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Social memory and structural poverty: limits of European theories in the case of the Yalpana Wasi Memory Museum

Memoria social y pobreza estructural: límites de las teorías europeas en el caso del Museo Yalpana Wasi

Dámiler Díaz Terán[1,a]

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the limits of European memory theories in contexts of structural poverty based on the case of the Yalpana Wasi - Memory Museum in Junín, Peru. It analyzes how categories developed in societies with consolidated states fail to account for realities shaped by inequality, racism, and institutional exclusion. The museum's experience reveals tensions between official, institutional memory on the one hand, and community and subaltern memories on the other, expressed in oral, ritual, and artistic practices as well as protective silences. The study concludes that social memory in Andean contexts is embodied, affective, and territorialized, and argues for a Latin American theory that recognizes these practices as legitimate foundations for reparation, dignity, and symbolic justice.

Keywords: *social memory; sites of memory; structural poverty; Andean context; cultural memory; communicative memory; Yalpana Wasi; political violence in Peru.*

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina los límites de las teorías europeas de la memoria en contextos de pobreza estructural a partir del caso del Museo Lugar de la Memoria Yalpana Wasi, en Junín, Perú. Se analiza cómo categorías elaboradas en sociedades con Estados consolidados no logran explicar realidades atravesadas por la desigualdad, el racismo y la exclusión institucional. La experiencia del Museo muestra tensiones entre memoria oficial e institucional, de una parte, y memorias comunitarias y subalternas, de la otra, que se expresan en prácticas orales, rituales, artísticas y silencios protectores. El estudio concluye que la memoria social en contextos andinos es encarnada, afectiva y territorializada y plantea la necesidad de una teoría latinoamericana que reconozca estas prácticas como soportes legítimos de reparación, dignidad y justicia simbólica.

Palabras clave: *memoria social; lugares de memoria; pobreza estructural; contexto andino; memoria cultural; memoria comunicativa; Yalpana Wasi; violencia política en el Perú.*

Affiliation and academic degree

[1] Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[a] Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology.

INTRODUCCTION

This article emerged from a specific event: a request by the Superior Court of Justice of Junín to the Regional Government to convert the Yalpana Wasi Memory Museum into a flagrancy unit. In response to this proposal, the Regional Social Development Office prepared a diagnostic report that addressed not only the regulatory framework, considering that this space forms part of the symbolic reparations that the Peruvian State committed itself to implementing after the internal armed conflict of 1980–2000, but also the social perception of its legitimacy as a site of memory, through a study conducted in the city of Huancayo, where it is located. The results showed that, far from being consolidated as a space for mourning, reflection, and recognition, Yalpana Wasi (as it is known) is perceived by much of the population primarily as a place of division and pain, and even as a tribute to the father of former governor Vladimir Cerrón. This situation raises a central question: why does memory in Peru—even in spaces formally intended for its commemoration—generate discomfort, questioning, and indifference, even among the victims themselves?

In recent decades, studies on collective memory have gained relevance in the social sciences, particularly in contexts marked by political violence, dictatorships, displacement, and historical trauma. Latin America in general, and Peru in particular, both deeply marked by these experiences, have produced abundant academic work on the ways of remembering, silencing, or resignifying the past. However, much of this debate has been influenced by European theoretical approaches, especially the contributions of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan Assmann, articulated around the concept of "cultural memory."

Halbwachs (2004) proposed that memory is not an individual process, but a collective one, since memories acquire meaning within the social frameworks that organize them. Nora (2008) introduced the concept of "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*), referring to spaces or symbols that condense the past into the present, especially when "living memory" has disappeared. Assmann (2011), for his part, distinguished between "communicative memory"—transmitted by direct witnesses—and "cultural memory," preserved through symbols, rituals, and texts. Although valuable, these theories were developed in post-industrial European contexts, with strong states, consolidated citizenship, and well-established cultural infrastructures.

The Peruvian case is substantially different. A large part of its population has lived under historical conditions of structural poverty, institutional exclusion, and symbolic inequality. In this setting, social memory is not constructed primarily through state archives or official monuments, but resides in orality, the body, silence, and community rituals. The violence suffered during the internal armed conflict was not symbolically processed by the State, and many communities continue to sustain their own ways of remembering, resisting, and mourning without official recognition.

