

The dangerous silences of memory

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Abstract

Peru's 20 year-long Internal Armed Conflict is an open wound, a part of the country's History still disputed. Cultural memory is paving the path for new generations to learn about what happened during the period. Films are part of the cultural products that represent some of the events; they are screened in seminars, film forums, Universities, or memory museums as evidence of what happened, as a testimony of the traumatic days the country lived.

In this work we analyze the way the Internal Armed Conflict is remembered by twelve films produced after the conflict was over, identifying the absences that may lead to dangerous silences. These films are held as clues to re-construct the past. But partial tales may lead to an incomplete and flawed memory.

Keywords: Film; Memory; Peru; Internal Armed Conflict.

The most violent period in Peru

Several traumatic events plague human history. The deaths, destruction and fear caused by wars, invasions, political unrest, terrorism, and other events, affect the citizens in ways that span over decades. Latin America has had its share since the times of the colonies, and in the last decades dictatorships, guerrilla and terrorist movements have opened wounds that are still bleeding in several countries. The Internal Armed Conflict in Peru (1980-1999) is one of them. Shining Path's quest for power started in the impoverished Andean region of Ayacucho and spread to the whole country, leaving over 69,000 deaths when it ended (CVR, 2004). The conflict increased the existing division between the coastal region and the Andes, between the so-called "white people" and the indigenous population, between the urban and rural ones.

Looking back at traumatic events may be a painful challenge. Nevertheless, several authors (Bal, Crewe, & Spitzer, 1999; Feld, 2004; Lira, 2010; Neiger et al., 2011; Sturken, 1997) stress the need to remember so that we can achieve closure, or the importance of not forgetting, so mistakes from the past are not made again, as Santayana is constantly quoted. In Peru, it seems that some part of the population does not want to forget that era, while some others try to bury or distort it. Unable to become part of the country's official history -textbooks barely have little facts about it, and the information is always disputed- memory is the challenging field to represent what happened in those twenty years.

Jelin (2002) and Halbwachs (2004) explain that memory is a construction of the past made from the present, within the cultural frameworks of the individual or society that remembers. Those memories are filled with selective actions, which encompass silences

and omissions. Peruvian's memory of the Internal Armed Conflict has become extremely selective since the social actors of it – peasants and urban population, military members, and the terrorists- blame the others for the extreme violence and high death toll of those decades.

Memory does not appear spontaneously (Nora, 2008). It is not something that suddenly happens for no reason. Something usually triggers it, and the construction of the past is made after something activates it. Cultural memory focuses on how cultural artifacts trigger memories and shape it (Erlil & Nünning, 2008; Neiger et al., 2011). Sites of memory, in terms of Nora (2008), abound everywhere, triggering memories of each nation's history, as well as traumatic events from several populations. Monuments, literature, film, TV series, etc. can be a footprint of the past, something that triggers the memory of past events.

For social traumatic events, these cultural products could become a way to help retell a past that cannot be rebuilt in other ways. The official text in Peru from the Internal Armed Conflict is the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR, in Spanish), a bulky text that has a smaller version that not many Peruvians have read. With a not so friendly document in a country with high illiteracy numbers and low readings rates, memory has become the new testimony of the Internal Armed Conflict. That is why in Peru, the cultural field is the one that is building memory and trying to develop the much-needed mourning that official institutions have not (Vich, 2015).

As we mentioned before, the Peruvian Internal Armed Conflict era is barely considered in official textbooks. However, it is a topic addressed in some contexts: seminars, film forums, memory museums, universities, NGO associations, public libraries. To talk about the Internal Armed Conflict period and tell what happened in those years, cultural products - such as films- are used. They are screened as evidence of what happened throughout those years, as a testimony of the traumatic days the country lived.

They become traces of the past, tales of facts that help trigger the memory of those who lived those years, and are shaping the memory of those who were too young to remember. However, those traces, those footprints of the past, are a partial tale of what happened in those 20 years, and the past is being constructed with forgotten or silenced facts. If we are aware that these products select a part of the past, what is the responsibility when they are used as a way to tell a nation's past? If memory always has silenced elements and facts omitted, shouldn't we ask ourselves whose memories are being allowed and whose are forgotten or denied?

