The Crux of Violence: *Unheimlich* Encounters and PTSD in Santiago Roncagliolo's *Red April*

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Abstract: This article explores the connection between close encounters, PTSD, and Freud's concept of the "uncanny" by analysing the internal armed conflict in Peru (1980-2000) and offering a novel reading of Santiago Roncagliolo's *Red April* (*Abril rojo*, 2006). Focusing on how the novel establishes cross-referential relationships between traumatic encounters and repressed parts of our selves, my reading shows how *Red April* calls into question the identity position from which we tend to look at war. By eliciting what I call a "positional identification" with the narrative of war and an "ironic identification" with its main character, I argue that *Red April* foregrounds our implication with the structural forms of oppression that feed conflicts like that which struck Peru in the 1980s. In doing so, it reveals our compromised positions and *unheimlich* proximity to the violence of war.

Keywords: *Peruvian civil war, Sendero Luminoso, PTSD, the uncanny, Santiago Roncagliolo, Abril rojo, fictional representations of war*

Introduction

A famous short story by Julio Cortázar called *House Taken Over* describes a brother and a sister living a calm and untroubled life in their large family home in Buenos Aires. When unnamed others infiltrate the house from the rear, the siblings retreat in the remaining half and seal it off. The identity of those who are taking over the house is never revealed, nor how or why "they" are doing that. The brother and sister seem to acknowledge the danger, but their reaction simply involves accepting and withdrawing into smaller and smaller parts of their house. Eventually, further noises signal that the entire house is being taken over, and the owners flee, lock the front door and toss the key down a drain, not wanting any poor devil to enter the house that has been "taken over".

This uncanny and puzzling story could be read as a metaphor of Santiago Roncagliolo's *Red April*. Like in Cortázar's story, in Roncagliolo's novel something "takes over" the protagonist, pushing him outside of what is familiar. In both stories, the reader is left to wonder what kind of beings are advancing in the house, why a house that has been taken over is being locked, and what are the reasons and effects of such an act. But in the case of *Red April*, the "house" is the protagonist's own self while the intruder is the violence of the internal conflict in Peru (1980-2000).[1] The novel presents war, indeed, as a

force that takes over our lives and questions who and what belongs to the "house", causing deep distress as a result.

Santiago Roncagliolo was born in 1975 in Lima, but he spent his early childhood in Mexico where his family was exiled. Roncagliolo's parents were left-wing activists who had to temporarily leave Peru two years after the military coup of General Francisco Morales Bermúdez (29th August 1975). As Roncagliolo recounts in an article (*The Dogs of Deng Xiao Ping*: 148), his first image of Peru is that of dead dogs hanging from the lampposts in the centre of Lima in 1980: "Their lifeless bodies were wrapped in posters that said, 'Deng Xiao Ping, Son of a Bitch'." Sendero Luminoso,[2] a Maoist revolutionary organisation at war with the Peruvian state, had killed and exhibited the dogs to showcase its power in the country's capital and to denounce the "revisionist" economic reforms of Deng Xiao Ping, which were distancing China from the thought of Mao Zedong.

Since Roncagliolo's family settled back in Lima during the war between Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian state,[3] Santiago grew up in a time in which terrorist attacks, kidnappings, torture, power cuts, and car bombs were frequent. Roncagliolo's father, Rafael – a well-known academic, journalist, and television presenter – was periodically threatened by the police. All this fed into Roncagliolo's novels, which feature fear as their central subject. In this article I will focus on *Red April*, a political thriller set in Peru in 2000, when the war between Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian state was coming to an end, and the corruption and human rights violations of Alberto Fujimori's government were exacerbating Peru's political crisis.

Wars, military occupations, and other traumatic historical events are often followed by an initial period of unfinished mourning, in which the actors of the conflict bracket off or struggle to address the trauma of the conflict in which they were involved. Later on, with the coming of age of the children of victims, perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders, there is usually a "return of the repressed", during which the conflict and the thorny questions related to it are discussed more openly.

In the case of Peru, the governments of Valentín Paniagua and Alejandro Toledo established an independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that investigated, between 2001 and 2003, the development of the internal conflict and the human right abuses perpetrated during the 1980s and 1990s. The work of Peru's TRC rekindled the debate over the crimes committed in the war and provided substantial new content for discussions about collective responsibility, historical memory, trauma, political representation,

and social justice. The commission has been widely praised for its scrupulous endeavours, which resulted in fundamental findings that clarify the number of victims, the facts of the conflict, and the responsibility of the different agents involved. The data, evidence, and testimonies it gathered enabled a better understanding of the sociological and historical contexts of the conflict, persecuting the leading perpetrators, and providing recommendations for a national transition to a democratic era. Yet Peru's TRC has also been critiqued for being timid in its treatment of the ethnic dimension of the conflict, for framing its discourse of transitional justice within "a national project very much rooted in neoliberal aspirations of modernisation and economic prosperity" (Lambright, *Andean Truths*: 12), and for coding indigenous experiences of affliction according to the western category of trauma (Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*: 24-53), giving little weight to local epistemological frameworks.[4] In any case, the commission's findings stimulated public discussions and cultural explorations of the *sasachakuy tiempo*, the "difficult time" of the internal armed conflict. A sign of this is the flourishing of cultural productions and academic investigations that explore different aspects of the conflict. Works like Alonso Cueto's *La hora azul* (novel, 2005), Claudia Llosa's *La teta asustada* (film, 2009), Iván Thays's *Un lugar llamado Oreja de Perro* (novel, 2012), Lurgio Gavilán's *Memorias de un solado desconocido* (memoir, 2012), or José Carlos Agüero's *Los rendidos* (hybrid text, 2015), to mention but a few, address the armed conflict from a variety of viewpoints, emphasising both the deep roots and the moral complexity of the violence that emerged in Peru. Roncagliolo's *Red April* – which won the prestigious Alfaguara prize in 2006 – fits within this trend, but it is more apt to discuss the themes of the current journal issue because it places close encounters in war and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the heart of its narrative.