Accordingly, this article argues that European theories of cultural memory are insufficient for understanding memory processes in contexts of structural exclusion such as Peru. Without proposing their replacement, it advances a critical rereading that repositions and reformulates these frameworks from a situated, affective, and political perspective. It proposes thinking of memory as an embodied social practice, rooted in territories and vulnerable bodies, marked by power relations, inequality, and imposed silences.

Based on an analysis of the Peruvian case and of the Yalpana Wasi Memory Museum, the aim is not only to reveal the limits of hegemonic theoretical categories, but also to contribute to the formulation of a Latin American—and particularly Andean—theory of social memory. A theory that does not begin from institutional abstractions, but from concrete practices, community languages, and struggles for the right to remember by those who have historically been denied as subjects of memory.

Within this framework, this analysis relies on a conceptual distinction that allows for greater precision in terms that are often used as synonyms in memory studies. Collective memory: the process through which social groups construct and transmit memories within shared frames of reference (Halbwachs, 2004). Cultural memory: a modality of collective memory preserved through symbols, texts, rituals, and durable material supports (Assmann, 2011). Social memory: a broader field that integrates both institutionalized forms and community-based, affective, and situated practices in contexts of structural poverty (Jelin, 2002). Official memory: that which is promoted and legitimized by state institutions, generally through public policies, archives, monuments, and museums. Popular memory: memories that emerge from non-institutionalized communal experiences and practices. Subaltern memory: popular memory produced by groups historically marginalized and excluded from official narratives (Spivak, 2010). This terminological clarification seeks to avoid ambiguities and to provide a coherent frame of reference for the discussion, recognizing that each category entails differentiated dynamics of production, transmission, and legitimation of remembrance.

DEVELOPMENT

Historical context of the creation of the Yalpana Wasi – Memory Museum

In June 2014, the site of memory "Yalpana Wasi – Wiñay Yalpanapa" was inaugurated in the city of Huancayo, also referred to as the "House of Memory to Remember Forever," in accordance with its meaning in Quechua. Located in the district of Chilca, the Museum was conceived as a regional space of symbolic reparation dedicated to the victims of the Peruvian internal armed conflict (1980–2000) and forms part of the Symbolic Reparations Program established under Law No. 28592, which created the Comprehensive Reparations Plan for victims of political violence. The implementation of the Museum required an investment of approximately 9 million Peruvian soles, and its first cycle of visits coincided with the opening of the site of memory in Lima.

Although the initiative was initially promoted by associations of victims of the period of political violence experienced in Peru (1980–2000), with the support of the Social Ministry of the Archdiocese of Huancayo, its construction was made possible through a public policy advanced by the Regional Government of Junín during the administration of Vladimir Cerrón. The personal history of the then governor was also linked to the conflict: his father, Jaime Cerrón Palomino, was abducted on June 6, 1990, and found dead eleven days later. Although the circumstances of his death have not been clarified, the Museum's museography includes his story and indicates that his wife, the governor's mother, was subjected to threats and assaults by members of the security forces.

According to Inga (2020), the impetus for the creation of the Museum was not due solely to institutional political will, but also responded to a social demand for memory, led by victims' organizations and actively supported by the local Catholic Church through the Social Ministry of the Archdiocese of Huancayo. The author emphasizes that, since 2011, these organizations had been articulating proposals and demands for the construction of a regional commemorative space. Thus, Yalpana Wasi emerged as the result of a hybrid configuration in which both state initiative and community memories converged, although not without tensions regarding narrative control over the space and its subsequent social appropriation.

From the outset, Yalpana Wasi faced institutional difficulties. The laying of the cornerstone, in October 2012, took place without the corresponding district council license, which generated tensions between the regional governor and the mayor of Chilca, Abraham Carrasco, who belonged to an opposing political affiliation.

Despite these setbacks, construction was completed in April 2014, and the Museum was inaugurated on June 11 of that same year. However, six months later, following the change in authorities after the regional elections, the Museum closed its doors and was left in a situation of administrative uncertainty.

In January 2015, the District Council of Chilca proposed relocating its administrative offices to the Museum building, alleging legal gaps in the transfer of the land. At the same time, it demanded the annulment of Regional Ordinance No. 192-2014, enacted on December 30 of the previous year, which had declared Yalpana Wasi the Cultural Heritage of the Region and sought to ensure its continuity. José Carlos Rivadeneyra, the Museum's first director, recalled that at the time of its opening there was no institutional clarity, nor were there management instruments or a budget for its sustainability.

