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## ENUNCIATION AND MEMORY: CONSERVATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PERUVIAN INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT THROUGH COMICS

**SUMMARY:** This article analyzes how Peruvian comics represent the internal armed conflict (1980–2000) from a conservative perspective, transforming it into a graphic narrative that contributes to shaping a collective memory aligned with political interests. Motivated by the lack of critical studies addressing comics produced by conservative groups from a semiotic perspective. The analysis focuses on contemporary productions characterized by short formats distributed through print and digital media, which reconfigure both state actors and victims. Methodologically, the study examines the enunciative discursive strategies used to exalt state figures and demonize adversaries through the construction of characters, spaces, and temporalities. The findings reveal that *actoriality* shifts from an empathetic representation of urban victims to an idealized military heroism; *temporality* moves from a closed past toward a narrative of ongoing threat; and *spatiality* leaves behind concrete urban settings to become abstract scenarios that glorify political decisions. Finally, the article identifies the emergence of a conservative protological myth that reactivates epic narratives of the past and turns comics into instruments of symbolic domination, aimed more at mobilizing fear than at fostering historical understanding.

**KEYWORDS:** narrative, corporeality, semiotics, internal armed conflict, conservative discourse, conservatives.

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## 1. Introduction

As artistic products, graphic novels possess a notable capacity to shape, reflect, and even create realities parallel to everyday experience. In this sense, as a form of visual narrative expression, graphic novels do not only act as a medium to transcribe reality, but to actively recreate it in its construction and in the configuration of its meanings. From semiotic studies of comics (Bateman, 2023; Cuñarro, Finol, 2013; Quezada Macchiavello, 2024), numerous analyses have been carried out focused on exploring how the images and codes of graphic works have influenced the construction of discourses that shape social perceptions, historical memory and, moreover, consolidate hegemonic discourses in society (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017). From this perspective, the present research focuses on a specific aspect of the relationship between graphic representation and its “real” referent, approaching the comic not as a neutral and de-ideologized medium, but as a tool in the so-called “cultural war”, used by conservative groups to rewrite the past, especially in the context of post-armed conflict Peru.

Since 1989, with the publication of the graphic novel *Confidencias de un Senderista*, which addressed the internal armed conflict between the Communist Party *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and the State, up to the recent proliferation of short comics beginning in 2008, Peruvian comics have followed a trajectory marked by periods of silence followed by resurgence. After nearly two decades of absence of graphic representations of the internal armed conflict under the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), the 2000s witnessed the reactivation of production on the subject, though under new narrative forms and visual strategies. Unlike the comics produced in the 1980s and 1990s, the early 21st-century comics are characterized by a documentary and non-fictional approach, constructing an objective and journalistic representation of events through documented stories of the internal armed conflict. However, this representation was interrupted by a polarized climate that, since 2016, has been experienced not only in Peru but also throughout Latin America, where conservative right-wing narratives clashed with progressive discourses centered on collectivist and social themes. This gave rise to a shorter and more dynamic format, presented mainly as inserts in newspapers affiliated with politically conservative positions. These comics, distributed through digital and print media, align with conservative outlets and perspectives that reformulate the historical memory of the armed conflict, transforming representations of state actors and privileging a particular view of the war.

It is in this context that the need arises for a more detailed semiotic analysis of comic production as conservative ideological devices within collective memory (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017), a field that has so far received attention mainly from progressive perspectives that privilege consensus and the recognition of victims (Gomes, 2024; Gras, 2020; Hodapp, 2022; Nieto, 2022; Pau, 2021; Vich, Hibbett, 2022). This article is framed within the reflection on the contributions that comics make to the so-called “culture war” of the Peruvian

conservative right, focusing attention on how these narrative products not only tell a story, but also react to reality and shape it through a visually articulated political rhetoric. In the case of comics, the visual signs of the actors, the compositions, the demonization of adversaries, and the exaltation of state heroes contribute to establishing a discourse that legitimizes and perpetuates a conservative view of the past. Semiotics, when applied to these comics, becomes an effective tool for unraveling the discursive construction of reality—in this case, through meanings that compose the graphic representations and their narrative elements from a conservative perspective.

This research, therefore, is situated within the analysis of contemporary conservative aesthetics and a broader inquiry into the cultural devices involved in the construction of a particular social reality. Hence, the main research question is: How does Peruvian comics represent the internal armed conflict (1980–2000) from a conservative perspective, transforming it into a graphic narrative to contribute to the shaping of a collective memory aligned with political interests? In this case, the comic is configured as a fundamental space of “ideological battle” within the framework of the so-called “culture war” that seeks to reinterpret and reinscribe the past according to specific political interests—namely, those of the Peruvian conservative right.

