

Anthropological Knowledge on Political Violence. Interview with Orin Starn

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Bibliographical reference

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TEXT

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The Shining Path: Love, Madness and Revolution in the Andes (W.W. Norton, 2019) is a collaboration between anthropologist Orin Starn and historian Miguel La Serna. The book builds on a rich corpus of documentation and archives (which is presented at the end of the book).

Amongst these: local, national and international press of the time, more than a hundred interviews, archives of the Peruvian anti-terrorist unit and those of the “megatrial” (megajuicio) of the Shining Path and the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación).

The text is written in a novelistic narrative form, far from the dry style of classical anthropological monographies.

Kyra Grieco (KJ) and Julie Métais (JM) — Over the last decade, we can observe a “memorialization” process of the Peruvian internal conflict (Delacroix and Robin, 2017): from the Museum of Memory in Lima to the Monument of the Crying Eye, from the overdue inclusion of Amazonian populations amongst the victims of the conflict (Cornejo and Villapolo, 2007; Espinosa, 2012), to the publication of PHD dissertations and other scholarly work (Boutron, 2019; Delacroix, 2016; Robin, 2019) but also fiction (Roncagliolo, 2006) and graphic novels (Rossell, Villar and Cossio, 2015).

How does this book fit in this general landscape? What was your intention when drafting this text? Why this particular story, and why now? Did you aim to inform the anglophone public about the history of the Peruvian internal conflict, or did you want to give another point of view on the shining path guerrilla movement? Do you plan to translate the book into Spanish, or other languages?

Orin Starn (OS) — I was in Peru in the 1980s when the war was being fought, but in some ways it was very hard to understand what was going on between the smoke and death and fear and anxiety of the conflict. Now we are 30 years from the end of the worst fighting, and people are more ready to talk and there is access to archival documents which weren't available earlier.

One new development of more recent years has been the publication of memoirs like those by Lurgio Gavilán¹ and José Carlos Aguero² from people who were combatants or who were directly affected by the war. Those voices were not audible in the 1980s, when people were often afraid to go public with their stories. So it does feel to me like now that there is a certain kind of distance and retrospection that is making it possible for different perspectives to be heard.

In terms of what we set out to do, even for us, who had worked for decades on the Shining Path, there was a lot that we didn't know, and especially about what it was really like on the inside of the Shining Path. The leaders, Abimael Guzmán – Presidente Gonzalo – and Elena Iparraguirre, were legendary and fearful figures when I was in Peru. To be able to speak in person to top leaders of SP and to get a perspective on what they were thinking was really useful for us. In general what we wanted to do – it is kind of a cliché term – was to humanize the conflict. This meant taking all of those who were involved it seriously as complex and contradictory human beings, instead of as a caricature or a stereotype – a terrorist, a murderer, a noble heroic shanty town leader, a brave rondero (peasant patrol). We were trying to capture a feel for what it was like to be in the war and in Peru at that particular time and the way in which the people involved experienced it. Our research included going into the maximum security women's prison in Lima and spending a lot of time with Elena Iparraguirre, Maria Pantoja and other higher-ups in Sendero. We wondered if they would simply be slogan-shouting “Long Live the Revolution! Viva Sendero!” kinds of orthodox Marxists. It surprised us to find out that they were smart, capable, and well-read people who were perfectly willing to have an open-ended conversation with us. Of course, they are also very orthodox, unrepentant, and unreconstructed Communists, and responsible for the death of tens of thousands of people. The tragedy was that their desire to bring a more just and better way of organizing society to Peru led them to be willing to spill so much blood for what ended up to be nothing.

KG and JM — The second set of questions is about writing. You emancipate yourself from the codes of academic writing in order to produce a text which appears fluid and similar to a novel. You in fact adopt a narrative and descriptive writing style, with few references to theoretical discussions. When historical and anthropological works are mentioned in the text, they are often peripheral or in parenthesis.