In the face of these attempts at closure, various organizations of victims and displaced persons organized themselves to form the Social Platform for the Site of Memory. In an initial public statement, they underscored the importance of the Museum as a public policy aligned with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR, by its Spanish acronym), denouncing the closure as an offense against the victims. The Vice Ministry of Human Rights and Access to Justice, the Ombudsman's Office, and the National Human Rights Coordinator also spoke out in favor of preserving the space and guaranteeing its operation.

At the end of January 2015, the Museum reopened its doors. Social organizations then demanded the formal transfer of the land, the institutionalization of the Museum as a decentralized body of the Regional Government, and the allocation of a budget. Nevertheless, on March 3 of that same year, the Regional Council repealed the ordinance that recognized it as cultural heritage. Although the legal argument referred to a lack of authority to declare that category, the debate revealed critical positions toward the Museum's approach. It was argued that the museographic narrative did not represent the "true victims" and that it exalted those considered responsible for the conflict, accusing it of reopening wounds and straying from the population's development priorities.

The repeal of the ordinance entailed dismantling the fragile institutional framework that protected

Yalpana Wasi, the first memory museum created by a regional government in the country. The debate revealed the persistence of tensions surrounding the meaning of memory, the legitimacy of human rights discourse, and the resistance of certain sectors to symbolic reparation initiatives. According to Inga (2020), this fragility is also explained by the Museum's limited social appropriation, which, although defended by organized sectors, failed to consolidate itself as a point of reference for collective memory among broad sectors of the regional population.

Despite this, the Museum continued operating under limitations and, in October 2015, Regional Ordinance No. 214-GRJ/CR was enacted, declaring it to be of regional public interest, intangible in character, and establishing the Multisectoral Advisory Committee of the Site of Memory.

This Committee was composed of the Museum director (who presides over it), a representative of the Regional Office of Social Development of the Regional Government of Junín, the Regional Directorate of Communications, the District Council of Chilca, the Archdiocese of Huancayo, the Ministry of Culture, the High-Level Multisectoral Commission (CMAN, by its Spanish acronym), the Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS, by its Spanish acronym), organizations of those displaced by political violence, victims' organizations, and the Regional Directorate of Education of Junín (DREJ, by its Spanish acronym). Its functions include drafting the Internal Regulations, supporting the preparation of management documents, managing international cooperation efforts, promoting the Documentation and Research Center, and implementing social intervention actions in education, mental health, interculturality, and communication.

In January 2021, Yalpana Wasi was formally incorporated into the National System of State Museums, which reinforced its recognition as a regional and national site of memory. Likewise, since August 2019 it has been included in the Mantaro Valley tourist circuit, as an initiative linking memory, culture, and social reflection.

Thus, Yalpana Wasi faced institutional obstacles and political controversies from the very beginning, which, over time, became entrenched in discourses that grew increasingly stronger due to the advance of authoritarian projects and new logics of denial and conservatism. The question is: why?

Memory studies from European social sciences

The historical and institutional trajectory of Yalpana Wasi not only allows for the reconstruction of the conflicts surrounding its creation and legitimacy, but also opens a deeper question about the theoretical frameworks used to analyze this type of commemorative space. Although the Museum was conceived as a site of symbolic reparation, its limited social appropriation and the fragility of its institutional framework reveal a gap between official discourses of memory and local forms of remembering. This gap can hardly be understood without a critical review of the theoretical categories that have predominated in studies of collective memory. For this reason, a review of the most influential European approaches is presented below, whose limitations become evident when applied to contexts marked by structural poverty, historical exclusion, and a plurality of subaltern memories, as is the case in Peru.

Within the field of memory studies, the contributions of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan Assmann have been fundamental for conceptualizing remembrance as a social, symbolic, and culturally mediated phenomenon. These proposals, formulated in postwar European societies, conceive memory as a collective construction organized through social frameworks of reference (Halbwachs, 2004), materialized in "sites of memory" (Nora, 2008), and transmitted through distinctions between communicative and cultural forms (Assmann, 2011). Nevertheless, their application to the Peruvian context requires critical examination.