From *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to today, literature has been a vital medium for coming to terms with the traumatic memories of war (Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*: 1-31; Crocq and Crocq, *From Shell Shock*: 47-48; and MacMillan, *War*: 251-281). On the one hand, writing is a useful method for confronting the traumas that haunt our psyche. On the other hand, literature helps us to develop an understanding of the violence of war in many ways: by providing examples of how soldiers and civilians cope with such an experience; by exploring the causes and meaning of people's actions and suffering; by processing traumatic recollections; by opening vistas on how people in other times and cultures deal with war traumas; and, finally, by creating a moral filter that discloses our capacities for empathic recognition and self-reflection. Indeed, "trauma research has demonstrated the importance of developing a

narrative or story about the traumatic event" (Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*: 162).

Using literature as a vehicle for probing our relation to war, in this article I explore how *Red April* analyses the experience and the consequences of a traumatic conflict, showing how close encounters in a context of war can lead to PTSD and how PTSD shapes the way human beings encounter each other during and after violent events. In my discussion, I investigate the link between PTSD and the concept of the "uncanny", as articulated by Freud in the homonymous essay. In particular, I examine how uncanny encounters bring into the open feelings, experiences, and behavioural patterns that had been kept hidden or that remain largely unacknowledged, thus challenging our conceptions of selfhood, identity, and violence. My reading of *Red April* shows how Roncagliolo's novel calls into question the identity position from which we tend to look at war. By eliciting what I call a "positional identification" with the narrative of the war and an "ironic identification" with its main character, I argue that *Red April* foregrounds our implication with the structural forms of oppression that feed conflicts such as the one that struck Peru in the 1980s. The "we" to which I allude here includes first and foremost the citizens of the Global North and the global "privileged"[5] classes that probably constitute the primary readership of *Red April* and this academic journal.

With this aim in view, I will proceed by first summarising the development of the armed conflict in Peru, showing how the killing methods and operating procedures of its actors turned several face-to-face encounters into deeply traumatic experiences. I will then discuss *Red April*, focusing on how the novel establishes cross-referential relationships between close encounters, PTSD, and the uncanny that reveal our compromised positions and *unheimlich* proximity to the violence of war.

The historical background of the civil war

Located in the southern-central Peruvian Andes, Ayacucho is the cradle of Sendero Luminoso and the setting of Roncagliolo's *Red April*. Badly connected to the rest of the country, Ayacucho was one of Peru's poorest cities. Many people in its region lived under a feudal agricultural system where exploitation, illiteracy, discrimination against the large indigenous and Quechua-speaking community, and the phenomenon of *gamonalismo* (a system of power in the which landowners and state functionaries exert a bossing and corrupt authority over the impoverished and disenfranchised population) were widespread. Sendero's roots grew out of this environment. Their leader, Abimael Guzmán,

alias Comrade Gonzalo, a professor of Philosophy in the San Cristóbal of Huamanga University in Ayacucho, gave form to the hope and the anger of "the people who always had to keep their heads down" (Cueto, *La hora azul*: 203), but that form was a monstrous one.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, two movements were shaking the foundations of Ayacucho's classist society: the peasant movement, that claimed a fairer distribution of land, and the student movement, whose objective was free public education. The latter was particularly strong in San Cristóbal of Huamanga University, which Guzmán converted in a centre of indoctrination and the motor for his political project. Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL), which emerged in 1970 after a series of scissions with other Marxist-Leninist parties, was able to channel the grievances of Ayacucho's youth and peasant population. Yet, unlike other parties, it did not run in the elections after Peru's return to democracy in 1980 and went underground to prepare its revolution. The PCP-SL characterised Peruvian society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial and, blending Mariátegui with Mao, believed that the revolution should start from the peasantry (Taylor, *Shining Path*: 9-26). The goals of its anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution were overthrowing the state and taking the power through armed struggle. Guzmán shaped the party into a tightly-knit organisation and traced the political line in a dogmatic fashion. The party's ideology aimed at suppressing every inkling of individualism and demanded its members "to carry their lives on the fingertips, ready to hand them over" (Roncagliolo, *La cuarta espada*: 106). Indeed, over the years Guzmán's power increasingly acquired theological and totalitarian traits, so much so that the party line will be called "*Pensamiento Gonzalo*" (Gonzalo's thought).[6] To gain independence Guzmán rejected any external funding for his armed struggle and taught his fighters that any tool or object could be turned into a weapon. In this fashion, with low funding, emboldened by an extremist ideology, and articulated into the party (led by the Central Committee in Lima), the popular army, and a series of support groups composed of workers, teachers, students, and peasants, Sendero went into war against the Peruvian state.