Why choose this writing style? Is it another way to tell this story? To what extent does this novel dialogue with more academic approaches, in history and anthropology, to the Shining Path (for example in the work of historian Ponciano del Pino whom you cite in your sources or that of anthropologist Irene Silverblatt)?

OS — It's interesting to think about the history of anthropology and the choices that anthropologists have made about writing. Back in the early 20th century in the United States, figures like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict won enormous audiences. *Coming of Age in Samoa* sold more than a million copies, so did both Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Zora Neale Hurston was also a novelist and a student of Franz Boas, and her *Mules and Men*, an extraordinary experimental ethnography, was also a book for general audiences.

So there was a day, many decades ago, where anthropologists wanted to speak beyond the confines of the academy, and they wanted to be read by non-anthropologists, but by bigger publics. Since that time, over the last 60-70 years, anthropology in the United States has become more and more a kind of involuted exercise. Now when I ask my beginning anthropology students "Name me one anthropologist", my undergraduate students guess "Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict", who died half a century ago. This reflects the fact that anthropologists have largely ceased to be influential public figures. I believe theory is important and jargon can be a necessary tool for knowledge production. But I personally would like to see anthropology encourage more public facing styles of writing, not to close ourselves off so much in our own debates. We made the choice to write this as a trade book, not as an academic book, because trade books have far larger print runs and circulation than university presses. But doing a trade book means doing a readable and accessible book, a more novelistic narrative in our case.

There always has been a kind of stigma around popular writing. And I think it is a gendered stigma, among other things, an example of what Catherine Lutz has called "the gender of theory": "Well, Margaret Mead, she sold a lot of copies, but she was superficial, not a deep theoretical thinker". There was this sort of idea: "Women tell artsy stories, and men develop great theories and science".

Despite the tendency to look down on popular writing, I actually find it harder than academic writing. You want to be faithful to complexity, yet you do not have the shorthand of jargon. And it is doubly hard because part of what we do in our professionalization as anthropologists is to lose the capacity to write in the vernacular, and instead learn the terms and writing style that becomes the professional language that we use.

In American anthropology nowadays, you hear plenty of talk about public anthropology, including about how to decolonize anthropology. But writing for trade presses and for general audiences still tends to be kind of ignored or discounted within academic anthropology.

KG and JM — To further develop this issue... Certain passages contain a part of “fictioned” writing, even though they rest upon testimonies and interviews, especially when, in order to describe a situation, you have to delve into the characters’ subjectivity. This stylistic choice creates a reality effect which highlights the difference – and the close relationship – between ethnography and fiction.

How far did you allow yourself to go with this break away from ethnographic writing, and how do you conceive these differences? What does one gain, and what does one lose with this stylistic choice?

OS — I grew up, as a graduate student, in the age of new critiques of ethnographic writing. It was the so-called “writing culture” moment of the 1980s, with dialogues and debates about reflexivity and representation, and politics and poetics of ethnography. And certainly, the way that we have written this book, and the way that most books for general audiences are written, is in a very old-fashioned realist mode. There’s is not a single reference to ourselves in the book. And in fact in the book I am the character Ray Starr, anthropologist, as I just decided to make myself into a pseudonym. That we are textually invisible narrators is incorrect by post-modern standards of an ethnography that is supposed to mark the ethnologist’s positionality. My earlier book *Ishi’s Brain* was also a trade book. But that one was from my perspective, with lots of first person. Each book has always felt to me as if it makes its own demands in terms of its form and genre.

In terms of dialogues and the characters, we tried to be faithful to what we documented, whether it was something by somebody who was involved in that conversation or in some cases from written sources. There is of course always the question of the instability of memory, and we asked people about events happening decades ago. We all remember with our own silences and forgetting, and reinventions. We tried within these constraints to reconstruct as much as we could.

A review of our book in the London Review of Books dismissed it as like a “telenovela”. We actually took it as a compliment, because we wanted it to have a little of the style of a Netflix series, like *The Sopranos* or *Breaking Bad*, in the sense of creating characters and staging scenes, drawing on the conventions of fictions, of commercial films and television, and making the reader want to keep reading and stay engaged. Yet trying to be faithful to sources and what happened.

