17</sup>

When I asked Falconí why he and so many others wrote and performed these songs, especially given that doing so put a number of them in mortal danger on more than one occasion, his response was simple. "It was the only space we had to talk about the terrible things happening in our lives"—a statement that acknowledges both the climate of silencing and fear that permeated the public sphere in Peru, and the singular importance of music in repeatedly rupturing that silence.

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<sup>17</sup> The original Spanish, from an interview with Falconí on April 16-17, 2000: "El wayno, la *canción testimonial* . . . surge de las bases. Casi todos los ayacuchanos, casi todos los serranos han visto morir a alguien, de su familia, especialmente en el centro sur del país de tal suerte que hay una efervescencia, por un lado miedo y por otra indignación por todo lo que sus ojos veían. Y es por eso que se comienzan a difundir las canciones, y el labor de los compositores es poner una *canción* en los labios de toda la gente, para que sirviera como catarsis por un lado, o como una gran protesta social masiva."

Though recourse to music as vehicle for resistance as well as solace in times of violence is a widespread phenomenon, it is not universal; protest song movements do not simply spring forth from difficult circumstances or emerge “naturally” in times of oppression. Beyond the desire for a social space in which “to talk about the terrible things [that were] happening,” other conjunctural factors played a catalytic role in spurring the Ayacuchan testimonial song phenomenon and deserve at least cursory mention here. First was the deep history of social commentary in Andean musical and other performative traditions that the *canción social* built upon. Carnavalesque inversions of the social order during civic-religious festivals, masked troupes and other popular dance-dramas critically depicting historical events or portraying current class and ethnic conflicts, and song traditions full of barbed commentary on current events constitute well-established aspects of Andean popular culture (Montoya 1987; Romero 1993; Cánepa 2001).

The wayno song genre in particular bore a special reputation for critical social commentary by the time of the violence in the 1980s, due to the popularity of so-called “protest” waynos in the 1970s such as Ranulfo Fuentes’ “El Hombre,” Ricardo Dolorier’s “Flor de Retama” (discussed later), and various works by the Ancashino wayno star “Jilguero de Huasacarán” (Ernesto Sánchez Fajardo). Consequently, though the *canción social ayacuchana* movement in the 1980s and 90s marked a qualitative and quantitative shift in the critical commentary offered by Ayacuchan waynos, it did so well within an established tradition that was generally acknowledged and built upon by its practitioners. That tradition was also easily recognized by listeners due to the relatively conservative musical language chosen by *canción testimonial* composers and performers in the 1980s, who, with very few exceptions, maintained the characteristic musical features of the mestizo wayno from Ayacucho.<sup>18</sup>

A second key development in the *canción social* movement’s success was the development of new performance spaces and opportunities for the messages of its songs to be heard. Principal among these, particularly for the role it played in encouraging composers to write new material, was the song contest or *concurso*. Though such contests were not a recent invention, dating back at least to the 1920s and the first folklore festivals held in Amancaes that were sponsored by the Leguía administration (Turino 1991: 270-71; Mendoza 2008: 44-46), the prominence and the prestige such contests offered among Ayacuchanos in the 1980s marked a qualitatively new moment in their history, and thus offered a significant platform from which to engage in social critique and public remembrance of the violence.

Perhaps the most interesting and surprising aspect of these politicized spaces for testimonial performance was the variety of entities who sponsored them, ranging from migrant associations in Lima’s shantytowns to the Peruvian state itself. Of the dozens of such contests that were held at the local, regional and national level in those years, one in

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<sup>18</sup> While virtually all testimonial music in the 1980s remained faithful to traditional wayno instrumentation (guitar duos, in the case of the Ayacuchan mestizo wayno, or small ensembles including harp, violin, guitar, mandolin, or accordion), a more “pop” oriented sound for Ayacuchan music generally emerged in the 1990s, in part due to the popularity of the testimonial repertoire. For a full discussion of *musica ayacuchana* in the 1990s, see Tucker 2005.