The conflict started on 17th May 1980 in a district called Chuschi with the burning of ballot boxes. This symbolic act was followed, in the ensuing months, by attacks to agricultural estates and small police stations in the regions of Ayacucho, Huancavelica, and Apurímac. Little by little, Sendero crossed the Rubicon and began to "*batir el campo*", a tactic that consisted in attacking rural villages, institutions, and state figures and replacing them with its own people. In this way, the organisation started to gain power, weapons, and territory in the central highlands. In the first two years, Sendero's actions and discourse

found support in a good part of the country's marginalised and impoverished population. After their violent operations, Sendero's popular committees were able to impose order in the occupied Andean communities, thus gaining authority and feeding the hopes for social justice. The conflict, however, was brutal from the outset. For Guzmán, the revolution demanded a "*cuota de sangre*" (blood fee), and Sendero was ready to make its soldiers and innocent civilians pay. What is more, after the first year the "blood fee" became an intrinsic part of its strategy. The Central Committee wanted to "drive the state mad and provoke a genocide that would yield political results for the insurgents" (Zapata, *La guerra senderista*: Kindle location 1276).

The initial reaction of the state was clumsy and ineffective. The ill-prepared police units first sent to face the rebellion were followed by counter-insurgency squads called *sinchis* who, unable to distinguish between the civilian population and *senderistas*, carried out slaughters and abuses. In 1983-1984 the Armed Forces entered into the scene and the number of deaths spiked. Their initial approach was to weed out Sendero by wiping out the whole field. If Sendero's methods involved kidnappings, selective killings, seizures of food, weapons and dynamite, torture, terrorist attacks, and the repression of civilians deemed uncooperative, the army's involved arrests, torture, rapes, disappearances, and arbitrary killings. The rural civilian population bore the brunt of the conflict, but it was not a passive, homogenous agent. Rather, as Theidon shows in *Intimate Enemies*, the conflict played into local conflicts and rivalries, creating a volatile social landscape characterised by internecine violence and shifting roles and allegiances:

> One particularity of civil wars is that foreign armies do not wage the attacks. Frequently the enemy is a son-in-law, a godfather, an old schoolmate, or the community that lies just across the valley. The forms of violence suffered as well as the forms of violence practiced matter greatly and influence the reconstruction process when the fighting subsides. The fratricidal nature of Peru's internal armed conflict means that ex-Senderistas, current sympathisers, widows, orphans, rape survivors, and army veterans live side by side. (Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*: xiii)

The fact that Peru's civil war frequently involved people who lived in the same community or neighbouring areas made close encounters particularly distressing and precarious. Many people became "two-faced" (*iskay uyukuna*), showing one face to the army and another to the *senderistas*, one in private and another in public. In many villages, people found themselves forced to share spaces with the murderers of their father or brother, with their rapists or

walked streets that were recently scenes of lethal violence. These traumatic aspects were exacerbated by the killing methods. While technology tends to play an increasingly central role in modern warfare, often creating a "distancing effect", in Peru's theatres of war killing was typically intimate, low-tech, and crude. Enemies were frequently murdered face-to-face, with guns, rocks, knives, slingshots, or bare hands. As a result, the *sasachakuy tiempo* created a strong connection between close encounters and trauma,[7] turning the house and the community (the loci of safety and familiarity) into places of distress, ambivalence, and estrangement.

By the mid-1980s, the material and death tolls exerted by Sendero on the local population turned many Andean communities against it. Locals began to organise peasant patrols (*rondas campesinas*) and self-defence committees (*comités de autodefensa*). Yet, despite the dwindling support from highlands communities, between 1985 and 1990 the insurgent organisation expanded its political and military influence over an ever-widening swathe of territory. After its 1988-1989 congress, the PCP-SL declared that it had reached the "*equilibrio estratégico*", that is, a balance of power with the state. This was a miscalculation that nonetheless led Sendero to engage in a head-on confrontation aimed at seizing power. The organisation thus moved its focus to the urban areas, concentrating especially on the capital. Hence the killings, kidnappings, industrial sabotages, armed strikes, destructions of electric pylons, and car-bombs that form the backdrop of Roncagliolo's *La noche de los alfileres* became more and more frequent. The war reached its turning point on 12th September 1992 when Abimael Guzmán and other key members of the PCP-SL's Central Committee were captured in the well-to-do Lima neighbourhood of Surco. Given Guzmán's pseudo-religious influence on the organisation, this was a severe blow for Sendero. After "the capture of the century", as it has been denominated, the intensity of the conflict progressively waned.

According to the estimates included in the TRC's *Final Report*, the number of victims of Peru's internal armed conflict adds up to 69.280 and that of internally displaced people to between 600,000 and one million people. Sendero is deemed responsible for 46% of the dead, government forces for around a third, and village militias, paramilitary groups, and other agents for the rest (*Informe final, Anexo 2*: 13). The TRC calculates that 75% of the people that were murdered or disappeared belonged to populations whose mother tongue was not Spanish. In the region of Ayacucho, 90% of them were Quechua speakers. For the most part, the victims of the war were *campesinos*, indigenous, and poor, and lived in areas that were geographically and socially distant from Lima (Degregori, *Qué difícil es ser Dios*: 35-36). It is indeed telling that before the work

of the TRC the number of deaths was estimated at ca. 25,000, much lower than the figure calculated by the commission. This gap and the surprise generated by the "discovery" of the magnitude of murders, disappearances, forced displacements, and destructions betray how indifference and "the differential grievability across populations" (Butler, *Frames of War*: 24) had facilitated the catastrophe.

