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Art from a Fractured Past

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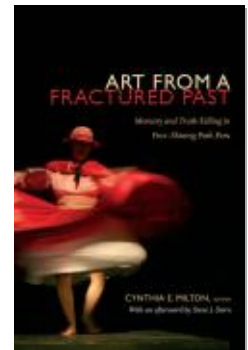
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CHAPTER FIVE / LUIS ROSSELL, ALFREDO VILLAR,
AND JESÚS COSSIO

RUPAY / (HI)STORIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE
IN PERU, 1980–1984

In the artistic tradition of Art Spiegelman, Joe Sacco, and Chester Brown, a collective of Peruvian artists—Luis Rossell, Alfredo Villar, and Jesús Cossio—published the graphic novel *Rupay: Historias de la violencia política en Perú 1980–1984* (Heat: (Hi)stories of political violence in Peru, 1980–1984).¹ The authors play with the ambiguity of the term *historia*, which in Spanish means both “history” as a narrative of past events and “story” as a fictional tale. Using the format of a “comic” (a term they prefer to “graphic novel”), the authors present, in a series of nine vignettes, emblematic cases from the early years of the internal conflict included in the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, from the initial Shining Path act of burning the voting boxes in Chuschi to the military’s murder of the residents of Putis. The section reproduced here, “Uchuraccay,” recounts the case of the murder of eight journalists and one guide in 1983 in the small hamlet of Uchuraccay (Ayacucho). The authors combine many sources—newspaper clippings, findings from government-mandated commissions, testimonies, rumors, and other artists’ portrayals of events (including a Sarhua *tabla*, depicting on a painted board the special division of the national police, the *sinchis*)—to try to piece together one of the mysteries of the political conflict: who really killed the journalists and their guide, and why? Through their métier as comic artists, the makers of *Rupay* reveal the intricacies of this event, how it unfolded in the media and public imagination, and what the legacies of this massacre are, not just for the families of the murdered victims but also for the residents of Uchuraccay. In the wake of the massacre, some residents

of Uchuraccay were accused and sentenced to prison, others were killed in subsequent Shining Path and military attacks, survivors deserted the hamlet and faced a racist backlash because they were from Uchuraccay when it became synonymous in national media with savagery. The artists bring to light inconsistencies, “hidden” facts, and testimonies in a text that is not merely a recounting of the past but is in itself a document of how some Peruvians are attempting to figure out and work through this past. From the subtle detail of a Peruvian flag with the color red (later picked up in flowing blood and in Shining Path’s flag, though not colored here in this black-and-white reproduction) to the insertion of photographs and newspaper clippings from the time, this comic helps us to see the complexities of this tragedy as extending beyond the juxtaposition of “Deep Peru” (Perú profundo)—traditional, backward, outside modernity—with the rest of Peru, an unfortunate explanatory dichotomy that emerged out of the Vargas Llosa commission’s investigation into the initial massacre.² The *historias* in *Rupay*, taken as a whole, provide a lucid, stark, and moving account of Peru’s civil war.

ONE MONTH AFTER THE ARMY'S ENTRANCE INTO AYACUCHO, BETWEEN JANUARY 20TH AND 22ND, 1983, RUMORS REACH LIMA OF A REVENGE KILLING OF SEVEN SUPPOSED SHINING PATH MEMBERS AT THE HANDS OF HUAYCHACO COMUNEROS*



PRESIDENT BELANDIERE ALSO APPROVES OF THE SLAUGHTER ...



NEVERTHELESS, LEFT-WING GROUPS AND THE OPPOSITION MEDIA HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE DEGREE OF THE COMUNEROS' PARTICIPATION IN THE KILLINGS.

DUE TO THE ABRUPTNESS AND BRUTALITY OF THE KILLINGS, THEY SUSPECT THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMY OR POLICE FORCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, WHETHER OVERTLY OR DISGUISED AS PEASANTS.

