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What Makes Latin American Public Histories Different?

Dialogues, Debates, Perspectives

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Abstract

This article explores how Public History, as developed in the Anglo-Saxon world, has evolved independently in Latin America since the 1970s. Despite its divergence from Northern traditions, Latin American public history, characterized by cultural diversity, offers alternative narratives that challenge dominant histories and support social struggles. We examine three case studies: the rise of comics about characters and historical processes of marginalized populations; the Andean Oral History Workshop (THOA) and Ch'Ixi Collective's work in Bolivia led by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and a 2010 Colombian museum exhibition addressing historical memory and violence. These examples highlight the region's contributions to public history.

Keywords: Latin America; Public history; Comics; Oral history; Museums; Social justice.

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1 Introduction

In September 2024, the Working Group *Public History from the South: Dialogues between Latin America and African Public Historians* convened during the 7th World Conference of the International Federation for Public History in Luxembourg. The group comprised members from Argentina, Brazil, Tunisia, Colombia, Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, and Ecuador. The discussions centered on the current state of public history practices in the Global South. The deliberations underscored a notable absence of historiography on public history in Latin America, despite evidence of its practice since the 1970s and potentially earlier. This lack of scholarly documentation stands in contrast to the long-standing and diverse public history activities in the region. This article aims to contribute to addressing this gap by initiating a historiographical exploration of public history's development in the region.

Public history is a historiographical trend that emerged in the late 1970s in Anglo-Saxon countries, mainly the United States, England and Australia. Its interest was to expand the spaces of incidence of the historical discipline beyond the academic sphere.[1] Although this is the most popular and well-known public history, we should not lose sight of the fact that it has been practiced in different parts of the world. For example, several initiatives developed in both academic and non-academic settings have been very important in countries such as India, China, South Africa, and also in Latin America as we argue in this text.[2] We also want to emphasize the different approaches and journeys of the field in the region as we explore here. Since the 1970s, in Latin America, public practices of history have been characterized by collaborative work between historians or social scientists and diverse social actors. Using diverse media and languages that transcend the written format, and via the commitment to concrete social struggles, the field has its own political stances.[3] However, these practices are not always recognized as part of the tradition of public history, which is dominated by literature produced in the Global North.

The main objective of this article is to recognize and value these forms of public history for their contributions to strengthening democracy and fostering pluralism in Latin America since the 1970s and even before. Consequently, we distance ourselves from the approaches that understand public history narratives as commodities that trivialize the past. We aim to transcend mere storytelling, emphasizing the importance of these practices in fostering a more inclusive and socially engaged understanding of history. Therefore, we have chosen three case studies to illustrate Latin American public history trajectories, which are related to non-fiction comic books, oral history, and social museology. Without undermining the significance of public history practices in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, this text focuses on emblematic examples from the Andean region (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia). These cases were selected for their methodological originality and the diversity of the narrative resources they employ, including visual, oral, and exhibition-based approaches.

1. James Gardner and Paula Hamilton, "Introduction: The Past and Future of Public History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, ed. James Gardner and Paula Hamilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Thomas Cauvin, "New Field, Old Practices: Promises and Challenges of Public History," in *Magazén: International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2021):13–44 ; Thomas Cauvin, "For a New International Public History," in *Public History Review*, 30 (2023): 71–78; Tanya Evans and Melanie Burkett, "The Pedagogical and Social Value of Public History and Work Integrated Learning: A Case Study from Australia," in *Cultural and Social History*, 19, no. 1 (2022): 77–95.

2. Na Li, "Introduction: Public History in the Global Context," in *Public History Review*, 30 (2023): 1–2; Heather Hughes, "Public Histories in South Africa: Between Contest and Reconciliation," in *Public History Review*, 30 (2023): 31–42; Indira Chowdhury, "The Archival Book as an Experimental Dialogue in Public History," in *Public History Review*, 30 (2023): 61–70.

3. See Sebastián Vargas Álvarez, "Presentación del Dossier: 'Prácticas públicas de la historia: Contextos locales, diálogos globales'," in *Ciencia Nueva: Revista de Historia y Política*, 5, no. 1 (2021): 142–157; María Elena Bedoya, Jimena Perry Posada and Manuel Salge Ferro, eds., *Comunidades digitales, museos e historia pública: Experiencias en torno a América Latina* (Quito, Ecuador, Colombia: Universidad San Francisco de Quito USFQ, Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2023); Daniela Torres-Ayala, "Historia pública: Una apuesta para pensar y repensar el quehacer histórico," in *Historia y Sociedad*, 38 (2020): 229–249; Jimena Perry Posada, *Museums, Exhibitions, and Memories of Violence in Colombia: Trying to Remember* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023); Alejandra F. Rodríguez and Susana de Luque, *Historia pública en América Latina: Teorías y prácticas desde el sur* (Bernal, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2025); Amada Pérez and Sebastián Vargas Álvarez, "Historia Pública e investigación colaborativa: Perspectivas y experiencias para la coyuntura actual colombiana," in *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 46, no. 2 (2019): 127–153; Sebastián Vargas Álvarez and Amada Carolina Pérez Benavides, "Perspectives on Public History in Colombia," in *International Public History* 4, no. 2 (2021): 143–152.