The shadow of the war in *Red April*

The fraught reality of close encounters in Peru's civil war, the violence of "intimate enemies", and the differential distribution of precariousness and grievability play a crucial role in *Red April*. The novel narrates the story of Félix Chacaltana, the Associate District Prosecutor in Ayacucho, who attempts to solve a series of gruesome murders that occur during the celebrations surrounding Holy Week in 2000, when Sendero had seemingly been largely neutralised. The events take place against a double backdrop, political and religious-symbolical. Roncagliolo situates the story twenty years after the beginning of Sendero's insurgency, in a period of transition, when Fujimori's Peru, plagued by corruption and political scandals, was trying to overcome the trauma of the conflict and prepare for the general elections. At the same time, the context of the Holy Week charges the story with transcendental significance. Together with Seville's in Spain, Ayacucho's *Semana Santa* is the most traditional in the world, staging vivid re-enactments of the Passion, Jesus' path to crucifixion, and the resurrection. This celebration of death, with blood and sorrows exhibited in the streets, bestows a symbolic meaning on each of the murders investigated by Chacaltana. The latter indeed follow the schedule of celebrations that go from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day.

The story begins when Justino Mayta Carazo, a peasant, discovers a body in his neighbour's hayloft. The following day Chacaltana goes to the Military Hospital to look for the forensic report. Chacaltana is originally from Ayacucho, but since he grew up in Lima he avoided the worst years of violence in the highlands.[8] He is introduced as an honest, patriotic, and punctilious paper-pusher, who talks to his mother as if she were alive and seeks in the penal code a refuge from his personal insecurities: "He had done nothing bad, he had done nothing good, he had never done anything not stipulated in the statutes of his institution" (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 11). When the prosecutor sees the body in the morgue, he is shocked. The corpse is charred, it misses an arm, and it is marked with a cross on the forehead.

During the following days, the image of the body flickers continuously in

Chacaltana's mind (18). He re-experiences the encounter with the carbonised body in distressing recollections and nightmares. Daily life stimuli back the memory of the corpse and affect his sleep and meals. Yet the charred corpse is only the first in a series of five gruesome murders Chacaltana must investigate. The main plotline focuses on the protagonist's investigations of the killings and on his attempts to decipher their marked symbolism. Each body found has been killed in concomitance with a religious event: Ash Wednesday, the Friday of Sorrows, Holy Wednesday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday. As in the case of the first body, there is a close connection between the method in which the five victims have been murdered and the date of their death. All the bodies have been brutally mutilated and are missing a specific part. The sequence of findings seems to suggest that the murderer(s) are composing a body made up of the dismembered parts. This is an explicit allusion to the Andean myth of Inkarri, the Incan King. According to this legend, the Spanish Conquistadors tortured Túpac Amaru and buried his dismembered parts in different areas of their empire, as a punishment for his rebellion. The Andean *campesinos* believe that those parts are growing and will eventually rejoin. When this will happen, the Inca will rise again and restore their empire, crushing those who destroyed it. Father Quiroz, the priest who is explaining the legend to Chacaltana, draws a connection between the Inkarri and Sendero: "At times, when I see the Indians so submissive, so ready to accept anything, I wonder if on the inside they aren't thinking that the moment will arrive, and that someday our roles will be reversed. […] Sendero presented itself as the resurgence. And it was always conscious of the value of symbols" (196). These words reinforce Chacaltana's suspicion that the murders are an indication of Sendero's return. While the prosecutor pursues this line of investigation, the government's officials obstruct his work. There seems to be a wish to deny Sendero's resurgence, especially on the verge of the new elections and at the height of the Holy Week tourist season in Ayacucho, which should mark the establishment of a new era of peace and development. As Commander Carrión tells Chacaltana: "In this country there is no terrorism, by orders from the top" (32).

The clues left by the murderer and the identity of the victims (a *sinchi*, a peasant, a *senderista*, a priest, and a woman Chacaltana thinks he is in love with) lead the prosecutor to formulate alternative hypotheses. Little by little, he notices that the new victims are people whom he recently encountered and realises that he is being framed. Chacaltana comprehends that he is supposed to be the sixth victim, who will provide the heart to the modern Inkarri. The architect of the project is Commander Carrión, the head of the military forces in Ayacucho and Chachaltana's key interlocutor within the government. Carrión

gradually emerges as a character affected by PTSD, who "began killing in order to protect the governmental pact of silence: his first victim was another military member who could not stop talking about the massacres during the armed conflict. The subsequent killings were a consequence of his strategy to leave no trace of his undoing" (Chauca, *Mental Illness*: 74). On Easter Sunday, Chacaltana confronts and kills Carrión, yet not before the latter reveals a secret that sheds a retrospective light on the many signs of disturbance that the prosecutor manifested throughout the novel. When he was a child, Chacaltana accidentally killed his mother in an attempt to punish his father for his abuses. Both parents died in the fire caused by the young Chacaltana in the family house. The revelation exposes Chacaltana's own PTSD, which becomes increasingly prominent as he progresses in his investigations.