KG and JM — Concerning the “making” of the book, which is co-written: could you tell us a bit more about the way in which you proceeded? Did you have a disciplinary division of roles and contributions, between the historian Miguel La Serna (conducting archival work) and yourself, as an anthropologist (conducting ethnographic observations and interviews)?

Was the writing of this book an opportunity to combine disciplinary approaches and savoir-faire – such as an ethnography of the archives or a historical approach to your ethnographic material?

OS — It was very interesting to have a collaboration between an anthropologist and a historian. I am myself a historical anthropologist having written much about the twentieth century. One weird thing as you get older is that experiences that you lived when you were

younger become the domain of “history” and no longer so much of “anthropology”. Miguel had the expertise and connections to work in the archives, a kind of skill that I do not have, but I had deep connections in certain places as an anthropologist. We did some of the interviews together. So we each brought something different to the book.

Collaborative writing is a beautiful thing. I think we should be doing much more of it. Contemporary anthropology is so critical of the neoliberal fiction of the sovereign individual subject. Yet, ironically, with our single-authored books we embrace exactly this kind of an individualized free market model. We usually write our books and article on our own and to climb the ladder of prestige and visibility just like in a corporation. Our research is deeply social, and yet our writing is so lonely – writing can be a home breaker, relationship breaker. Co-writing brings a welcome dimension of sociality to the process of making a text.

Miguel and I did a back and forth of drafts. Our styles complemented each other, because I am a control freak about writing and Miguel is not. I kept final say over the text, out of neurosis and to make sure the text was in one narrative voice. Especially with narrative, non-fiction, you have to have a single narrative voice, otherwise it can be difficult for the reader.

KG and JM — You highlight how the Shining Path is, throughout the 1980s, mainly a rural guerrilla carried out areas inhabited by indigenous populations, directed by white middle-class central committee, in which women play a crucial role. You therefore highlight the intersection of race, class and gender in the movement.

On this topic, how can one present the rural and indigenous populations of Ayacucho to the North-American public, without falling in to the trap of “othering” them, thereby perpetuating a form of “Andinism” which North-American anthropology – as you pointed out in an article (Starn, 1991) – largely contributed to produce?

This is also a critique which has been addressed to the novel of Mario Vargas Llosa “Lituma en los Andes” by Enrique Mayer (1991), loosely based on his experience as part of the state inquiry on murder of eight journalists in Uchuraccay. You for example resort to the memories of Lurgio Gavilán “When Rains Became Floods” (2015), in which he recounts his experience as an indigenous child in the Shining Path. More generally, how can one convey the complexity and agency of these other, indigenous members of the guerrilla? What kind of sources could be used? Is resorting to fiction a possibility?

OS — Work on the Shining Path, or “Senderology” as it’s sometimes known, has been somewhat fragmented. There has been a lot of work on peasants, villages, and rural responses to Sendero; and then there is a whole set of work about the leadership and ideology of the Shining Path and Abimael Guzmán. In order to really capture the diversity of the perspectives and actors in the war, we wanted to have a fuller range of experiences. Somebody living in the shanty town Villa El Salvador – María Elena Moyano –, somebody from the Andes, and then to have people who were Lima-based, like Abimael Guzmán and Gustavo Gorriti, in order to have a real cross-section of Peruvian society and how it was affected by the war. So we made the decision to make a *rondero* whom we call Narciso Huamán one of our main characters, and also use Lurgio Gavilán and some other of our interviews to talk more about peasants, including the experiences of village women.

