Introduction

Image: a hard crease in time. So many things concealed in an abrupt fold. Money flows and the people who followed behind. Imported Japanese motorcycles and four-door sedans, speeding up and down muddy streets of nameless towns. Semiclandestine airstrips and Cessnas packed with kilos—now off to Colombia, now back to the Huallaga, stuffed with dollars. And with the arrival of every plane, how the festivities would begin. Topline acts brought in from Lima. An ever-expanding wave of parties in the bars and brothels that popped up all over the place. A decadence of lavish expenditure. Crowded dance floors. Sex behind plywood partitions. And beer. So much beer kicked back or tossed to form pools at people's feet. But touch the coke, *never*. All "serious" *narcos* knew better than to hit the stuff. The point was to send it on.

In the years following the Huallaga cocaine boom, narrated images such as these populated the stories people told about what had been a vertiginous, accelerated, and lethal time. Such images were called upon to mark the crease between the boom event and the event of its wake, which for those who remained became a more subdued, less extreme, if depressed present.

Scattered among scenes of dizzying consumption were other images, too. Competing political flags and disfigured corpses, used as signs to trace the advancing lines of new law. These images stemming from civil unrest were distinct from those associated with the drug trade, and yet the two sets commingled to become the driving force behind narratives of radical rectitude—of bloody attempts to set "straight" the unruly lifeways of the boom. Who was crooked, and how, would change according to the perspectives of those doing the killing. Which perspective would dominate in any one place varied

according to the historical moment. Looking back, however, it was possible to speak of two broad epochal shifts within the cocaine boom itself, in which corpses and flags had played a formative role in asserting new law: the first belonged to a Maoist insurgency; the second, to the Peruvian army.

What I explore in this book is how hard folds in time—separating historical eras but also denoting the rise of legal regimes—could be read from the stories people shared in their attempts to make sense of the historical experience of social conflict. Specifically, I consider what happened in the eastern foothills of the central Peruvian Andes in an area known as the Upper Huallaga Valley, when the trade in unrefined cocaine fueled an economic surge from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s that overlapped with an insurgent-counterinsurgent war.

In these pages I do not write a history of those years but rather an ethnography of their immediate aftermath: a phase of residual political emergency in which historical memory was formed collaboratively between incidents of violence and the ethical valuations people made as they sought to lend the boom a retroactive coherence. In so doing, I sift through narrative modes that told about, conjured up, and re-created the past: forms of memory that were at once multivocal and fragmentary. I also point to how violent acts were implicated in the creation of laws and drawn upon to craft a sense of time, whether to differentiate between current and past conditions or to trace out horizons of anticipation.

What distinguished the period Huallaga residents called the *apogeo de la coca* (coca's peak) from other cycles of boom and bust in the Peruvian Amazon (most notably rubber but to a lesser extent timber and gold) was the decidedly illicit character of the commodity at its center. This robust illegality, together with the tremendous economic force of the emergent drug trade, effectively pushed the Upper Huallaga as a region—and, more important, the settlers who lived there—beyond the formal guarantees of state justice. The sheer magnitude of the boom quickly turned cocaine production into the dominant activity of the valley and converted the local population, above all in the eyes of the police, into de facto criminal subjects. This situation set the conditions for what would become a major front in the internal wars that dominated Peru in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Maoist Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso),[1] in particular, moved in to provide generic state functions of protection and administration of justice to Huallaga communities while simultaneously selecting out and refunctioning subjects for its armed insurrection.

The episodes related here I learned about or experienced during three years of field research conducted between 1995 and 2000. In the Upper Huallaga Valley this was a time of acute malaise, sandwiched between the collapse of the cocaine economy and the later emergence of a regional coca farmers movement. The lived reality of the scarred and not yet peaceful social landscape of the late 1990s is what this ethnography seeks to convey: the *post-boom*, when memories of the heady and destructive energies of the past weighed heavily upon everyday experience. It was a period when anyone who lived or traveled in the Upper Huallaga had to navigate conflicting regimes of law left behind in the boom's wake. Concretely, those legal regimes belonged to the Peruvian state (which controlled the towns and, through a network of checkpoints, the valley's main road) and to the Shining Path (which maintained a diminished though palpable presence in the countryside).