The novel concludes with a report from the National Intelligence Service agent Eléspuru who attributes all the murders to Chacaltana and praises the work of the armed forces and the intelligence services for keeping the facts out of the press and removing all the files related to the case, adding that the accused, Félix Chacaltana, has been seen in the region of Ayacucho "on the occasion of his attempting to organise 'defence militias' with intentions that remain unclear" (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 270). The prosecutor "displayed evident signs of psychological and moral deterioration, and […] he still retains the murder weapon, which he flourishes constantly and nervously at the least provocation, although it lacks the appropriate ammunition" (270-271). Having covered up the truth and created a fictional account of the events that backs up the official narrative of success with regards to the countersubversive struggle, Eléspuru (*él es Perú*, he is Peru) – the "figurative embodiment of the nation" (Lambright, *Andean Truths*, 49) – considers that "the Intelligence Service has fulfilled its mission of safeguarding the peace and security of the region, at the same time that it has directed information to channels most suited to the interests of law and order, thus collaborating in the future development of a nation like ours" (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 271).

Red April could be read as "an important critique of transitional justice processes, where procedure and craft can take precedence over more important purposes" (Lambright, *Andean Truths*: 50). If Chacaltana's modus operandi underscores the prevalence of form over content ("I also want to close this case as soon as I can, Captain, but your report has to reach me because procedure demands it", 54), Eléspuru's concluding report represents the national willingness to advance a political and economic agenda at the expense of truth and justice. The detective novel structure allows Roncalgliolo to interweave many themes connected to the internal armed conflict and TRC's *Final Report*.

The novel exposes questions like the corruption of state institutions and the Church, the politics of language concerning the armed conflict and its memory, performances of melancholia as acts of protest for the disappeared (Celis-Castillo, *Loss, Emotions, and Politics*), debates and popular beliefs on the origins of violence (De Vivanco, *Postapocalipsis*: 144-146; Lopez, *Magna violence*).

For the purposes of my discussion, I want to address some critical points highlighted by recent scholarship. The first concerns the fact that *Red April* has been written decisively with an international audience in mind. For Víctor Vich, "*Red April* is a novel that is highly influenced by a set of demands that global market currently imposes and that in its case crystallise in specific representations of violence, religion, and the subaltern" (*La novela*: 249). Chacaltalana "discovers" the corruption of Peruvian institutions as if someone who had developed his professional career within those institutions could notice structural malfunctions only at a late stage. The treatment of indigenous people could be described as "orientalist" insofar as it creates a superficial and stereotyped account of Andean culture and people. Adopting the perspective of the outsider and positing Spanish as the proper language, the narrative represents the indigenous population as obscure, unfathomable, and backwards:

> The Indians were delighted to attend Mass, and at Mass… They prayed and learned canticles, they even took Communion. But they never stopped worshipping the sun, the river, and the mountains. Their Latin prayers were only memorised repetitions. Inside they continued worshipping their gods, their *huacas*. They deceived the Jesuits. (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 40)

> [The street vendor] mumbled a couple of phrases in Quechua. The prosecutor understood that "not too far" could mean "two days away". He remembered how difficult it is to question Quechua speakers, especially if they also do not feel like talking. And they never feel like talking. They are always afraid of what might happen. They do not trust anybody. (47)

The *limeño* characters in the novel often depict the indigenous population contemptuously, using racialised derogatory terms like "*cholos*". Andean culture is represented as "alien to modernity", as an obstacle that needs to be shed or removed if the country wants to achieve modernisation. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the dominant, metropolitan (read: western) culture and the radical indigenous otherness. As Lambright points out,

> constructed as peripheral to the socio-political and cultural progress of the nation, in [*Red April*] indigenous people, and even, for the most part Andean mestizos, are consistently denied voice and agency. […] Their subjectivity in the novel is constituted exclusively through their interactions with the main character, and through interpretations of their culture proffered by members of the dominant culture (government representatives from Lima, or the local priest). (*Andean Truths*: 51-52)

This form of "hermeneutical injustice" (Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*: 147-175), an identity-based marginalisation that keeps whole groups of knowers from shaping social understandings of human experience and history, also determines the novel's portrayal of violence.

By weaving into the narrative stereotypes about the *campesinos* and the *senderistas*, representations of sacrifice and collective purification charged with religious symbolism, ancient legends about the Inca and the Wari, and an image of an Andean culture characterised by archaism and incomprehensibility, Roncagliolo's novel seem to advance an "indigenista" interpretation of the internal armed conflict. According to this interpretation, "[Peru's] political violence should be understood as a ritual practice rooted in the deepest essence of Andean tradition" (Vich, *La novela*: 253). This position is explicitly voiced by Commander Carrión who, at the beginning of the investigations, reminds Chacalatana of the *cholos*' intrinsic violent nature and of the Uchuraccay massacre, a tragic episode of the war in which local *campesinos* slaughtered eight journalists they mistook as *senderistas*. The reference recalls the Vargas Llosa Commission's report on the massacres, which built its interpretation of the events on a radical separation between a modern Peru and an archaic one, uncivilised and characterised by primitive violence (Vargas Llosa, *Inquest in the Andes*; Franco, *Cruel Modernity*: 56-76). Considering these aspects, Lambright argues that *Red April* and other novels by Lima-born writers like *La hora azul* and *Un lugar llamado Oreja de Perro* "commit their own sort of violence. Indeed, they participate in and further a sustained project of symbolic violence that begins with the Conquest and, that, it could be argued, is the very root system that gave birth to and sustained the war itself, and they offer no viable alternative, discursive or otherwise" (*Andean Truths*: 59).

