

Introductory essay to the original Spanish edition
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Anthropology of Violence. Between Studies of Social Suffering and an Anthropology of Peace

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*I come to speak through your dead mouth.
All through the earth join all
the silent wasted lips
and speak from the depths to me all this long night
as if I were anchored here with you,
tell me everything, chain by chain,
link by link, and step by step,
file the knives you kept by you,
drive them into my chest and my hand
like a river of riving yellow light,
like a river where buried jaguars lie,
and let me weep, hours, days, years,
blind ages, stellar centuries.
Give me silence, water, hope.
Give me struggle, iron, volcanoes.
Fasten your bodies to me like magnets.
Hasten to my veins to my mouth.
Speak through my words and my blood.**
Pablo Neruda. *Poem XII, Heights of Macchu Picchu*

ORIGINS OF THE PUBLICATION OF THIS BOOK. MY POINT OF VIEW

Being a university professor entails numerous responsibilities; some inspire and give meaning to our work. Some two years ago, I had a stimulating conversation when Lurgio Gavilán visited my office to discuss his thesis. I was his dissertation director and we took some time to review a plan that allowed him to explore his interests by focusing on the effects of violence following Peru's armed conflict.

After finishing, Lurgio said, "Professor, some years ago I wrote a book about my life. Would you be interested in reading it and giving me your opinion?" "Of course," I said immediately. We took our leave: Lurgio left with some ideas on researching his thesis and I carried away the manuscript of his life.

That night curiosity trumped my need to sleep. I picked up the text and began reading it carefully. Page after page I delved into Lurgio's life and, through his experiences, into Peru's recent harrowing history. The text was easy to read and clear in its intentions. I could not put down his narration of people and circumstances. After a few hours, I finished the manuscript with a single thought in mind: it had to be published.

When I saw Lurgio a few days later, I suggested that we publish his autobiography and I asked if he had tried to do so in Peru. His text, he said, had been read in Peru by Carlos Iván Degregori (author of the prologue of this volume). Degregori had shown great interest in publishing Lurgio's autobiography, but unfortunately had taken ill and was unable to follow up.

* Translated by John Felstiner.

After several conversations, Lurgio and I decided on a plan to publish the account of his life.

To begin, I would review the manuscript and suggest improvements. Clearly, though, the original text was very well written. Using suggestive prose, Lurgio had been able to combine autobiographical details with poetic cadence. As the reader can confirm herein, the text weaves the author's experiences with literary metaphors that are inherent to *campesino*¹ life and Ayacucho landscapes. There are revealing and frightening passages and others that beckon us to accompany him as he experiences his life. In this sense, the text comes close to Geertz's "I witnessing" in his classic book on the written word in anthropology,² yet Lurgio shuns the role of omniscient narrator who sees and knows everything, while observing from above how events unfold.

We agreed that I would help improve the original manuscript and prepare a theoretical introduction for the book. Further, we would ask Carlos Iván Degregori to draft the prologue. In addition, in my role as professor at the Iberoamericana University (UIA), I extolled the virtues of publishing this autobiography, especially to Dr. Marisol Pérez, who, within our department, is in charge of relations with the UIA's Publications Office. In June 2010, at the request of my colleagues, I drafted a proposal to publish the book that described several key aspects of the content, the importance of this particular autobiography, and why it should be published by our university. In what follows, I endeavor to explain why I believe this narrative should be made available to a wider public.

IMPORTANCE OF THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE AUTHOR "WAS THERE"

Autobiographies and life histories share several methodological resources as a means of registering information from a social setting. Similar to life histories, an autobiography is a subjective document crafted around a case study.³ Autobiographies seek to delve into the cultural logics as interpreted by their authors, in an effort to understand the wider social system of which they are a part. In retelling a portion of a person's life, they follow a timeline that allows both author and reader to plumb greater depths of understanding.

Nonetheless, there are important differences with respect to life histories, highlighted by this autobiography. Life histories are produced in the framework of a wider investigation and are the product of the researcher's own initiative in contacting the informant and spending a good deal of time in trying to set down his/her story in accordance with a certain thematic and historical focus.

None of this occurred in the case of Lurgio's manuscript. As he tells us, he wrote his autobiography several years ago at the suggestion of a teacher at his college. He used his own criteria and wrote freely, adopting a narrative style and a historical sequence dictated by his own idea of his experiences. In this regard alone, the book takes on consequential value.

As opposed to well-known autobiographies that are part of the genre of auto-ethnographies or ethnic autobiographies,⁴ Lurgio's is rather more a spontaneous narration that welled up from his desire to speak, to express the life he lived, and, by so doing, to try to reconcile his present with remembering and forgetting, two key dimensions of all constructed autobiographies.

¹ Throughout this introduction, "campesino" is left in the original Spanish, given the conceptual differences that exist with its more common translation into English, i.e., peasant.

² Geertz, C. (1989), *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Stanford University Press, California.

³ For more information on life histories and autobiographies as genres of study in the social sciences, see, among others, Taylor, S.J. and R. Bogdan (1998), *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. USA; Becker, H. (1970), *Sociological Work: Method and Substance*, Adline, Chicago; Bertaux, D. (1982), "Stories as Clues to Sociological Understanding", in Thompson, P. (Ed.), *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe*, Pluto Press, London, p. 93-108; Okely, J. and H. Callaway (Eds.) (1992), *Anthropology and Autobiography*, Routledge, London/New York; and Reed-Danahay, D.E. (Eds.), (1997), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Berg, Oxford/New York.

⁴ A list of these works is never short. Some that have had an impact on Latin America are: Rodríguez, R. (1982), *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodríguez: An Autobiography*, Godine, Boston; Behar, R. (1993), *Translated Women: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, Beacon Press, Boston; Menchú, R. and Burgos, E. (1984), *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, Verso, London and Brooklyn; Viezzer, M. and D. Barrios Chungara (2004), *Si me permiten hablar: Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, Siglo XXI, Mexico.