During my fieldwork much of what I "saw" of the earlier boom years came to me in the form of other people's stories. These stories, and the events of which they spoke, ramified within a history of uneven state efforts to impose ambiguous legal and moral codes upon highly mobile groups of settlers who had once attached their hopes to the precipitous rise of cocaine. They told of how the authority of Peruvian law eroded as the police mistreated workers at the lowest rungs of the cocaine economy while entering into business relationships with those at the top. They recounted the brutal attempts of the Shining Path to install a total and puritanical rule over the Huallaga countryside, and what the Peruvian army was later willing to do under the pretense of restoring order.

In this book I look at the boom's narration as it circulated through and around such disparate forms as newspapers, local radio, school parades, political calendars, building materials, and road signs. However, I privilege storytelling practices because this was the principal means through which the historicity of the boom was rendered legible, though never transparent. In the late 1990s there was no direct access to the occurrences of the preceding era, only narrative forms in which the past was expressed and continually reworked. These narratives bore the stress of current conditions as well as the sedimented force of former times. As such, they revealed only in a roundabout and highly refracted sense how events had actually transpired. This mediated quality did not make the narratives, for all that, any less compelling.

Pervading stories in particular were the stunning images that condensed crucial facets of the boom event as they served to enumerate the many reasons

why the sluggish and impoverished days of the present held no resemblance to the violent prosperity of the preceding era. Contrasting with these vivid image-motifs, nonetheless, were the disparate material vestiges found throughout the valley during the years of immediate post-boom: cement walls, slabs, and structures; fading Sendero graffiti; hills stripped of foliage. These remains were historical indexes that materially bore witness to earlier trajectories and their points of impact. Recognizing the events to which such vestiges corresponded required knowing how to move beyond their mute character in ways that brought them into dialogue with the stories about the past. Reestablishing their connection to the boom was only possible through those who had been there.

Sometimes people related their own personal exploits. More often they insisted they had been but passive spectators to the events they recounted. Their stories were one of the few places where the history and the continued life of the boom persisted and occasionally could be inferred. As oral renderings of boom time, both fragmentary and spoken in confidence, the stories frequently contracted moral lessons from defeated aspirations and sobering contacts with extreme violence. In so doing, they threw into relief quotidian dimensions of political emergency and the ways people warded off, but sometimes had to traverse, the time-space of a no man's land where signification and the force that animated it became all but indistinguishable.

historical sense

The relationship of signification and force plays a crucial role in this ethnography. One of my primary concerns is how violent events left their mark on the form and content of stories and storytelling practices. Indeed, a central presupposition of this work is that the multiple valences of historical sense that amassed around coca/cocaine—both in the moment and retrospectively—were inseparable from the acts of violence for which the boom time became known. What I mean by "historical sense" should become increasingly evident over the course of these pages. The phrase is redundant by design. Sense is always historical because it is produced by real events. What's more, it is indelibly linked to those events in at least two ways: as acts of "sensing" that seek to discern what is happening *within* a state of affairs, and as practices of "sense making" that articulate what has come to pass from a distance in time and space. Grasped under this dual aspect, sense rises from events but undergoes transformation when seized upon through interpretative acts. Sense

shifts with the times, all the more so across perceived breaks in history. Here those breaks appear as turning points in the clash of political forces.

To borrow two analytical concepts from Reinhardt Koselleck, the boom created a unique "space of experience" and generated hopes and fears that traced out "horizons of expectation" of what was to come.[2] That experiential milieu and the anticipatory horizons it contained drastically changed in the movement to post-boom. Retrospective accounts were thus fashioned from a place in time and within future orientations that contrasted strikingly from those of the boom itself. Above all, those accounts emerged from a political and social environment that was far less turbulent than the ones about which they spoke.

Violence not only saturated most major events during the period that cocaine thrived; it was responsible for lending the Upper Huallaga Valley a distinctive atmospherics of threat, as different armed groups attempted to appropriate the drug trade in order to steer it in directions favorable to their respective interests. "Atmospherics of threat" refers to the plural forms of sense that the violence produced, which in turn shaped expectations of coca/cocaine and its potential. Shaping expectations was tantamount to orienting the history of coca/cocaine as it later came to be narrated.

The act of recounting history is foremost an exercise in sense making, because it involves crafting some kind of coherence that can be attributed to the past. That exercise happens from a place no longer experientially contiguous to the events narrated. Sense making continually moves farther and farther from what happened, that is, from the space of experience of events themselves and from the historically unique ambience they precipitate. Sense would appear, nevertheless, to travel *between* events and how they come to be apprehended. In other words, the work of sense is more intricate than would be implied by the dual division sketched so far. Sense, rather, encompasses many things at once: a sensorial *atmosphere* felt by some(one's) body and a *sensibility* or affective disposition, but also a direction or *good sense* that foresees as well as a faculty of judgment or *common sense*.