Unheimliche encounters with the past of violence

Vich's and Lambright's analyses are convincing, but I disagree with the idea that *Red April* offers no viable alternatives. I contend that it is possible to read

Roncagliolo's novel differently, as a narrative that through the connection between close encounters, PTSD, and the uncanny foregrounds the involvement of the privileged classes in the violence that struck Peru in the 1980s, thus calling into question our common self-conception as innocent and peaceful subjects, alien to the violence fictionalised in the novel. Global novels are not passive victims of the world literary market; rather, they are often "acutely conscious of their position as part of a world system" (Kirsch, *The Global Novel*: 24) and can use the global as a medium to analyse how human experiences communicate across borders.

While *Red April* brings up many issues related to war – torture, state-sanctioned violence, guerrilla tactics, the disappeared, "extreme masculinity", and "expressive crimes" (Franco, *Cruel Modernity*: 15-21) – a question that stands out is that of the relation between close encounters and PTSD. As we saw above, the nature of Peru's internal armed conflict made face-to-face killings and encounters with intimate enemies prominent. This is reflected in the narrative of *Red April*. Having to investigate the murders, Chacaltana comes face-to-face with brutally mutilated bodies, a mass grave, members and sympathisers of Sendero, state officials traumatised by the war, and dogs strung up from the lampposts in the village of Yawarmayo. These encounters have an ever-increasing impact on its psyche, as many passages reveal. After seeing the charred body in the morgue, Chacaltana has continuous distressing recollections and nightmares about fire, death, and the years of terrorism. The cases he investigates "inflame his memories" (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 45-46) and generate intrusive flashbacks that translate into somatic symptoms of PTSD. Noticing how people he recently met are found dead he tells the priest: "All the people I talk to die, Father. I'm afraid. It's… it's as if I were signing their death sentences when I leave them" (194). What frightens him most is knowing that "there was something he could not control, something inside him" (124). Indeed, Chacaltana's outbursts of anger increase as he progresses in his investigations. Eventually, he becomes so violent that he rapes Edith, his love interest.

The encounters Chacaltana makes are particularly distressing because they bring back something he had repressed: "I'm afraid. I don't sleep well. This… all of this is as if I had already seen it. There's something in all this that has already happened, something that speaks of me" (195). He gradually realises that the dead bodies "have something to do with him more concretely than he had imagined" (120). The narrative repeatedly connects the prosecutor's dreadful findings with fire and the death of his mother, which the conclusion reveals as Chacaltana's childhood trauma. The events that are traumatising the

protagonist of *Red April* thus acquire a further dimension. They are not simply stressors that generate Chacaltana's PTSD, but also *unheimlich* encounters, situations that are linked to "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud, *The Uncanny*: 124). The German word "*unheimlich*" (uncanny, eerie, unhomely) seems to indicate the opposite of *heimlich*, what is known and familiar, and thus safe and comfortable (from *Heim*, "home"). Yet, as Freud shows in his 1919 essay, there is a shade of meaning in which *heimlich* merges with its formal antonym, "so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*" (132). According to Freud's analysis, the uncanny effect has to do with phenomena such as the constant recurrence of the same thing in combination with particular circumstances; the experience of *déjà vu*; the idea of the "double"; odd coincidences and the sense that things are fated to happen; situations in which what is inanimate is given attributes of life or, conversely, living beings that display the features of an automaton; circumstances in which what is not human appears in a pseudo-human form; "anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" (148); severed limbs, especially when they are credited with independent activity; "the idea of being buried alive, only apparently dead" (150); "the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead" (154). In sum, the uncanny "concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar" (Bennett and Royle, *An Introduction*: 34). Freud argues that this troubling experience is due to something that has been repressed and now returns, for the uncanny – according to Schelling's definition – is something "that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (quoted in Freud, *The Uncanny*: 132). By revealing the ambivalence of what we considered familiar, close to us, and dear, the uncanny introduces a fundamental disturbance at the core of what we feel and think. This can have traumatic effects on our psyche for it disrupts our sense of self and identity.

Red April shows how a series of traumatic encounters in a (post)war context may generate a qualitative change in the mental state of an individual once a certain threshold of traumatic exposure is trespassed upon. The case of Chacaltana suggests that such a threshold may be connected to the degree in which we uncannily identify with the events, images, or behaviours that are traumatising us. Close encounters, PTSD, and the uncanny thus form a sort of hermeneutic triangle in *Red April*. Each of them can be interpreted as a result of the combination of the other two factors. The encounters are "close" not just because they involve coming up face-to-face with something, but also because

they bring into the open things that are strangely familiar to Chacaltana and that affect his own psyche. The PTSD he suffers is not due to just conflict-related stressors, but also to the fact that the latter reveal something he had repressed about his own past and self. Finally, the uncanny effect is generated by traumatic experiences of *déjà vu* (fire, carbonised bodies), the vision of dead bodies and severed limbs, strange repetitions of events, and by the fear of being buried alive and the instantaneous fulfilment of certain thoughts. The intersections between these three elements become more and more apparent as the story develops, opening important avenues for the study of the psychological consequences of war and the nature of violence.