When I read his story, I repeatedly asked myself what led Lurgio to write. Of course, we later discussed this. As the reader will note, Lurgio writes with spontaneity on questions that are extremely complicated to express and experience, yet he does so without moral pretensions, without seeking a favorable verdict from history. Rather, his intention is to reveal all, speak and name all, thus making the act of writing an emotional self-liberating deed; an exercise in self-help and reconciliation with the past and with a life lived.

In terms of content, Lurgio's history is built around four chapters that describe four moments or stages in his life. The first occurs when, as a very young boy, he joins the ranks of the Shining Path (SP) guerrilla movement in order to follow in his older brother's footsteps. After many rural areas in the Ayacucho region joined SP in the hope of achieving radical change in Peru, Lurgio describes in a narrative filled with intimacy and passion how disappointment set in when proffered promises faded as violence and war increased.

In this initial section, Lurgio's history explores why, when war was getting underway, agents external to the communities were able to win not just the population's acceptance, but also its willing participation. With poverty as a backdrop and within a scenario where racism and discrimination are prevalent, SP was able to find young people like Lurgio willing to give their lives for the cause of social and economic justice.

In the second part of the autobiography, after being captured by the Peruvian army, Lurgio describes his participation in its ranks in different regions of the country and how he became fully aware, for the first time, of the two sides of a conflict that had rocked Peru. Paradoxically, within the army he finds a world not unlike the one he had previously experienced and avails himself of the opportunity to strengthen ties with numerous people. He is also able to continue his studies, crucially important in his later life.

A careful reading of this part of Lurgio's story reveals that two encompassing institutions in Peru (the army and Shining Path) share unimagined similarities. Both have common genealogies, similar structures, and are equipped to exercise violence on a daily basis. The true nature of these armies, the mechanics of their work, and the logic of their operations are detailed.

For those unfamiliar with this era of Peruvian history, Lurgio's autobiography provides an ideal framework to glean greater meaning from period narratives and meet real men and women, rather than simply grapple with figures and statistics.

The book puts a human face on war by allowing us to experience it through the eyes of a grassroots protagonist such as Lurgio. As a guerrilla on the frontlines or as an army private, his story reveals certain facets of humanity, not as an apologetic of conflict, but as a text that goes beyond the intellectual or moral discussion of the problem. Lurgio and I agree that his story may help others to speak, write, even recall their experiences, in the hope that, by so doing, similar confrontations will never again occur.

In the third part of the book, after he willingly leaves the army, Lurgio follows a religious calling and joins the Franciscans. Once again, Lurgio enters a totally different environment, furthers his studies, and makes friendships in perfect alignment with his constant journey of exploration to his inner self.

Several years later, Lurgio decides to forego the priesthood and begins a new life outside the previous settings. The religious environment was auspicious for achieving inner peace and reflection, i.e., the calm that would allow him, among other things, to begin to write his biography.

The fourth chapter finds Lurgio, twenty years on, returning to the land of his infancy and, with a mix of nostalgia and emotion, he retraces his steps and ponders the years that have elapsed. In this final section, Lurgio is now an anthropologist. His intellectual inquisitiveness and the desire to comprehend his world have led him to the social and human sciences. His written musings take us to his birthplace and we accompany him as he reflects on his surroundings, while looking inward but profoundly engaged.

The text itself offers a unique vantage point for deepening our knowledge of Peru's recent history. It is a story of conflict and camaraderie, of violence and shattered dreams. Though written

in an intimate and personal style, Lurgio never misses details that allow the reader *to be there* while viewing events *from here*.

As a life history, Lurgio Gavilán's autobiography evokes the most important works of this ethnographic genre. Obviously, his story cannot hope to reflect "all" the stories of Peru's campesinos and rural areas. Yet it does provide a window to observe, slowly and carefully, a part of Peru's history that in fact could be that of many countries in Latin America.

Fundamentally, by journeying to such distinct venues and contexts, in conflict with one another, Lurgio's narrative invites us to ponder the role of ethnographies in our modern world. How is a coherent vision of rural life to be constructed if, where we see violence, we also see its complexities and its multifaceted visage? How are ethnographies to be written where no clearly delineated forces of good and evil exist? This autobiographical narrative connects us with current debates on the anthropology of violence, with studies on feelings, with analyses of community and struggle, hegemony, and participation.

Similarly, Lurgio's story encourages readers to revisit debates within the autobiographical genre in the social sciences: genres based on oral sources, particularly life histories, autobiographies, etc. raise doubts about the scientific credibility of their work methods. Questions persist regarding the reliability of oral histories as serious information sources, and are often compared to literary or journalism genres.

Although these debates continue, Lurgio's story emerges as a dense, profoundly subjective, and valuable source of information. The result is a very complete, thoughtful, and analytic picture of unfolding events that would be difficult to obtain from any single source or research technique.

Further, in anthropology a problematic relationship exists between ethnography and truth. *Representations circulate, not truths*, Said told us in *Orientalism*.⁵ Thus, in ethnography, the politics of truth demand critical and thoughtful discussions regarding our methods, not in a quixotic attempt to find those truths, but to debate them.

In this regard, Lurgio's story, written by the protagonist, once again challenges our thinking on the main conflicts within the branch of anthropology that studies violence.

Those who study the anthropology of violence or social suffering incur substantial difficulties given the very nature of their work. Iván Degregori recalls that many anthropologists had to study violence in Peru by undertaking "ethnographies on the run," given the dangers that researchers faced. The particular difficulties of doing research in settings of terror and death cannot be underestimated.

Ferrándiz and Feixa expressed it best:⁶

Forms of violence are not an easy object of study, even less so for a discipline whose dominant methodological paradigm is, since Malinowski, participatory observation. Obviously there are substantial differences between some research settings and others, But, as a general rule, as the intensity of violence increases... the uncertainty and dangers of undertaking an investigation also increase in the short or long term for anthropologists, participating informants, and communities.