## 2. The Enunciative Position of Latin American Comics

The review of specialized literature maintains that comics, by combining images and words in a predicative way—what Groensteen (1999) calls “iconic solidarity”—enable not only the transmission of information, but also an aesthetic response from the reader, making them a literary genre capable of offering complex reflections on reality, beyond their apparent classification as a medium for children (Jiménez Arriagada, Bañales-Faz, Lobos-Sepúlveda, 2020). This iconic-verbal quality of comics gives them a strategic role in the construction of historical memory, especially in contexts marked by political violence, as they manage to balance the need for historical verisimilitude—to sustain the authenticity of the narrative—with the creation of a sensorial experience in the reader, activating semiotic mechanisms that resist oblivion (Leroux, 2024). It is precisely from this dual function, both informative and aesthetic, that comics have acquired a specific political dimension in Latin America, establishing a place of enunciation characterized, in many cases, by giving voice to peripheral subjects who have historically been disadvantaged due to their class, gender, or ethnicity within social power structures.

Within this framework, studies such as those by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1973) have highlighted how comics in Latin America have functioned as a space of resistance against hegemonic formats and narratives imported from the United States, resignifying the medium as an instrument of identity affirmation and political contestation (Gomes, 2024; Hodapp, 2022; Nieto, 2022). Graphic novels are thus consolidated as devices that not only tell stories, but also reconfigure urban spaces as settings for struggle, defense, and survival, as exem-

plified in paradigmatic works such as *El Eternauta* (1957–1959) and *La Guerra de los Antartes* (1974; Turnes, 2024). This phenomenon also manifests in comics of political exile such as *Tumac* (Aman, 2023) or *Exilia* (Ricalde, 2019), where memory is articulated not only as recollection but as a political act against imposed oblivion. Feminist literary criticism in Argentina has reinforced this perspective by analyzing comics as a praxis of social critique and a means of making structural gender violence visible within the Latin American urban context (Gandolfo, Turnes, 2020), finding examples in works such as *Femimutancia* (Caraballo, 2021) or in the production of authors like Carol Lay (Singh, 2022), where the city becomes not a mere backdrop but a symbolic battlefield where the meanings of everyday life are disputed. The recurrence of humor and satire as forms of denunciation against the dominant classes (Stavans, 2019; Wade, 2024) completes the configuration of a tradition in which comics not only represent but activate a living political memory (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017).

Nevertheless, this centrality of comics as a tool of resistance does not exhaust its field of action. Although critical literature has focused on these peripheral experiences, few studies have addressed the use of comics from the center of the social semiosphere. Although conservative sectors have historically been portrayed as censors of comics—particularly after Fredric Wertham’s crusade in 1954 (Condis, Stanfill, 2022)—we also observe a strategic use of the medium by sectors in power for the dissemination of their own ideological discourses. In Latin America, for instance, the Catholic Church systematically used comics as a vehicle for spiritual renewal and moral reaffirmation, as evidenced by publications such as *Vidas Ejemplares* and *Patronos y Santuarios* (Díaz Patiño, 2023; 2024). Here, comics are not resisted but instrumentalized to promote conservative values, relying on representations such as “Humonegro” in the magazine *Aguiluchos*—a character who, under the appearance of an Afro-descendant native, functioned as a passive actant, predisposed to be evangelized and molded by European Catholic values (Díaz Patiño, 2019; Gandolfi, 2024). This use of comics as a medium of ideological dissemination reveals its semiotic flexibility: the same graphic language can serve both as a tool of emancipation and as a device of hegemonic consolidation.

The Peruvian case is inscribed within this Latin American tension, both replicating and transforming the dynamics of appropriation of comics as a medium of symbolic production. From the appearance of *Palomilla* (1940–1942), the first comic magazine in the country, to contemporary representations of the internal armed conflict, Peruvian comics consistently reflect a social construction marked by representations of race, gender, and political marginalization (Sagastegui, 2024). During the government of Manuel A. Odría (1948–1956), there was a consolidation of a preference for popular narratives of a *criollo* (Creole) nature that, although urbanized, maintained subordinated representations of Indigenous and rural sectors, as seen in the magazine *Avanzada Avanzada* (1957–1968; Villar, Sagastegui, 2016), where Indigenous peoples were portrayed through an evangelizing lens that reinforced social hierarchies. In opposition to this trend,

the government of Velasco Alvarado promoted a more inclusive editorial current that, although incipient, opened space for vindicatory narratives within a cultural field still dominated by conservative perspectives.