First, these theoretical frameworks rely on structural assumptions that do not always hold in Latin America and, particularly, in Andean regions where structural poverty predominates. Halbwachs argues that collective memory is articulated on the basis of stable social groups with shared references; an assumption that is difficult to sustain in territories disarticulated by prolonged violence, forced displacement, and institutional fragmentation. Similarly, Nora proposes that "sites of memory" emerge when living memory has weakened and must therefore be fixed in symbolic objects, archives, or monuments. But what occurs in societies where the State has never recognized that living memory and where the archive is inaccessible or nonexistent?

In Latin America, the uncritical use of these categories may produce a form of "conceptual transplantation" that obscures local particularities. As Jelin (2002) warns, it is necessary to problematize the importation of theories developed in industrialized societies with consolidated welfare states, since in contexts such as the Peruvian one memory is produced not in state archives or official monuments but in community practices, everyday rituals, and cultural expressions. In the same vein, De Sousa

Santos (2018) proposes the "epistemologies of the South" as an alternative to Eurocentric thought, arguing for an ecology of knowledge that recognizes forms of understanding grounded in the social and cultural struggles of historically oppressed peoples.

In Peru, the memory of the internal armed conflict (1980–2000) has not found a legitimate and widely shared symbolic channel. Despite the efforts of the CVR, symbolic reparations have been fragmented, fragile, and frequently contested. Yalpana Wasi illustrates this phenomenon: designed as a commemorative and pedagogical space, it has been perceived by some sectors of the population as a politicized monument or as something detached from the lived experiences of the victims. Its association with former regional governor Vladimir Cerrón has reinforced the perception of partisan instrumentalization, weakening its reparative function. In contrast, as Vich (2015) notes, the "poetics of mourning" have shown that it is through artistic and cultural interventions—retablos, cantuta flowers, photographs—that civic imaginaries have been more forcefully challenged, introducing into the public sphere uncomfortable truths about the violence that official discourse tends to obscure.

This scenario raises a key question: why does an institutionalized space of memory fail to generate identification or legitimacy among those who should be its principal interlocutors? The answer goes beyond a lack of pedagogical strategies or deficits in public policy and instead requires questioning the very categories through which cultural memory is conceived.

One of the central limitations of European theories lies in the fact that they assume a State that, even when problematized, acts as a structuring agent of remembrance. Nora writes from within a France that possesses a "national archive" capable of organizing the collective narrative, even amid symbolic disputes about its content. In Peru, by contrast, the State has historically been exclusionary and fragmented. As Quijano (2000) argues, the "coloniality of power" has shaped not only relations of economic exploitation but also the forms of symbolic representation and legitimization. Indigenous, peasant, and migrant subjects have been excluded not only from access to rights but also from the right to memory.

In contexts of structural poverty, memory resides more in the body, orality, music, and silence than in archives or monuments. Violence is not processed in museums but in community rituals, in *huaynos* that narrate loss, or in silences that protect individuals from stigmatization. As Jelin (2002) maintains, memory is a "field of dispute," and in marginalized contexts this dispute rarely finds institutional channels through which it can be expressed. Many victims of the armed conflict do not seek visibility before the State but rather preserve remembrance in intimate and communal spaces, where the narrative is lived rather than formally articulated.

Under these conditions, silence does not equate to forgetting; rather, it is often an unfinished mourning, a form of self-protection, or an act of resistance. Remembering may entail risk, and public exposure can reopen wounds or provoke revictimization. Spivak (2010) reminds us that "the subaltern" not only lacks a voice but, when speaking, is not heard within its own codes. In Peru, Quechua-speaking women who were victims of violence have been rendered invisible not only by the State but also by academic frameworks that determine which memories deserve attention.

In the case of Yalpana Wasi, the distance between institutional discourse and popular experience is evident. Its design as a space of symbolic reparation did not guarantee legitimacy, revealing the gap between the institutional model of "cultural memory" and the situated forms of remembering present in communities marked by extreme precarity. The physical existence of a "site of memory" does not ensure its social appropriation, even less so when local practices of remembrance have historically been marginalized or criminalized.