Firstly, in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, non-fiction comics have played a significant role in "print activism,"[4] utilizing leaflets, pamphlets, magazines, books, party bulletins, doctrinal documents, and posters to surpass the impact and reach of other political groups. Additionally, the rise of testimonial and documentary publications, including ethnographic history, trauma memoirs, and oral testimonies, became crucial. These forms of narrative, offering a "view from below," served precise political ends and were essential for recording, transcribing, and writing oral narrations. The credibility of these testimonies bolstered their value as elements of denunciation and justice.

In a second instance, we will refer to the Andean Oral History Workshop, THOA for its acronym in Spanish, in Bolivia, whose members also worked extensively with oral testimonies. Since the 1980s, the THOA, led by historian and sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, has reconstructed the historical experience of the indigenous struggles for land in the first half of the twentieth century, based on the co-production of oral testimonies with the Aymara and Quechua communities. In more recent years, with the Sociology of the Image project and together with *Colectix Ch'Ixi*, Rivera Cusicanqui has proposed new ways of approaching Andean history through a critical use of both documentary and narrative visual sources such as drawing, engraving, painting, photography, and film.

Finally, we examine a 2010 exhibition at the National Museum of Colombia, which delved into the life and death of a demobilized guerrilla leader and former presidential candidate. This temporary display underscored the museum's role as an agent of social change, aiming to present multiple perspectives on painful stories rather than a singular, official narrative. It also serves as a prime example of how collaborative efforts between curators and community members can transform intimate, private accounts into meaningful national narratives. The case studies presented exemplify how public practices of history in Latin America foster the collaborative construction of narratives and reinforce ongoing social processes. They also serve to enhance the visibility and legitimacy of historically marginalized groups, including women, gender minorities, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, and peasants.

2 Between Graphic History, Testimonies in Images and Popular History

The representation of the past—specifically the experiences of Black people, Indigenous communities, and women, traditionally marginalized in official narratives—was achieved through various visual formats, including illustration, caricatures, and comics. These mediums reinterpreted traditions, resistances, and social conflicts, offering alternative perspectives that challenged dominant narratives. The ability to construct a sequential narrative allowed for the visualization of struggles and political transformations while questioning the historical exclusion of these groups. It is of great significance to underscore the release of *Para hacer historietas* (*To Make Comics*) by Peruvian artist Juan Acevedo, published by Editorial TAREA Acciones Educativas in 1978. This work was of an educational nature, centered on the question of who is able to narrate a story and how this can be done. Its fundamental premise was to render storytelling accessible to a broader audience. Not only did it inspire a new generation of comic creators, but it also fostered critical engagement with social issues, leaving a lasting mark on the visual culture of Latin America.[5]

When considering comics with a proclivity for historical narrative, a variety of production styles emerge. These materials were used as tools for the promotion of a historical consciousness committed to justice and social transformation. We highlight three types of publications. Firstly, and one of the most emblematic, were the materials produced from the participatory action research methodology[6] of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda. Secondly, there are comic books sponsored

4. Carlos Aguirre, "Cultura política de izquierda y cultura impresa en el Perú contemporáneo (1968–1990): Alberto Flores Galindo y la formación de un intelectual público," in *Histórica* 31, no. 1 (2007): 179.

5. At that time, "among many artists, Juan Acevedo stands out for being the first to organize workshops on popular comics in Ayacucho (1974) and Villa El Salvador (1975–1977) and for introducing overtly political commentary into the comic genre." Jorge L. Catalá-Carrasco, Paulo Drinot, and James Scorer, eds., *Comics & Memory in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 11.

6. Investigación Acción Participativa, IAP, in Spanish.

by NGOs or religious groups who made use of relevant testimonies or stories of oppressed groups; and finally, the significant work of a group of Peruvian female historians in the production of popular history leaflets in their country. Although these ways of producing graphic histories may be interrelated to each other, or even had a non-continuous existence, they are samples of the effervescence of these public visual historical narratives in a particular social, historical and political context.

