Art from a Fractured Past

Milton, Cynthia E.

Published by Duke University Press

Milton, Cynthia E.
Art from a Fractured Past: Memory and Truth-Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/64012
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). 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. 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 ATACUCHO, BETWEEN JANUARY 29TH AND 30TH, 1983, RUMORS REACH LIMA OF A REVENGE KILLING OF SEVEN SUPPOSED SHINING PATH MEMBERS AT THE HANDS OF HUANCHAO COMMUNERS.

THE PEOPLE OF HUANCHAO HAVE PROVIDED AN EXAMPLE... I PRAISE THE COMMUNERS' COURAGE IN FACING THESE SUBVERSIVE CRIMINALS. THEIR ACTIONS ARE IN RESPONSE TO THOSE HEARTLESS INDIVIDUALS THAT COME TO VILLAGES TO ROB, RAPE, AND MURDER...

THE PRESIDENT SAID: "I PRAISE THE PATRIOTIC, VOLUNTARY, AND CIVIC COOPERATION OF THE RURAL COMMUNITIES... I HOPE THAT IN THESE MEANS THEY REESTABLISH TRANQUILITY."

SHIT! THE INDIANS REVENGE ON THEIR OWN PENA!

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

DUE TO THE SUDDENNESS AND BRUTALITY OF THE KILLINGS, THEY SUSPECT THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMY OR POLICE FORCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, WHETHER OVERLY 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...

MAYBE SOME OF THE POLICE DIRECTED THE LYNCHING.

IT'S ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THE SUPPOSEDLY EXECUTED SHINING PATH MEMBERS WERE REALLY VILLAGERS KILLED IN A CASE OF POLICE BRUTALITY.

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

LOOK, LET'S GET A GROUP TOGETHER AND LEAVE FOR HUANCHAO... WE NEED FIRST-HAND INFORMATION.

PERFECT, WE'LL HAVE TO HIRE A TAXI...

IT SHOULD COST AROUND TWENTY TO FORTY SOLES. WE'VE EIGHT PEOPLE, RIGHT?

* Cusco, a resident of a semi-autonomous autonomous region governed by its residents.

** Puno refers to Andean plateaus but is also a derogatory way of referring to wealth Andean communities.
AFARIZO: OUTSIDE OF CACACHAMBA, ON THE ROAD TO UCHURACAY, JANUARY 29, 1983.

SO DRIVER, WOULD YOU BE UP TO TAKING US TO UCHURACAY?

SHIT, LOOKS LIKE THE TRAIL'S GOING TO BE TOUGH.

WE'LL BE ON THIS ROAD FOR A FEW HOURS...

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO GET UP THERE BY CAR AND IT'S DANGEROUS OVER THERE. THERE ARE TERRUGOS...

WAIT, I THINK THE OTHER GROUP HAS FALLEN BEHIND.

DAMNIT, THEY ARE OUT OF SHAPE!

HAHAHAHA, THEY MUST BE FROM LIMA...

HEY, COULD WE REST A LITTLE BIT?

MY LEGS ARE HEAVY LIKE ROCKS, WE'VE BEEN GOING AT A FAST PACE...

ALSO, I THINK I HAVE ALTITUDE SICKNESS.

LET'S GO! BE STRONG, BOYS!

YOU SEE, SIDANO? YOU EAT TOO MUCH!
SHOOT, I'M ALREADY AN OLD MAN...

WHAT A CLIMB... IF WE WERE SOME SPOILED JOURNALISTS, WE'D DEFINITELY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP HERE IN A HELICOPTER...

HAHA... RELAX, WE ARRIVE IN CHACARABAMBA IN HALF AN HOUR...

INFANTE HAS SOME FAMILY THERE AND SOME OF THEM CAN GUIDE US TO HUAICHAD...

LET'S SEE IF THE GUYS MAKE IT SINCE THEY'RE ALREADY ASKING FOR AN AMBULANCE.

ANYONE UP FOR RUNNING THE REST OF THE TRIP HAHAMA

RUNNING OR WALKING, THE IDEA IS TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED IN HUAICHAD AND AVOID REPORTING A FABRICATED VERSION.

OF COURSE!

MAYBE IT WAS THE ARMY

I DON'T KNOW, BROTHER, THE TERRICOS MESS WITH AND SCREW OVER THE PEASANTS TOO, AND THEY'VE REACTED

THE ONLY WAY TO FIND OUT IS TO GOING TO THE PLACE OURSELVES...

MAYBE WHAT HAPPENED IN HUAICHAD WAS A FAMILY FEUD, A THING ABOUT LAND, PEASANTS HAVE THEIR CONFLICTS TOO.
I think it was the police. Last week in Yanchos, some of them killed three locals and raped a nine-year-old girl.

Hey, we’re already arriving in Chacabamba. Should we take a picture as a souvenir?

Take it! Over there is good.

Let’s see, wait... ok. Ready, look at the little birds!

In Chacabamba, Octavio Infante convinces his half brother Juan Argumedo to guide them to Uchuraccay. Argumedo’s family gives them food and lends them blankets and a mule to carry their cameras and luggage.