After reading Lurgio's story, I am convinced of the need for a field within anthropology that studies different forms of violence. This is not to reify violence as an object in and of itself for the social sciences; on the contrary, I believe that, by undertaking careful and systematic observations, we could learn much about the current state of our societies. We have almost always seen violence as a statistic, as an effect of certain social relationships. In this introduction, I posit that it is important to study violence for what it can teach us about society.

⁵ Said, E. (1979), *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, USA.

⁶ Ferrándiz, F. and C. Feixa (2004), "Una mirada antropológica sobre las violencias", in *Revista Alteridades*, 14 (27), p. 149-163.

For these reasons, we can justify speaking of an anthropology of violence or social suffering. This might very well be a sub-discipline of anthropology, related to political anthropology.

If we add to the above the enormous social importance of these issues for Latin America, it is clear that we need to grant them the intellectual and material resources required to help us understand our recent history and future possibilities.

Returning to Lurgio's story, there are many moments when the reader is asked to think beyond explicit content. For example, he relates the difficulties of getting enough to eat while in the ranks of SP:⁷ "...we would dream of eating, communism means eating, it means filling our bellies." When I read this passage, I could not help thinking about the limits of revolutionary discourse among campesinos. If we grant that communism means being able to eat, then it is clear that the objectives of a boy-soldier in the ranks of the guerrilla are quite limited. Eating should be a natural and unremarkable activity for a campesino child from Peru and for children throughout the world. Yet, given the brutal reality of scarcity, eating becomes here the semantic equivalent of an ideal behind the struggle.⁸

This leads me to question the role of a hidden, but undoubtedly present, actor in Lurgio's story: the state. Although not clearly or transparently reflected in the text, the state appears in many settings. For example, in the guise of an army that first captures and later educates him. Is the army not then a source of employment for the poor of Peru? Based on Lurgio's experience, the army gives succor to impoverished campesinos, who find work, a salary, a career with a certain degree of social mobility, social security, and other government benefits.

Further, Lurgio's life traverses such different worlds that we are obliged to ask what elements of coherence exist therein. Solely in terms of language, his experience within the ranks of SP is a history in Quechua, his mother tongue. Later, in the army, the history is in Spanish.⁹ Later still, with the Franciscans, reading and praying in Latin was important. We are thus led to ponder Lurgio's culture and relationships with the outside world. Clearly, the Andean region where Lurgio is from is not impervious to sociocultural contact and change; that is why we can perceive continuity throughout the story. In all of these different spaces, discipline and companionship are common elements, as are serious dedication and passion for taking on challenges, and, clearly, each challenge is addressed with solid commitment. Dreams and fears are also common elements, as are readily expressed feelings, given his story's transparent example of reflexivity and self-perception. At different times, Lurgio helps us to understand that we are in the presence of a child and then a young man of complete integrity, in spite of the fragmented nature of his several lived experiences.

Quechua, Spanish, and Latin are the three languages that meld the fragments of his experience. After reading his story, I asked Lurgio how he and his Shining Path comrades could have learned Marxism or Maoism if they spoke mostly Quechua. He explained that in SP, some of his comrades, high-school professors or students from the small towns of Ayacucho, would translate for those who did not speak Spanish.

All the indigenous members of SP listened intently to lessons on Marxism: "We didn't understand much", Lurgio confessed, "but our professors didn't either." At one point Lurgio's brother gives him Mao's *Red Book*, which he carries everywhere, but never has a chance to read.

⁷ This occurs when Lurgio is still in Shining Path, at a time when the campesinos, after lending substantial support by feeding and giving [the insurgents] resources to continue their struggle, slowly begin withholding aid and rejecting SP's presence in the region.

⁸ When I read this, I recalled my field studies in the United States: many indigenous immigrants told me that they had decided to leave their native Oaxaca to "live the American dream." I heard the phrase frequently, and over time I began to understand what immigrants meant. For them, the American dream involves having work and food for their kids, and, if possible, giving them a better future than what was possible in Mexico. Seen in this way, this American dream was definitely not what was being touted by American television and other media, which held that the United States was the land of opportunities, the land where, by pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, you could, after a short time, accumulate unimaginable goods and wealth. See: Castro Neira, Y. (2009), *En la orilla de la justicia. Migración y justicia en los márgenes del Estado*, Juan Pablos, Mexico.

⁹ Significantly, at this point Lurgio spoke only a few words of Spanish. It would be several years later, after studying and learning Spanish, that he began writing his autobiography.

Can we judge Lurgio for having been a part of such totally different and contradictory worlds? The answer is no. I believe this is another of the important merits of his story: like all of us, he experiences the ambiguity of being a human being. There is no such thing as unity, if by that we mean an iron and monolithic human will. Paraphrasing Antonio Gramsci, we are but multiple lines within everyone's inner self. Lurgio, perhaps like many other children of Peru's recent troubled history, as a rule lived a fragmented life and scattered experiences. The difference here is Lurgio's desire to tell us about that life.

GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WAR IN PERU.

Virtue and truth go together: virtue without terror is disastrous, terror without virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing if not swift, severe, inflexible justice, and thus an emanation of virtue.

Max Robespierre

Lurgio Gavilán's story covers more than 15 years, beginning in 1983 when he joined the ranks of Shining Path. Since his story takes place in different setting of Ayacucho, the following section covers some essential aspects of the historic developments that are the backdrop to Lurgio's autobiography.

It is not my intention to cover events in detail during this period in Peru; rather I will focus on aspects that may be useful for readers unfamiliar with the history of the region.

In 2013, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created in Peru. After extensive research by the Commission, its *Final Report* began:¹⁰

We were asked to investigate and make public the truth surrounding the twenty years of politically-motivated violence that began in Peru in 1980. After finishing our deliberations, we can exemplify that truth with a shocking and yet insufficient fact: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has concluded that the most probable figure of fatalities during those two decades exceeds 69,000 Peruvian men and women who died or disappeared at the hands of subversive organizations or due to actions on the part of state agents.