After the Internal Armed Conflict was over, several films about that period were produced, in a country with no real film industry. The technological advances of films made in video or digital supports, allowed that “film” cost dropped significantly, and independent and amateur filmmakers appeared all over the country. At the turn of the Century, Lima, the capital city, and the center of political and economic power, was not the only place producing films in Peru. Regions like Ayacucho also started producing films and telling the story from their side. In the first decade of this Century, films produced outside Lima vastly outnumbered the ones produced in the capital city.

We worked with 12 films that were produced in Lima and Ayacucho during this Century. These were all the films produced in these two cities, which directly addressed the Internal Armed Conflict. Five of them were produced in Ayacucho: *Sangre inocente* (2000), *El rincón de los inocentes* (2007), both directed by Palito Ortega Matute; *Gritos*

de libertad (2001), *Mártires del periodismo* (2003), both directed by Luis Berrocal Godoy; and *Secuelas del Terror* (2010) directed by Juan Camborda.

The other seven films were produced in Lima: *Paloma de papel* (2003) and *Tarata* (2009) directed by Fabrizio Aguilar; *Flor de Retama* (2004) directed by Martin Landeo; *Vidas Paralelas* (2008) directed by Rocío Lladó, script by Carlos Freyre; *Magallanes* (2015) directed by Salvador Del Solar; *La última noticia* (2015), directed by Alejandro Legaspi, and *La hora azul* (2016) directed by Evelyne Pegot-Ogier. With the exception of *Vidas paralelas*, all scripts were written by the directors themselves.

It is also important to stress that *Paloma de papel*, *Flor de retama*, *Vidas paralelas*, *Magallanes* and *La hora azul* were the directors' first films of their career. In a country with a small film industry, the fact that the film that becomes the presentation card of new filmmakers has a direct relation with the Internal Armed Conflict talks about the symbolic capital -in terms of Bourdieu- these films provide, and the position they assume to tell the story, and how or what will be remembered of the past.

We analyzed the way the Internal Armed Conflict is represented in these films, and in this sense, how it is remembered, who are the ones that shape that memory, whose voices are heard and whose are rejected or forgotten, and how the figures of victims and perpetrators are built.

Using the visual methodology proposed by Rose (2012), character analysis methods (Buonnano, 1999; Dettleff, 2015; Field, 2005) and discourse theory (Dhoest, 2007; Erll, 2008; Foucault, 1979; Mujica, 2007; Van Dijk, 2009), we approached the research with multiple methods.

Since the actions are performed through characters, we used character analysis matrix for them. These matrices allowed us to analyze their physical, social, psychological, sentimental, and trauma dimensions. To understand the plots and the way they were built and presented to the audiences, we used scene description and analysis and a narration structure matrix. Since we needed to determine what the films were about, we used topic analysis matrices and discourse analysis, which also allowed us to identify power relations and truth discourses developed in them. In-depth interviews with seven filmmakers -Aguilar didn't want to talk about his films, and Ortega died before we could interview him-, one producer -Ortega's wife and also the producer of his films- and screenwriter -Freyre- allowed us to understand the references and motivations for making these films. And to have first-hand information about how was to live in Ayacucho during the conflict and how did the CVR worked before writing their final report, we did several in-depth interviews with historians, CVR commissioners, members of Human Rights NGOs, and academics who lived and analyzed the life in Ayacucho during the Internal Armed Conflict period.

This methodology allowed us to analyze the films from several perspectives such as the production, the enunciators, the film itself as a product and its relation to real facts.

Urban tales, forgotten citizens.

According to CVR's report, 75% of the victims during the Internal Armed Conflict were people whose mother tongue was not Spanish, but other native languages -as Quechua, Aymara, or an amazon language-, and 57% of the victims were peasants (CVR, 2004).

For this research, we analyzed 130 characters of the films. Although almost 60% of the 130 characters were represented as Andean population, less than 12% are peasants or people that live or work in the countryside. Most characters are represented as urban, living in Lima, in Ayacucho, or another Andean city. In the interviews made for this research, some filmmakers said that shooting outside the cities meant higher production costs, and that is why they preferred urban tales and characters. However, some others recognized that they did not know enough of what happened outside the cities, or recognized the fact that the rural population has been neglected in Peru for centuries, and these films were another demonstration of that reality.