I take the idea that sense is plural and transformed through force from Nietzsche. However, the idea that sense extends across a broad spectrum comes from the work of Gilles Deleuze.[3] Though I follow his framework only loosely, I am indebted to it. I am especially indebted to his insight that sense, while actively participating in the production of signification or meaning, also moves outside discourse as *affects* that register the impact of events upon

those whom they touch. With respect to the Upper Huallaga Valley, the events in question often entailed circumstances in which human life was directly harmed or threatened. So, while this book is about history and its narration, more specifically it considers how acts of violence engendered divergent *modes of sense* that at once accrued to those acts and flowed from them: as atmosphere, as disposition, as good and common sense.

How do the atmosphere or visceral tone and ambience precipitated by violent acts become an "orientation"—a good and a common sense understood as abstract modes of reasonable expectation and judgment? And how do those orientational senses then guide and direct how people inhabit a place and experience time as lived dimensions of present, past, and future? These two questions make up my general field of inquiry into the aftermath of the Huallaga boom. As a conceptual field, this inquiry has a range of problems that I propose less to solve than to explore in hopes of drawing out their complications. Drawing out complications without flattening the terrain in which they subsist is, as I grasp it, the challenge of ethnography.

In the Huallaga of the mid- to late 1990s, recollections of what had transpired during the boom tended to follow a narrative itinerary that carried the traces of the violence of the previous era, together with the threats that still primed and burdened social relations. Such memories, however, reflected foremost the historical perspective of the present in which they were related, where the lines between winners and losers of cocaine's demise appeared to be clearly established. The semblance of unambiguous boundaries, in the matter of who was up and who was down, paralleled the division of time that seemed to separate boom from post-boom. But this impression was also intimately linked to the overwhelming advantage that the armed institutions of the Peruvian state had gained in the work of dispensing violence during the latter half of the 1990s. This new state of affairs radically altered the political and legal topography of the Upper Huallaga Valley and had profound effects on what could be said about the past. Put succinctly, the knowledge of outcomes, coupled with the sustained assertion of state power, exerted an intense retroactive force on interpretations of recent history.

Thus it is important to stress that boom recollections did not deliver the past by re-presenting it as it had been. They did, nonetheless, convey the strength of the past's hold on the present through the vividness and repetition of stories and storied motifs. These oral accounts were not independent of the events of which they provided narrative form, precisely because the accounts spread across the

very ground produced through the violence of that former era. That ground was not in itself representational but more akin to a deep temporal structure or synthesis: a dimension of the present orienting notions of what had been, what was happening, and what was still to come.[4] Boom memories, then, were more than just a record of what had preceded the current moment or an archive that could be weighed against other sources and checked for accuracy. Rather, they were recollections that manifested and reproduced a temporal structure of a present, which was itself the product of its own violent political history and the kinds of sense that history precipitated and made possible.

directions

Everything conveyed about the cocaine boom happened around the river from which the valley took its name, but also on and off the jungle road that launched the Upper Huallaga into its modern era. Locals would tell you that the Upper Huallaga is *selva alta,* or tropical highland forest, flanked to the west by the Andean highlands and flowing northeast toward the *selva baja,* or tropical plains. They would also tell you that the area straddles the political "departments"[5] of Huánuco and San Martín. Up close, however, the valley resembles a patchwork of rolling hills crisscrossed by streams that pour down into the Huallaga River to make it strong. All but one of the valley's main towns, Uchiza, sit on the banks of this river and along the road that hugs it. Such are the basic features of the physical landscape from which boom-time stories borrowed their coordinates.