A LITTLE BIT LATER, IT IS DISCOVERED THAT YOUTH BETWEEN THE AGES OF 17 AND 18 YEARS OLD WERE AMONG THE DEAD.



MORE QUESTIONS ARISE BEFORE THE FACTS ...



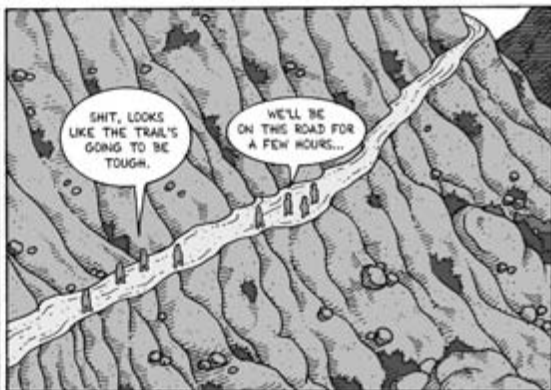
TO INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION IN HUAYCHACO, A NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS TRAVEL TO HUAYTA, THERE THEY EXCHANGE INFORMATION AND LOOK FOR CONCEALED FACTS ...



* Comuneros, a resident of a communal settlement, an autonomous geographic region governed by its residents.

** Puna, refers to Andean plateaus but is also a derogatory way of referring to so-called Andean communities.

ATACUCHO, OUTSIDE OF CHACABAMBA, ON THE ROAD TO UCHURACCAU, JANUARY 28, 1983.







FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: EDUARDO DE LA PINIELLA, WILLY RETTO, OSCAR SÁNCHEZ, FELIX GAVILÁN, JORGE LUIS MENDOZA, AMADOR GARCÍA, AND JORGE SEDANO (JUAN INFANTE TOOK THE PICTURE).

IN CHACABAMBA, OCTAVIO INFANTE CONVINCES HIS HALF-BROTHER JUAN ARGUMENTO TO GUIDE THEM TO UCHURACCAY. ARGUMENTO'S FAMILY GIVES THEM FOOD AND LENDS THEM BLANKETS AND A MULE TO CARRY THEIR CAMERAS AND LODGAGE.



BUT THE JOURNALISTS NEVER ARRIVED IN HUAYCHAC. IN UCHURACCAY, THEY WERE BEATEN TO DEATH TOGETHER WITH JUAN ARGUEDO.

WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY?



FERNANDO BELAUNDE'S GOVERNMENT FORMED A COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE MURDERS IN UCHURACCAY. IT CONSISTED OF THE WRITER MARIO VARGAS LLOSA, THE JOURNALIST MARIO CASTRO ARENAS, AND THE CRIMINAL LAWYER ABRAHAM GUZMÁN. ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND LINGUISTS ASSISTED THE COMMISSION.

IT'S SUSPECTED THAT SINCHIS* MIGHT BE INVOLVED.

THESE ARE THEORIES. WE HAVE TO BASE OUR INVESTIGATION ON FACTS, NOT SUSPICIONS.

THE FACT IS THAT SINCHIS WERE IN UCHURACCAY WEEKS BEFORE...



THE VARGAS LLOSA COMMISSION WAS IN THE COMMUNITY OF UCHURACCAY INTERROGATING THE COMUNEROS AND OTHER WITNESSES FOR ONE DAY (FEBRUARY 10). AFTERWARDS, THEY RETURNED TO LIMA TO PREPARE THEIR REPORT. IT WAS PRESENTED IN MARCH, THREE MONTHS AFTER THE MASSACRE.

THE REPORT STATED THAT THE INHABITANTS OF UCHURACCAY KILLED THE JOURNALISTS.



THE VARGAS LLOSA COMMISSION SPECULATED THAT THE COMUNEROS ACTED IMPULSIVELY AND IN FEAR OF A SHINING PATH RETALIATION TO RECENT CONFRONTATIONS.

