



P.O.V.'s "The Fall of Fujimori"

By Ellen Perry

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Filmmaker's Statement

I first saw Alberto Fujimori on CNN, just after his commandos stormed the Japanese Embassy in Peru, freeing all but one hostage and ending a four-month crisis. As Fujimori delivered a powerful and emotional victory speech, I remember thinking, "Who is this Japanese guy, and how did he become President of Peru?" The next day in the *New York Times*, an article suggested that the commandos might have killed some of the rebels *after* surrendering. There seemed to be more here than meets the eye. Perhaps this would make a good film.

That was in 1997. At the time, I was in the middle of production for my first film, *Great Wall Across the Yangtze*, an unauthorized investigation of China's contentious Three Gorges Dam project, which centered on the plight of 1.5 million displaced persons. In China, I dodged government officials, stumbled onto a top-secret army base, and was even placed under house arrest by the military. Luckily, the soldiers never checked my bags nor even suspected I was making a film, a process that requires government authorization and 24-hour supervision.

Making *The Fall of Fujimori* has been equally memorable. In Peru, I often didn't know if I was making a film, or in one. In Lima, CIA operatives and the Peruvian secret police followed me. While interviewing an arms trafficker in San Jorge prison, I was knocked off my feet by a 7.2 earthquake. After the rumbling died down, the trafficker let me know that he and his associates would be interested in financing a feature-length movie about a Latin American gun-running, drug-dealer with a good heart (starring, of course, Robert DeNiro!). I told him I'd think about it. He gestured at the prison walls and smiled, "Well, you know where to find me."

Locating an arms trafficker in a Lima prison is one thing; tracking down Fujimori in Japan was entirely another. For a year and a half I bounced between Peru and California, calling and knocking on the doors of every politician and relative that might be able to introduce me to the exiled president. Eventually, Fujimori's brother and other loyal members of his senior staff agreed to meet me. After earning their trust, I was able to interview Fujimori's eldest daughter (and former First Lady), Keiko. With her blessing, Fujimori finally agreed to see me. I was closer! But more months passed as an ambivalent Fujimori failed to commit to an interview date. By January 2004, I was running out of time, and bought a ticket to Tokyo. When I arrived, a somewhat surprised Fujimori said he was fighting a nasty flu. Every morning for the next four days I called his office and politely inquired as to his health. Finally — almost reluctantly — he called and said he could see me in thirty minutes at the Tokyo hotel where he lives.

Navigating my way through Tokyo's labyrinthine subway system, I was at the hotel an hour later. Fujimori had been patiently waiting for me, and I half-expected him to be angry at my tardiness. On the contrary, he was the epitome of grace. While he had initially said he could spare only an hour, six hours later he was preparing a hotpot dinner for us, and enthusiastically recalling key events of his presidency.

In person, Fujimori was gracious, warm and accommodating. I expressed my vision, and was clear that the film be honest and impartial. Sensing my objectivity, Fujimori was only too happy to tell his side of the story. We finally parted at midnight, after agreeing to begin the formal interview on camera at the hotel at 9:00 a.m. sharp.

The next few weeks were surreal. It didn't seem possible that the Alberto Fujimori wanted by Interpol for murder and corruption could be the same polite, modest, and soft-spoken man I spent hours with everyday.

Three weeks into our interview, we set off for Kumamoto, Japan, the birthplace of his ancestors. I asked Fujimori if we could shoot a scene with him on the nearby beach, as I would be leaving Japan in days. Without complaining, and still fighting his cold, Fujimori let me shoot him for over an hour in miserably wet and frigid conditions. In the near dark, our faces tingling and fingers nearly frozen, we finally wrapped.

But even though we had a flight back to Tokyo in two hours, Fujimori's work wasn't done: he had promised to meet workers of a local factory. When I pressed him on the time and suggested we get to the airport right away, he insisted we accommodate the workers in the same way he had accommodated me. The "factory" visit turned out to be a stop at a family mat-weaving business. As I watched Fujimori take a tour of the barn where the mats were produced, I understood how he had won the hearts of millions of Peruvians, and why many still revere him: Fujimori has a true affinity for the common man. So, I asked myself, what had gone wrong?

The more I dug, the more the story took on the dimensions of a Shakespearean tragedy in its richness and its plot. There is the bitter and estranged wife, the fiercely loyal daughter, the cruel and diabolical enemy, and even the treacherous confidante. Finally, there is the exiled king, Fujimori himself, wandering the edge of the night, searching in the shadows for his lost throne.

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