

AFTERWORD

“You Have to Stand Firm”

THE ELDERLY ACTIVIST, 2000–2015

Using the bright glare of an exposed light bulb to help him see, Llamojha sat at his desk, looking through his many papers about past and present struggles. We had celebrated his ninety-second birthday earlier that day in May 2013, but that evening he had stubbornly resisted our calls for him to rest, relax, and go to bed early. He simply had too much work to do. Despite his failing eyesight and limited mobility, he remains determined to continue his activist work as an elderly man. This afterword reflects on Llamojha’s commitment to activism across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. He pushes on, maneuvering through the terrible difficulties of aging, illness, and loss.

Although Llamojha has lived into the twenty-first century, he built his life as an activist in Latin America’s “century of revolution.”¹ He fought for change in the heady years of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, when fundamental social, economic, and political transformation seemed not only possible but imminent, a time of incredible revolutionary excitement and exhilaration throughout Latin America and much of the world. He continued these struggles in the 1970s, when Peruvian activists fell into the kind of bitter infighting that hobbled much of the Latin American left, and he pressed forward through the 1980s and 1990s, when the militants of the Shining Path used extremist violence in their pursuit of revolutionary transformation. Llamojha’s polit-

ical struggles took place on multiple fronts—local, regional, national, and international—and he fought his battles simultaneously as an indigenous man, a peasant, a father, and a leftist.

But Latin America's century of revolution was also a century of counter-revolution.² Llamojha was routinely jailed for his political efforts, harassed and sometimes tortured by police whose superiors had instructed them to detain this supposedly dangerous communist activist. These arrests sometimes took place during periods of authoritarian rule—under the military dictatorships that ruled Peru intermittently between 1948 and 1980—but many of the arrests took place when Peru had democratic governments. As in much of Latin America, repression of political activists in Peru was never confined to times of military rule. Just as crucially, Llamojha suffered the painful realities of local authoritarianism. Many of the figures who were most determined to stop Llamojha and see him imprisoned were district political authorities who were themselves of rural and indigenous backgrounds. Throughout Latin America, some of the most energetic counterrevolutionary efforts came from individuals of relatively humble origins who mobilized ideologies of anticommunism to further their own claims to economic, political, and social power.³ Llamojha also lived through two devastating decades of counterinsurgent violence that forced him to flee from his home and beloved community, that pushed him into a difficult existence as an internal refugee. That terror led to the arrests of three of his children and the permanent disappearance of his youngest son, Herbert. For countless Latin Americans caught in the horrors of twentieth-century dirty wars, Llamojha's terrible experiences are all too familiar.

Latin America's century of revolution and counterrevolution brought stunning changes that we find echoed across Llamojha's life. His determined efforts to learn to read and write foreshadowed the astonishing expansion of education and literacy in twentieth-century Latin America. When he moved to Lima as a teenager, he was part of a wave of rural-to-urban migration that ultimately transformed most Latin American countries into places where more people lived in cities than in the countryside. His energetic fights for campesinos' land rights were also part of broader efforts that eventually resulted in the effective dismantling of the hacienda system. Llamojha saw political connections forged across national borders, with new global solidarities forming around shared dreams of justice and change. He also witnessed the enfranchisement of indigenous peasants, long denied the right to vote because of their race, their class, and—for women—their gender. And in the

first years of the twenty-first century, two men of Quechua heritage were elected into Peru's presidency, something that would have seemed impossible just a few decades earlier.⁴ Llamojha has also lived to see the dramatic resurgence of explicitly socialist political projects in several Latin American countries, with left-wing governments coming to power in Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador.⁵

Sadly, many things also remained stubbornly unchanged across the twentieth century, even into the present day, despite the concerted efforts of activists like Llamojha. The divide between Latin America's rich and poor remains stark, and anti-indigenous racism, though perhaps more muted in its everyday expression than in previous decades, still carries oppressive force. Injustices still pervade the countryside, leaving campesinos to fight difficult battles against powerful—often foreign—mining, oil, and agricultural corporations.⁶ Many Latin Americans continue to feel excluded and ignored by their governments, as democratic rule has not always created inclusionary political systems based on the meaningful, engaged participation of ordinary citizens.⁷ The forces of political reaction also remain strong. When Llamojha was a teenager, he boldly proclaimed, "Now Peru is mine," certain that revolutionary triumph was at hand. But Peru has yet to become the kind of just and equal society he had envisioned.