In the 1970s, a working group used IAP methodology to document the history of land tenure and dispossession in the Caribbean region, collecting testimonies from peasant communities. This work was captured in *Historia gráfica de la lucha por la tierra en la Costa Atlántica* (*Graphic History of Land Struggles in the Atlantic Coast*), 1985. This document integrates the exercise of translating historical narratives into comics by Ulianov Chalarka, Fundación Sinú and Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, ANUC. Many of the stories told in the comic reflect the injustices and experiences of oppression of Black, Indigenous and peasant groups by the landowners of the early twentieth century. Leaders such as Felicita Campos highlight the Black activism and political organization of a character who took local land claims to Bogotá, obtaining land titles for her people in the 1920s. Charlaka co-produced four comics with the Sinú local actors between 1972 and 1974, each fifteen to twenty pages long, researched and written in collaboration with ANUC activists.[7] These comics collected the narratives of Afro-descendant peasant peoples serving "as mnemonic devices for coastal communities to denounce, expose, or remember human rights violations, becoming vehicles of resistance."[8]

The relationship of this print activism with some religious NGOs was constant. Most of the publications of the churches and ecclesiastical grassroots communities[9] used images in different formats to disseminate their religious creed. However, they also collected the experiences of political leaders, as in the case of the Bolivian indigenous peasant woman Domitila Barrios de Chungara. A book was written about her life testimony and political organization with the miners of Bolivia, entitled *Si me permiten hablar* (*If I am allowed to speak*), edited by Moema Viezzer. These memoirs were converted into comic book format in 1979 by the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, CINEP, a Jesuit organization influenced by liberation theology.[10] Domitila's testimony was presented at the 1975 UN Women's Forum, highlighting the plight of Bolivian miners around the world. Through that work, Domitila was shown as a spokesperson for rights and a promoter of social justice from a notion of class and feminism.

The dissemination of these materials within religious contexts played a crucial role in their reach and impact. Churches, religious groups, and organizations—both Catholic and Protestant[11]—served as key platforms for the circulation of these comic books and printed materials. They were distributed during religious services, study groups, and community gatherings, where they became powerful tools for education and awareness. In many cases, these publications were used in catechism classes and pastoral missions, helping to bridge religious teachings with broader social and political struggles. The accessibility and visual appeal of comics allowed them to resonate with diverse audiences, fostering a sense of collective identity and empowerment among marginalized communities.

This circulation strategy not only reinforced the connection between faith and social justice but also enabled the materials to reach remote and underserved areas, significantly amplifying their influence beyond traditional political spheres. A particularly compelling example is the comic *El Negro en el Ecuador* (*Blacks in Ecuador*), published in 1983 by the Afro-Ecuadorian Pastoral Department as part of the *Historietas Populares* (*Popular Comics*) collection. This pastoral initiative was based in one of the most impoverished provinces of the country, highlighting the strategic use of comics as a medium to address social inequalities. This material gathers the memories of slavery and the historical processes

7. Joanne Rappaport, "Visualidad y escritura como acción: Investigación Acción Participativa en la Costa Caribe Colombiana," in *Revista Colombiana de Sociología*, 41, no. 1 (2018): 141.

8. Felipe Gómez, "Centering Afro-Colombian Lideresa Felicita Campos: Counter-narrative Comics against Land Grabs," in *Hispania*, 107 (2024): 236.

9. Comunidades Eclesiales de Base, CEBs, in Spanish.

10. *Domitila: Testimonio de una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1979), 1–2.

11. Joanne Rappaport, *El Cobarde No Hace Historia: Orlando Fals Borda y los Inicios de la Investigación Acción-participativa* (Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario, 2021), 76.

of the black people in Ecuador. Among the objectives of this publication is to recount "the drama lived" and the search to find "true freedom."[12] This case, along with the Chalarka and Fundación Sinú work, emphasize the different forms of oppression and discrimination against marginalized populations. These accounts promote historical awareness and the transformation of citizenry in favor of social justice.

The Peruvian case also proves to be an interesting experience in the field of printed public history. The Centro de Investigación de la Historia Popular, CEDHIP, sought to address historical and social issues by publishing eight editions between 1979 and 1985. Among the publications are: *Lima 1840–1906: progreso, trabajo y vida cotidiana* (*Lima 1840–1906: progress, work and daily life*), 1979, which addressed the experiences and contributions of the Black population in Lima, exploring their roles in the workforce, social dynamics, and cultural expressions within the broader context of modernization; *Los comuneros* (*The Commoners*), 1980, a text that reflected on labor rights, analyzing the struggles of rural communities to achieve fair working conditions and their efforts to organize against exploitative labor systems; *Guano y sociedad peruana 1840-1879* (*Guano and Peruvian Society 1840-1879*), 1980; *Capitalismo y crisis* (*Capitalism and crisis*), 1981; *Los dueños de las minas* (*The Mine Owners*), 1982; *La formación de la clase obrera en el Perú* (*The formation of the Peruvian working class*), 1983; *Del artesanado urbano y sus luchas* (*On urban craftsmanship and their struggles*), 1983; *Mujeres en Lima. Su historia* (*Women in Lima. The history*), 1985. Its founders were the Peruvian historians Margarita Giesecke, Cecilia Israel La Rosa, Cecilia Blondet Montero, Wilma Derpich Gallo, Alicia Polvarini and Carmen Checa Leigh. In addition to the use of drawing and cartoons, some photographers and illustrators contributed to the design of the booklets.