Film is an urban media, and technology is scarce and difficult to acquire, more in Peru's poor regions. It was not easy for Ayacucho's filmmaker to make their films, several times having to borrow cameras and material to shoot their films. For the rural population, this seemed to be an impossible task. So, the stories were told by those who lived in the cities, and they told the facts they knew.

That is why 78% of the 18 main characters of the films were urban, while 12% were peasants and 10% military. This means that the stories told by these films represent the Internal Armed Conflict as mainly urban, something that happened primarily in the cities, affecting primarily people who lived and worked in the cities. The underrepresentation of peasants' stories not only forget them, but also denies them of the agency they had and silences their actions during the Internal Armed Conflict. This fact let us see that urban characters were the ones who had citizenship status to tell the stories, or have their stories told about. We will return to this idea later.

Using these films as part of the cultural memories, turning them into trials of what happened during the Internal Armed Conflict, skews the History, turning the Internal Armed Conflict into an urban one, telling only a part of what happened. Nevertheless, understanding whose stories are being told and who are the ones that tell it is only part of the way the memory is being shaped.

Plenty of male victims, few survivors.

In almost every film, the main characters are portrayed as victims who suffer the violence -may it be from the terrorist or the military- and can never escape that role. These characters represent a role where they stay from the moment of trauma and can never abandon it. Furthermore, most stories told are about urban males, which is also a way to suppress the female characters' suffering -and thus, the female population and their representation. The female characters portrayed on the films struggle to achieve justice not for themselves, but for their male relatives.

The way the Internal Armed Conflict is represented tells the story about male people living in the city, helpless individuals, with no agency or any capacity to avoid what happened to them or defend themselves. However, they are also free of any responsibility for their actions and behavior. As Agüero states, "the cultural centrality of the victim makes that it is not important what he or she has done, but what was done to him or her. It takes away the [social] actor, and deliver us a helpless and depoliticized character" (Agüero, 2016, p. 98).

There are no tales about survivors, and almost no character is represented as such. Those who suffer because of the Internal Armed Conflict violence, will never be able to

overcome that suffering, and become a survivor of that period. They stay on the victim position, and from that position, the films denounce what happened during the Internal Armed Conflict era. These stories build an identity of victims, both in Lima and Ayacucho narratives. However, while in the former, trauma will mark the characters but will not define their existence, in the latter, trauma is the place where the characters will live, their existence will be circumscribed by that fact, giving them an identity and allowing them to perform themselves to other State institutions.

In films produced in Ayacucho, militaries are mainly portrayed as perpetrators, while in films produced in Lima, they can be perpetrators, or they can be protectors. It will depend on who is telling the story and what they want to represent. When their representation is not negative, military people may also be represented as victims. Not only victims of the violence from the terrorist, but also victims of what is depicted as a misunderstanding of their actions, and victims of a State that do not support them enough, or had forgotten them once the Internal Armed Conflict was over.

We have on these films a representation where militaries and civilians -may they be urban or rural- are the ones who suffered during those years. An identity of victim is built, with a trauma that remains in several characters, who remain fixated on that situation. Lamas reminds us that being a victim “gives reputation, demands to be listened [...] Victims become immune to any critic, ensure the innocence beyond any reasonable doubt. How can the victim be guilty or responsible for anything?” (Lamas, 2018). We can also recall the idea of executioners and victims sharing what Agamben calls a “gray zone,” where there is no responsibility at the end of what is told (Agamben, 1999, p. 21).

For this reason, some filmmakers from Ayacucho reject the idea of representing the military as victims because that takes away the guilt that most people of Ayacucho put on them. “They were supposed to protect us, but they were the ones that harmed us most. They did not know how to help us in the time we needed them most” told us Nelba Acuña, a film producer from Ayacucho, in a personal interview. Despite the fact of proven abuses and crimes committed by military forces during the Internal Armed Conflict, it is also true that they were murdered and tortured, and several were neglected by the State once the Internal Armed Conflict was over. The CVR report tells how unprepared and isolated the military were, when they had to face the war during those years. Nevertheless, to remember that side of the story is difficult for a big part of the population, and some filmmakers prefer to stress the violent part of the military, or self-censor themselves and avoid the topic.