The political violence between 1980 and 2000, derived from the internal armed conflict between the State and the Communist Party of Peru—*Sendero Luminoso* (Heredia Alarcón, 2021), radically reconfigured the enunciative position of comics. Works such as *Barbarie*, *Rupay*, *Novísima Crónica* and *Mal Gobierno* (Gras, 2020; Pau, 2021) embraced a documentary approach that avoided the simplifying moral dichotomy, presenting social actors in their material, historical, and political complexity (Arango, 2017). In contrast to these projects, however, a conservative narrative also took hold—one that in recent years has gained strength through processes of postmemory that exalt the role of the State and the armed forces, glorify figures such as Alberto Fujimori, and simplify the armed conflict as a struggle between civilization and barbarism (Vich, Hibbett, 2022). In this type of narrative, the representation of insurgents as “psychopaths” or “common criminals” (Sotelo Melgarejo, 2013) not only depoliticizes the conflict but also blocks the possibility of a critical memory by presenting a history in which dissent is pathologized and state violence is legitimized as the only path to order.

In this sense, Peruvian comics, in constant dialogue with Latin American dynamics, reveal a profound ambivalence: while they have been a crucial medium for articulating dissident memories and representing historically marginalized subjects, they have also been instrumentalized as a tool for the consolidation of conservative discourses, adapting to the ideological needs of the moment (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017). This capacity for transformation—of becoming a field of symbolic dispute—explains their continued relevance as an object of study for understanding the configurations of power, identity, and memory in Peru and Latin America.

### 3. Visual Enunciation and Myth

From structuralist semiotics (Greimas, Courtés, 1979), the concept of *enunciation* is generally understood as the act of producing the enunciated text and realizing the various layers of meaning in discourse—whether fundamental, narrative, or surface-level. Thus, although the analyst is faced with an enunciated message, it is conceived as the result of an implicit act of production, which grants it interpretative limits and boundaries. Summarizing its relevance in discourse analysis, Bruno Latour (1998) points out that enunciation is logically presupposed, insofar as it is constructed from the marks present in the enunciated text. These marks can be gathered and analyzed to account for the very process of meaning production. While enunciation may refer to the pragmatic conditions of enunciation production (social, economic, ideological), in Greimasian structural semiotics it is the enunciated text itself that constructs its context through specific marks and inscriptions. These marks are of different types: spatial (here/there), temporal (now/then), and actantial (I/you/he-she). In this sense, the

“I”, the “here”, and the “now”—the *ego hic et nunc*—are understood as internal stagings within the text, even in the case of visual texts. Thus, these marks and their displacements (the processes of *embrayage* [shifting in] and *débrayage* [shifting out]) operate as *passes* (*passee*) that reveal the constructions of meaning within the enunciated message.

Nonetheless, although studies on enunciation tend to focus on a predominantly linguistic approach, the shift in analysis toward the study of image-based language as extraverbal enunciated forms has also been addressed in the development—albeit fragmentary—of semiotics as a discipline (Basso Fossali, Dondero, 2022). This shift began, in part, with Christian Metz’s semiotic proposal in the audiovisual field, and continued with the analysis of still images (Dondero, 2008), where specific modes of enunciation and narrativity have been identified in photographs, illustrations, and static graphics (Lagopoulos et al., 2025). While Greimasian semiotics argues that visual enunciated messages can be analyzed as systems of meaning based on differential relations between forms, colors, and arrangements—that is, on the intersection between the figurative and the plastic—later research (Basso Fossali, Dondero, 2022; Dondero, 2008; Lagopoulos et al., 2025) has increasingly challenged the separation between spatial and temporal arts. This effort has largely been channeled through the analysis of enunciation as a cross-cutting principle in the construction of meaning.

From this perspective, the work of Jacques Fontanille (1989) brings the concept of enunciation into the visual domain, applying it to the analysis of objects such as painting and cinema through categories such as actoriality, aspectuality, and the modes of realization of the gaze. For Fontanille (1989; Lagopoulos et al., 2025), enunciation allows for an understanding of the construction of a point of view and the position the observer is meant to occupy in spatial, pragmatic, cognitive, and emotional terms. In this sense, enunciation becomes an optimal tool for analyzing the values, tensions, and ideological realizations inscribed in visual discourse. Following this line, Dondero (2020) argues that visual analysis through enunciation enables the identification of different types of visual simulacra. Actorial simulacra manifest in the characters and in the roles of the observer, who may be admiring, indifferent, or disengaged. Spatial simulacra, in turn, refer to the perspective from which the scene is constructed: the location of the characters, the framing geometry, the atmosphere, and the implicit spatiality of the visual enunciation. Temporal simulacra, finally, are evident in the trajectories of action (Dondero, 2024), in the simultaneous movement of human bodies, as well as in the temporal programmings expressed not only through the representation of the passage of time, but also through plastic transformations such as changes in color, light, or texture. Thus, the marks of enunciation can be recognized both on the figurative level (bodily actions, gestures, objects) and on the plastic level (colors, textures, compositions). By engaging with both bodily action and the act of observation implied in the enunciated message, visual enunciation reconstructs the discursive simulacrum and accounts for its meaning-making, not only by considering the image as an already-emitted product, but as an act in itself—as the

manifestation of a gaze. In this sense, the image incorporates, in the form of a simulacrum, the very acts of its production and observation (Dondero, 2020).