particular was frequently cited to me by Ayacuchanos as an important moment in the history of testimonial music. Responding in part to criticism of a “national” music festival sponsored by the Alan Garcia regime in 1986 that featured primarily urban *criollo* (white, coastal, upper-class) and foreign Latin American musics,<sup>19</sup> in 1987 Garcia opted to host a song contest for traditional music (*música vernacular*) from Peru. Officially entitled the “Festival de Autores y Compositores del Perú” (Festival of Peruvian Authors and Composers), the contest was known more popularly as the *Urpicha de Oro*, or “Golden Dove,” the use of a Quechua title indicative of the political aspirations of the festival. According to one of the judges of the contest, more than a thousand entries were received from Ayacucho in the festival’s first two years (1987-88), vastly outnumbering submissions from other areas, and the majority of these songs addressed themes related to the war.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Ayacuchan composers nearly swept the awards in the categories for which they were eligible, and their songs are prominently featured in the LPs released by the government-run IEMPSA label documenting the festival. Given the overwhelming criticism of the government and military contained in these songs, not surprisingly, the Garcia administration cancelled the contest after just two years.

A third factor in the spread and importance of this music in the late 1980s was the popularization of cheap cassette technology in Peru, and the subsequent diversification of the national recording industry. While the few major labels left in Peru by this time largely refused to record political or controversial material,<sup>21</sup> a fact reiterated to me by many musicians, a host of micro-labels had emerged by late in the decade to fill the gap. Recording on relatively primitive, portable equipment, producing only cheap cassettes, and selling their wares through ambulant street vendors or in working class markets, many such micro-labels succeeded in turning a small profit in Peru’s substantial “gray market” while also avoiding problems with the authorities over the content of such cassettes. Coupled with rampant piracy, which continues to plague the Peruvian music industry today, canción testimonial recordings received a much wider circulation than would likely have been possible just a decade earlier.

This informal music industry and its promotion of the canción testimonial movement was sustained in part by its symbiotic relationship with live performance. In addition to sales by street vendors and in markets like Lima’s Mesa Redonda district, wayno singers and other musicians sold cassettes of and at their own performances. The most famous such recording is of a 1987 concert by wayno singer Martina Portocarrero in Lima’s Teatro Municipal. This concert, taking place at the height of the violence, in one of the country’s most storied venues, by arguably the most popular and politicized wayno singer of the time, marked a high point for the Ayacuchan testimonial song movement, and live recordings of the event have been in circulation ever since. The recent decision by Dolly

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<sup>19</sup> The polemics aroused by the 1986 festival are discussed in Turino 1993: 226-27.

<sup>20</sup> Chalena Vasquez, personal communication, April 2000. These rough numbers were reiterated to me by several of the singer/songwriters who participated in the contests. Unfortunately but perhaps not surprisingly, these song submissions were not archived by the government organizers of the contest.

<sup>21</sup> This point is powerfully illustrated in John Cohen’s documentary about wayno singers in Peru, *Dancing With the Incas* (1989), in which he interviews a number of prominent performers about the politics of recording testimonial or “protest” songs.



**Figure 1: CD cover of Dolly J.R. Producciones' 2005 re-release of Martina Portocarrero's live recording from a 1987 concert in Lima's Teatro Municipal**

J.R. Producciones—one of the most successful and important labels to emerge in the 1980s, in large part due to its promotion of the Ayacuchan cancion testimonial repertoire—to invest in re-mastering the original recording and re-release it on CD (see Figure 1) offers some indication not only of the concert's historic importance as an event *during* the war, but also of the continued popularity and broad demand for testimonial song recordings well *after* the period of violence, a point to which I will return in a moment.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The advent of compact disc and video compact disc (VCD) recordings of Ayacuchan music since the turn of the millennium have gradually supplanted the cassette as preferred mediums, but this move has also reinforced the continued circulation and popularity of the cancion social repertoire. Tellingly, Dolly (originally “Dolby J.R. Producciones”) issued the first CDs of Ayacuchan music in the year 2000, with a sampler of testimonial waynos as one of their first releases (*Ayacucho en el Corazón de Todos*, Dolby CD 006, 2000). Dolby/Dolly also played a crucial role in the development of a more pop-oriented sound for *musica ayacuchana* (“Ayacuchan music”) in the 1990s, beyond the testimonial repertoire, which contributed to its massive popularity throughout the country. For more on that sound and its social implications, see the essay by Joshua Tucker in this volume.