For this reason, the challenge is not to replicate European frameworks, but to construct a Latin American—and particularly Andean—theory of social memory that incorporates non-hegemonic practices of remembrance. In many rural and Indigenous communities, memory is expressed through songs, pilgrimages, patron saint festivals, agricultural rituals, or shared silences. These forms, although they may not seek public visibility, possess symbolic density and political force.

Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) and Walsh (2012) have emphasized the urgency of developing "decolonial epistemologies" that recognize subaltern knowledge as active forms of meaning-making. Within this framework, remembering is not merely narrating the past but resisting imposed forgetting, affirming communal continuity, and contesting the State's monopoly over historical narratives.

This perspective also requires rethinking notions such as "archive" and "document." In the Andean world, the body is an archive, the land is an archive, and the spoken word is an archive. The idea that only what is written or monumentalized constitutes

memory is a colonial legacy that must be dismantled. The CVR itself demonstrated that oral testimonies in Indigenous languages exceed chronological and legal frameworks, for within them there is not only denunciation but also the reconstruction of a world shattered by violence.

In sum, the Peruvian case shows that European theories of cultural memory, far from being universal, respond to specific historical and cultural contexts. For these frameworks to be useful in Latin America, they must not only be translated but also displaced, deconstructed, and rewritten from the concrete experiences of those who have historically been denied recognition as subjects of memory.

Thus, the contributions of Halbwachs, Nora, or Ricoeur should not be dismissed, but rather contextualized and complemented. In the Peruvian case, the challenge lies in articulating these theories with decolonial and Latin American approaches that highlight the centrality of subaltern memories, the plurality of voices, and the agency of historically marginalized communities (Quijano, 2000; Segato, 2013).

Limits and reinterpretations of European theories in contexts of structural poverty

Although the contributions of Halbwachs, Nora, and Assmann have been fundamental for the consolidation of studies on collective and cultural memory, their application to realities marked by structural poverty and historical exclusion requires a critical reinterpretation that engages with theoretical frameworks emerging from Latin America and other regions of the Global South. The contexts in which these theories originated—post-industrial societies with consolidated states, full citizenship, and developed cultural infrastructures—contrast sharply with the realities of large sectors of the Andean region, whose historical experience has been shaped by persistent inequality, state fragmentation, and structural racism (Quijano, 2000; Jelin, 2002).

Structural poverty is not limited to insufficient income but refers to inequalities historically reproduced through exclusion from access to material goods, rights, and cultural capital (Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003; González de la Rocha, 2001). This form of poverty also entails the denial of spaces for symbolic representation, which directly affects processes of memory. In contexts where the State has historically been absent or perceived as oppressive, the collective frames of reference described by Halbwachs (2004) lack stability, and the "sites of memory" proposed by Nora (2008) do not possess the legitimacy—or even the material existence—that such theories presuppose.

Various Latin American scholars have emphasized that in these environments memory is transmitted through non-institutionalized practices such as song, ritual performance, pilgrimages, or silence understood as a strategy of protection and resistance (Del Pino, 2008; Stern, 2006). Assmann's notion of "cultural memory" (2011), centered on the durability of symbols and texts, does not fully encompass these "living archives," in which the body, orality, and even the land itself function as repositories of remembrance. As Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) argues, such practices constitute a *ch'ixi* form of thought in which elements from different cultural horizons coexist without merging, thereby challenging the narrative homogeneity often assumed in European theoretical models.

From a decolonial perspective, scholars emphasize that the epistemology of memory in subaltern contexts must be constructed from its own logics of meaning production and transmission rather than through the adaptation of external categories (Spivak, 2010; Walsh, 2012). The "right to memory" thus implies not only inclusion within official narratives but also the preservation and exercise of autonomous forms of remembering and resignifying the past, even when these remain invisible or unintelligible to state institutions or academic frameworks. In the Peruvian case, memories of the internal armed conflict are not necessarily articulated through museums or archives, but through communal ritual spaces, songs in Indigenous languages, and agricultural practices linked to the festive calendar.

Proposing a situated theory of social memory entails recognizing that the materiality and modes of transmitting remembrance depend on specific historical and political conditions. From this perspective, memory is not merely a cultural asset safeguarded in archives or monuments, but also an embodied, affective, and territorialized practice. This view resonates with Taylor's (2003) notion of "embodied memory," which understands remembrance as knowledge transmitted through performance, gesture, and the body, as well as with the idea of "living memory" developed by Latin American social movements (Jelin, 2002; Wills, 2006).