Within this framework, the relationship between visual enunciation and myth emerges, as the marks of enunciation, understood as meaningful fragments, make it possible to identify axiological elements (in the addressee) and ideological elements (in the enunciative instance) in visual discourse. Jean-Marie Floch (2005), a pioneer in this field of study, maintains that mythic production—like the construction of visual identities—is based on a process of recomposing already-existing visual signs, selected and reorganized creatively. This process constitutes a form of enunciative praxis, that is, a mode of meaning production that operates through formal procedures and engages both cultural structures and personal or collective choices (Brodén, 2002). Floch’s work highlights how plastic expression—for instance, *bricolage*—can account for mythical trajectories and thematic-narrative configurations conceived as forms of shared thought. In this way, visuality can function as a mythical space, insofar as it articulates cultural oppositions through objects, images, and graphic arrangements. For this reason, this research draws not only from structuralist reflections on myth—reinterpreted through visual semiotics by Floch—but also from the contributions of Furio Jesi (1973; 2014), who links myth to specific forms of power. From Jesi’s perspective, there is no single type of myth. On one hand, he identifies the “pure myth”, that is, an unmanipulated image that emerges spontaneously in the present and does not serve purposes of domination or logics of control (Jara, 2022). This myth arises as a free expression of popular imagination and operates as a common force. It is manifested through a visual discourse made up of ephemeral, fractal, plural, and intuitive images that do not seek to persuade or mobilize, unlike the heroic or propagandistic myth proposed by Sorel. On the other hand, Jesi distinguishes the “technical myth”, a discursive construction tainted by the will to dominate. This type of myth does not arise organically from the collective unconscious or lived experience, but is fabricated or reappropriated by ideologues, intellectuals, or apparatuses of power with the aim of mobilizing, controlling, or manipulating the masses. It is a myth that has been instrumentalized, degraded in its function as a meaning operator, and converted into a tool for action (*faire-faire*). It is precisely in response to this type of myth—and the directionality of the visual discourse associated with it—that this research takes a critical stance.

#### 4. Methodology

To delimit the comics to be analyzed, it is fundamental to establish clear criteria that allow the identification of those works that meet the characteristics of interest according to their content, context of production, and ideological alignment. The selected comics must have been published from the year 2001, as this period coincides with a surge in the production of works that reinterpret the historical memory of the internal armed conflict in Peru, reflecting the impact of the

sociopolitical context following the end of the conflict. Additionally, special attention will be paid to the entities responsible for funding and production, prioritizing those linked to institutions, publishers, or media outlets with conservative leanings, as these reflect in their content the ideologies of their funders. To determine conservative content, themes related to security and national sovereignty with a clear ethical and moral discourse will be identified (moralization of the internal armed conflict, protection of national sovereignty from ethical threats to hegemonic values), as indicated by the specialized literature (Cuevas-Calderón et al., 2024). In this way, in terms of narrative, it was considered whether the comics include elements that glorify state actors, portray victims as part of a “true people” aligned with traditional values, and demonize the State’s adversaries (Vich, Hibbett, 2022). This type of narrative is also manifested in the exaltation of morality and order as tools of justice and social protection. Likewise, it is important to analyze how the works reinterpret the events of the internal armed conflict to consolidate a historical memory aligned with conservative values, which is reflected in the review of images, dialogues, and discursive constructions that present an alternative reality favorable to the State.

The methodology employed a qualitative approach focused on semiotic discourse analysis from a structuralist perspective (Courtés, 1991; Greimas, Courtés, 1979), centered on the process of meaning production through the formants of visual enunciation. This approach made it possible to identify the relationship between actoriality, spatiality, and temporality, three key elements for understanding how the comics represented violence, the purification of state actors, and the staging of an alternative reality. The structuralist model holds that the enunciated message presents two dimensions that refer to the *ego, hic et nunc* (I, here, now), as a starting point for the visual analysis of meaning in discourse (Dondero, 2008; 2020; 2024). In this sense, the visual enunciative traces are of an actorial nature (I, they, others), spatial (here, there), and temporal (now, then), identified in the figurative and plastic components of the analyzed object.