## Protest, Testimony, and Bearing Witness: The Cancion Social Message(s)

What, then, did these songs actually have to say? Within the ample public sphere created by song contests, recordings, and limited live performances, the emergent repertoire of canciones testimoniales in the late 1980s offered a number of perspectives on the violence itself. Most, such as Falconí's "Ofrenda," delivered a combination of lament and implicit outrage at the atrocities taking place, particularly those wrought by the army, though without offering detail on individual events. Indeed, drawing and building on the literary conventions of the wayno genre, poetic imagery and the frequent use of metaphor characterize the vast majority of songs, rather than blunt description or narrative. Martina Portocarrero's wayno "Mamacha de las Mercedes" ("Virgin of Mercy"), contained on the aforementioned recording, is typical in this regard:

<i>Penas que arrastran mi alma</i>	Grief that drags down my soul
<i>Me están matando</i>	They are killing me
<i>Mamacha de las Mercedes</i>	Virgin of Mercy
<i>¿Qué es lo que pasa aquí?</i>	What is happening here?
<i>Unos a otros se matan</i>	Killing one another
<i>Sin compasión</i>	without compassion
<i>Mamacha de las Mercedes</i>	Virgin of Mercy
<i>¿Qué es lo que pasa aquí?</i>	What is happening here?
<i>Unos son hierba del campo</i>	Some are country weeds <sup>23</sup>
<i>Otros quien diablos serán</i>	Others, what devils could they be?
<i>Mamacha de las Mercedes</i>	Virgin of Mercy
<i>¿Qué es lo que pasa aquí?</i>	What is happening here?

Other songs, like Carlos Falconí's "¡Viva la Patria!", were more explicit in their references to abuses perpetrated by the Peruvian military, but again eschewed narrative in favor of poetic rumination. Falconí, by his own admission, wrote the song in response to a well-known army massacre that took place in 1983 at a wedding party in the small town of Soccos, near the city of Ayacucho.<sup>24</sup> Soccos, however, is not mentioned in the lyrics; rather, two other Ayacuchan towns that were also the site of army incursions are mentioned in passing (Vinchos, Cangallo), while the *fuga* or "coda" presents a bitter, satirical indictment of army behavior more generally in Ayacucho.

<i>Takichum takisqay, wiqichum wiqillay</i>	Can my song continue to be sung
<i>Warmachakunapa ñawichallampi</i>	when the eyes of children
<i>Chiqnikuy huntaptin</i>	fill with hate?
<i>Takichum takisqay, wiqichum wiqillay</i>	Can my tears still be shed?

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<sup>23</sup> The reference here to a "country weed" (*hierba del campo*) is an early example of a now well-established tradition of intertextual references in testimonial songs. In this case, the reference is to "Hierba Silvestre" ("Wild Weed"), another testimonial song performed and arranged by Portocarrero, discussed later in this article.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Carlos Falconí, April 16-17, 2000. The incident in Soccos is also treated in quasi-fictionalized form in the movie *Boca del Lobo* ("Mouth of the Wolf").

<i>Vinchus viudalla asirillanmanchu</i>	Can the widow in Vinchos still laugh?
<i>Cangallu viuda kusirikonmanchu</i>	Is the widow in Cangallo still capable of happiness?
<i>Allqupa churinta unanchallanmanchu</i>	Could she treat that son of a bitch as her own?
<i>Pimanraq kutinqa sapan paloma</i>	Who will help the lonely dove,
<i>Quru sacha hina mana piniyuq</i>	with no one, like a dying tree?
<i>Sipillawaptimpas sayarimusaqmi</i>	I will rise up, even if they kill me
<i>Chakiytawiptimpas sayarimusaqmi</i>	I will stand up, even if they cut off my feet
<i>Makichallaykita haywaykullaway</i>	Lend me your hand in solidarity, we have to walk quickly
<i>Utqaymi purinay qamllama allinlla</i>	Until later, I hope you will be alright
<i>Huamanga del alma hatarillasunmi</i>	Ayacucho of my soul, we must rise up
<u>Fuga</u>	<u>Coda</u>
<i>Vacaytaqa nakankutaq</i>	They cut off my cow's head
<i>Radiuytaqa apankutaq</i>	They steal my radio
<i>"Concha tu madre" niwankutaq</i>	They say my mother's a whore
<i>"Viva la patria" niwankutaq</i>	And they still say "Long live the Fatherland!"