Applying this situated perspective to the case of Yalpana Wasi helps explain why, despite its physical existence and institutional backing, the Museum failed to consolidate itself as a legitimate reference point for broad sectors of the population. The disconnection between its museographic narrative—based on institutional criteria—and local practices of memory reveals that, in contexts of structural poverty, the symbolic capital of a commemorative space depends less on its monumentality than on its capacity to engage with lived forms of remembering.

Thus, the goal is not to discard European theories, but to recognize their limits and rewrite them from the historical realities of the Global South, incorporating the voices and practices of those who have historically been denied recognition as subjects of memory. This approach implies acknowledging oral and bodily archives as legitimate forms of knowledge, as well as understanding that silence and invisibility may constitute active forms of resistance and mourning rather than simple indicators of forgetting.

In light of these limitations, reinterpretations become necessary. From decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, authors such as Quijano (2000) and Segato (2013) demonstrate that memory in Latin America is deeply shaped by the "coloniality of power and knowledge." This requires rethinking "sites of memory" not only as material landmarks but also as relational spaces in which communities process mourning, justice, and dignity in relation to a State that often fails to recognize them.

In this sense, contexts of structural poverty should not be understood as voids but as fertile grounds for the production of new ways of remembering and resignifying the past. These memories, though fragmented, constitute a vital repertoire for imagining alternatives to the Eurocentric model, illuminating experiences in which precariousness becomes a creative resource and orality acquires a central role in intergenerational transmission. The limits of European theories thus also represent an opportunity to enrich the global debate on memory through voices from the Global South.

Embodied memory, architecture of mourning, and subaltern practices of remembrance

In contexts of political violence and structural poverty, memory becomes embodied in bodies and territories rather than in official archives or state monuments. The pain of loss, forced displacement, and everyday precariousness generates what some authors describe as an "architecture of mourning" (Robben, 2005), in which the traces of violence are inscribed not only in physical places but also in the bodies of survivors. Scars, family absences, and practices of interrupted mourning constitute ways in which memory remains alive, even when it is not recognized by the State.

Faced with the limits of European theories of memory, Latin America has developed a critical body of scholarship which, grounded in the lived experience of structural violence, racism, and institutional forgetting, proposes alternative ways of understanding and practicing remembrance. Within this framework, memory is understood not merely as an academic or legal category, but as a practice of cultural resistance and symbolic struggle against historical denial.

Scholars such as Jelin (2002), Crenzel (2014), and Wills (2006) have shown that memories of conflict in the region are often constructed within contexts of social inequality, state repression, or enforced silence, transforming the act of remembering into a political practice "from below." These memories are not confined to museums or state archives; rather, they materialize through rituals, songs, pilgrimages, and popular artistic expressions, where the body, orality, and culture become fundamental vehicles of transmission, especially when the State has failed to serve as a symbolic guarantor.

In the Peruvian case, research by Roca (2015), Del Pino (2008), Delgado Ponce (2017), and Inga (2020) allows memory to be understood not only as an evocation of suffering but also as an affirmation of communal identity resisting dispossession and silencing. Delgado Ponce (2017) demonstrates that memory museums in Peru are constructed amid multiple tensions: the drive for institutionalization, disputes over official narratives, the persistence of community memories, and the intervention of political actors who instrumentalize pain.

Similarly, Inga (2020) analyzes how the creation of Yalpana Wasi was shaped by disputes among the regional government, victims' organizations, and social sectors holding divergent positions regarding the conflict. The Museum, initially sustained by victims' associations and the local Church, later experienced institutional discontinuities, political appropriations, and social resistance. This trajectory makes it a paradigmatic example of the tension between official memory, popular memory, and absent memory.

Testimonies collected by the Yuyarisun Collective in Huancavelica and by the Site of Memory in Ayacucho (ANFASEP) show that remembrance of the armed conflict is also expressed through embroidery, song, pilgrimages to sacred sites, and shared silences. These forms of remembrance exceed state and legal frameworks, constituting a bodily and symbolic archive deeply rooted in the historical experience of Andean communities.

As Quijano (2000) warns, these memories must be understood through the lens of the "coloniality of power," recognizing that the denial of subaltern memory forms part of the modern colonial order. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to incorporate these voices into state discourses, but to transform the categories through which the State and academia understand the act of remembering.