Trying to do justice to our village characters was one of the hardest parts of writing this book. Because most of us anthropologists are middle-class, university educated people. It's not so hard for us to understand a lot about middle class city people like Gustavo Gorriti or Abimael Guzmán or the policeman Marco Myashiro. They don't think exactly like us, but it's easier to feel like you have a sense of them than to give a good representation of the interior lives of campesinos in the Andes, like Narciso whose native language is Quechua and is a native of a high puna village. Nowhere in the Andes is cut off, archaic, isolated, and "primitive", as what I once called the "Andeanism" of old-style Andeanist anthropology had it. But it was still difficult to try to convey Narciso's point of view, capture how he thought and how he might have experienced things. There are a lot of books and films about Andean villagers, going back to the indigenista tradition of the early 20th century, that end up being just caricatures of them as either backwards obstacles to modernity or wonderful and wise communitarian guardians of tradition.

We had the advantage of having both done a lot of work in Andean villages. Although every village is different, you learn things about campesino culture that are helpful and that in some ways apply across the Andes. I had actually met Narciso during the war in the early 1990s, when Shining Path was still active and it was kind of dangerous. He remembered me from that time. Miguel had done research in his village of Huaychao, and they are compadres. So this gave us the connection where we could speak with him and understand something of his experience in a good enough way.

Cultural production in Peru has been dominated by white middle and upper-class people, whether filmmakers, novelists, academics. One of the remarkable things about Lurgio Gavilán's book – and he now has another one – is that it is the memoir of a peasant boy, in his own words. It's a novel perspective because a still quite racist and classist Peru has not wanted to hear or make space for those voices, reserving the rights of white middle class researcher Peruvian and foreign to share and convey and transmit the views of brown-skinned people in the Andes. We are seeing a change in the economy of representation with more Andean voices in film, too. A good example is the film *Wiñaypacha* by the young Aymara director Óscar Catacora. It's overdue.

KG and JM — Your book underlines the role of Augusta La Torre and Elena Iparraguirre in the birth of the Shining Path and its passage to armed conflict. You suggest several times that without these two women at his side, Abimael Guzmán would have remained a provincial professor, with oratorical skills and some charisma, but more a coffee-house revolutionary who would never have actually launched a guerrilla war.

Has this approach in part been influenced by feminist readings of this guerrilla movement (such as those provided by Kimberly Theidon or Camille Boutron) or by other approaches and influences? Besides saying that "behind every great man there is a great woman (in this case, two)", how does this perspective change, in your opinion, our understanding and memory of the internal war?

OS — From very early on in the 1980s people could see that there were a lot of female fighters in the Shining Path and good studies by historians, journalists, and anthropologists about women in the party, like Robin Kirk's work and that of Jaymie Heilman and a number of others. So there was a certain amount of research, certainly influenced by feminist concerns, yet also driven by the empirical fact that there were so many women in the Shining

Path, and the effort to explain that. In the big role of women, I think early on it was recognized that the Shining Path was really quite unique in Latin America. The Cuban revolution was a boy's club and that was true for a lot of other guerrilla movements. The FARC had significant female participation; the Zapatistas certainly made an important place for Mayan women in leadership positions. But all these movements were male-dominated, with men occupying the vast majority of the leadership as well as doing most of the fighting.

We knew already in the 1990s that about half the members of the Shining Path Central Committee were women, but our book underlines the importance of Elena Iparraguirre and Augusta La Torre in the making of the Shining Path. They were co-creators of the movement, along with Guzmán. It's hard to recognize that because the SP so mythologized, deified, apotheosized Abimael Guzmán as "Chairman Gonzalo", as the maximum leader. That made it easy to assume, wrongly, that he was the decider, creator, and originator of everything. But from talking to Elena Iparraguirre and many people who knew Augusta La Torre, including her mother, we realized this view was wrong. Even the very choice of having Guzmán be presented in party propaganda as a legendary, larger-than-life leader, and the so-called "Fourth Sword of Marxism" after Marx, Lenin, and Mao was a kind of strategic creation of Augusta, Elena, and Guzmán. They believed – perhaps correctly – that movements need mythologized heroes. Elena Iparraguirre was very clear about this to us. She said "Abimael wasn't any smarter or better than the rest of us, this is a choice that we made that every movement needs a leader and a figurehead." Indeed Elena Iparraguirre is really the top figure in the Shining Path right now, or what is left of it, not Abimael Guzmán, who is heading towards ninety in solitary confinement.