With the disappointments and tragedies of twentieth-century upheavals, many activists turned away from social justice struggles. Some did so for their very survival, distancing themselves from political activism in an attempt to save themselves and their loved ones from the cruel nightmares of violent political repression. For many, it came down to a literal choice of life over death. Others moved away from activism in despair, their hearts broken by the betrayals of former allies, the tenacious persistence of inequalities and injustices, and the seemingly relentless crush of neoliberal economic policies. For many activists it seemed that one person would never be able to make a lasting difference and that thoroughgoing change would remain forever unattainable. Such activists' dejection is easy to understand and easy to share. But Llamojha remains unwilling to give up, resolute in his commitment to keep fighting for change even as an elderly man. His continuing determination is one of the most remarkable characteristics of this very remarkable man.

Ongoing Struggles for Justice

On his return to Concepción in 2000, Llamojha immediately resumed his political work on behalf of his community, launching an effort for postwar justice even though he was almost eighty.

During the time of danger, they installed a barracks up in the area called Joyllor Jocha and they started to sack all of the pueblos. Thirteen homes were destroyed, right down to their foundations, but first they were looted. Soldiers would come into a home and loot everything. They took everything, even campesinos' sandals, every little thing. Nothing at all was left in the houses.

Twenty-three little children were dismembered in the barracks. They grabbed the children by their feet and chopped them up.

When I arrived, the barracks was still here; the killings were still going on. So I started to write letters to send to Lima, to the ministry and to the government, to put a stop to this. I couldn't let this be; I had to denounce it all. And that's why the barracks pulled out of here. They came from Lima to see, to investigate, and then they immediately withdrew the barracks.

This sort of military violence typified counterinsurgency efforts in Peru's Andean regions, as soldiers, particularly in the early years of the internal war, automatically associated indigeneity with support for the Shining Path. Driven by racist stereotypes of indigenous peoples as inherently violent and easily manipulated by political radicals, Peru's military and political leaders incorrectly assumed that Shining Path militants effectively controlled indigenous peasants and responded by razing the countryside.⁸ Llamojha's denunciations of military violence included an impassioned letter to the CVR decrying the abuses committed by soldiers stationed in his community. Llamojha wrote:

The cruel tragedy of the pueblos of the district of Concepción started that fateful day, Monday the 27th of September 1982, when by order of the then Peruvian president, the terrible figure Fernando Belaúnde Terry, more than 300 soldiers . . . took the pueblo of Concepción in an assault of blood and fire, and looted humble homes, proceeding with savagery and cruelty. They mistreated men, women, the elderly and children. They raped women and youth, doing so in the presence of their parents. Without showing even a minimum of respect for human rights, they sav-

agely sacked homes as true enemies of humanity, taking everything from them. . . . The so-called “members of the Armed Forces of Peru” burned and destroyed homes, acting with cruelty and malice, like true enemies of the Peruvian people.⁹

Llamojha also prepared a detailed pamphlet about the abuses, condemning the military’s misdeeds and demanding the immediate withdrawal of the barracks. He made photocopies of the pamphlet and distributed them in Concepción’s central plaza, pasting the remaining copies on electrical poles throughout the community.

His postwar political battles were also intensely personal. Being back in Concepción brought hard, tangible reminders of all his family had lost. Herbert was gone, his still-unexplained disappearance an ongoing sorrow for his family. Even Llamojha’s home was destroyed: twenty years of political violence and harsh Ayacucho weather had left the family’s adobe brick house in ruins. He explained:

The soldiers knocked it down. They demolished the door in order to enter and then they seized all of my documents. The soldiers took all of this. And then they abandoned the house and the rain destroyed it all.¹⁰

Llamojha also lost his treasured document archive and personal library to the violence. He still speaks with much sadness about the fact that soldiers seized his archive when the violence began to escalate in 1982.