From this perspective, memory in Peru cannot be limited to a public policy; it must also be understood as a cultural, social, and affective process embodied in the everyday practices of communities. Yalpana Wasi, as an institutional space, is therefore called not only to represent the past but also to engage in dialogue with local forms of memory, recognize them, and allow itself to be transformed by them.

In sum, Latin American and Peruvian thought on memory shifts the emphasis from an archival and monumental vision toward an embodied, lived, and situated memory. This implies not only theorizing "from the South," but also constructing memory practices that recognize plurality, accept symbolic conflict, and refrain from closing the past within a single or totalizing narrative.

The case of Yalpana Wasi in Huancayo reinforces this perspective. Rather than functioning solely as a "site of memory" in the classical sense, it can also be understood as a communal space where testimonial archives, cultural activities, and commemorative performances converge to embody memory in living practices. There, Huanca music, artistic workshops, and oral narratives become vehicles for the intergenerational transmission of pain and hope, shaping a collective mourning that challenges institutional forgetting.

These subaltern practices of remembrance question the hegemony of Western forms of monumentalizing memory. In contrast to the rigidity of official memorials, bodies, songs, and everyday objects become supports for an insurgent memory that does not depend on state recognition to exist. In this sense, embodied and communal memory not only complements but also redefines the field of memory studies, contributing categories born from the historical experience of the Global South.

The case of Yalpana Wasi in light of memory theories

The historical and institutional trajectory of Yalpana Wasi clearly demonstrates the limits of European theoretical categories when applied to contexts marked by structural poverty, historical exclusion, and distrust toward state institutions. Halbwachs (2004) argues that collective memory rests on stable social frameworks and shared references; however, the political violence that affected Junín between 1980 and 2000 produced massive displacement, community disarticulation, and a profound weakening of local institutions (CVR, 2003). Under these conditions, the groups expected to sustain a common memory were precisely those most affected, making it difficult for a stable social framework to exist in which remembrance could be anchored, as Halbwachs suggests.

Similarly, Nora's (2008) notion of "sites of memory" presupposes a process through which living memory is transformed into a symbolic object or space capable of condensing the past. Yalpana Wasi was conceived under this premise, yet its trajectory demonstrates that the mere physical existence of a museum does not guarantee its social appropriation. The association of the space with particular political interests—especially with the figure of the then regional governor Vladimir Cerrón—eroded its legitimacy (Inga, 2020). Thus, rather than becoming a consensual reference point, the Museum became embedded in a scenario of symbolic dispute and popular distrust toward the State and political elites.

In the case of Assmann's (2011) distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory, the difficulties are equally evident. Communicative memory—transmitted orally by direct witnesses—remains essential in Andean communities where intergenerational transmission occurs in Quechua through songs, stories, and festivals. However, this dimension was not significantly incorporated into the museographic narrative of Yalpana Wasi, which privileged elements associated with institutionalized cultural memory. The result was a gap between lived memory and its official representation, reproducing the distance that Jelin (2002) and Del Pino (2008) identify between popular memory and institutional memory.

These mismatches confirm that memory in contexts of inequality cannot be analyzed independently of power relations and disputes over the right to remember. In Yalpana Wasi, the combination of weak institutional structures and the underrepresentation of community memories fostered a scenario of silent resistance, in which many victims chose to preserve their memories in intimate, communal, or ritual spaces beyond the reach of the Museum.

For this reason, interpreting the case requires a situated conceptual framework capable of integrating the practices and supports through which memory has been sustained in Junín: from *huaynos* that narrate pain to pilgrimages and agricultural rituals, as well as silence as a form of protection against stigmatization and revictimization. As Latin American and Andean scholars have emphasized, a regional theory of social memory must recognize that the political and symbolic value of a commemorative space depends not solely on its monumentality but on its capacity to engage with lived forms of remembering.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Yalpana Wasi as a space of memory in Peru allows for a critical reassessment of the

applicability of European theories of "cultural memory" in contexts marked by structural poverty and historical exclusion. Although the proposals of Halbwachs, Nora, and Assmann have been fundamental for consolidating the field of collective memory studies, their theoretical frameworks prove insufficient when applied to realities deeply shaped by inequality, dispossession, and subaltern forms of remembrance such as those present in many Andean regions of Peru.