The only ones that are never represented as victims are the terrorists. These are characters who are depicted just as evil and cannot suffer or be the victim of anything. Whatever happens to them is presented as something they deserve, and they seem to have no rights. Their voice is the most absent one in the films, and most times the characters that represent terrorist barely talk or show any feelings -positive or negative. They are just represented as evil and violent characters, with no reasons for their actions.

Two countries, and no justice for all.

We identified ten recurrent actions on most of the films through the topic analysis, including sexual violence, kidnapping, torture, and murder. Some of these actions are part of a representation of lack of justice, a recurrent topic on Peruvian films that depict the

Internal Armed Conflict. However, this lack of justice is not proposed for military and terrorists. The concept appears to elude them since the harm they have done seems to overshadow whatever may have happened to them, whatever injustice or harm has been done to them. In words of Merino, there is a differential distribution for the characters, because “in the eyes of the others, they have not lost anything and have no reason to suffer” (Merino in Agüero, 2016, p. 144). As we told before, it is as if they were no citizens of Peru, and their rights do not exist.

Ayacucho filmmakers tell the story as a testimony, stressing that it is something they lived, something they know. They were the real victims of the conflict, and their story has to be told and heard. Although they do not build their identity as survivors, they feel that they have to remember what happened, they cannot let go, in the face of what they suffered, and also because of all the people who are dead and cannot tell what happened to them. They have to be not only their own voice, but also the voice of the dead ones. That is why Agamben tells us that those who have survived have “a vocation to remember, [they] cannot not remember” (Agamben, 1999, p. 26).

Several plots of the Ayacucho’s films depict actions that directors say happened to them or someone they know. “We decided to tell the story like that because that was our experience. The military people were extremely abusive with us” told us in a personal interview Luis Berrocal, a filmmaker from Ayacucho. Despite this, there are no biographical films. Their characters do not represent specifically a person and his/her life. They build what Weingarten (2006) calls character models. “It is not about someone specific. It is based on anecdotes of several people”, said Palito Ortega, one of the most renowned Ayacucho filmmakers, about his last film (Ortega in Cadenas, 2016).

In the films, the characters are supposed to be built by the aggregate of different people, bits and pieces of deeds that happened to several individuals, a mixture that builds a character that represents no one in particular, but at the same time represents the population of Ayacucho. Those things that happen to their characters and their loved ones -imprisonment, torture, rape, disappearances- are never solved, their denounces will never be heard, and justice will never be on their side. They are victims not only of the physical and psychological abuses but also of a justice system whose structure was more to preserve the injustice than to fight against it, as noted by the President of the CVR (Lerner, 2008, p. III).

In previous work, we have already discussed the lack of justice during the Internal Armed Conflict (Dettleff, 2020). The films depict sexual violence, kidnapping, torture, and murder, by the terrorists but mainly by the military forces. These actions are part of the representation of violence, but they end up proposing the lack of justice, a recurring theme in Peruvian films that portray the Internal Armed Conflict. This is represented in non-judicialized acts and in legal neglect by the authorities, slow and cumbersome processes that never come to an end, producing discouragement, final apathy, and distrust in the judiciary by the population.

The power structures are revealed by the discourse analysis, where Andean people, peasants, and the ones with the least economic resources are the ones that will see justice as more impossible to reach. Nevertheless, we must say that Lima and middle- class characters will also suffer this problem, and justice will seem to be a very elusive goal for most people during the Internal Armed Conflict.

Analyzing the lack of justice during this period, the representation made in these films depicts how the judicial system in Peru neglected the victims of their voice, compassion, and the right to be considered citizens. People accused of several human rights violations during the Internal Armed Conflict never stood trial, or their trials have come decades later. However, even a trial is only part of the justice because “law is solely directed toward judgement, independent of truth or justice” (Agamben, 1999, p. 18).

If the urban or military victims feel there was no justice for them, people from the rural areas had it even worse. In a personal interview, Adelina García -former President of ANFASEP, an Ayacucho organization of relatives of disappeared people during the Internal Armed Conflict- told us that even if they do not receive justice through the courts, they still wait for words of those responsible for what happened during that era. “They only need to apologize to the relatives. That cost nothing, that is not money. Just an apology” Garcia told us.

