

CURRENT DEBATES

Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social (LUM)

Bajada San Martín 151, Miraflores • <http://lum.cultura.pe/>

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Musealization of conflictive episodes occurring in the recent past has taken place all over Latin America in the last two decades. The following review refers to the most recent memorial site. Lugar de la Memoria, Tolerancia e Inclusión Social (LUM), located in Lima and inaugurated on December 17, 2015, is a cultural and educational institution that commemorates the twenty years of political violence (1980–2000) in Peru.

The initial idea and financial support for the creation of a memorial museum came from the German Development Ministry in 2008. However, the then second administration of President Alan García – the first one took place during the conflict – at first declined the offer. After massive pressure from civil organizations and politicians of the opposition, he finally accepted the donation. Today, the LUM is funded with (scarce) state resources as part of a series of transitional justice measures. The construction of this museum involved years of negotiations among different actors. In order to get an idea of how the conflict should be displayed and how people wanted to be represented, the

curatorial team organized a participatory process in which surviving victims from both sides, family members, military personnel, journalists, and activists could comment on and criticize a pilot museum script. Taking the different participants' views into account was central for the legitimization of the project in a society that remains polarized with regard to the past.

The museum's narration has both a chronological and a thematic approach. The permanent exhibition opens with a chronological timeline, which is divided according to the respective administrations. Portraits of presidents Fernando Belaúnde, Alan García, and Alberto Fujimori are complemented with audiovisual materials and photographs of terrorist acts and anti-subversive measures. Without making explicit accusations, the timeline represents an insinuated responsibility – at least political – of the presidents at the time.

The dramaturgy displays three emblematic cases as an example of the complexity of the Peruvian conflict. The

cases of Uchuracchay and Putis and the history of the Asháninkas are explained through reproductions of press notes, a few original objects, and video interviews with witnesses commenting from a present-day perspective on how they experienced their tragedies. These cases show both the drama and ambiguity of the conflict, especially in terms of “guilt” and “victimhood”. This aspect is noteworthy, as museums of this kind tend to present traditional dichotomies in order to avoid historical “grey zones”. The LMU makes extensive use of personal testimonies, which are essential in contemporary exhibitions. Serving as an emphatic mediation strategy, they provide the visitor with multiple perceptions and help to restore the dignity of victims, mostly anonymous. Yet, the authority of these statements is not deconstructed – certainly, for moral reasons.

This approach becomes particularly visible in a section of the exposition named *Una persona, todas las personas*. On eighteen hanging flat screens, people of different ages and backgrounds (surviving victims, victims’ family members, activists) provide their testimonies about the conflict. In addition to providing accounts of their past sufferings, they also focus on positive experiences, emphasizing how, as survivors, they faced violence and continued to fight for a better future. This aspect was one of the most important results of the participatory process. In this installation, the visitor virtually stands face-to-face with the witnesses, depicted in real-life size, and learns about their

experiences over headphones. It produces a physical as well as emotional proximity between visitor and victims and thus can best represent the curators’ concerns: to avoid constructing one official truth about the conflict and ensure that no official narrative stands out over others.

Whereas the victims’ perspective is widely applied in memorial museums, statements from the perpetrators’ side are less common. At the LUM, the Shining Path’s political motivations to undertake the “lucha armada” are not displayed. Although the names of some perpetrators are mentioned on information boards, they are not part of the museal discourse. Originally, the museum’s script intended to make a spatial division between perpetrators and victims. However, this proposal was rejected under pressure from the military – as Miguel Rubio, entrusted with the first museum script, told me in interview. Thus, the Peruvian military is still not willing to admit human rights’ violations.

Compared to the ground floor, the first floor is less robust in terms of quality and content. The large number of topics discussed there, including formation of associations of families of desaparecidos, human rights and grassroots organizations, cultural manifestations, military interventions, and the Truth Commission, makes any profound differentiation difficult. In addition, arrangements are rather conventional, and the use of new media, scarce. One notable exception is a large, white, and central cubic structure,

which consists of small showcases on all four sides containing individual memorabilia. At the time of the opening, the few objects on display included some photographs, a university certificate, clothes, and a letter; all provided by relatives of victims of the political conflict. As there is neither infrastructure nor sufficient resources for proper storage or conservation of objects of this sort, so the question of how the museographers will deal with them in the future remains unanswered. Inside the cube, spoken voices retell stories of people's disappearance, and small booklets contained in a box reconstruct, through images, the episodes of the life of desaparecidos/as. These autobiographical documents and individual experiences form the basis for a major national narrative. Unfortunately, the origin of the objects remains unknown for visitors, which complicates the transmission of their sentimental, historical, and political meaning.

The end of the permanent exhibition emphasizes the ongoing challenges concerning pending issues, such as justice and democratic consolidation. In addition, there is an open space with a semi-circular arrangement of seats which can be used for (in)formal exchange and museum-related pedagogical or remembrance activities. The LUM also holds an auditorium for different cultural events, such as theater performances and movie screenings. These spaces, which do not address the conflict per se, are essential for the continuity and outreach of such an institution. They promote dialogue and

are aimed at young people, who did not grow up in times of conflict and constitute a major target audience for the LUM.

A quick review of the visitors' book and in social media reveals that the audience is responding – in their majority – positively. However, these are persons who actually go to the site. Most Peruvians are unaware of the existence of this place and are mostly indifferent to topics related to memory. On a larger scale, after more than a decade, the results of the Truth Commission are still not accepted by a vast group of political representatives, including the major party in parliament, the party of former president Alberto Fujimori. In Peru, there is no historical, social, or political consensus about the conflict. Therefore, trying to maintain this place "alive" is the big challenge. But the mere existence of a place like the LUM, as well as the discussions and controversies it has inspired, is an important step forward in processing memories of the conflict.