First, it becomes clear that the assumptions of institutional stability, full citizenship, and universal access to mechanisms for constructing remembrance—such as archives, monuments, and museums—do not hold in territories where the State has historically been absent or perceived as an oppressive entity. In such contexts, the act of remembering does not primarily take place through official devices but through everyday, oral, ritual, and communal practices. Consequently, the study proposes an epistemological shift: moving from a model of memory centered on archives, monumentality, and institutionalization toward one that recognizes memory as an embodied, affective, and situated process.

The case of Yalpana Wasi illustrates this tension in a paradigmatic way. Despite having been conceived as a site of symbolic reparation following the internal armed conflict (1980–2000), the Museum has faced persistent political disputes, processes of delegitimization, and fragmented social appropriation. These difficulties cannot be explained solely by deficiencies in management or by a lack of civic pedagogy; rather, they reveal a deeper mismatch between institutional forms of remembrance and local memories that find no place within official narrative frameworks. The distance between official memory and lived memory is therefore not a problem of implementation, but of conception.

Second, the analysis demonstrates that in contexts shaped by political violence, structural racism, and historical silencing, memory acquires a political dimension of resistance. Remembering under these conditions is not a neutral practice but an act of identity affirmation, a claim for dignity, and a symbolic struggle over the right to narrate history from below. For this reason, subaltern memory does not always seek institutionalization or recognition by the State; often it finds in silence, song, celebration, or the body itself the means through which mourning is preserved and life sustained. Such expressions must be recognized as legitimate, even when they do not conform to academic or state criteria of validation.

Furthermore, the study highlights that memories in contexts such as Peru are neither homogeneous nor consensual, but rather multiple, contested, and constantly negotiated. The plurality of voices surrounding the armed conflict—victims, perpetrators, survivors, relatives, and communities—prevents memory from being reduced to a single or pacified narrative. In response, the article proposes an approach that embraces symbolic conflict as a constitutive element of remembrance, without closing the past within a single interpretation.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is an urgent need to advance toward the formulation of a Latin American—and particularly Andean—theory of social memory, one that begins not from the formal devices of remembrance but from the concrete practices of historically excluded peoples. Such a theory must recognize that the archive is not always a building or a written document; it may also be a body that dances, a song that resists, a silent pilgrimage, or a community that refuses to forget.

Thus, this text does not merely question the relevance of European theories but proposes a critical rereading that decenters, displaces, and rewrites them from the Global South. In this effort, the case of Yalpana Wasi should not be understood as a failed example but rather as a clear warning: if spaces of memory do not engage in dialogue with local forms of remembering, they risk becoming empty monuments—alien or even rejected by the very communities they seek to represent. To prevent this, public policies on memory must recognize the symbolic density of popular practices, open channels for genuine participation, and abandon claims of neutrality in order to acknowledge their role as arenas of political and cultural contestation.

In sum, the analysis of Yalpana Wasi reveals the limitations of applying European theoretical frameworks in contexts of structural poverty, where social memory is sustained not by official archives but by cultural, communal, and affective practices. This observation is linked to the proposal of the "epistemologies of the South," which call for an ecology of knowledge aimed at recognizing and legitimizing the forms of understanding produced in the struggles of historically oppressed peoples (De Sousa Santos, 2018). At the same time, the Peruvian experience demonstrates that the construction of collective memory cannot be separated from the symbolic and artistic sphere. As Vich (2015) argues, the "poetics of mourning" disrupt official silences and introduce into the public sphere the uncomfortable truths of the armed conflict, contributing to the process of shared mourning and the recognition of victims. In this sense, cognitive justice and symbolic justice emerge as inseparable dimensions: without them, any policy of memory risks being reduced to a fragile or instrumentalized institutional framework.

Ultimately, advancing toward a Latin American theory of memory requires recognizing that the archive may take the form of a festival, a pilgrimage, or a body that refuses to forget. Yalpana Wasi reminds us that remembering is both a political and vital act, a reminder that, even amid poverty and exclusion, memory sustains dignity, contests official histories, and projects the hope for a different future.

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Correspondence
Dámiler Díaz Terán
E-mail: damiler.diaz.teran@gmail.com