This lack of justice is a sad reality in Peru. During the Internal Armed Conflict it became more evident, so it is no surprise that the topic is found in almost every film analyzed for this research, and more so in those produced in Ayacucho. These films become not only what Martínez (2000) calls truthful fictions but are presented as real testimonies of what happened in the region during the Internal Armed Conflict, told by the people that feel they are the ones who really know. Ortega -who died in 2018- stressed how the Internal Armed Conflict could only be told by Ayacuchans, and saw his films as “historical documents, because they tell the truth. One day they will become essential films, historical ones” (Ortega in Gálvez, 2006).

While Ayacucho films are posed as testimonies of something known, Lima films seem to tell something about what was learnt, even though terrorism acts also happened in Lima, and several filmmakers or relatives of them were affected by some terrorist act. In the interviews I had with each of them, Salvador Del Solar told me how his mother spent months in the hospital after a terrorist attack; Martín Landeo told me how his mother and sister were blocks away from one of the deadliest explosions in Lima, and how his grandparents had to flee from their farm in the Andes; Evelyne Pegot-Ogier told me that a relative was killed in a terrorist attack. Despite all these personal experiences, for most Lima filmmakers it seems as if the Internal Armed Conflict did not happen in their own region.

“I am not from Ayacucho. I have no idea of what they went through. It would be disrespectful that I can tell their story,” told us Pegot-Ogier in a personal interview, implying that the Internal Armed Conflict story is not part of Peruvians’ history, but only of Ayacuchans’ history. Rocío Lladó, another Lima filmmaker, told us in an interview that the producers wanted the film to be shot in Ayacucho, “but I opposed it. I felt that it could even be a lack of respect that people from Lima went and tell what they have lived”. Let’s not forget that Lladó’s film was the only one produced by the military, and the only one that is told from their perspective, so she was telling what the military lived and suffered. However, she did not seem to consider that fact as important and valuable as what happened to the civil population, especially Ayacucho's population.

Since most filmmakers -who are the directors and the screenwriters in almost every film analyzed in this research- draw on their own experiences and resort very little to official documents or sources, we have as a result the fact that the representation of the

Internal Armed Conflict is made from a personal point of view, becoming not a representation of what happened, but of an idea the filmmakers have of what happened.

A very selective memory

Peruvian's memory of the Internal Armed Conflict has been in dispute, almost since it ended. The CVR was watched with distrust, both from Ayacucho's people -who saw it as a new foreign entity- and the militaries -who saw it as a group of leftist intellectuals, coming after them. The CVR's report has been criticized, even before the Commission turned it into the government. But not only the report is disputed, but also the several versions of what happened. Civilians from Ayacucho and other parts of the country feel the different governments abandoned them during the Internal Armed Country. In contrast, the military feel they are taking all the blame, and nobody recognizes their sacrifice during that era.

As said before, these disputes have hampered the possibility of having a story that can become the official history on books to be told to the new generations. That is why cultural products are the ones building the memory of that era.

Memory is selective. It is made of things that are stressed and things that are forgotten. We have seen that in these films, the stories told remember a set of specific actions, but forget and silence other ones, and those silenced are important ones.

The first thing that stands out is the fact that the Internal Armed Conflict is remembered in these films as something that happened to urban males, who are always victims of the events, events which they did not want or had anything to do about, events that are proposed as something that comes "from outside" their own lives. Almost no film addresses how the conflict started, or what caused it. The films focus on the ongoing violence and how it affects their main male urban characters. And they are depoliticized characters, with no ideology or political position, which gives them an aura of neutrality.

Women are not absent from these stories, but there are no female main characters in the stories. At most, a couple of them share their importance on the story with a male character. They will also be victims of torture and mainly rape, but the interesting thing in these films, is that several female characters will be the ones looking for justice -and not getting it- but not for themselves and because of the violence and damage suffered, but for their male relatives, taken prisoners, kidnapped or disappeared. It seems that whatever happened to the women in these films is not as crucial as to whatever happened to a male character. This can be partly due to the fact that most directors and screenwriters are men. Even when we have that women directed two films, the stories were written by men, and they ended up telling a story from a male perspective.

The way these films represent what happened to women during the Internal Armed Conflict silence their hardship and misfortunes. They show better resilience than males, and some are shown as trying to do something to overcome what they have to go through. However, we cannot forget that their presence in the stories is only a third of male characters, which stresses the fact that these films are male stories, about what happened to the male victims, and what their suffering was.