Can you take us to the village?

No, just to the entrance. They’re killing each other over there!

Calm down, Julia. We’ve got acquaintances in Uchuraccay. How are they going to do anything to us?

Ok, now I’ll arrive refreshed.

Let’s go to Uchuraccay.

From left to right: Eduardo de la Pinella, Willy Retto, Oscar Sánchez, Félix Cauyllán, Jorge Luis Mendivil, Amador García, and Jorge Sedano (Juan Infante took the picture).
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!"

*Stratos. A special yellow division in charge of the counterinsurgency campaign.
THE VARGAS LLOSA REPORT MAINTAINED THAT THERE WAS NOT DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE REPORTERS AND THE COMUNEROS, EVEN THOUGH THERE WERE THREE QUECHUA-SPEAKING JOURNALISTS WHO COULD HAVE DISPelled THE CONFUSION.

THE DECISION TO KILL ANY SHINING PATH MEMBERS HAD BEEN MADE DUE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DECISION WAS THAT THE SINCHE* HAD GIVEN PERMISSION TO THE COMUNEROS TO ACT AS THEY DID, FOR THEIR OWN SECURITY.

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

NOW THAT WE'VE DEFENDED OURSELVES, GUERRILLAS WILL COME AND KILL US.

IF THEY COME, DEFEND YOURSELVES. KILL THEM. FRIENDS COME BY AIR, ENEMIES BY LAND.

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

THE COMUNERO* OF CHUCURACAY WERE SINGLED OUT AS BEING DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MURDERS.

THE REPORT POINTED OUT, AS WELL, THAT THE FORCE SHOULD BE SYMBOLICALLY SHARED BY THE "OFFICIAL" FOR HAVING MARGINALIZED RURAL INHABITANTS AND ANDIN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. THIS MARGINALIZATION LEAD TO THEIR LACK OF COMMUNICATION. A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN THIS CRIME.

THE VARGAS LLOSA REPORT NEVERTHLESS, WOULD LEAVE A NUMBER OF LOOSE ENDS UNSOLVED...

THE SINCHE ORDERED THE KILLING. THEY DON'T WANT JOURNALISTS IN THE AREA. THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN PRESENT WHEN THE COMUNEROS STARTED TO ATTACK!

RELATIVES OF THE JOURNALISTS

MORE QUESTIONS ARose UPON A DISCOVERY MADE FOUR MONTHS LATER.

LOOK AT THIS. WHAT'S IT DOING THROWN OVER HERE?

THE VISCACHAS* DUG IT UP

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 CHUCURACAY COMUNEROS, PUTTING INTO QUESTION THE COMMISSION'S VERSION OF A SUDDEN ATTACK.

* Viscacha. A large Peruvian hare.
Even if the Vargas Llosa 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 rag 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 Gayán.

The community was summoned by its authorities to take part in the slaughter.

But did pressure from the police or military on the authorities of Uchuraccay end up provoking the town to commit the massacre?

The journalist Luis Morales gathered some testimonies on the day that the cadavers were examined...

They told us, “Kill people who you don’t know... That we had to poke out their eyes and pull out their tongues.”

Sinchis told us...

They told us that at the end of the week.

General Clemente Noel had his own version of the events...

The journalists were confused for terrorists because they carried a red flag. Furthermore, their cameras confused the comuneros.

The statement about the red flag has not been proven. And the comuneros recognized the cameras (and other equipment), thus they couldn’t have “been confused.” A large part of the responsibility seemed to fall on the Lieutenant Governor of Uchuraccay, Fortunato Gayán. It was his initiative that the villagers went to the Sinchis on the day of the slaughter.

Is this all those strangers brought?
But who was Fortunato Gavilán? And why did he and other Ichuracay 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?"

"When were you going to notify your friends so they could come rob and kill us?"

"We're journalists. Let's go to Tambo and they'll tell you that!"

"We're not shining paths, understand?"

"We're innocent!"

"Don't they say that Gavilán is tough?" "Did you come out a page?"

"Shut the damn maze, damn! I can't understand you!"

After five years in Lima, he returns to Ichuracay, 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.

"We don't want anything to do with territorial. You want to trick me, but I know your tricks!"

But Fortunato Gavilán fled from Ichuracay before facing the accusations against him.

In the end, he is assassinated when he fled to the jungle. Simon Chávez, another accused Ichuracay authority, ended for suicide. The assassination of Fortunato Gavilán was never cleared up.

In Ayacucho, 17 communards are accused, but only three of them are taken to court. All this occurred in an accusatory climate, in which the people of Ichuracay are seen as "barbaric" and "savages."

"Murderers!"

"In the court you'll see what it is to be civilized..."

"They pretend to be such saints but they're beasts."

*Tarrazas, People from the Paramo Highlands.*
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 Belaunde had praised them for “getting even” in Huanta. But later...

Those who had been “heroes against terrorism” just days before were turning into “barbaric murderers” by social and journalistic morbid fascination.

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 providing a massive exodus. 135 Comuneros 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.