The selection of comics produced in the 21st century with a conservative tendency, aimed at modifying the historical perception of the internal armed conflict in Peru and its collective memory, was based on a rigorous methodology that analyzed a total of 17 comics produced between 1980 and 2021. Of these, 7 comics were selected for the final corpus, as they met the criteria that included conservative ideological alignment, sources of funding, and discursive and visual elements reflecting conservative positions in the works. The selected comics are shown in bold in Table 1.

**Table 1**
*List of comics selected for the final corpus*

Author	Institution/Publisher	Title	Year	Format
Juan Acevedo	Contracultura	El cuy	1980	Comic strip
Juan Acevedo	Centro de estudios y Acción por la Paz (CeaPaz)	Luchín González: La violencia terrorista	1988	Comic strip
Luis Baldoce	Comisión de Cultura de la Base Naval	Confidencias de un senderista	1989	Staple-bound
Jesús Cossio	Penguin Random House	Rupay	2008	Book
Jesús Cossio	Contracultura	Barbarie	2010	Book
Miguel Det	Contracultura	Novísima Corónica i mal gobierno	2011	Book
<b>Guillermo Figueroa</b>	<b>Perú21</b>	<b>¡La caída de Abimael!</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>
<b>Guillermo Figueroa</b>	<b>Perú21</b>	<b>Barrios Altos</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>
Oscar Libón, Walter Dávila, Orlando Tapia	Convoca.pe	Huellas del terror	2017	Digital
<b>Guillermo Figueroa</b>	<b>Perú21</b>	<b>Tarata: El principio del fin</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>
<b>Martín Espinoza</b>	<b>Perú21</b>	<b>Chola Power: Nuestros muertos</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Staple-bound</b>
Oscar Colchado Lucio, Daniela Gamarra	Random Comics	Rosa Cuchillo. La novela gráfica	2021	Book
<b>Author unknown</b>	<b>Expresso, Computalace y Willax</b>	<b>La historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>
<b>Teniente Coronel C. Freyre, J. Castro</b>	<b>Comando Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas del Perú</b>	<b>Chavín de Huántar</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Digital</b>
Oscar Malca	Reservoir Books	¡En la cara no!	2021	Book
<b>Eugenio Antonio Ramirez Pando</b>	<b>PBO Radio y Diario Expreso</b>	<b>La operación Chavín de Huántar</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>

*Note.* Source: authors' own elaboration.

These comics were selected due to their alignment with conservative themes and narratives, expressed through their graphic representation, narrative structure, and institutional origin. Although the conservative discourse in the Peruvian context becomes more visible and explicit from the year 2021 onward—with open enunciations such as “the culture war”—the choice of a corpus spanning from 2016 should be understood as an approach to the early stages of that discourse. Already during that period, as Melgar (2016) notes, conservative traits were observable, especially in the biased and partial representation of historical events, through which attempts were made to justify crimes against humanity. In this way, the temporal selection of the corpus makes it possible to trace different degrees of consolidation and realization of conservative discourse from 2016 onward.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The analysis in this essay addresses conclusions and discussions across three key aspects of enunciation. First, the characteristic traits that construct the characters, or what is referred to as *actoriality*, will be identified. Then, an analysis of the composition of *postmemory* will be carried out through the study of temporal markers present in the graphic enunciation. Finally, *spatiality* will be examined to identify the visual markers that support the first two aspects through backgrounds and settings in which the narratives are instantiated.

Regarding actorial characteristics—that is, those related to the construction of characters within the discourse—representation in the early comics from 2016 (*La caída de Abimael*, *Barrios Altos*, and *Tarata: El principio del fin*) focuses on the victims of the internal armed conflict. Unlike representations such as those in *Rupay*, where Andean subjects historically marginalized appear as a “they”, these comics portray the victims as those affected by violence in the capital city. Thus, the enunciation is not structured from a “they”, but from a “we”: familiar, deeply urban characters who reinforce this collective identity of the country’s capital. These characters affirm the connotation of an alert and the presence of a reality manifested in interaction with urban modes of existence, specifically those of the capital. It is important to highlight here that the comics adopt a style typical of the documentary: verifiable, reliable, and journalistic informative content. This non-fiction approach, through iconic resources, generates a more credible effect of reality. Postmemory employs varying degrees of iconicity to create a discourse of non-fiction (Figueroa, 2016).