The production of these materials of "popular history" or "history from below" was oriented toward the idea of disseminating knowledge of the past of the popular sectors beyond academia and the written word. These forms of historicizing were intended to be consumed by groups, associations, unions, and leftist movements. This perspective perceived "the enormous usefulness of incorporating history into social practice for the construction of their identity as a local community."[13] Institutions such as TAREA;[14] Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado, CIPCA, in Piura,[15] and CEDHIP promoted new methodologies and produced texts for broad audiences with a strong use of illustrations, stories of how the different populations of commoners lived, from Inca times to the present.[16] These public practices of history were conceived for teaching and the dissemination of narratives of the past on a local and regional scale. In addition, they sought to impact legal and public policy fields, such as in Bolivia, as we will address in the following section.

3 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and the Taller de Historia Oral Andina: A Chi'ixi World is Possible

Another Latin American example of public practices of history is the work carried out since the 1980s by the Bolivian intellectual and activist of indigenous origins, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, SRC, and the THOA. Born in La Paz in 1949, SRC has made significant contributions to the fields of sociology, oral history, and visual studies from a decolonizing perspective. In 1983, as a sociology professor at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, she formed the Andean Oral History Workshop, THOA for its acronym in Spanish, together with some colleagues and students, mostly from rural settings and

12. *El Negro en Ecuador* (Quito: Departamento de Pastoral Afroecuatoriana, 1983), introduction.

13. Jacobo Alva Mendo, "El testimonio oral en los Andes centrales: Travesías y rumor," in *Tradición oral, culturas peruanas: Una invitación al debate*," ed. Gonzalo Espino Relucé (Lima: Fondo Editorial UNMSM, 2003), 79.

14. The organization is now called *TAREA. Asociación de Publicaciones Educativas*, gathered under the slogan "For the right to a liberating education." See: https://tarea.org.pe/acerca-de-tarea/.

15. Organization promoted by the Society of Jesus and its actions are inspired by the mission of the Society of Jesus in its "preferential option for the poor." See: http://www.cipca.pe/bienvenida/.

16. See María Elena Bedoya, "Plotlines and Tensions around Race: The Experiences of Cristina Zavala Portugal and Marisa Godínez in Peruvian Comics," (forthcoming).

descendants of Quechua and Aymara communities. She currently directs the collective Chi'ixi and continues to support various social movements in her country.

THOA emerged in the context of the Katarista indigenous movement of the 1970s–1980s. It sought to transcend the limitations of the Bolivian left that were inherited from the 1952 Revolution, which was framed in Marxism and trade unionism but disregarded indigenous issues.[17] For the members of the workshop, history and the social sciences were incapable of dealing with indigenous history. Therefore, a new historiographical, methodological, political and epistemological proposal was needed to account for the reality of Indigenous Peoples in a long-term perspective. The purpose of this approach was to contribute to the transformation of their current precarious situation.[18] THOA's first research and historical communication projects focused on the *caciques apoderados*, indigenous leaders who, in the first half of the 20th century, undertook a series of struggles for the recovery of land in different regions of the country. The objective was to connect these experiences of struggle and resistance with those of the past (such as the rebellion of Tupac Katari in the eighteenth century) and with those of the present, typical of the democratization process in Bolivia in the 1980s.[19]

One of the main reasons why we are interested in highlighting this case is its methodological originality. The methodology employed by THOA was a combination of oral history (collecting the memories of contemporaries and descendants of the *caciques*) and work in historical, legal and press archives.[20] In addition, visual sources and methodologies were used, such as the elaboration of social cartographies and collages to obtain visual representations of the *caciques*' networks.[21] All these processes had been carried out hand in hand with the indigenous communities, as THOA has always conceived its work as a collective and collaborative enterprise for creation of historical narratives. On that point, one of its requirements was to speak Quechua or Aymara, in addition to Spanish. In this way, they could gather "the voices of the actors themselves or their descendants and in their languages" and thus promote "epistemic alternatives of intercultural coexistence of a holistic nature."[22]

THOA's first major work was the biography of the cacique Santos Marka T'ula, published in 1983 as a bilingual, Spanish and Aymara, booklet.[23] A year later, SRC's well-known book *Oprimidos pero no vencidos, Oppressed but not Defeated,* appeared.[24] Research was also carried out on other subaltern social groups, such as workers organized into anarchist collectives.[25] However, THOA's contribution transcended written socio-historical research. One of its most relevant features was the interest in making its work known to the communities involved and to the general public using non-specialized formats such as pamphlets, radio soap operas, photographic and audiovisual exhibitions, theatrical performances, and cultural happenings.[26]

THOA stood out from the beginning for its political commitment to the recovery of lands and the

17. Marcia Stephenson, *The Impact of an Indigenous Counterpublic Sphere on the Practice of Democracy: The Taller de Historia Oral Andina in Bolivia. Working Paper #279* (Notre Dame: Kellog Institute for International Studies, 2000).