There is more here, however, than simple outrage. The lyrics in the third verse allude to the Andean myth of the *Inkarrí* or "Inca King," whose body it is believed was dismembered and buried centuries ago by the conquering Spanish; when his body regrows or is rejoined underground, according to the myth, he will rise again. Falconí's valorization of Andean cultural/spiritual beliefs here is deliberately linked to a call for solidarity, for people to band together and "rise up" in defense of their lives and their identities as indigenous people, as peasants, and as Ayacuchanos.<sup>25</sup> This tie between cultural identity and political resistance is a frequent trope in the testimonial song repertoire, one also reinforced by the deliberate use of the Quechua language.<sup>26</sup>

Resistance, nonetheless, had its limits. Protests against abuses committed by the Shining Path, for instance, were almost non-existent among urban canciones testimoniales in the 1980s and 90s. There are several reasons for this discrepancy. First, virtually everyone associated with the canción social movement retained a deep distrust of the Peruvian armed forces after the dictatorship of the 1970s, and the explosion of violence in 1983 (when the military entered the war) and subsequent persecution of a number of musicians and composers only confirmed that distrust. Second, though the Truth Commission would much later assign blame for more than half of the deaths and disappearances of the 1980s and 90s to the Shining Path, during much of the conflict itself, the full extent of Shining Path violence and who it was directed against remained unclear for most observers.<sup>27</sup> Last, though singers and songwriters who publicly identified with the

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication from Carlos Falconí, February 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Martina Portocarrero's decision to dress in the clothing of a rural, Ayacuchan peasant woman for her 1987 concert in Lima (previously discussed) offers another compelling example of the links testimonial singers often made between indigeneity and resistance.

<sup>27</sup> This characterization was certainly true in the mid 1980s, during the formative stage of the canción social phenomenon and at a time when reliable information about guerrilla activity in rural areas remained scarce, in part due to the Shining Path's own penchant for secrecy. By the end of the decade, however, the shift in

Shining Path were rare, for obvious reasons, many came from the same leftist university student social circles that the guerrillas did and held at least some degree of sympathy for their project, if not always their means. Indeed, a few explicitly Shining Path songs became well known in the 1980s thanks to performances by leftist performers. One, “Hierba Silvestre” (“Wild Weed”), a poem by the martyred Shining Path guerrilla Edith Lagos, set to music by Martina Portocarrero, became one of the most popular waynos of the 1980s, and is still widely available on recordings today.

In sum, popular recordings that received wide circulation, prizes awarded for testimonial songs in contests at the local, regional, and national level, and concerts in some of the major theaters and concert halls in Lima: all of these factors lend credence to the argument that the *canción social* phenomenon opened an important and widespread social space for protest and later commemoration of the years of violence. This fact is all the more remarkable given the inhibiting factors that *did* exist to curtail freedom of expression in this unconventional political arena. Many artists took substantial risks in composing and performing songs that could be interpreted as critical of the military or sympathetic to the Shining Path. For that reason, few of the nationally-prominent musicians or composers associated with the *canción social* phenomenon lived in Ayacucho, where police and military presence under the state of emergency made it simply too dangerous to perform such songs outside of the occasional, officially-sanctioned *concurso*. Carlos Falconí was one of the few such nationally-known artists to continue living there throughout the 80s and 90s, a fact for which he paid by having to go into hiding for more than a year while being targeted by a paramilitary death squad.<sup>28</sup>

Even among those living and working in Lima, persecution by state authorities was common. Numerous musicians recalled in interviews with me concerts that were cancelled by the army, or occasions when they were taken into custody and questioned after publicly performing testimonial songs. Several of the most critical and prominent *canción social* performers, including Martina Portocarrero and guitarist Julio Humala, spent time in exile to avoid further police persecution; while Julio’s brother and musical partner Walter Humala was imprisoned three times during the war, the last time in the mid-1990s explicitly for *apología de terrorismo* (being an “apologist” for “terrorism”), with the lyrics to his songs used as legal evidence against him.<sup>29</sup>

### **After the Violence: The Cancion Social Legacy**

The flourishing of testimonial song composition in the late 1980s slowed in the early 90s and, interestingly, ceased almost entirely by the middle of the decade, suggesting that the act of writing such songs was closely related to the immediacy of the experience of violence. Performing and listening to such songs did not, however, end with the conflict. Unlike most topical songs in the Andes, such as those composed for carnival, many of the testimonial songs written in the 1980s persisted in the performance repertoire of

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guerrilla strategy from rural actions to terrorist acts in urban areas left few delusions among Peruvian observers regarding the Shining Path’s capacity for bloodshed.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Carlos Falconí, April 16, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Walter Humala, May 26, 2008.