Later, additional information in the study helps put the figure in a wider context:

For every four victims, three were men or women campesinos whose native language was Quechua. As Peruvians, we know that, historically, this sector of the population has been ignored by the state and by an urban society that does enjoy the benefits of our political community. The Commission has not found grounds to conclude, as has been claimed, that this was an ethnic conflict. But there are grounds to state that these two decades of destruction and death would not have been possible without the profound contempt for the most impoverished sector of the country, manifested equally by the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (PCP-SL), and state agents, contempt that is interwoven into every moment of the lives of ordinary Peruvians.

These shocking conclusions begin a *Final Report* that gathers an impressive amount of stories of terror, underscoring the evolving drama that enveloped the lives of thousands of campesinos. The important point here is that Lurgio's story unfolds in the midst of these social milieus: mountains and valleys on which a human geography is sketched, consisting of an overwhelming, if not exclusive, Quechuan indigenous and campesino population.

¹⁰ In accordance with laws 27806 and 27927, the *Final Report* of Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was prepared in 2003. The Commission itself, however, dates from November 2000 when President Alberto Fujimori fled Peru. The transitional government headed by Valentín Paniagua established the Commission and Alejandro Toledo, the following elected president, formalized its existence through the laws mentioned above. Note that since the 1980s, truth commissions were set up in various countries; some important examples in Latin America include Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Guatemala, etc.

Anthropologists and researchers studying other societies with similar experiences of extreme violence agree that, in violent and sinister scenarios, there is a phenomenon that Taussig, paraphrasing Bertolt Brecht, called “disorderly order.”¹¹

The report is overwhelming in its images of pain and terror. Yet these images, filled with chaos and polarized confrontations, came to be seen as common, even normal, beyond what our ethical norms might allow. So the term disorderly order is apropos here, since violence was normalized and made part of the natural order of things.

Peru experienced this situation for so many years that Walter Benjamin’s maxim (coined as he observed the traditions of the oppressed), still seemed to ring true: “the state of emergency we are experiencing, far from being an exception, has become the rule.”¹²

Taussig implicitly agreed when studying events in Colombia and he went still further, questioning whether he and others were even in a position to define the situation in Colombia as chaotic, given that, contrary to expectations, chaos there was normal, a daily occurrence. Taussig reflected on Colombia (whence we can extrapolate to Peru in the eighties), and suggested that, since the country seemed to be about to disappear or disintegrate, we ought to think of what happened in the case of Colombia as an example of the end of society itself.

In a post-modern world, where the state, the multinational corporations, and the market take up positions in new configurations of plans and arbitrariness, might it be that the concept of the social, itself a relatively modern idea, has been superseded, insofar as it depends on assumptions of stability and structure? If that’s the case, what are we talking about when we speak of order?¹³

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, still another observer of the conflict in Colombia, suggests that we face processes of *de-modernization*, or *de-contracting* (referring to the collapse of the social contract), in a situation where an excess of feeling prevails, an excess of meanings, making it difficult to separate victims from enemies, danger from certainty.¹⁴

Seen in this manner, in the eyes of the reader Peru becomes overwhelmed by a semiotics of pain and suffering. As I write this introduction, I cannot help thinking of the photos on line from the National Museum of Lima, where we can see, for example, Edmundo Canama, better known as Celestino Ccente, a survivor of the Lucanamarca massacre.¹⁵

Lurgio’s autobiography takes place in the same area, in distinct locales of the Ayacucho region, the hardest hit by a war that marked one of the most tragic episodes of Peruvian history. Analyzing the bitter fruits of war, Iván Degregori says:

After 13 years of violence (1980-1993), the region was devastated, its already meager infrastructure destroyed, most of the population in extreme poverty...during the crisis called the worst of our modern history...the GDP collapsed...the population was decimated. Between 1983 and 1984, a true genocide occurred; tens of thousands of Ayacucho residents fled to other departments...the changes in the countryside are profound, brutal.¹⁶

¹¹ Taussig, M. (1995), *Un gigante en convulsiones. El mundo humano como sistema nervioso en emergencia permanente*, Gedisa, Barcelona, p. 31-32.

¹² Quote taken from Benjamin, W. (1977), “Tesis sobre la filosofía de la historia”, chap. 8, in *Para una crítica de la violencia*, Premiá Editora, Mexico.

¹³ Taussig, M (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ De Sousa Santos, B. and M. García Villegas (2004). *El caleidoscopio de las justicias en Colombia*, Siglo del Hombre Editores, Colombia.

¹⁵ Mass murder by Shining Path in April 1983 of campesinos who were supposedly government collaborators. Canama was able to escape after being axed and left for dead by his aggressors. Gravely wounded, he made it to an aid center where the emblematic photo to which I refer was taken. That day, almost the entire village was murdered, Canama, renamed Celestino Ccente by the photographer, never returned for that reason. Many years later in 2008, the same photographer found Canama living in subhuman conditions in a cave. Canama died in 2009.

¹⁶ Degregori, C.I. et al., (1996), *Las rondas campesinas y la derrota de Sendero Luminoso*, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Ediciones Lima, Peru, p. 16.

The question immediately arises: how could this situation have occurred? In the historical context of poverty and abandonment of the campesinos, why was a climate of generalized horror possible? Some answers are attempted below, but they surely do not encompass all possibilities.

In 1960, philosophy professor Abimael Guzmán founded Shining Path (SP), a name that referenced the well-known founder of the Peruvian Communist Party, José Carlos Mariátegui, who said, “Marxism-Leninism will open a shining path to revolution.”¹⁷

From its inception, SP’s base consisted of radical professors and students, whose discourse combined Marxist-Leninist and Maoist elements. With time, starting in 1980, Guzmán took charge of the movement and was named “President Gonzalo”, or the “fourth sword of communism,” in reference to a school of thought that included Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Gonzalo himself.