Because I traveled to all the pueblos of Peru, I recorded the situation of all the pueblos, in written form. I wrote and I gave each pueblo the original while I kept a copy; I kept the copies here. But because there was the danger of the armed struggle, soldiers came into my home and took away everything. What could they have done with it all? They took all the documents, from all of Peru. I don’t know what they took them for.

I also had all my books, I had a huge number of books in my pueblo. But when the armed struggle started in 1982, the army entered my house and they took all of my books. For what? What could they have done with so many books? A huge number of books. I had a big suitcase full of them, and the soldiers took them all.

In the three decades that have passed since the Shining Path launched its armed struggle, Llamojha has rebuilt some of his library and document collection. When I emailed him—via his daughter María—a photograph of a

letter he wrote in 1958, María told me, “I read him the letter you sent. He remembered it and got really excited. He was astonished that you have these documents! He asked me to see if you have others. He hopes you can send all that you have so that he can conserve them in his personal archive. . . . He was so happy with the letter that I printed it off and once he had it in his hands, he didn’t want to let me have it back, and he packed it away carefully among his things. He’s so loving, like a kid with a new toy.”¹¹

He eventually managed to reestablish part of his document collection, storing his papers in a large bureau in his Concepción home. He commented:

I have documents about all the struggles I went through. I have everything here. People can come here and read, study everything that happened in Concepción. I’ve got documents about Concepción since its foundation. I investigated and searched for all the documents in Lima.

These documents and books are important to Llamojha in and of themselves; he treasures them as a historian and intellectual.¹² But these archives also matter greatly to him because as he has advanced in age, writing and teaching have been two of the key ways he has managed to continue pressing for change.¹³

During the first years after his return to Concepción in 2000, he found an effective method for sharing his political ideas: the radio. For a few years, he hosted a daily radio program on which he told local listeners about the history of Concepción and its surrounding communities. He also used his radio program to denounce continuing injustice. He told his CVR interviewers:

The police used to be good, but not anymore. Now they’re against the pueblo. For example, in Concepción we have a police post, and it’s good for nothing. When we go to make a complaint, they don’t attend to us. They demand money, beer; they’re good for nothing. As we now have a radio in Concepción, I talk daily for an hour, and I attack the police there. I tell them to go to hell. For the poor, there is no justice.

After returning to Concepción, Llamojha also began educating individuals directly. University students writing their senior theses often traveled to Concepción in the first years of the twenty-first century to interview him about Ayacucho’s past. His daughter María recalled how he requested a Peruvian history monograph shortly after his ninetieth birthday; he wanted to study it so that he could better answer questions from the university students who came to visit him.¹⁴ These visits from students were deeply important

to him. After the sudden death of Esther from an aneurysm in May 2011, his Lima-based children brought him to the capital and urged him to move there permanently. He refused: he wanted to be in Concepción, where students and campesinos would be able to find him and seek his advice. When he was in Lima for a subsequent medical appointment, Llamojha commented:

In recent years, students have been coming to Concepción from the university in Ayacucho. They always come to ask me about the peasantry, about what Peru was like, about what the arrival of the Spaniards was like. All of that. Because of that, I always have to study! Happily, the students never leave me alone. I'm always happy there [in Concepción]. Here [in Lima] I'm sad!

These connections with university students are not new. I have found documents showing that Llamojha's ties with university students stretch back all the way to the 1950s, and he recalled how during the 1960s and 1970s he often gave talks to students at Ayacucho's San Cristóbal de Huamanga University and at Lima universities, including San Marcos and the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.¹⁵

The universities of Lima always called me. San Marcos, the Catholic University, they always invited me to talk about the peasantry, about the struggle with the hacendados and the problems in the countryside. San Marcos was like my home! They'd feed me there, and I'd even stay and sleep there. Many students wanted to know about these things, so they'd gather at night. They'd ask about Peru, about how it has been since the arrival of the Spanish, about how campesinos live in the sierra, about how the hacendados behaved. This is what the students asked.

These memories, though, are tinged with nostalgic sadness. In one interview Llamojha commented:

Back then, we were really strongly united with them [university students]. I was really well treated, they respected me. That's how we used to be. Now, I'm poor and no one comes to see me. What is my fate?

As an elderly man, the main way Llamojha has been able to share his ideas and experiences is through writing, a task he has always loved.