In these early comics, the “they”—that is, the terrorists—are represented without ethical connotations or elements of personification that might suggest moral weight. For example, Abimael Guzmán, leader of the *Partido Comunista del Perú—Sendero Luminoso* (PCP-SL), is portrayed as a historical figure who led a war against civil society, without being demonized or endowed with an explicit moral charge (Baldoceca, 1989; Figueroa, 2016; Ramirez Pando, 2021). In contrast to what was previously observed in *Confidencias de un Senderista*—

a comic produced in 1989 by the Culture Commission of the Naval Base under the direction of Luis Baldoseda, at the height of the internal armed conflict—the comics from 2016 avoided openly demonizing representations. In these works, the figure of Abimael Guzmán was presented as a historical subject without an explicit moral charge, allowing for a more complex representation of the conflict. However, this trend changes drastically starting in 2021, in a context of increasing political polarization and institutional crisis in Peru. In this scenario, the term “terrorist” began to be used by conservative sectors to delegitimize labor, social, and communal claims. This shift is reflected in comics such as *La historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso* (2021), where Abimael Guzmán is depicted as the embodiment of absolute evil, stripped of historical agency and motivated solely by an ontological evil. Thus, a moral charge that had already been rehearsed in the military narrative of 1989 re-emerges strongly, now updated in a political and media-driven key. This representation prevents any portrayal of the political or sociohistorical agency of the actors involved by reducing the conflict to a binary semantics of good and evil, of saints and demons.

In relation to the construction of temporality, this is articulated in the discourse through figurative and plastic reiterations in various forms. Particularly, in the comics produced between 2016 and 2017, the representation of the internal armed conflict is established through the use of greys as a plastic resource, which constructs the connotation of the past—a time of the “then”. This aesthetic finds parallels in progressive graphic novels such as *Rupay* (2008) and *Novísima Crónica y Mal Gobierno* (2011). In this way, greys, as a plastic resource in comics, attribute an affective and intensive quality to the past, one that goes beyond simple objective documentary recording, portraying a past charged with emotional weight that intensifies the temporality of the represented reality.

However, this affective load—documentary, tragic, and dramatic in nature—is altered starting in 2021. At this point, as previously noted, Peruvian society experienced a polarization marked by an electoral clash between a left labeled as “extreme” and “terrorist” (often framed in racist terms) and a populist, radicalized right. This is reflected in comics such as *La historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso*, *Chavín de Huántar*, and *La operación Chavín de Huántar*. Thus, the victim character of the internal armed conflict—who functioned as a figure of a “you” who has suffered its violence in the comics of 2016–2017—is accompanied by a particular figure of the “I” from 2020 onward, a date when social polarization intensified across Latin America and especially in Peru. It is precisely this relationship between the “you” and the “I” that gives shape to the construction of an idea of “us”, those who “have” suffered the effects of this war. To construct this “us”, the “you”-victim is linked to an “I” represented by the army’s intelligence command (Freyre, Castro, 2021). The discourse’s main actors are the military forces, represented utopically and stripped of any socio-political agency beyond their operational and programmed function. This discourse has succeeded in converging with a call aimed at future members of the armed forces and a belief in a *criollo* civil society. This occurs in a context marked by a shortage

of personnel in the armed forces after the conflict and a setting of discredit affecting both the state apparatus and urban society (Sierra-Zamora, Tapia, 2020). Within this framework, heroic discourses and ethical myths act as stimuli to counteract such crises.

The temporal representation in comics born out of social polarization since 2021 abandons the tragic past rendered in greys, replacing it with a bloody past that imposes itself upon the present—transforming from an objective past (“then”) into a present time that looms and persists. The narration is no longer merely demarcative or conclusive; instead, it acquires a durative and progressive quality, building a bridge between past and present through the continuity of the imperfect tense: Terrorism does not belong solely to the past; it is an ongoing instance, a phenomenon that persists in the present and has not ended. In the comic titled *La operación Chavín de Huántar* (Ramírez Pando, 2021), published in 2021, this effect can be seen: the use of the child as an actantial figure instrumentalized in the armed struggle of *Sendero Luminoso* symbolizes the emergence of a time still under construction, representing not a concluded event but one that continues to take shape in the present. It is the narrative of how children were used to explode with bombs attached to their bodies in urban locations, in the city space. This gives the past not only a latent presence but also an intensified dynamic of permanence.