Like in Cortázar's *House Taken Over*, in *Red April* an unidentified force gradually disrupts an apparently calm situation. Both stories end with a "house" locked and a "key" tossed away. And both stories raise questions on the nature of such a house, revealing that at the heart of the *Heim* there lies the *un-Heim*. The story of Chacaltana shows that repressing the trauma of war and one's relation to violence makes it difficult to recognise how violence can flare up, and that ignoring the parts of the self which are connected to violence makes it difficult to identify the parts that can control it. Indeed, Chacaltana and his initial myopic reliance on the penal code represent our widespread self-serving biases toward violence. We tend to present our self in a positive light, to observe traumatic events from the standpoints of the victim and the moraliser, and to conceive evil as an external force that penetrates our "house", ignoring that "most of us – including you, dear reader – are wired for violence, even if in all likelihood we will never have an occasion to use it" (Pinker, *The Better Angels*: 582). This does not mean that we are bound to visit violence on each other, nor that we cannot distinguish victims from perpetrators, but rather that for evolutionary, psychological, and social reasons human beings accommodate both motives that impel us to violence and motives that impel us towards peace and cooperation.

In several interviews, Roncagliolo explained that in his intentions Chacaltana represents our naïve and moralising attitude about war and horror.[9] *Red April*'s exploration of violence is sustained a subtle mix of irony and identification that challenges readers to continuously negotiate between proximity and distance with the protagonist. I would argue that Roncagliolo's wager is to create "ironic identification" as a mode of narration. On the one hand, the detective novel structure draws us close to Chacaltana and invites us to look at the events through the prosecutor's gaze. On the other hand, Roncagliolo's irony creates a distance between us and the protagonist. Like Chacaltana, we *tend* to approach violence from a perspective of self-assumed innocence. We hardly ever imagine

ourselves as perpetrators, and yet many historical crimes are committed by ordinary people. On the other hand, Chacaltana is to a large extent a caricature of this position: his focus on rules, procedures, and the law is too pronounced to be believed, his guileless ignorance of corruption is too bizarre, and his lack of street knowledge is at times embarrassing. Identifying with a character is a messy and unpredictable business, and should not be conflated with the question of identity. Identifying is not synonymous with "sameness": contrary to what some scholars seem to assume, centring *Red April* on Chacaltana's perspective is not to endorse that perspective. As Rita Felski writes, "glimpsing aspects of oneself in fictional beings involves a volatile mix of the familiar and the different; to recognise is to know again but also to see afresh. As I recognise myself in another, I also learn something about myself. And I might be startled or discomfited by what I see" (*Identifying*: 101). The ironic identification elicited by *Red April* is premised on this short circuit of recognition and disassociation. The reader is drawn to Chacaltana, yet also estranged from him. This double movement invites us to put ourselves in Chacaltana's shoes and, simultaneously, to look at his (and our) conduct from the outside, calling into question our relationship to violence.

The Vietnam War veteran Karl Marlantes argues that we all have a "shadow", that is, an opaque part of our self that we despise, that can be violent, that we do not want to see. We cannot defeat the shadow. The more we deny it, the more vulnerable we become to it, especially in war and in delicate post-war situations. Recognising "the repressed and despised parts of our personalities" that under ordinary circumstances "manifest themselves as small human foibles or weaknesses in character" but that in the crucible of war can lead to consequences of great horror and suffering is "a form of heroism not taught in boot camp" (Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*: 80). *Red April*, I submit, can be read as a novel that pushes us to come to terms with our "shadow". It does not offer definitive answers, but it bids us confront our *unheimlich* proximity to war, "society's dirty work" (184).

Conclusions

Such proximity is not only connected to our inner demons but also our subject position. The "ironic identification" analysed above also applies to the narrative at large, that of the novel itself. *Red April*, scholars have underscored, addresses an audience rather unfamiliar with the Andean culture. It is written from a Lima perspective, middle-class and dominant, principally for a metropolitan and global audience. The novel thus creates an uncomfortable "positional

identification" that highlights "our" (readers of the "privileged" classes) implication in the violence suffered by the subaltern and in the differential distribution of grievability. I would argue that the dialectic of irony and identification that we saw above structures the whole novel. The stereotypes about Andean culture and people, the haughty or implicit discrimination of Quechua language and local categories of knowledge, the fantasy of the enclosed nation (Ubilluz, *El fantasma*), and the fact that the government official and dominant classes in the novel portray the *campesinos* and the indigenous population as primitive and intrinsically violent, are so marked that can be read as a way of ironizing on how the criollo elite framed the conflict. There is indeed a distinctive vein of black humour and "sociological" irony in *Red April* that parodies the mentality of Lima's upper classes. For example, when Chacaltana protests against the electoral frauds and misconducts he has witnessed in Yawarmayo, Commander Carrión – who was visiting the village – responds: "What law? There's no law here. Do you think you are in Lima? Please…" (Roncagliolo, *Red April*: 88). And the journalists who come to check the conduct of the elections – "all white, Limenians or gringos" (100) – are completely out of touch with the problems and reality of the Andean highlands and easily fooled by the corrupted local police:

> "As you can see", the police officer continued: "A good climate, a peaceful countryside, people freely exercising their right to vote… What else could you ask for?"
>
> "You are right", said the journalist. "I ought to move here. Lima can be an unbearable city." (101)

By representing the state and the privileged classes as historically disinterested in or ignorant of the condition of the populations living in the Andean highlands, *Red April* brings into relief our responsibility as "implicated subjects", that is, as subjects who contribute to, inhabit, or inherit complex systems of domination and violence "without being themselves direct agents of harm" (Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*: 1). Indeed, as Chauca has argued, Chacaltana's pathological Oedipus complex "mirrors the governmental pact of silence" and his denial of his childhood crime "allegorises the state of denial of those who benefit from the [the structures of power that alienate Andean communities and their territories]" (*Mental Illness*: 75-76). In a country where exclusion is so embedded that "the disappearance of tens of thousands of citizens went unnoticed by the dominant society" (69), the privileged need to acknowledge and take responsibility for propping up and propagating the

structures of discrimination and social, political, and epistemic injustice that made possible and fuelled Peru's civil war.