I always wrote. I liked to write histories. I also wrote poems, but it's hard to think them up. I wrote about the question of the struggle, that's what

I wrote about. Now, too, a book is going to be published. I have writings, loose sheets about the struggle, and I'm going to publish a book. The campesinos are demanding I do this.

A few years after his return to Concepción, Llamojha self-published a 158-page book titled *History and Tradition of the Pueblo of Concepción*. It describes Concepción's precolonial history under the Inka and the community's experience under Spanish colonial rule. Llamojha's anticolonial perspective is clear: he describes the "genocide perpetrated by the voracious and blood-thirsty Spaniards who invaded the territory of Tawantin Suyu [the Quechua term for the Inca Empire]."¹⁶ He offers a detailed description of the *envarados* (indigenous authorities), discussions of Concepción's geography and topography, and a history of the community's migrant club in Lima. The book then documents Concepción's annual celebrations of Carnival and Easter and goes on to detail the community's struggles against the Ayrabamba hacienda.

When he entered his eighties, Llamojha began spending much of his time filling the pages of his personal notebooks, recording as much of his diverse historical knowledge as he could. He generously shared some of his notebooks with me, and they revealed an exceptional range of historical interests and knowledge. He notes, for example, that celebrations of Christ's birth have been commemorated on December 25 since the fourth century, that Peru has manufactured noodles since 1860, and that the first modern Olympic games were held in Athens in 1896. His notebooks are also packed with richly detailed information about Ayacucho's precolonial, colonial, and republican history. Importantly, he has used these notebooks to voice his continuing dedication to social justice struggles. Two passages from the early twenty-first century are particularly instructive. In the first, from January 2004, he writes about those who had to flee their rural communities during the years of the internal war, just as he and Esther did.

DISPLACED PERSONS

During the years of political violence in Peru, more than 300,000 were displaced from the pueblos of Peru's whole interior. Their lands were left abandoned. When they wanted to return to their pueblos, they were impeded by the secret agents of the dominating high society, and the soldiers and police did not permit them to enter their pueblos. This is how it is, damn it!

A second passage—written when Llamojha was ninety-one—likewise shows his enduring activist commitment:

Sunday, the first of January 2012.

Today, Sunday, the first of January begins the year two thousand twelve, another year of pain, blood, and tears that we the poor will continue suffering. We continue to suffer the tragedy of our fate but the damned dominant class of Peru and the Planet will disappear when their day arrives. This is how things are. Viewed from the dialectical point of view, everything has a beginning and end.

Chainam chay majtakúna. [Quechua: This is how those people are.]

Beyond writing and teaching, Llamojha worked to remain active in local politics, attending meetings of Concepción's village council. In one interview he also relayed that he was helping campesinos who had recently occupied some vacant lands near Concepción.

Down below, in the valley, some campesinos have seized land. They've occupied unused land, and they're going to form a new pueblo called Puka Orjo Pampa. I've now got to write about how this land was—it was empty in distant times, and it wasn't even a hacienda in the Spanish era. It was empty land, and the campesinos lived there with their cattle. Now, the campesinos have taken the land. And now I have to act. I'm going to write about the land's borders.

Llamojha's continuing commitment to social justice struggles is not surprising: he dedicated his life to the fight for change and for justice. Although he accomplished much during his years as an activist, he also faced enormous personal hardships, including repeated imprisonments, political marginalization, and the loss of his son. Yet as he looked back on his life during our interviews, he expressed no regrets about his activist past.

Regrets about the struggle? No. I don't regret anything, I have no regrets. Nothing turned out badly, it was always good. There was triumph in all the activities. I'd like to go back to that time! Because I was with the masses, because the masses respected me.

But while he may not regret the past, he does fear for the future. One of his sharpest concerns as an elderly activist is that younger people have forgotten his generation's past political efforts and grown apathetic about social justice struggles.

The new generation doesn't take much of an interest. They're barely interested. So only us older ones are continuing the struggle.

In another interview, he reflected:

How we struggled for Concepción! Now the new generation doesn't know how to struggle. They don't know much about what the struggle was like back then, because they're youngsters.