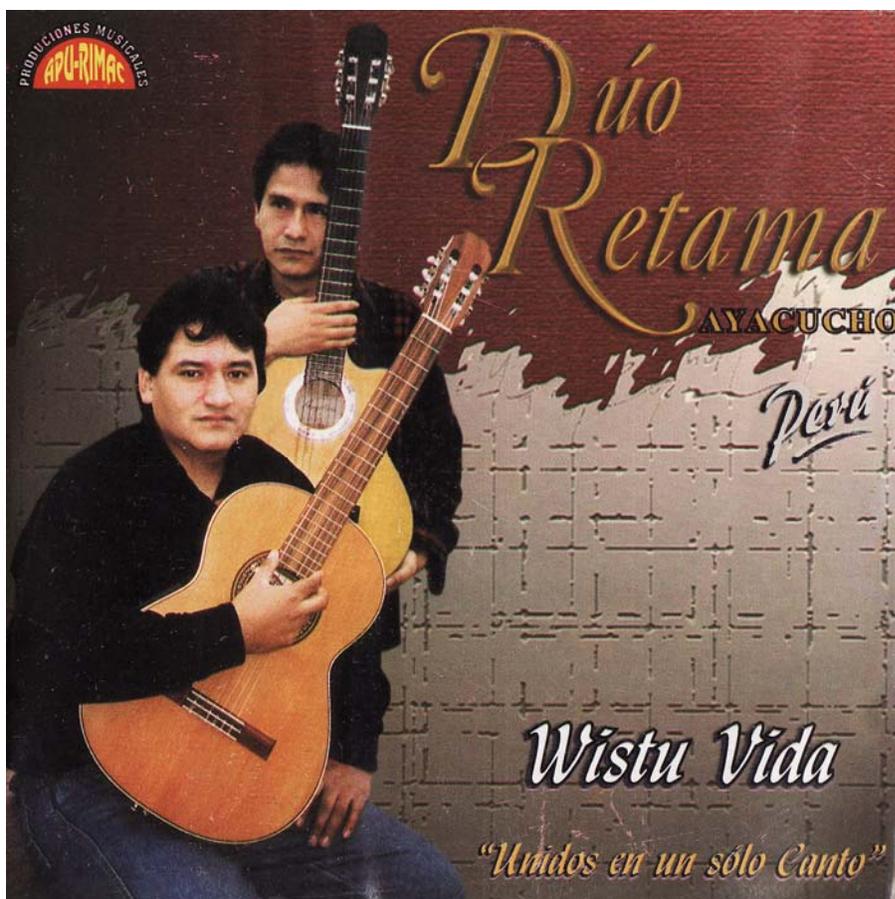
Ayacuchan singers and artists well into the 1990s, and several remain popular today, re-signified now as acts of memory, audible cues for the visceral recollection of past experiences.

By way of illustration, one of the most compelling and complex examples of this process of re-signification is contained on a 2001 recording of the song “Flor de Retama.” Written by Ricardo Dolorier, a poet, professor, and teacher’s union activist, “Flor de Retama” was composed in the early 1970s as a response to a 1969 massacre of students and peasants in Huanta, Ayacucho, more than a decade before the Shining Path war began:

<i>Vengan, todos, a ver</i>	Come, everyone, to see
<i>Ay, vamos a ver</i>	Ay, we are going to see
<i>En la plazuela de Huanta</i>	In the plaza of Huanta
<i>Amarillito flor de retama</i>	The little yellow <i>retama</i> flower
<i>Amarillito, amarillando, flor de retama</i>	Bright little yellow <i>retama</i> flower
<i>Por cinco esquinas están</i>	They are at Five Corners <sup>30</sup>
<i>Los sinchis entrando están</i>	The National Guard soldiers are entering
<i>Van a matar estudiantes (campesinos)</i>	They are going to kill students (peasants)
<i>Huantinos de corazón</i>	Huantinos at heart
<i>Amarillito, amarillando, flor de retama</i>	Bright little yellow <i>retama</i> flower
<i>Donde la sangre del pueblo</i>	Oh, where the blood of the people
<i>Ay, se derrama</i>	spilled over
<i>Ahí mismito florece</i>	Right there flowers
<i>Amarillito flor de retama</i>	The little yellow <i>retama</i> flower
<i>Amarillito, amarillando, flor de retama</i>	Bright little yellow <i>retama</i> flower
<i>La sangre del pueblo tiene rico perfume</i>	The blood of the people has a rich
	perfume
<i>Huele a jazmines, violetas</i>	It smells of jasmine, of violets,
<i>Geranios y margaritas</i>	Geraniums and daisies
<i>A pólvora y dinamita, ¡carajo!</i>	Of gunpowder and dynamite, damn it!
<i>A pólvora y dinamita</i>	Of gunpowder and dynamite

The song has become a veritable palimpsest of Ayacuchan memories of violence today, recalling several generations of meanings and associations. What began as a protest song focused on the specific 1969 event treated in its lyrics reemerged as a popular song of resistance to the military regime among radicalized workers, students and migrants living in Lima in the late 1970s. It then became an unofficial anthem of the Shining Path guerrilla movement itself in the 1980s, and its public performance during the years of violence was consequently a highly charged political act. By the mid-1990s, it had shed some of the specific associations with the guerrillas and had instead become a popular expression of Ayacuchan identity in general, yoking notions of “Ayacuchan-ness” to a

<sup>30</sup> “Five Corners” is, as it sounds, a five-cornered intersection in the town of Huanta.



**Figure 2. CD cover of debut album *Wistu Vida* by Dúo Retama (Lima: Producciones Musicales Apu-Rimac, 2001)**

30-year history of violence and resistance in the region. It has been recorded dozens of times, by a wide variety of wayno recording artists, and remains a staple in the repertoire of most mestizo musicians from the region.<sup>31</sup>

In this 2001 recording, the lead track on the debut album of the Duo Retama (named for the song), musicians Kramer Rojas and Erick Betalluz recontextualize the tune with references linked particularly to the Shining Path era, including a long voice-over “intro” and “outro” that paraphrase and reference the lyrics to Carlos Falconí’s “Viva la Patria”:

**Sung/crying (from “Flor de Retama”)**

*Amarillito flor de retama*

*Amarillito, amarillando, flor de retama*

The little yellow *retama* flower

Bright little yellow *retama* flower

<sup>31</sup> In perhaps the most interesting re-signification of the song, a number of wayno singers mentioned to me occasions beginning in the 1990s in which they were asked by military personnel to perform “Flor de Retama,” for whom it had become a sonic reminder of their undoubtedly intense years serving in the “emergency zone” of Ayacucho.

**Spoken in Quechua (paraphrase/reference to “Viva la Patria”):**

<i>Qomer pacha runakuna</i>	Green earth people [soldiers]
<i>Llaqtanchikman yaykuramunku</i>	You come into our towns
<i>“Cholo concha tu madre” niwaspanku</i>	“Cholo, concha tu madre” you say to us
<i>Manchakullataña cheqarachispa</i>	Spreading fear
<i>Llaqtamasinchikta chinkarachinku</i>	You “disappear” our neighbors
<i>Imachay kunatapas suwaspa tukuramunku</i>	You steal everything and anything
<b>Song (“Flor de Retama”)</b>	
Vengan todos a ver...	Come everyone to see...

**Spoken “outro” (paraphrase/reference to “Viva la Patria”):**

<i>Viva la patria qaparkachaspa</i>	You shout “Long live the fatherland!”
<i>Wañuyllataña aparamunku</i>	But you come bringing death
<i>Chaynam usiasun,</i>	Leaving us to rot
<i>chulla uchkupi pampaykusqa</i>	Buried in a hole in the earth
<i>wawanchanchikpas wakchalla purikamunqa</i>	While our children walk along in poverty

The intertextual references here, between not only different experiences of violence but also different well-known songs about those experiences, point to a certain self-referentiality within the testimonial song tradition today, allowing meanings to stack upon meanings, remembrances upon remembrances, to accrue and sediment to particular texts and songs such as “Flor de Retama.” Indeed, the combination of “Flor de Retama” with a textual paraphrase of Falconí’s “Viva la Patria,” performed in the more pop-oriented style of Ayacuchan wayno at the turn of the millennium, draws together three different eras spread over thirty years into a single narrative, one that could be said to define Ayacucho today as a place of past violence and current re-imaginings of self and the future.