It could be said that the modern history of the Huallaga began with a road, because the construction of the Marginal Highway[6] in the mid-1960s incorporated the valley into the country's transportation infrastructure and opened it to large-scale migration. Following a model of earlier state efforts to promote the settlement of Peru's eastern territories,[7] thick swathes of tropical forest were plowed down on either side of the new highway to create farming plots for migrants lured by the promise of free soil. Unlike previous jungle road projects, the Marginal Highway was not built out of concern for protecting national territory from the expansionist designs of neighboring countries, but as a response to domestic political pressures and perceived internal enemies. Land reform had become a pressing and intractable political issue since the mid-1950s when peasants and farm workers began to stage mass occupations of highland haciendas and coastal plantations to protest the country's grossly inequitable system of land tenure. For the liberal elected governments[8] that

held power until the 1968 leftist military coup of General Juan Velasco Alvarado, eastward expansion promised a path to social peace that would spare the political power and wealth of Peru's minority and mainly mestizo landholding class. The road project, which the United States supported under the umbrella of its anticommunist Alliance for Progress, became for many years the Upper Huallaga's most concrete symbol of the Peruvian state.

The settlement program brought new life to the valley's towns and oversaw the rise of homesteader villages along, as well as off, the road. This impulse to create a new agricultural zone found justification in the idea that—unlike the sierra where land ownership was overtly contested—the Upper Huallaga was an unoccupied region with no indigenous population. The question of what had happened to the valley's original inhabitants was never really asked. For if it was true that in the seventeenth century Franciscan priests had encountered numerous Amazonian groups, speaking a variety of languages and dialects,[9] by the latter half of the twentieth century no explicit traces remained of these indigenous groups nor apparently anyone who could remember them.[10] Huallaga townspeople I met in the 1990s would speculate that the original inhabitants had disappeared into the forest or died out long before the new, mostly Andean and mestizo, settlers arrived. Precise local memories of their plight did not exist, and this amnesia as to their fate only served to underscore the devastation of a historically deeper and geographically broader pattern of violence against Amazonian peoples. However, those now calling the Huallaga home spoke of their communities as being a mix of immigrants from all parts of Peru who had come together—before and during the coca glory days—to form a kind of frontier "cosmopolitanism."[11]

remains

In the immediate aftermath of the cocaine boom, a precise sense of the dimension and magnitude of past events remained elusive to me. To travel through the valley in the mid- to late 1990s was to be struck by how everything on the surface looked less significant or dramatic than I had come to expect from the rumors, anecdotes, and renown that preceded the place. Along the Marginal Highway, pockets of tall grasses obstructed a clear view of the countryside, but in the places where they receded, a largely empty rural expanse was revealed. This vacant air extended into the small towns, which appeared to have more buildings and houses than people to fill them. Tingo María, the Upper Huallaga's lone city, was an exception to this shrunken panorama. Situ-

ated at the southernmost edge of the valley and prior to the turnoff onto the Marginal Highway, it maintained a stable population of about fifty thousand inhabitants and was in those days the only urban area with a steady if sluggish commercial activity. For the rest of the valley, however, visual impressions didn't begin to square with the Huallaga's notoriety or even with the kinds of sober census figures found at that time in government reports and in locally produced monographs about the region. Tocache was often said to have a population of about twenty thousand, followed by Aucayacu and Uchiza with ten thousand each and Nuevo Progreso with around four thousand. Meanwhile, the number of rural inhabitants, clustered in villages and farms outside each of these population centers, was claimed to mirror or surpass that of town dwellers.[12] Such modest numbers, however, corresponded poorly with what was available to the eye, begging the question of where everyone had gone or was now hiding. This at times vexing dissonance—between lingering fame, official statistics, and a visual backdrop of bleak and diminutive farming communities—was overpowered, nevertheless, by the force of secrecy that imbued the place with a presence larger than life.

Tingo María distinguished itself from the rest of the valley in ways other than size and the relative prosperity that it had managed to hold onto even in the face of the drug trade's steep fall. In part this was because Tingo María's era as a frontier town had come a generation earlier than the settlements to the north. In the 1930s it became a major stop on the new Central Highway, which was built to establish the first overland link between Lima and a navigable tributary of the Amazon (the Ucayali River). Though Tingo María started as little more than a trading post with a government settlement office and a U.S.-funded agricultural station, it became in the coming decades a launching-off point: for pioneers intent on carving small farms out of the jungle thicket; for gold prospectors; and for venture capitalists looking either to deal in tropical commodities of rubber and cube or to set up large coffee, tea, and coca plantations. This role of frontier gateway only intensified during and immediately following the construction of the Marginal Highway, when the state began to actively promote the Upper Huallaga Valley as a future agricultural heartland for the country.[13]

Because of this historical trend, the valley's population north of the city tended to be more recent and fluid, and there were few who lived there who could trace their family lines in the Upper Huallaga back more than a generation. People arrived and moved on with the rise and decline of the

valley's fortunes. The first major exodus came in the early 1970s when the new homesteaders began to endure increasing hardships in their efforts to make good on the agricultural promise of the jungle frontier.[14] Small-scale farmers, whether independent or associated through agrarian cooperatives, struggled to locate dependable markets for the crops of yellow maize, rice, coffee, and cacao endorsed by settlement officials. Their precarious situation only got worse when the successive military governments of Velasco and Morales Bermúdez gradually phased out state subsidies, causing debts to mount and become unpayable. It was amid this general downturn that many settlers left the Huallaga. It was also then that coca began to insinuate itself as the solution to the valley's woes.