Llamojha's concerns about the younger generation eased somewhat when he earned some long overdue public recognition of his life of activism. In September 2010, the scholars Ricardo Caro and Valérie Robin published a feature story on Llamojha's life in the national newspaper *La República*.¹⁷ The following year, he was formally honored by his community. At a November 2011 ceremony commemorating the fifty-seventh anniversary of Concepción's recognition as a district, local authorities presented Llamojha with a trophy and a large golden medal, honoring the work he had done for Concepción. That evening, he danced in a celebration with members of his family, moving to the music with a crutch under his arm. Alicia asked him how he felt about this special recognition.

I felt really happy when they congratulated me. They have recognized my struggles from those times, and that's why the mayor told me I had to be there, so they could record my statements.

He has also witnessed some political vindication of his generation's activist work. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, countless observers spoke about the global triumphs of capitalism and liberal democracy. For many, it seemed that utopian political projects and socialist experiments—the “dreamworld” of Marxism—had come to a definitive end.¹⁸ But in the first years of the twenty-first century, popular protests and democratic elections have brought leftist governments to power in several Latin American countries. Socialism has proved very much alive, as have trenchant national and international opposition to that political turn. The inspiring dreams and bitter debates that so shaped Llamojha as a younger man continue today, just as they surely will tomorrow. The legacies of twentieth-century political struggles and counterstruggles endure.



FIG. A.2 Llamojha with Hilda, Walter, and María Llamojha Puklla, Concepción, 2011.
Photo by Alicia Carrasco Gutiérrez.

The Difficulties of Aging

As an elderly activist, Llamojha has also had to confront the hardships of aging. Those hardships include a creeping feeling of loneliness, greatly exacerbated following his wife's sudden death. Although his eldest daughter, Hilda, her husband, and her son moved to Concepción from Lima following doña Esther's death, Llamojha has often felt alone, cheered mainly by calls from his children. In a passage from May 23, 2012, he wrote:

This morning, my daughter María called. She's now back in Lima. She told me she's well and that she'll come back [to Concepción] soon. Talking with her left me happy. She worries about me, and I'll be waiting for her return.¹⁹

A passage from the following day:

In the morning, my daughter Delia called me . . . she works in a hospital, as she is an obstetrics nurse. When I got this call from my daughter, I was really happy. Delia lives with her husband in Arequipa. She studied at Ayacucho's San Cristóbal University.²⁰

These calls helped him greatly, but he still felt quite lonely. Many mornings, he would walk out to Concepción's central plaza and sit on one of the benches, hoping that someone would join him for a conversation. Hilda has noted that her father loved visits and the chance to talk about the past but became sad and depressed when he did not have visitors.²¹ In one of our interviews he recalled some French scholars' visit to Concepción.

On their first trip, we spent four days together. We talked all about the struggle. It was lovely. My life is really happy when [such visits] happen. When it doesn't, I'm sad. I feel like crying.

Advancing age has also brought serious physical hardships. In a passage from January 2012, Llamojha describes his day's activities. The quality of his once beautiful handwriting has deteriorated, and the page is dotted with blotches of white correction fluid. At the bottom of the page, he has written: "I don't know why I can't write well. I'm like a donkey."²² In his interview with the CVR, he lamented the fact that he was no longer able to craft the intricate stamps he had once made to adorn his political documents:

Now they don't turn out well. I don't know why. I think someone has done witchcraft against me.²³

Part of the problem is that Llamojha is losing his eyesight. A stroke in 2001 left him with partial facial paralysis and weakened vision. Over the next few years, additional retinal damage occurred and left him completely blind in his left eye. Sadly, the vision of his right eye also began deteriorating rapidly. The loss of his vision is particularly upsetting for him, as his failing eyesight means that it is harder and harder for him to do what he most loves: read and write. In a May 2012 notebook passage he laments, "I can't write well because my vision is failing. My fate is sad."²⁴