18. Cristina Oyarzo, "La escritura de la historia y la política: El Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA) y Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 1983–1984," in *Cuadernos de Historia*, 57 (2022): 161–184.

19. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and René Arze, "Taller de historia oral andina: Proyecto de investigación sobre el espacio ideológico de las rebeliones andinas a través de la historia oral (1900–1950)," in *Estados y naciones en los Andes. Hacia una historia comparativa: Bolivia - Colombia - Ecuador - Perú,* ed. Jean-Paul Deler and Yves Saint-Geours (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 1986), 83–99.

20. Oyarzo, "La escritura de la historia y la política."

21. Lucila Criales and Cristóbal Condonero, "Breve reseña del Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA)," *Fuentes. Revista de la Biblioteca y Archivo Histórico de la Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional*, 10, no. 43 (2016): 57–66.

22. THOA, *Historia oral andina: cuatro textos fundamentales* (La Paz: THOA/Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023), 15.

23. This biography can be found, in addition to other early works of the workshop (on communitarian women, indigenous education and their own commemorations), in the compilation TOHA, *Historia*.

24. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *"Oprimidos pero no vencidos." Luchas del campesinado Aymara y Qhuechwa 1900–1980* (La Paz: Hisbol, 1984).

25. Zulema Lehm and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Los artesanos libertarios y la ética del trabajo* (La Paz: Ediciones de la THOA, 1988).

26. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Sociología de la imagen: miradas ch'ixi desde la historia andina* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015), 15–19; Oyarzo, "La escritura de la historia y la política;" Criales and Condonero, "Breve reseña del Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA)."

vindication of native peoples, thus contributing to the constitution of an "indigenous counter-public sphere."[27] During the 1980s–1990s, the members of the workshop accompanied the movement for the reconstitution of the Ayllus and were part of the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu, CONAMAQ.[28] The intellectual and political work of the workshop was not limited to Bolivia. SRC and the THOA established relationships with several movements and research centers in the Andean region, such as FLACSO-Quito's Masters in Andean History and the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, CONAIE;[29] the Institute de Estudios Peruanos, IEP, and the Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, IFEA, in Peru;[30] ANUC and the CINEP in Colombia.[31]

Between 1989 and 1990, crises and internal disputes caused the dissolution of the original group that founded THOA.[32] The workshop continued to be active, focusing on issues such as food sovereignty, and created its own publishing house. For her part, SRC founded the collective Chi'ixi and dedicated herself to deepening her project of a decolonizing epistemology through the sociology of the image. She also continued her social research with or on subaltern groups, such as Aymara migrant women in La Paz and El Alto.[33]

Chi'ixi—gray with black and white spots intermingled in Aymara—is a concept used by SRC in which she refers to the motley condition of postcolonial societies such as those in Latin America. It is a mixture of various elements intertwined with each other but without reaching a harmonious synthesis—as other notions such as "*mestizaje*" or "hybridization" might suggest—that converge into a contentious relationship:

> In Oruro, Potosí and other Qhichwa-speaking mining towns, the mechanic or lathe operator in charge of machinery maintenance is called *ch'iqchi* (spotted gray). This Qhichwa term is the equivalent of the Aymara *ch'ixi* and illuminates very well a crucial aspect of its variegated condition [...] the image of the stains or social jaspers of diverse historical depths interwoven in an agonizing way, which at times is seen as a constitutive feature, but also as a critical disjunction that must be overcome.[34]

Chi'ixi, the mottled, the indeterminate—which is and at the same time is not—, is a category that allows us to approach the multiplicity of temporalities and histories in tension that make up our contemporary society, in order to promote anticolonial practices.[35] In the analytical and critical assembly of diverse registers (oral, textual, visual, corporeal) SRC was weaving a method to approach Andean history through a chi'ixi epistemology:

> In the dialogue, but also in the montage, there is like an alembic still of our own, a product of our creative and theoretical personality, but also of our lived experience. It works with heterogeneous materials and makes strange combinations. Discovers a sort of secret pattern, an underlying diagram in which past history finds new meanings when confronted with the dilemmas and experiences of the present.[36]

27. Stephenson, *The Impact of an Indigenous Counterpublic Sphere on the Practice of Democracy*, 16.

28. Criales and Condonero, "Breve reseña del Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA)."

29. Stephenson, *The Impact of an Indigenous Counterpublic Sphere on the Practice of Democracy*, 5–6.

30. Alva Mendo, "El testimonio oral en los Andes centrales," 75.

31. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Política e ideología en el movimiento campesino: El caso de la ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos)* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1982).