Guzmán and his followers took Marx’s adage to the hilt: society consists of classes and the relationship between classes is always one of struggle. Thus, for Guzmán, campesinos held a key role in the Peruvian revolution and consequently Mao’s ideas had to be adapted to the local situation¹⁸. Portocarrero comments:

For Mao, violence was a natural and inflexible phenomenon. Struggle entails an antagonistic, absolute dynamic, overcome only through death or the unconditional surrender of one of the parties. Therefore, even though the conflict may be masked by ideology, or tempered by the treacherous betrayal of leaders, in the long run its nature tends to prevail, because what characterizes the relationship between social classes is the fight to the death.¹⁹

Step by step, President Gonzalo became the undisputed leader of these ideas. He was, according to his followers, “the guiding light of world revolution.” In this context, violence as a systematic tool was at the center of his speeches and actions.

Guzmán left the university in the mid-1970s and SP’s first public activity occurred on May 17, 1980 when, on the eve of presidential elections, it burned ballot boxes and voting cards in the Ayacucho town of Chuschi. As numerous studies have shown, this act was largely ignored by the government, to a certain degree allowing SP to continue operating openly in the region.

During the early 1980s, SP grew rapidly among the campesino areas of the Ayacucho mountains. Its expansion brought one of the first and possibly most controversial debates among academic circles. If initially characterized as a student and university movement, what accounted for its presence in wide swaths of the Peruvian countryside? A consensus was never reached. I will return to this point shortly.

Shining Path was originally an urban and university movement and, beginning in the 1980s, large numbers of campesinos joined ranks with teachers and students. As previously mentioned, the movement was primarily based on Maoism and so, in keeping with SP’s teachings, it was grounded in the campesino population.

In tune with Maoism, Guzman also posited that it would be the poorest campesino that would be the first to join the movement. In fact, students of this process recognize that although SP initially enjoyed rapid growth, it was not mostly the poorest campesinos who joined.

[...] the support for Shining Path came mainly from communities located in the valley, i.e., from those that were the least traditional, the most integrated to the market, and the most exposed to the

¹⁷ Guzmán was hired as a professor at the National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho, a radical environment that enabled development of his ideas. In fact, professors who were present at that time recall that the university president and anthropologist Efraín Morote was one of the movement’s initial inspirational figures. Given his ideological closeness to Maoism, Guzmán made several trips to China, beginning in 1965.

¹⁸ Students of Marx continue to debate the role of campesinos in the revolution. As is well known, Marx rejected their importance after observing the revolutionary movements in Paris. In a famous book on the subject, Marx held that “they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.” See: Marx, K. (1994), *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Intl Pub.

¹⁹ Portocarrero, G. (1998), *Razones de sangre*, Editorial Pontificia de la Universidad Católica del Perú, Peru, p. 24.

influence of schooling. And within these communities, most members were young high-school or university students who, in general, were the sons and daughters of better-off campesinos.²⁰

There are several explanations for campesinos' initial support of SP. Once it coalesced as a movement of Ayacucho students and teachers in the early 1980s, SP was strengthened by a significant influx of rural youth who had achieved a secondary-school education, but, in the words of Degregori, lacked hope for the future. Degregori maintains that in the latter half of 1982, SP benefitted from an unprecedented affiliation that coincided with a strategy of creating "total identification" of young people with its policy of being a war machine:

When war began in May 1980, Shining Path was a party largely of school teachers and university professors and students. Its presence among the campesinos of the region was weak. Yet after Christmas 1982, when the armed forces took political and military control of Ayacucho, Shining Path had already handily dislodged the police forces in wide swaths of the northern rural provinces of the department and was poised to surround the capital of the department.²¹

For Orin Starn, SP was initially viewed with approval, which led it to be conceived of as an agrarian revolt or an indigenous rebellion. Nonetheless, "it was never a part of what U.S. anthropologist Eric Wolf called the peasant wars of the 20th century."²²

Just when SP had achieved a certain degree of acceptance in 1982, the Peruvian army began operating throughout the region. Almost imitating SP's disproportionate use of violence against any foe, the armed forces unleashed similar tactics against the campesinos. The wave of terror throughout the Ayacucho region began spreading at the hands of two opposing forces. Abilio Vergara describes the moment thusly:

Enemies began to look alike, because Shining Path also favored a militarized approach and tightened the screws in order to exercise control, in addition to stepping up highly formulaic rhetoric that explained all ideas, society, the universe, and material objects by one factor: the law of contradiction. The opposing force, i.e., army troops and particularly the armed forces' mid-level ranks, had no such "philosophical" concerns and went about killing the enemy, ransacking villages, and enjoying the criminal environment in which they trained and sought to participate; their main concern was to stay alive and "enjoy" the spoils of limitless power. In both cases, relationships with the people were guided by doctrine or by silence, foul language, insults, and shouts. Both sides also had in common the most fatal form of communication, i.e., murder, at once the means and the end.²³

Suddenly, the Ayacucho landscape took on a hue of violence and terror, heightened by media portrayals of events.²⁴ Specialists in SP initially explained the conflict as the logical response to the separation between Lima, a developed and cultured center, and Ayacucho, sentinel of a mythical Andean world, mired in precolonial backwardness. Painted in such stark terms, it was easy to characterize problems as an ethnic conflict and indigenous peoples as savages who by nature were criminals.²⁵

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²¹ Degregori, C.L., *et al.* (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 189-190.

²² Starn, O. (1996), "Senderos inesperados. Las rondas campesinas de la sierra sur-central", in Degregori, C.I. *et al.* (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 235.

²³ Vergara, A. (2009), "La memoria de la barbarie en imágenes, una introducción", in Jiménez, E., *Chungui: Violencia y trozos de memoria*, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Peru, p. 19.

²⁴ Oddly enough, these scenarios of terror became common for the campesinos. In many ways violence became routine, almost part of the natural order of things, and violence among residents of the region was the norm.