His notebooks also describe his ailing health. In a passage from 2004, he wrote about the day's emergency trip to the city of Ayacucho. His blood pressure had been dangerously high for three days, and after a worried phone call from his daughter María, he agreed that he needed to go to the department capital for medical treatment.²⁵ That health emergency had no lasting consequences, but in 2008, on a short walk to a local store in Concepción, he fell and broke his hip. Most doctors were unwilling to operate, given his advanced age. The family finally found a doctor prepared to do so, and Llamojha's children and other relatives pooled together money for the expensive surgery and medicines. Always energetic, always determined, he then stubbornly refused

the doctor's orders to rest and recuperate. A week after the surgery he insisted on getting up and going for a walk. The ensuing damage to his hip required another surgery. After the second surgery, his mobility remained hampered, and he had to walk with the aid of a crutch. He commented on his reduced capabilities in a January 2012 notebook passage:

Today is the birthday of my deceased wife, Esther Honorata Puklla Fernández. If she were alive, she would be 79 years old this year. Today, my daughter Hilda, accompanied by her son Manuel and her husband Eulogio, went to the cemetery to visit her mother's grave. I could not go because of my disability [invalidéz] as I cannot go on foot. That's why they went to the cemetery alone. It's more than two kilometers out of town. In addition, a torrential rain fell and got them wet.²⁶

Failing health is not Llamojha's only concern as an elderly man. In our interviews, he sometimes grew frustrated at himself, upset at his inability to recall names or events, and asserted that he couldn't remember anything anymore.

I'm losing my memory. Someone has done witchcraft against me. I even forget my name. I used to get mad when people talked like that.

"I'm even forgetting my name," they'd say.

And I'd say, "How can you forget your own name?" But sure enough, in the questions I'm asked, I can't even remember my own name easily. It's strange, but it's true!

Llamojha's health problems suddenly turned acute in April 2014, when he suffered a massive stroke while at home in Concepción. His family rushed him to the nearby hospital in Vilcashuamán, and he was quickly transferred to a hospital in the city of Ayacucho because of the severity of his condition. He regained consciousness after two days in the hospital, but he was largely paralyzed and could speak only with great difficulty. After he had spent several days in the hospital, a doctor informed the family that he would have to leave by the end of the day: there was nothing more the hospital could do for him. His family managed to bring him to Lima, where he remained bedridden in his son Walter's home.

Notified of Llamojha's illness by the historian Ricardo Caro Cárdenas, Llamojha's longtime political rival Andrés Luna Vargas—of the Vanguardia Revolucionaria faction of the CCP—visited Llamojha in Lima. The men had not seen each other in decades. Llamojha asked Luna Vargas what the CCP

was doing these days, and Luna Vargas generously replied, “Nothing . . . you didn’t leave us even a single hacienda to demolish. You demolished every last one!”²⁷

That moment of laughter and joy, though, was surrounded by much sadness. Llamojha was deeply upset by the fact that he was mostly unable to move, that speaking was so difficult, and that he was so far away from his beloved Concepción. His family worked hard to comfort him, staying by him constantly. It seemed unlikely that he would live much beyond his ninety-third birthday, but with his astonishing will to continue fighting, he made remarkable improvements. He poured his energy into physical therapy, and by August 2014 he was able to stand for brief periods and had regained much of his speech. By September he was once again walking, if only for a few short meters. Today, in August 2015, he is eager to return to Concepción and resume his activist work. His determination is both moving and inspiring.

Confronting the devastation of unrealized political dreams, the nightmares of counterinsurgent terror, and the ruthless advances of age, many would have understandably retreated from the fight for social justice. But Llamojha remains compelled to continue working for change. During our interviews he reflected on the responsibilities of an activist. His ideas seem a fitting close for this book.

You have to struggle. You have to organize the masses well and not abandon them. You have to continue the struggle until you attain all the peasantry’s goals, until you attain the goals of the pueblo, which needs to liberate itself from the clutches of tyranny.

I like struggling with the masses when they stand firm. It gives you strength, you see, it gives you worth and courage. The struggle is really lovely when the masses are united.

In the peasant struggle, you have to stand firm. You can’t waver and lead the masses. The masses recognize their leader. When their leader stands firm and doesn’t get frightened, the masses support him. You have to struggle without getting demoralized, because if you lose heart, everyone gets demoralized. You have to fight until the ultimate triumph.

Manuel Llamojha Mitma died in Lima on May 31, 2016. Following his death, his family returned him to Concepción for burial.