32. Criales and Condonero, "Breve reseña del Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA)."

33. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Bircholas. Trabajo de mujeres: explotación capitalista y opresión colonial entre las migrantes aymaras de La Paz y El Alto* (La Paz: Mama Huaco, 2002).

34. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2018), 40.

35. Cristina Fangman, "Un modo andino de estar en el mundo: La teoría y praxis ch'ixi de Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui," in *CeLeHis* 30, no. 42 (2021): 65–76; Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2010).

36. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Experiencias de montaje creativo: De la historia oral a la imagen en movimiento ¿Quién escribe la historia oral?," in *Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación*, 120 (2012): 16.

Her main priority in recent years has been the development of the "sociology of the image," an initiative to "decolonize the gaze." She critically and creatively addresses diverse visual narratives such as the drawings of Guamán Poma de Ayala (16th century), the watercolors of Melchor María Mercado (19th century), the photographs of the *Album of the Revolution* (1952), or contemporary social cartographies and visual essays, to generate new interpretations of our history in the light of the urgencies of the present.[37]

Currently, Chi'xi Collective organizes workshops, meetings, audiovisual projects and seminars that bring together not only individuals and groups from Bolivia, but from different parts of Latin America.[38] SRC, in turn, is a widely recognized author and her work is well known around the world. In 2010, she was invited to the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, Spain, as a curator of *Principio Potosí Reverso* (*Inverted Potosi Principle*), a dissident counter-reading of the exhibition *Principio Potosí. ¿Cómo podemos cantar el canto del Señor en tierra ajena?* (*Potosi Principle. How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*).[39] The museum is, without a doubt, another social space where historical narratives about Latin American peoples have been constructed. It is also a place where collective memories are disputed, as we will see below.

4 Multifaceted Ongoing Historical Memories and their Representations in Latin American Museums

As mentioned in the two above sections, during the Cold War, Latin American public history practices acquired a committed political stance, evident in museums too. However, the region's museology had been active since the nineteenth century, with natural history and national venues emerging early on. In the twentieth century, museums became thematically specific, with art institutions appearing in Cuba, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina. Museums in the region also began specializing in ethnography and archaeology, following European scientific trends.[40] In addition, history and its representations were understood as the positivist binary opposition between "us" and "them," being western white elites the first ones, and peripheral and marginalized communities the second.[41] Since the 1990s, memory museums—now present in almost all Latin American countries—have emerged to commemorate postdictatorship mass suffering in the South Cone, for instance.

A definitive benchmark for the museum field was the 1972 Roundtable of Santiago de Chile. It was held in a convoluted socio-political historical situation, in which the lurking presence of the Cuban Revolution, 1959, was still being felt. It was a time during which social movements strengthened and fought for public and collective liberties as well as for justice and critical reflections.[42] It was also the first time that there was a socialist government democratically elected in Latin America, with Salvador Allende in Chile. This context was propitious for the meeting, where representatives from nineteen countries from the region and from two European countries addressed not only issues such as accessibility, circulation of cultural property but also the need for modern museology, social participation, inclusion, and education. The participants discussed the pressing relevance of dealing with contemporary traumatic events and underrepresented groups in museum narratives.[43] The Chilean roundtable

37. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Sociología de la imagen: miradas ch'ixi desde la historia andina* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015).

38. Colectivx Ch'ixi, *Blog Colectivx Ch'ixi*, to be consulted at: http://colectivachixi.blogspot.com.

39. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, *Principio Potosí Revers: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui*, to be consulted at: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/multimedia/principio-potosi-reverso-silvia-rivera-cusicanqui.

40. María Elena Bedoya Hidalgo, *Antigüedades y nación: Coleccionismo de objetos precolombinos y musealización de los Andes, 1892–1915* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario, 2021).

41. Amada Carolina Pérez Benavides, *Nosotros y los otros: Las representaciones de la nación y sus habitantes Colombia, 1880–1910* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2015).

42. Cristóbal Bize Vivanco, "Sobre la Mesa de Santiago de 1972 y la función social del museo en la actualidad," in *ICOFOM Study Series* 50, no. 1 (2022): 51–66.

43. Ibermuseums, "Roundtable of Santiago of Chile, 1972, vol. 1," April 2013, https://www.ibermuseos.org/en/resources/publications/mesa-redonda-de-santiago-de-chile-1972-vol-1/.

paved the way for international scholars such as Peter Vergo and Mario Chagas to advance the conversation on new and social museology. Vergo criticized museums as authoritarian entities that tell hegemonic stories supported by often-contextless objects. He advocated instead for inclusive spaces where marginalized social groups could seek social justice and where artifacts could reflect their cultural meanings.[44] Chagas argued that museums are in crisis and must evolve to remain relevant. Vergi further affirmed that these institutions are complex because they are not only about the past, in them "memory, forgetfulness, power, resistance, imagination, poetics, and politics come into play, both to elaborate the past and to invent the future."[45]