²⁵ Lurgio recalls that, given the country's rejection of people from Ayacucho, many inhabitants of the region decided to change their names and places of origin. For many years, to be a Quechua from Ayacucho was a stigma leading to rejection and discrimination.

Yet initially for many observers Shining Path's emergence only seemed to confirm the eternal otherness of rural inhabitants, the *cholos* and their Andean ways... many initial studies overlooked the fact that Shining Path was a Marxist party that strangely lacked roots in indigenous or Andean culture and that its leader was a white intellectual whose more remarkable speeches quoted Kant, Shakespeare, and Washington Irving. Notwithstanding the facts, the Maoists were considered to be primitive rebels from a non-Western world.²⁶

Some of the bloodiest incidents during this period occurred in this context. Paraphrasing the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, in Peru being a Quechua campesino became synonymous with being a criminal and suspected terrorist.²⁷

Reviewing academic research on the topic in Peru, Portocarrero posited two separate and (to his thinking) irreconcilable arguments regarding the reasons why, for a time, campesinos joined SP.

According to Portocarrero, investigators such as Degregori have focused on the reasons behind SP's ultimate failure among the campesinos and, therefore, tend to emphasize the movement's lack of grounding in the Andean campesino world. This group of researchers includes those who maintain that SP was a movement foreign to Andean cosmography and social structure and thus, sooner or later, destined to fail.

(Degregori's) conclusion is that Shining Path, which he characterized as a movement of "new *mistis*,"²⁸ did not find acceptance among the campesinos who, over time, isolated and defeated it. This was due to the clash with Andean culture and Shining Path's contempt of Quechuan social institutions and cultural manifestations.²⁹

The other line of thought tends to focus on the reasons why SP initially seemed to coincide with Andean campesino ideals and objectives. Within this current, Alberto Flores Galindo's work highlighted that SP did indeed have an Andean base. According to Portocarrero, Flores Galindo maintains that SP's discourse was successful since it touched very sensitive chords of the Andean culture and identity, particularly those having to do with the Andean utopia.

For Portocarrero, this utopia is an Andean representation of a regime of justice and abundance that someday will return from a glorious past that continues to survive in the substratum.

Flores Galindo suggests that SP's discourse emanates from this mythic religious background and, thus, its ability to interpret the campesino world. Leaders and the rank-and-file share similar beliefs about a social order based on conflict, and about change as revolution or *pachacuti*.³⁰ A radical transformation from a just and totally renovated society would emerge. Abimael Guzmán's messianic preaching found fertile ground in ancient beliefs of the campesino culture, in turn informed by Christian teachings and accumulated rage and hate after centuries of domination.³¹

Seen together, these two lines of thought seem to be polar opposites. Yet several aspects coincide. Portocarrero posits that Shining Path emerges from a combination of Andean and Marxist elements,³² and what matters is how, over time, the campesinos themselves defeated SP.³³

²⁶ Starn, O. (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 239.

²⁷ Fernando Ortiz is considered one of Cuba's most renowned anthropologists. His work is vast, but here I refer to his studies that found that, in Cuba, being black and practicing Santería became classified as presumably criminal. See, for example, *Apuntes para un estudio criminal: los negros brujos* (1906), or *Los negros esclavos* (1916).

²⁸ "Mistis" in Peru is a concept applied to indigenous people with relative power and wealth, the approximate equivalent of Mexico's indigenous *caciques*.

²⁹ Portocarrero, G. (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 108.

³⁰ *Pachacuti* is a Quechua word formed from *pacha* (space and time) and *cuti* (that which returns), and is translated as "cyclical time." Anthropologists have defined it as "transformation." It is linked to the idea that time is a cycle in which good times and bad times return and repeat one after another: an order emanating from disorder.

³¹ Portocarrero, G. (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 126

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Degregori believes that as Shining Path exercised disproportionate violence against the campesinos, they opened a Pandora's Box that later would be difficult to control.³⁴ Their increasingly violent actions, coupled with the Peruvian army's change in strategy, led campesinos to gradually see the military as the lesser evil.

Why was SP defeated? If seen from the perspective of campesino society, Shining Path and the armed forces adopted contrasting strategies. While the former drew away, the latter drew closer; as SP became more of an outsider, the armed forces became more embedded in the population.³⁵

According to Starn, several factors led campesinos to slowly rise up in arms against a revolution fought in its name. One of them was the change in military strategy,³⁶ whereby soldiers went from being "aggressive strangers to becoming much closer collaborators."³⁷

The rural population began organizing in so-called campesino patrols given their dissatisfaction with SP. In line with most researchers, Degregori writes:

The event that signaled a change from hopelessness to renewed vitality was the spread of the Civil Self-Defense Committees, also known as campesino patrols [Rondas Campesinas]³⁸... which, by the end of the (1980s) began to multiply throughout the region.³⁹

As the patrols consolidated, SP saw them as an "anti-social" movement. SP's brutality and violence backfired, and massive campesino opposition became a game changer. Orin Starn lists the reasons why campesinos withdrew their support from SP and created conditions for its expulsion from several regions in Ayacucho.

As previously mentioned, Shining Path was increasingly repudiated due to its macabre record of murder and authoritarianism, as well as its ongoing battle with different denominations of regional Pentecostal churches, which SP saw as opposing their struggle. Further, the leadership was seen as inflexible and arrogant, and it tended to ignore the changes in the balance of power. Finally, the presence of the armed forces and their change of strategy slowly improved the relationship between campesinos and the military.⁴⁰

Following a gradual decline in support for SP in various regions of Ayacucho, in 1992 Abimael Guzmán was captured in Lima in an operation led by the National Directorate against Terrorism, created by controversial president Alberto Fujimori. Since then, SP has practically disappeared and its actions have been quite sporadic.

Seen from a historical perspective, Peru's recent history is a series of sad and painful events. In one of his last books, Eric Wolf studied extreme societies, i.e., social systems with extreme violence and excess, which, from his perspective, is where the limits of a culture are best understood.⁴¹ This position may be too radical but it allows us to emphasize that societies in extreme violence can be very productive sites to understand society and culture.