By narrating the unfolding of Chacaltana's PTSD within the larger context of the trauma of Ayacucho's society, *Red April* prompts us to examine the constitutive ambivalence of our self. The stressors that may cause our anxiety disorder are maximally traumatic when they mirror past experiences, character traits, behavioural patterns, or subject positions that we perceive as uncomfortably familiar even though they have been estranged from our psyche through repression, habit, or lack of self-scrutiny. Literature demonstrates the importance of narratives for probing the heavy contradictions and consequences of war. Roncagliolo's literary articulation of the interplay between close encounters, PTSD, and the uncanny could indeed be read as an invitation to unlock the house that has been "taken over" and explore how the violence of war "assault psyches, confuses ethics, and tests souls" (Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*: xi).

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[1] After 2000, there have been occasional resurgences of violence attributed to *senderistas* (or small groups that claim a historical affiliation with Sendero). However, given the local nature and the low-intensity of these incidents, the armed conflict between the Peruvian state and Sendero is generally considered to have taken place between 1980 and 2000. See Ríos and Sánchez (*Breve historia de Sendero Luminoso*: 133-154).

[2] While it has become commonplace to use the name "Sendero Luminoso" (Shining Path), which derives from the slogan "by way of the shining path of Mariátegui," the actual name was Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL). José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) was an influential intellectual and the founder of Peruvian Socialist Party.

[3] Several authors, including Roncagliolo (*La cuarta espada*: 218-219), Agüero (*Los rendidos*: 24, 29-30, and 49), and Aguirre (*Terruco de m…*), point out that there is no neutral language to refer to the internal conflict in Peru and its protagonists. According to the speaker and his or her interpretation of the events, the former can be referred to as "*conflicto armado*" (armed conflict), "*guerra senderista*" (Shining Path's war), "*lucha armada*" (armed struggle), "*guerra popular*" (people's war), or "*revolución*" (revolution) and its protagonists can be called terrorists, soldiers, comrades, "*senderistas*" (Shining Path's fighters), "*terrucos*" (a colloquial term, used as a substitute for terrorist and as a frequent insult to stigmatise sectors of the Peruvian population), "*presos políticos*" (political prisoners, if in jail).

[4] Following Theidon, Pedersen and Kienzler (*Exploring Pathways of Distress*: 253-257) have shown that in the region of Ayacucho there are "local idioms of distress", such as *llaki* (sorrow, grief), *susto* (fright), *pinsamientuwan* (an inner feeling of increasing and persistent worries, combined with the embodied experience of "worrying thoughts throbbing inside your head"), *tutal pinsamientuwan* (excess of worrying memories), *ñakary* (a collective form of affliction, induced by unfortunate events), and *llaki* (individual affliction, sorrow and sadness emerging from the inside).

[5] I am fully aware that *Red April* and this journal may also be read by other people, but in specifying my use of the first-person plural in the above passage I want to call attention to our position concerning structures of violence that we do not originate or control, much in the spirit of Bruce Robbins's *The Beneficiary*: "Who is a beneficiary? You are, probably. If you had not benefitted from some ambitious higher education, it seems unlikely that you would be dipping into a book with so earnest and unpromising a title as this one. The education that has prepared you to read this paragraph may not guarantee much in terms of job opportunities, income, or security, but on the global scale […] it makes you one of the privileged" (6).

[6] While earlier accounts of the PCP-SL emphasised the pseudo-religious conviction of many of its members, recent investigations and memoirs portray a more nuanced picture of the different motivations that led people to join its ranks. See, for example, Gavilán (*Memorias*: 38-44); Agüero (*Los rendidos*: 55-58); and Degregori (*Qué difícil es ser Dios*).

[7] According to Pedersen and Kienzler's study of PTSD in the region of Ayacucho (*Exploring Pathways of Distress*: 252-253), the violence-related stressors that affected the locals included witnessing the violent death of family members, friends, or close neighbours, lack of opportunities for proper bereavement, forced displacement, torture, material losses, being threatened with dying, being physically or sexually abused, and being forcefully enlisted in the army or as watchmen. Based on their survey data the authors conclude that "among the highland Quechua and after more than a decade of being exposed to political violence, one in four adults (24.7 %) reported symptoms compatible with the diagnosis of PTSD" (262).

Their research shows that "exposure to political violence created most of its ill effects in specific vulnerable groups, such as those unable to earn a living (unpaid domestic workers, aged, illiterate), lacking sources of emotional or material support (weak social networks), or unable to reciprocate economically (as in the case of widows)" (262).

[8] In my analysis of Chacaltana, I also consider *La pena máxima*, a novel published in 2014 but which constitutes a sort of prequel to *Red April*.

[9] See, for example, *Santiago Roncagliolo: 2015 National Book Festival*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OAvcdfqwjg (accessed 01/11/2020); and *Santiago Roncagliolo: La pena máxima*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WCQefeJzwY (accessed 01/11/2020).