In relation to the construction of spatiality, it is consolidated through urban traces that aim to concentrate the representation of the internal armed conflict in the city. In the comics published between 2016 and 2017, the urban setting emerges as the central stage of the drama, while the Andean space appears suspended or blurred. The latter, however, is addressed in graphic novels such as *Rupay* (2008), where the represented environment is the Andean village: small communities, marginal and peripheral plazas. By contrast, the conservative comics analyzed omit or virtualize the Andean space, replacing it with a focus on the central city, particularly the capital, which is presented as an environment violated by terrorist insurgency. Subsequently, this socio-historical representation of the city as the center of conflict is radically transformed in the conservative comics published after 2022. In these, spaces are abstracted, suspended, and disconnected from any concrete socio-historical context. They are represented as internal, isolated, almost ontological environments, stripped of agency or rootedness. Rather than emphasizing real-life settings, the comics shift toward constructing space through linguistic messaging, focusing on the dialogues that embody the programmatic decisions which led to the defeat of *Sendero Luminoso*.

In this narrative, the focus is placed on the management and strategic decisions of figures such as President Alberto Fujimori and his advisor Vladimiro Montesinos. The characters are positioned as symbols of military regularity and administrative efficiency. Space, then, is no longer a physical place, but regularity itself—a framework that glorifies the managers of the conflict more than the military for their direct action. In this way, there is a shift from an enunciation that emphasized *doing* (comics prior to social polarization) to one that prioritizes

*being* (comics after social polarization). This transformation reflects a clear instrumentalization of the comic in favor of a conservative discourse that redefines the narrative of the internal armed conflict. The emphasis on managerial figures, rather than on events or actions, reinforces a centralized view aligned with a specific political-ideological perspective.

The discursive characteristics of comics enunciated from conservative groups about the internal armed conflict reveal how these narratives feed “fear” more than a historical understanding of the events. Furthermore, they metapolitically transmit a mythology that is disseminated in a spectacular fashion. In this way, the symbolic interactions of actorialization, spatialization, and temporalization in the enunciation generate mythological material that becomes embedded as common sense within conservative discourse. Following Furio Jesi (1973; 2014), myth is configured as an extrahuman and extratemporal structure that inscribes itself in memory and is constantly reactivated in discourse. For Rodrigo Karmy (2020), as for Jesi, myth must disappear along with those who use it to perpetuate their power. In *Spartakus*, Jesi (2014) criticizes the presence of myth in the political realm and advocates for its elimination within the phenomenon of revolt. Unlike Georges Sorel, who defended it as a revolutionary engine, Jesi understands it as an instrument of domination that legitimizes oppressive power structures.

In the case of conservative discourse, it is not a matter of an eschatological myth—centered on the future—but rather a protological myth, which constantly recreates the past as a struggle for origins, granting a foundational meaning to contemporary Latin American consciousness. Thus, as Jesi (2014) points out, the construction of myth inevitably leads to an encounter with right-wing culture, whose discourses share traits such as brutality, heroism, sacrifice, traditionalism, and reverence for symbols. These characteristics reflect an ideological structure based on rigid beliefs and the exaltation of collective values that seek to legitimize an authoritarian order. In this way, myth not only preserves cultural memory, but also functions as a political instrument of domination and exclusion (Jesi, 2014).

With regard to actorialization and the personification of military heroism, it is not merely about idealizing the institutional subject, but about reformulating the myth of the hero. Unlike the graphic portrayal of the conflict in *Rupay* and *Confidencias de un senderista*, where the hero remains absent, conservative discourse reinstates a heroic ideal anchored in the past. This heroism does not construct a “new man”, but rather reactivates old deeds and epic narratives to reinforce a traditionalist imaginary.

Based on the semiotic analysis developed in this study, it is possible to identify how conservative comics produced in post-conflict Peru reconfigure three fundamental dimensions of visual discourse: actoriality, temporality, and spatiality. These categories reveal the enunciative strategies through which an ideologically oriented collective memory is constructed. As shown in Table 2, these dimensions are not constant but vary significantly between comics published be-

fore the sociopolitical polarization of 2021 and those published after this turning point. The chart compares these two key moments, showing how visual narratives shift from a more documentary and urban representation of the conflict to a heroic, mythified, and abstract narrative that reinforces a conservative view of national history.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Results*

Element	2016–2017 (Pre-polarization)	2021–onwards (Post-polarization)
Actoriality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urban victims as “us” (common citizens).</li> <li>- Terrorists without explicit demonization.</li> <li>- Documentary, realist style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abimael Guzmán and Sendero Luminoso represented as absolute evil.</li> <li>- Idealized military heroism.</li> <li>- Managerial figures such as Fujimori or Montesinos are glorified.</li> </ul>
Temporality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greys as a plastic resource to mark the “then”.</li> <li>- Tragic and closed sense of the past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The past imposes itself as present.</li> <li>- An imperfect, persistent time is constructed.</li> <li>- Durative and moralizing narrative.</li> </ul>
Spatiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capital city as epicenter of the conflict.</li> <li>- The Andean world is omitted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abstract spaces, without sociohistorical anchoring.</li> <li>- Predominance of political dialogue over geography.</li> </ul>
Myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urban myth of the conflict.</li> <li>- Focus on documentation of facts and mourning.</li> <li>- The myth acts as a tool for recording recent, urban, contiguous, and documentary memory.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergence of a protological conservative myth with heroic traits.</li> <li>- Idealization of the military hero and the state order.</li> <li>- The myth acts as a tool of symbolic domination, consolidating fear and exclusion.</li> </ul>

*Note.* Source: authors’ own elaboration.