In this context, one of the challenges museums faced was the inclination to romanticize, idealize, or condemn an "other" constructed by the West.[46] It also encouraged historians and other social scientists to address issues related to difficult pasts more directly, such as the atrocities committed during the Southern Cone dictatorships and the ongoing violence in countries like Colombia. This implied a "redesign of educational policies that include the need to know what happened during times of conflict, and the urgency to forget or condemn, or all three."[47] Along these lines, in the 1990s, María Victoria de Angulo de Robayo, the director of the National Museum of Colombia, decided to work recent social phenomena into the institution's temporary exhibits, a decision that facilitated the incorporation of sensitive political and social issues. These changes encouraged curators to set up different exhibitions in the following decade. Thus, from September 2010 to March 2011, the temporary exhibition "*Hacer la paz en Colombia: 'Ya vuelvo', Carlos Pizarro,*" *Peacemaking in Colombia: 'I Will Be Right Back,' Carlos Pizarro*, took place at the National Museum. The exhibit focused on the life of Carlos Pizarro Leongómez, a demobilized M-19 guerrilla fighter and former presidential candidate who was assassinated by a hired gunman in 1990. "Ya vuelvo" commemorated the twentieth anniversary of Pizarro's death, which occurred during his presidential campaign. Between 1989 and 1990, three Colombian presidential candidates were murdered by paramilitaries linked to drug cartels and the complicity and negligence of the state. One of them was Pizarro. These crimes shocked Colombians, who saw the potential for achieving peace in these leaders, thus bestowing upon them the aura of martyrs and making them worthy of inclusion in the National Museum of Colombia. The museum's director recognized that the Pizarro exhibit provided an opportunity for the institution to actively document Colombia's recent history. She declared, "I went for it because at that moment the National Museum faced the challenge of being a real national museum, which meant including as many people as possible and all kinds of thinking."[48]

This exhibition covered Pizarro's life, the 1985 Palace of Justice Siege perpetrated by the M-19, and his assassination as a presidential candidate. These topics brought up long-lasting public history discussions: should perpetrators of atrocities be present in museums? If so, how? Which kind of stories should museums tell? By whom? These questions do not have definitive answers. In countries such as Colombia, where violence is constant, persistent, and quite dissimilar to the dictatorships of the South Cone, for instance, representations of brutalities and their culprits raise mixed feelings. In the case of "Ya vuelvo," various Colombian social actors—including military officials, far-right politicians, and conservative media—resisted the museum's efforts to spotlight the M-19 due to lingering emotions of anger, pain, and sadness, particularly regarding the 1985 siege.[49] However, in a veritable public history exercise, "the curators encouraged polemic, discussion, and the sense that the museum needed to be

44. Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013 [1989]).

45. Mario Chagas, "Los Museos En Tiempos de Crisis," in *Museos.Es: Revista de La Subdirección General de Museos Estatales 5*, no. 6 (2009–2010): 86–101.

46. We are referring to Johannes Fabian's insights about how anthropology—and other social sciences and disciplines—construct their "others" for study and observation. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

47. Elizabeth Jelin and Federico Guillermo Lorenz, *Educación y Memoria: La Escuela Elabora el Pasado* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2004), 4.

48. María Victoria de Angulo de Robayo, director of the National Museum of Colombia (2005–2014), Interview by Jimena Perry, Bogotá, February 12, 2017.

49. Sharon MacDonald, "Is Difficult Heritage Still Difficult? Why Public Acknowledgement of Past Perpetration May No Longer be so Unsettling to Collective Identities," *Museum International* 67, no 1–4 (2015): 6–22.

a space to tell our own recent history."[50]

"Ya vuelvo" serves as a significant illustration of how public history practitioners disseminate narratives to broader audiences. Initially, the exhibit was conceived as an intimate recollection curated by one of Pizarro's daughters. She intended to honor her father's memory and for people to remember him as a peacemaker. However, museum professionals identified an opportunity to incorporate national narratives associated with Pizarro's representations. The ex-guerrilla was constantly talking about reconciliation, dialogue and forgiveness and was very popular among Colombians. So, when the exhibition arrived at the museum, curators included more parts of Pizarro's life such as his detailed political trajectory and his impact and influence on the country's recent history. For the Colombian curators, Pizarro represented more than just a father and husband; he was a notable political figure whose life warranted analysis from a historical memory perspective. Curator Catalina Ruíz noted that the curators perceived the narrative of "Ya vuelvo" as extending beyond a personal account.

The political context of Colombia during Álvaro Uribe's final term (2006–2010) and Juan Manuel Santos's first term (2010–2014) created a pivotal moment to redefine the National Museum's approach to addressing contemporary violence. This environment, marked by shifts in governance and policy, set the stage for the *Hacer la paz en Colombia* exhibition at the National Museum—an institution overseen by the Ministry of Culture.