THE REPORT ASSUMED THAT THE JOURNALISTS WERE ATTACKED SUDDENLY, BEING CONFUSED WITH A SENDERISTA SQUADRON THAT THE COMUNEROS HAD CONFRONTED DAYS BEFORE.

STRANGERS ARE COMING!



! TERRUCOS* ARE COMING BACK!

WE'VE GOT TO THROW THEM OUT!



*Sinchis. A special police division in charge of the counterinsurgency campaign.

THE VARGAS LLOSA REPORT MAINTAINED THAT THERE WAS NO DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE REPORTERS AND THE COMUNEROS, EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE THREE QUECHUA-SPEAKING JOURNALISTS WHO COULD HAVE DISPELLED THE CONFUSION.



NOT ONLY THE COMMISSION BUT ALSO A NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS AND WITNESSES HAD HEARD THAT THE COMUNEROS HAD REQUESTED THE SINCHIS* TO PROTECT THEM.



THE INVESTIGATORY COMMISSION DID NOT FIND THE SINCHIS OR THE ARMY RESPONSIBLE, ARGUING THAT THERE HADN'T BEEN PROOF THAT THEY'D DIRECTLY PARTICIPATED IN THE KILLING.

THE COMUNEROS* OF UCHURACCAY WERE SINGLED OUT AS BEING DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MURDERS.

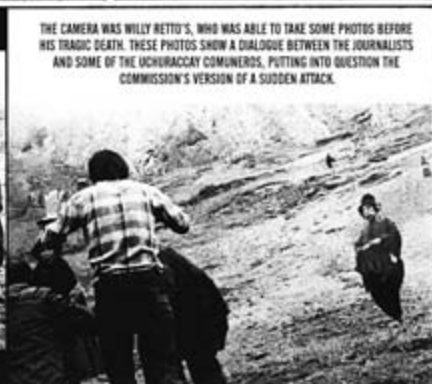
THE REPORT POINTED OUT, AS WELL, THAT THE FAULT SHOULD BE SYMBOLOGICALLY SHARED BY THE "OFFICIAL PERU" FOR HAVING MARGINALIZED RURAL INHABITANTS AND ANDEAN COMMUNITIES. THIS MARGINALIZATION LEAD TO THEIR LACK OF COMMUNICATION, A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN THIS CRIME. THE VARGAS LLOSA REPORT, NEVERTHELESS, WOULD LEAVE A NUMBER OF LOOSE ENDS UNRESOLVED.



MORE QUESTIONS ARISE UPON A DISCOVERY MADE FOUR MONTHS LATER.



THE CAMERA WAS WILLY RETTO'S, WHO WAS ABLE TO TAKE SOME PHOTOS BEFORE HIS TRAGIC DEATH. THESE PHOTOS SHOW A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE JOURNALISTS AND SOME OF THE UCHURACCAY COMUNEROS, PUTTING INTO QUESTION THE COMMISSION'S VERSION OF A SUDDEN ATTACK.

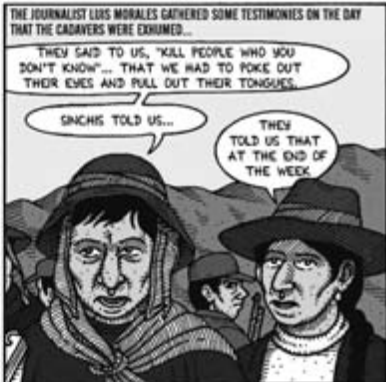
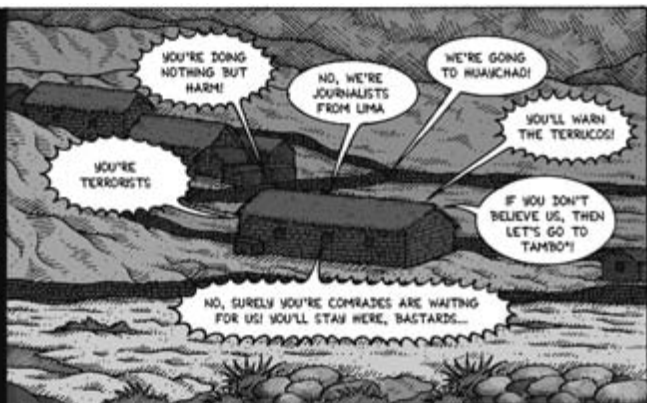


* Vizcacha. A large Peruvian hare.