Right-wing sectors construct a vision of time anchored in myth, idealizing a supposed “golden age” shaped according to their political interests. They present themselves as guardians of an original essence indispensable to humanity, managing to embed many of their ideas into common sense. Within this frame-

work, comics have made it possible to draw parallels with Latin American right-wing movements (Jara, Moya, Berrios, 2023), revealing traits such as the delegitimization of citizens' rights, the questioning of emancipatory principles, the demand for greater control by law enforcement, and the call for an authoritarian state in matters of security. Likewise, the construction of myth through graphic novels reflects a characteristic pattern of conservative discourse in Latin America: the rejection of the non-fictional and documentary format of the graphic novel. This format is perceived as an academic, intellectual, and scientific medium that distorts traditional values, which, according to right-wing views, must be preserved around the pillars of family, religion, and a non-emancipatory vision of society. Furthermore, comics that emerged during a period of social and electoral polarization—marked by opposing stances between right and left, conservatives and progressives—offered a vision of political violence that supports the status quo. In this context, both graphic novels and literary works about the conflict (Lamanna, 2018) share common features: they minimize issues of social justice, avoid portraying the political agency of terrorist groups, and present them as morally evil entities without sociohistorical agency, representing them as existential threats to advanced liberal democracies. In this way, both the graphic novel and literary production converge in their conservative approach to reality.

## 6. Conclusions

This research shows how the visual representations of the internal armed conflict in Peru, through comics, are significantly transformed as sociopolitical dynamics shift, especially in relation to the tensions and social polarizations that have characterized the country since 2020. Based on three key aspects of enunciation—actorialization, temporality, and spatiality—it has been revealed how comics become vehicles for ideological transmission, shifting from a representation centered on the victims of the conflict to one that places a polarized and heroic interpretation of the armed conflict at the center, seeking to reposition power and historical memory from a conservative perspective.

The early comics from 2016–2017 portrayed the victims of the armed conflict as urban and relatable characters, placing the victims at the center and avoiding a dichotomy of “good” and “evil”. However, from 2021 onward, the growing political polarization in Peru changes this representation. Comics begin to present figures such as Abimael Guzmán not as complex actors but as symbols of absolute evil, reflecting a moral simplification and transforming the enemies of the State into demonized myths stripped of context. This evolution in actorial representation responds to a more polarized and polarizing narrative. In the pre-2021 comics, the past of the armed conflict was represented in grey tones, suggesting its irreversibility. From 2021 onward, with the intensification of political tensions, this temporality is transformed. The past is no longer perceived as something distant, but as a persistent presence, in which the conflict remains ongoing, with symbols such as the child figure used by Sendero Luminoso evok-

ing the continuity of the conflict. This temporal reconfiguration turns the past into a living matter that calls out to the present, feeding fear and social vigilance within a polarized narrative. In the 2016–2017 comics, the internal armed conflict was represented mainly in an urban context, reflecting the connection between violence and the city. However, beginning with the polarization of 2021, a transformation in spatiality becomes evident: conservative comics omit the specificity of the sociopolitical context, and the city as the scene of the confrontations disappears. Spaces are reconfigured as internal environments, geographically and socially isolated, reflecting a more abstract approach to the conflict, centered on political decision-making and disconnected from concrete social and political causes. This underscores the importance of the political message behind the narrative.

The conservative narrative constructs a vision of the past that becomes an essential component of collective memory, replacing narratives centered on the suffering of victims with a heroic and somewhat idealized image of the saviors of order. In this sense, the comic becomes an instrument that not only mobilizes emotions but also constructs a certain historical “truth”, legitimized through its symbols, which responds to the need of certain elites to maintain a stabilized power structure under the argument of order and security. The structure of conservative mythology reveals how right-wing sectors not only construct an idealized past, but also perpetuate it as an active force, exercising continuous power through symbolic memory and a conception of time that limits critical capacities and deep historical memory. This raises the question of whether this representation of the Peruvian case is shared with other specific contexts in Central and South America—a question that could form the basis of future comparative studies.

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