During Santos's second term (2014–2018), his administration focused heavily on achieving peace with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This culminated in the historic peace agreement signed in 2016, following formal negotiations that began in 2012. Havana, Cuba, served as a neutral ground for these talks, which addressed key issues such as rural reform, political participation, drug policy, reparations for victims, and the disarmament and reintegration of FARC combatants. These efforts, while transformative for Colombia's political and social landscape, faced significant challenges in implementation and received criticism from various sectors.

Santos's endeavors to end over five decades of armed conflict earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016. Within this broader context, the *Hacer la paz en Colombia* exhibition can be interpreted as more than a cultural initiative. Rather than a spontaneous decision by the museum's director, it may have been a calculated political move by the Santos administration, leveraging history and museology to shape public opinion in favor of the peace process. By framing the exhibition within the narrative of reconciliation and peace, it likely served as one of several tools designed to build support for the ongoing peace talks.

This political context allowed the institution to participate in creating historical memories of the country's armed conflict, aligning with contemporary museological trends that favor memory museums over traditional history museums.[51] Although the National Museum of Colombia is not primarily a memory venue, its curators valued spaces dedicated to narrating recent violent episodes. Consequently, the museum's curators and researchers aimed to broaden the institution's scope to include diverse and marginalized voices in its exhibitions, critically interrogating conventional historical claims associated with official history.[52]

In conclusion, Latin American public history practices related to the museum field have a long and solid trajectory and are constant, dynamic, and ongoing. Although different from the Global North due to our colonial pasts, it does not imply that the field is new in the region. It means that our histories require other understandings and approaches.

50. Catalina Ruíz, curator of "Ya vuelvo." Interview by Jimena Perry, Bogotá, Colombia. February 14, 2017.

51. The Colombian Network of Memory Sites (Red Colombiana de Lugares de Memoria), for instance, comprises the memory site, which includes museums, in the country, "Quiénes Somos," RESLAC, accessed January 19, 2025, https://sitiosdememoria.org/es/institucion/red-colombiana-de-lugares-de-memoria/. In addition, the National Museum of Memory of Colombia is under construction in the country.

52. Silke Arnold de Simine, "Memory Museum and Museum Text: Intermediality in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," in *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 1 (2012): 14–35.

5 Conclusions

The three cases analyzed in this article exemplify a collaborative approach involving historians, social scientists, artists, and diverse communities. Through the use of co-creative methodologies and narratives, these initiatives challenge dominant historical perspectives and colonial accounts. For example, sequential storytelling in comics has been employed to represent historically marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, Black communities, and women. These narratives not only shifted the focus to struggles for rights in the face of state power abuses but also recreated and reclaimed historical figures from these communities, offering new perspectives on their agency and contributions. At the same time, they contributed to the construction of symbolic and political accounts of their territories. This approach has amplified their voices, increased their visibility, and positioned them as historical actors with both local and national significance.

In addition, the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA) and the work of scholars like Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui highlight the distinctive nature of Latin American public history. Their emphasis on oral history, visual sources, and collaborative research with Indigenous communities challenges established historiographical norms and introduces new epistemological perspectives. One of the theoretical and ethical legacies of THOA is the importance of constructing and narrating history in a multilingual way in territories where there are several languages that have been overshadowed or relegated by the imposition of an official language during centuries of colonialism. Concepts such as *chi'ixi*, as articulated by Rivera Cusicanqui, offer valuable insights into the complexities of historical narratives and identities in postcolonial societies.

Regarding exhibition, the case discussed in this text highlights how curatorial practices advanced the institution's politics. The display "Ya vuelvo" exemplifies the transformative power of memory in reshaping official narratives within museums. Focused on the armed conflict in Colombia, the exhibit created open spaces for the curators to integrate recent and contentious historical events into its narratives. This approach demonstrates how museum professionals successfully constructed national stories grounded in challenging and difficult histories. The significance lies not only in incorporating marginalized voices but also in addressing complex and traumatic experiences within the broader framework of national history. By doing so, the exhibition underscores that painful remembrances are an essential and inextricable part of our collective historical fabric.

Finally, these case studies not only reflect a commitment to inclusivity, social justice, and the democratization of storytelling but also stand out as a unique form of resistance to the commodification of narratives of the past. In addition, they advocate for the mobilization of history to advance social justice and democracy. In the complex times that Latin America and the world are experiencing, where fascism takes on multiple forms and permeates various spheres, the presence of these reflective experiences that promote a more humanizing history becomes essential. They invite us to critically question dominant narratives, rethink the present from new perspectives, and envision possibilities for a more just and inclusive future. This article contributes to the historicization, contextualization and recognition of our own experiences and trajectories of public history in Latin America, and more specifically, in the Andean region. It seems fundamental to us to contribute to the construction of genealogies of public history practices, articulating and tracing connections between multiple cases and experiences that are apparently isolated, but that are part of the same history.