EVEN IF THE VARGAS LUISA COMMISSION HAD CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY OF A DIALOGUE BEFORE THE SLAUGHTER, THE PICTURES THAT WERE FOUND HELPED TO SEE THE CRIME FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE.

IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS, ONE COULD SEE THE EIGHT JOURNALISTS TRYING TO EXPLAIN WHO THEY WERE. THE PHOTOS EVEN SHOWED A WHITE BAG AS A FLAG. ACCORDING TO TESTIMONIES COLLECTED BY TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IN 2001, THE JOURNALISTS WERE TAKEN TO THE HOUSE OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR FORTUNATO GAVILÁN.

THE COMMUNITY WAS SUMMONED BY ITS AUTHORITIES TO TAKE PART IN THE SLAUGHTER.



Tambo, the location of the closest police station.

BUT WHO WAS FORTUNATO GAVILÁN? WHY DID HE AND OTHER UCHIRACACAY AUTHORITIES NOT TAKE THE JOURNALISTS TO TAMBO AS THEY ASKED? DID THEY OBEY AN ORDER, OR WERE THEY PART OF A TERRIBLE CONFUSION? WHAT WOULD MAKE THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR STICK SO ADAMANTLY TO THE MILITARY ORDER TO "KILL THE STRANGERS?"



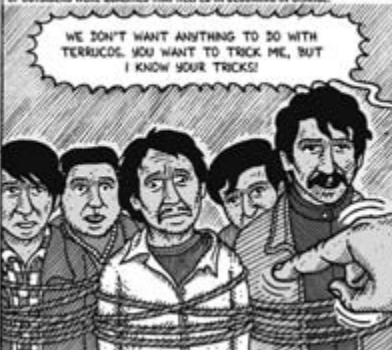
GAVILÁN WAS TAKEN AWAY WHEN HE WAS TWENTY-ONE YEARS OLD. IN LIMA, HE LEARNED TO "SERVE THE HOMETOWN" AND OBEY "AUTHORITY."



AFTER FIVE YEARS IN LIMA, HE RETURNS TO UCHIRACACAY, WHERE HE IS NAMED THE AUTHORITY OF THE REGION.



KNOWING TO READ AND WRITE, HIS URBAN EXPERIENCE, AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OUTSIDERS WERE QUALITIES THAT HELPED IN BECOMING IN CHARGE.



BUT FORTUNATO GAVILÁN FLED FROM UCHIRACACAY BEFORE FACING THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HIM.



IN THE END, HE IS ASSASSINATED WHEN HE FLED TO THE JUNGLE. SILVIO CHÁVEZ, ANOTHER ACCUSED UCHIRACACAY AUTHORITY, OPTED FOR SUICIDE. THE ASSASSINATION OF FORTUNATO GAVILÁN WAS NEVER CLEARED UP.



IN AYACUCHO, 17 COMUNEROS ARE ACCUSED, BUT ONLY THREE OF THEM ARE TAKEN TO COURT. ALL THIS OCCURRED IN AN ACCUSATORY CLIMATE, IN WHICH THE PEOPLE OF UCHIRACACAY ARE SEEN AS "BARBARIC" AND "SAVAGE."



Serranos. People from the Peruvian Highlands.

THE PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE THREE ACCUSED NATIVE QUECHUA SPEAKERS WERE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND...



THE JUDGMENT BEGAN IN AYACUCHO IN 1983 AND ENDED IN LIMA IN 1986. OF THE SEVENTEEN ORIGINALLY ACCUSED, ONLY THREE WERE PROSECUTED AND FINALLY SENTENCED.