³⁴ Degregori, C.L. *et al.* (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 200.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁶ This supposed "change in military strategy" is a complicated subject and so, stated thusly, it might be viewed as an oversimplification. There was probably never a decided shift in military strategy and facts on the ground were simpler. In other words, finding themselves in the middle of two groups in conflict, campesinos began to view the army as the "lesser evil," accepting its presence as a way of assuring SP's retreat and ending the war. The greatest aspiration of the Quechuan campesinos was for a halt to the conflict.

³⁷ Starn, O. (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 230, 236.

³⁸ There is a significant amount of literature on campesino patrols. Overall, it tends to emphasize campesinos addressing violence and excesses in the region. Similarly, it underscores differences with respect to similar organizations in Latin America, such as those in Colombia and Guatemala, whose links to the army were much closer and symbiotic, as opposed to the greater independence and autonomy of the Peruvian groups.

³⁹ Degregori, C. I. *et al.* (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

⁴⁰ Starn, O. (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁴¹ Wolf, E. (1999), *Envisioning Power, Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*, University of California Press.

In pondering this panorama, I am led to wonder whether this is a history of a single South American country, or of quite a few countries that share Peru's language and geographical setting. I am rather more inclined to choose the latter.

As we have seen, the war had a tremendous impact in Peru. Yet perhaps its most long-lasting effects remain hidden. I am certain that the sequels, as yet cloistered in memories and attitudes, will be the hardest to overcome. Starn says that undoubtedly the "memory of a violent recent past has not vanished... in meeting rooms and street corners, stories are told of loved ones tortured or disappeared by the military, a stubborn refusal to surrender in the face of the government's desire to eradicate [its] use of terror from collective memory."⁴²

By writing his life's history, Lurgio recounts his experiences and simultaneously opens that Pandora's Box, perhaps setting free just a small part of his accumulated burden.

It is quite likely that all of us have similar pain. I recall my own life story, which is also part of a Chilean history of almost two decades of violence. Undoubtedly, in Chile the tension between memory and forgetting has not been addressed, and so, occasionally, the present appears bluntly as a blank page that must be read from a past only partially or poorly reconstructed.

Some years ago, Rafael Gumucio wrote an article in the Mexican magazine *Letras Libres* in which he recalls *Cartago*, a novel by Germán Marín. In *Cartago*, the protagonist, an exile who returns to Chile, finds a woman's arm not far from Villa Grimaldi, one of the dictatorship's torture centers. He immediately falls in love with the arm, likely the remains of a detained-disappeared woman. From that point on, the protagonist fawns over the arm, displaying a strange, unwholesome love. Gumucio ends his recollection by saying "like the character in Marín's novel, we Chileans love our past but only partially, and even then with a hint of shame. We pretend to love an arm in order to remain silent about the rest of the body, and, by so doing, we let it rest in peace."⁴³

LESSONS FOR AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

A destructive nature only accepts orders: make way; just one action: clear the way. Its need for fresh air and open space is greater than all its hate. A destructive nature is young and joyful because destruction rejuvenates, and wipes away signs of aging; and joyful because, for the destroyer, ignoring becomes a perfect reduction, an eradication of even the place where the destroyer finds himself. For now, this Apollonian image of the destructive being lets us see how much the world could be simplified if we could corroborate just how worthwhile its destruction is.⁴⁴

I end this introduction to Lurgio Gavilán's book by offering some reflections on the academic sub-discipline called anthropology of violence. As social researchers, we know violence has always been part of the environment in which we work. Obviously, violence is not unique to the study of anthropology; it is also quite a common phenomenon among other fields of study.

Yet as Linda Green clearly shows through her research on women affected by war in Guatemala, we anthropologists have rarely made violent circumstances a systematic field of analysis and observation.⁴⁵ Due to a lack of theoretical approaches, or the need to guarantee investigators' safety, or certain political or even ethical stances, we have not seriously considered violence an important issue to research.

This is totally apropos given the violent situation we currently face in Mexico. For example, in 2010, the greater anthropological community learned that the Chihuahua campus of the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) recommended that its students abstain from undertaking field research within the state, given ongoing security concerns. A colleague and friend who works at the Center for Investigation and Superior Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS) at its Monterrey campus has corroborated the very real difficulties of carrying out ethnographies in the

⁴² Starn, O. (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁴³ Gumucio, R. (2007), "La transición: una reacción en cadena", in *Letras Libres*, year 9, number 105, p. 34-38.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, W. (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Green, L. (1998), "Lived lives and social suffering: problems and concerns in medical anthropology", in *Medical Anthropological Quarterly*, new series, vol. 12, no. 1, United States.

state of Nuevo León. In my case, I have had to revise quite a number of research proposals with my students, also in response to ongoing security concerns. These obstacles seem to be increasingly common in the professional pursuit of anthropology.

As a member of the organizing committee of the First National Congress of Anthropology, I have discussed with colleagues the lack of violence-related issues in the papers presented and we have asked some investigators to take them on. The response has been disappointing. I have reasons to believe that the heart of the problem lies in the totally understandable need to protect our personal safety and that of our families before risking everything on research, no matter how germane.

In Mexico, violence is increasingly a fundamental concern in our lives. Whatever the reasons, we are wont to conclude that, in modern society, hardly any field of research is free from violence, especially when viewed from our holistic anthropological approaches.

Ferrándiz and Feixa struck a remarkable balance in their studies on violence and concluded that, by researching the anthropology of violence, we create an anthropology of peace.⁴⁶ Indeed, I believe that by studying violence or social suffering, researchers are making a difference, given their profound ethical commitment. The stated goal is to further systematic knowledge thereof, but in addition and more fundamentally, the objective is to contribute to improving living conditions of people and societies who have suffered violence.