## Conclusion

What, then, do these examples tell us about the kind of remembrance offered by the canción social ayacuchana? Or to rephrase the question as stated in the introduction, what truths do they tell, and to whom? First, it seems clear to me that the canción testimonial has formed its own discursive realm of commemoration and protest, in many ways quite separate from official or otherwise public forms of remembrance and commentary. Though the “Concerts for Memory” held during the Truth Commission process brought these two sets of discourses together for a brief period, the prior existence and continued viability of the canción social phenomenon indicate that the memory work it accomplishes is not contingent upon its promotion or legitimization by the state. To the contrary, it is frequently heard and experienced as legitimate by Peruvian and specifically Ayacuchan audiences precisely in its *opposition* to the state. The Truth Commission, on the other hand, despite its concerted effort to collect and (re)present the “voices of the victims” and civil society more generally, was by its very existence a *part* of the state, and experienced and regarded as such by many Peruvian citizens (see Coxhall 2005).

Second, the generalized themes of lament and protest in most testimonial songs, rather than narratives of specific events or atrocities, allowed performers and listeners to define their own meanings, and conjure their own memories and truths, in relation to any given

song. This dynamism and the constant renovation of texts, meanings, and memories through performance and new recordings seems to me a crucial aspect of the canción social tradition today, and one that distinguishes it in important ways from the kind of static “memory” necessarily contained in documents like the Truth Commission report. Eduardo Gonzalez, writing on the globalization of what he calls the “right to truth,” has argued that this sort of flexibility is in fact crucial for acts of public remembrance—there cannot be a single, unitary national memory in the wake of mass violence. Rather, “what there can be, what is desirable, is a permanent and inclusive public forum where we all recognize ourselves as equals and submit our different memories with the goal of becoming citizens within a truth-under-construction” (2003: 181, see also LeFranc 2003).<sup>32</sup> The creation of such a forum was one of the major goals of the Truth Commission in Peru, and one that was, perhaps, fleetingly accomplished in the moment of its hearings. As I have argued in this essay, however, the CVR was not the first or only such forum, as it was preceded nearly two decades earlier by the first stirrings of a testimonial song movement that flourished in the late 1980s and persists in the performance repertoire of contemporary wayno performers from Ayacucho today.

Far from supplanting the established social space for remembrance through musical performance, the Truth Commission offered compelling evidence of the differences between their discursive domains, despite similarities in the rhetoric—of “speaking the unspeakable” and “rupturing silence”—that is often used to justify each. John McDowell has usefully labeled these competing domains as “informative” and “commemorative” discourse (1992). The former, in McDowell’s model, refers to expository prose and explanation, and could be used here to describe the kind of discourse produced by the Truth Commission in its final report—legal facts, timelines, written statements, and all the dry, necessary minutiae of official records that had been missing prior to the work of the CVR. These contrast in important ways from “commemorative” forms of oral performance that, particularly through differences in tone and a poetic economy of text, may have a more profoundly emotional impact on their audiences (*ibid.*). In this sense, testimonial music during and after the war might be most fruitfully compared with the CVR public hearings—as performatives that create communities of listeners who engage with particular ways of knowing, experiencing, and narrating the violent past.

As the Commission’s recommendations languish today in the desks of a hostile government, and the hearings recede into memory, the need for a public, enduring social space in which the war’s trauma is acknowledged and recognized remains a crucial one. The continued performance of the canción social repertoire, more than a decade after the inconclusive end of the violence itself, and years after the publication of the CVR’s final report, speaks to both this need for public remembrance and the ability of song to at least partially fulfill it. As before the Truth Commission, music once again appears to be, returning to Carlos Falconí’s assessment of the canción social’s place in Ayacucho life

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<sup>32</sup> The original Spanish: “No hay una memoria nacional; lo que puede haber, lo que es deseable que haya, es un foro público permanente e inclusivo donde todos nos reconozcamos como iguales y sometamos nuestras distintas memorias con el fin de ejercer ciudadanía alrededor de una verdad en construcción” (2003: 192).

during the violence, one of “the only places in which we can talk about the terrible things [that happened] in our lives.”

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