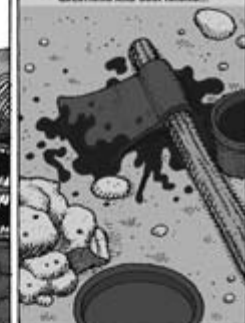
ONE OF THE ACCUSED, SIMEÓN ACCATOMA, DIES OF TUBERCULOSIS WHILE IMPRISONED IN THE SAN JUAN DE LURIBANCHO PRISON.



THE OTHER TWO COMUNEROS, DIONISIO MORALES AND MARIANO CCASANI, GOT OUT IN THE NINETIES...



REGARDLESS OF THE COURT RULING AND THE VARGAS LLOSA REPORT, THE UCHURACCAY CASE STILL PROVOKES QUESTIONS AND SUSPICIONS...



MEMBERS OF THE ARMY OVERHEARD THE JOURNALISTS PLANNING THEIR TRIP TO HUAYCHAQ. WHY DID THEY ALLOW THEM TO TAKE A TRIP TO A ZONE THAT THE SOLDIERS CONSIDERED UNSAFE? DID THEY WARN THE JOURNALISTS?



WHAT ROLE DID THE SINCHIS AND THEIR WARNINGS PLAY IN THIS TRAGEDY? WHY WERE THEY SO INSISTENT ABOUT THEIR WARNINGS?



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN HUAYCHAQ?



THE PEOPLE OF AYACUCHO HAVE THEIR OWN VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE HEIGHTS OF UCHURACCAY.



TO THIS DAY, THE FAMILIES OF THE MURDERED JOURNALISTS BELIEVE THAT THE TRULY GUILTY HAVE NOT YET PAID FOR THIS CRIME.



IN LIMA, THE SHOCKED LOOKS AND FEELINGS OF SUPERIORITY TOWARD THESE "SAVAGES" AND "PRIMITIVE" ANDEAN VILLAGERS WERE ABUNDANT. A WEEK BEFORE WHAT HAPPENED IN UCHURACCAY, PRESIDENT BELANDIER HAD PRAISED THEM FOR "GETTING EVEN" IN HUARICHO, BUT LATER...

THOSE WHO HAD BEEN "HEROES AGAINST TERRORISM" JUST DAYS BEFORE WERE TURNED INTO "BARBARIC MURDERERS" BY SOCIAL AND JOURNALISTIC MORBID FASCINATION.



SINCHIS PROVOKE THE MASSACRE BEASTS! THEY KILLED 8 JOURNALISTS WITH AXE, KNIFE, AND ROCK BLOWS THEY CRUCIFIED THE NINTH

IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS, THIS DISTANT AND CONDESCENDING ATTITUDE WOULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO LIVED IN LIMA AND OTHER CITIES TO IGNORE THE VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST THE PEASANT AND ANDEAN POPULATION.



AFTER THIS MASSACRE, AS MUCH SOLDIERS AS SHINING PATH MEMBERS WOULD ATTACK OVER AND OVER AGAIN THIS COMMUNITY PROVOKING A MASSIVE EXODUS. 135 COMINEROS DISAPPEARED OR WERE KILLED BY BOTH GROUPS. BY AUGUST OF 1984, UCHURACCAY IS A GHOST VILLAGE.



Notes

1. In Quechua, *rupay* means “heat,” “fire,” and “ardor.” This translation is by Jane Remick and is based on the 2008 version. Explanatory notes in excerpt are by Alfredo Villar.

2. On the killings in Huaychao, the deaths of the journalists and guide in the Uchuraccay case, the subsequent Vargas Llosa commission, the lasting effects of these deaths on the people from Uchuraccay, and the national response to them, see Ponciano del Pino, “Uchuraccay”; La Serna, *The Corner of the Living*, 7–8; Mayer, “Peru in Deep Trouble”; CVR, *Informe final*, vol. 5, 121–182.