We ought to accept Boaventura de Sousa Santos's recommendation about differentiating between the requisites of objectivity and neutrality when working on these issues. According to Santos, we can attempt to reconstruct social landscapes and conjure up analyses that explain them objectively. We must do so by ridding ourselves of prejudices and preconceived notions that might otherwise lead the research astray. Yet, this does not mean that we should be neutral, given that, due precisely to their nature, the phenomena of violence, social horror, and pain rarely allow us to stand aloof from what we judge to be totally unjust or undesirable.

Violence in Peru reached appalling heights during the 1980s and 1990s. During those years, the conflict was in the minds and in conversations of all Peruvians. Certainly the media played a role: repeated coverage of violence-laced episodes became their *modus vivendi*. This might not have been a problem had it not created exaggerated constructs of terror that made it increasingly difficult to understand the origins of, and possible solutions to, the conflict.

After studying Colombia, Taussig's concluded that the press had played a key role in constructing *tropical images of Hobbes's world*, a landscape remarkable for the grime and brutality of all its actors. Similarly, Benjamin's state of emergency was Colombians' "daily bread" where no one could be trusted.⁴⁷

As this social landscape of terror was created, i.e., Sousa Santos's *excess of feeling*, the situation in Colombia became increasingly opaque. Perhaps it was difficult to understand the difference between enemies and victims, and so, somehow, everyone seemed to be involved. Taussig's research illustrates how the state and the press took on the role of inevitable social cleansers. Their "hygienic function" consisted of pointing out and separating the soiled from the normal and thus designating presumed criminal elements. Obviously, a problem arises insofar as their categories of soiled held a wide range of human conditions.

Prostitutes, homosexuals, communists, leftist guerrillas, beggars, and all those whom I can reasonably call the threatening dark mass of poor people with no rights, meaning, if we give this some thought, that not many people are left in the higher world.⁴⁸

Yet working on an anthropology of violence should not only be about studying especially macabre cases of horrendous crime; on the contrary, we should assume that violence is probably more

⁴⁶ Ferrándiz, F. y C. Feixa (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ Taussig, M. (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

common in our lives than we care to admit. Thus, violence is consubstantial to the human condition, a part of which is present in our daily lives and in unusual episodes. Notably, studying violence can be an important source of information and analysis about society.

When we speak the language of terror, are we not only trying to hide and process the violence of our immediate world, that of our universities, workplaces, streets, shopping malls, and even that of our families, where, as in our work, terror is commonplace?⁴⁹

For the reasons given above, the study of violence can be undertaken in numerous human endeavors.⁵⁰ Ferrándiz and Feixa review numerous studies and point out that anthropologists are researching refugee camps, military bases, intensive-care units in hospitals, political prisoners, relatives of the disappeared, guerrillas, drug addicts, drug dealers, war journalists, war widows, and even colonial texts.⁵¹

It follows that the wide field of violence can be a propitious observation platform for social analyses. Social suffering is a privileged vantage point for researchers, precisely because it connects with the subjectivities and material conditions that make it possible. Ben Penglase studied how crime articulates several societal spaces in Brazil and concludes that the phenomenon of delinquency mobilizes symbolic and material territories, transforming and building cultures, traditions, and laws.⁵²

Therefore, we ought to observe how these issues are linked to a wide range of social phenomena and how they help reframe social thought beyond the Durkheimian limits of equilibrium and function. This, hopefully, can help answer the key question of what specific contributions anthropology can make to these studies.

As Sousa Santos put it, how can we best describe this “kaleidoscope of sociabilities,” without making certain actors invisible, while trying to build coherent images of society and culture? From my perspective, the discipline of anthropology can further understanding of the underlying cultural logics of violent and painful acts. As Ferrándiz and Feixa said in their study, “it is as important for anthropologists to observe violence itself as it is to understand the vision that the actors have of it.”⁵³

Anthropology of social suffering can help build a cultural understanding of the phenomena of violence. Not by considering, obviously, whether some cultures are more violent than others, but by seeing that all cultures have extreme aspects, as Wolf’s study showed regarding certain stages of some cultures. By analyzing social suffering, new insights may help avoid it and lead to an ethics of human relations as a desirable good.

It is my belief that this is what we can learn from Lurgio Gavilán’s book. His story demonstrates how difficult it is to clearly separate personal acts from the constructs of suffering that enmesh them. Lurgio was part of an *in extremis* historical process in his native Peru. Like many children of his age and social standing, he believed that social mobilizations nurtured hope for changing his and his family’s lives.

His life story is profoundly valuable because, in spite of traversing the long and bitter night of social suffering, his example is bearing fruit. As a Quechua student of anthropology in Mexico,

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁰ In anthropology, there are scholarly anthologies on violence that demonstrate what has been achieved so far. See, for example, studies edited by Rylko-Bauer, B., Whiteford, and Farmer (2009), *Global Health in Times of Violence*, School for Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe; Scheper-Hughes, N. and P. Bourgois (2004), *Violence in War and Peace: A Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford; and Schmidt, B. and I. Schroder (2003), *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*, Routledge, London.

⁵¹ Ferrándiz, F. y C. Feixa (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁵² Penglase, B. (1994), *Final Justice. Police and Death Squad Homicides of Adolescent in Brazil*, Human Rights Watch/Americas.

⁵³ Ferrándiz, F. y C. Feixa (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 152.

his Masters in Anthropology thesis focuses on matters that need to be urgently addressed in his place of origin.

I have had the privilege of accompanying Lurgio in two distinct moments of his writing: first, when he penned his life story, which has given me many insights and lessons, and, then, when he authored his thesis and continued to apply the rigor and commitment that are hallmarks of his work.

I look forward to supporting Lurgio once he returns to Peru with his published autobiography. This book will undoubtedly help other Peruvians tell their life stories. The histories of countries and their peoples can only be reconstructed with dignity and valor when they are based on an ongoing dialogue with memory and forgetting.

So that...never again.

Yerko Castro Neira
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