Something similar happens to rural characters, peasants who exist in several films, but seldomly the story is about them, what happened to them, or what they did to survive. They appear in the stories as part of the population that "also suffered" as did the urban

population, as background or part of the scene's extras. As happens with female characters, this way of representation of the peasants takes away not only what happened to them, but also what they did during the Internal Armed Conflict. There are few references of the rural organizations that confronted the terrorists and became part of the vital strategy to defeat them, in partnership with military forces.

An interesting fact is that in the films analyzed there are no antagonists which are peasants. The source of the evil and the male urban victims' suffering are the militaries, the terrorist, or even another urban character. It seems that there is no agency on the peasant, as well as there is no evil in them. In the same way that the stories about their fight is set aside, no mention is made on these films of the peasants own and troublesome interests, which made them betray fellow peasant communities, or support the terrorist during the first years of the Internal Armed Conflict. This can be seen as a paternalist position from the urban directors toward rural population, who are represented as submissive and pure of heart.

These urban male tales do not challenge or problematize any of the problems faced during the Internal Armed Conflict. Things are black or white, with defined and restricted characters as the innocent and helpless victims of the conflict. Not even racism, which is considered a primary problem for the violence and human rights violations during that period, is really problematized in the films. Racism is addressed in the same way women's problems or peasant suffering is, by naming it, talking about it, or saying it exists, but not making it a topic of the film's main argument. The fact that peasants are not part of the main stories, is a way of racism, but not even when faced with that fact do filmmakers address or seem to be aware of the issue.

Taking away the importance of the peasants and women struggles during that period, giving little or no value to what the military went through, and representing them along with the terrorist as the sole perpetrators of that period, allow the urban males to become the ultimate victims of the Internal Armed Conflict. They are the ones that deserve to be heard and tell the story, which is no small thing, because, as Agüero stresses, "in a Country as Peru, where having any kind of status is so hard, having the victim status may at least be something" (Agüero, 2016, p. 116).

To close this work, let us remember that memory about the Internal Armed Conflict in Peru is being built through cultural products. As such, they are being used to teach about the past in education institutions. They do represent facts that happened during those years, we do not challenge those facts. However, our interest has been in what is not being told, because if these films are part of the Peruvian cultural memory, regarded as footprints or clues to construct the past, we must stress that the footprint is not the object nor the fact. A partial one may lead to an incomplete and flawed memory.

Looking at these films as part of the cultural memory, as traces to build the facts of the past, we can say that the leading voices and memories are those of urban individuals, leaving most memories of those who suffered the most (rural individuals) as a second level or background part of the memory. And the same thing can be said about the representation of women.

The past of the military members during that period is also rejected or rather remembered as perpetrators. The social pressure makes it hard for civilian filmmakers to tell a story that depicts a military member not as perpetrators, so any representation

different from that, must be made by themselves, or give them a very brief participation in the story.

Furthermore, there is no voice allowed to remember or hear the terrorist side. Anyone who dares to tell anything about the terrorist, besides that they were murderers, can be pointed out as a terrorist supporter. They have no one to speak for them, and a vast group of Peruvians do not want to listen to them. Only those who present themselves as the real victims -denying the category to anybody else- are allowed to build a memory of the Internal Armed Conflict.

Those who build these representations construct a truth's regime, in terms of Foucault (1979), where the representation of the victim as protagonist is configured, the violation of human rights and lack of justice is the main action, and the consequences are a complete impossibility for reconciliation. These films reflect the fact that in Peruvian society it seems that nobody wants to start a real dialogue about the Internal Armed Conflict period, because they are not willing to listen to the others.

The films analyzed for this work are part of that one-sided inexistent dialogue, and denying or silencing part of the memory, may have dramatic consequences. If we have a rural population denied its voice, agency, or ideology, it could lead to deepening the peasants' situation in the impoverished region of Peru; if we represent terrorists just as madmen or fanatic people with no motivations or political reasons for what they did, we will never be able to prevent a new movement as Shining Path. Unresolved situations as such may build a possibility of a new resurgence of a period as the one we have lived at the end of the past century. Didion tells us that "pain is a place we don't know until we get there" (Didion in Dunne, 2017). The Internal Armed Conflict period were painful times, and Peruvians do not want to return to them. But if we build a partial memory and silence part of what happened, we may dangerously be going back to that place.

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