Coca was hardly new to the Huallaga. The stocky evergreen shrub of small, elongated oval leaves had long grown wild in the rugged, humid forest fringe of eastern Huánuco. The plant was domesticated at a very early date, and throughout the Andes migrations from the highlands to the tropical *yungas* or *selva alta* for the purpose of harvesting or trading coca went back thousands of years.[15] The plant's leaves, highly prized for their ability to provide endurance during strenuous work and to alleviate thirst and hunger on long journeys by foot, occupied then, as they still do today, a fundamental and multifaceted place in the economic, social, and religious practices of Andean agrarian communities.[16] But it was not until the twentieth century that the deflection of coca into the production and trade of its "industrial" derivative cocaine—at first legally, but increasingly criminalized over time—emerged as a perennial feature of the area economy.[17] Thus what changed in the 1970s was not the introduction of coca nor even of cocaine but the degree to which coca leaf cultivation, now destined overwhelmingly for illicit markets, came to dominate the new agricultural lands opened along the Marginal Highway.

Farmers say the shift to coca came on suddenly and that by the end of the decade it had pushed all other cash crops aside. This across-the-board transformation coincided with an upsurge in world demand for recreational cocaine and was part of a much wider regional phenomenon from Bolivia to Peru to Colombia that, under ever-changing configurations, continues to the present day.[18] Then, as now, coca was grown in all three countries, where it was converted into cocaine paste—either as cocaine sulfates (known in the Huallaga as *la bruta*) or as a purer cocaine base (*pasta básica de cocaína*). From the 1970s until the early 1990s, however, the final processing phase of Huallaga

cocaine—from sulfates and base into hydrochloride—happened not in Peru but in Colombia.[19] The so-called "cartels" based in Medellín and Cali dominated the trade: they purchased Huallaga cocaine paste, airlifted it to Colombia, and then oversaw its refinement into hydrochloride before shipping it to illegal markets in Europe and the United States. It was during this period of Colombian control that the Upper Huallaga developed into one of the region's leading producers of coca and cocaine paste. The valley even outpaced most other areas of the Andes where the leaf was grown, that is, if Peruvian and U.S. government statistics can be read at face value.[20] Yet in the Huallaga what gave the boom its extraordinary social force was not the extent of coca cultivation as much as the valley's emergence as both the principal national market for raw cocaine and a near-liberated zone for its production and trade. Cultivation also increased elsewhere in Peru as demand swelled, especially in the valleys of Monzón, Rio Apurímac–Rio Ene, and La Convención (Cusco). Throughout the 1980s, however, the Upper Huallaga enjoyed a virtual territorial monopoly over the national cocaine economy. Nowhere else did it seem to happen so massively and so out in the open.

atmosphere

The concentration of the Peruvian illicit drug economy in a single, relatively bounded geographic area helped secure a lasting place for the Huallaga in the Peruvian national imaginary. In the 1980s the valley's name, but also those of Tocache and Uchiza, came to be intimately associated with the dark prosperity of the cocaine boom and with the reckless abandon of lifeways rumored to accompany it. For a new chance at life, for "easy money," for good times, the Huallaga became *the place* to go. Whether to work directly in the production and distribution of raw cocaine or in the myriad support activities that clustered around the blossoming drug economy—from retail sales of food and agricultural supplies to musical entertainment and sexual services—people set out for the Huallaga in hopes of getting rich, of finding adventure, or of just taking in some of the then-wild ebullience of the place.

The valley's settler population referred to this latest round of newcomers as the *buscavidas* (literally, "life seekers"). The vast majority of these were young: sons and daughters of peasant families from the central Andean cordillera and working-class teenagers from highland and coastal cities. Many shared some initial disappointment or failure in their hometowns: aspirations to study denied or the inability to find work that promised a better