I do think that the Shining Path might not have gone to war if it had not been for Elena and Augusta, who were hardline, aggressive organizers, and oriented to action. It's interesting to compare the Shining Path with other splinter Peruvian Maoist groups of the era, like Red Homeland, which was completely male in its higher levels, nothing like the female presence in the Shining Path. Patria Roja and the rest of the left treated women mostly as secretaries or sex objects, with almost none in leadership positions. This mirrored the patriarchal structure of populist and conservative parties like the APRA and Popular Action in this respect. The Shining Path was really unique among all Peruvian aggrupations of the time for having women in influential positions. And, of course, this is a paradox that illustrates the fallacy of essentialized views of femaleness as necessarily connected to peace and nurturing. Women helped to direct the bloodiest insurgency in Peruvian history.

The reasons for so many women in Shining Path? One is that Abimael Guzmán was good with women. He was not patronizing, he was willing to listen to women's opinions – as much as he would listen to anyone – he was not threatened by women, willing to give them leadership roles. He was a womanizer, like Mao, a Mao, who even as an old man kept a harem of young women like spoils of war and revolution. That Guzmán treated women as equals was quite unique by comparison to the leaders of all the other political parties. Even today, we found the jailed women leaders of Shining Path are very protective and affectionate about Guzmán. And another thing, of course, was the presence, from the beginning, of Elena and Augusta. They provided role models for young women interested in revolution, and young women could see that there was a place for them as leaders and not just as fighters. There was a multiplier effect: women were drawn to the Shining Path because they saw Elena and Augusta there and so there came to be more women and it ended up creating this movement where women were really central to the struggle, at every level. At the level of ideology, Communism promised equality to women. That was also attractive even if the

Shining Path ultimately viewed patriarchy as a “secondary contradiction” compared to what it regarded as the central mission of class struggle and overthrowing capitalism.

KG and JM — The third part of your book is about the capture of Abimael Guzmán and Elena Iparraguirre, which led to the downfall of the movement. It is mainly based on a documentation constituted by Peruvian media coverage of the operation, as well as interviews and memoirs of the secret service agents who took part to the operation. The risk is to reproduce the triumphal and masculinist undertones of these written and oral discourses. It is also a question of the nature of the historiographical sources available, that can produce a silencing effect of certain voices or figures – for example that of Elena Iparraguirre, suddenly demoted to devoted partner – and the exaltation of others – such as the intronization of Abimael as Peru’s “Enemy Number One”. Was it an actual choice, that of assuming the “point of view” of the GEIN, the police unit that carried out the hunt and capture, or merely an issue of available sources on this part of Shining Path’s history?

OS — One of the things that we were really trying to do in the book was to draw together the different parts of the story of the war that have tended to be told separately. That included the police work to capture the Shining Path leaders, a story that has also been told now in various movies and memoirs by the officers involved. So yes, there is a police/detective plotment in the final part of the book. I should say that the other big focus of attention in that last part, however, is the remarkable story of a woman, María Elena Moyano, the shantytown leader who was brutally murdered by Shining Path for opposing them. We also follow the story of Gustavo Gorriti, the most famous Peruvian journalist, who was arrested and risked death for reporting on the human rights abuses and authoritarianism of the Fujimori government. Moyano and Gorriti were great heroes of late 20th century Peru.

I will say that the tale of the GEIN is very interesting, because this group is a small, underfunded unit at first that manages pretty incredibly to track down and capture the main leaders of the Shining Path. Up to that time, government strategy had been brutal, ineffective, and disastrous, making Peru into one of the world’s worst human rights emergencies between killings by the government and Shining Path. It was a small miracle that the GEIN was able to form and to do some very clever detective work – without torture, without killing anyone, going by the book. Their capture of the top leaders was the key to the war ending.

You are right, the police part of it is a more masculinist narrative. One regret I have is that we did not speak with Elena Vadillo, who was one of several important female operatives in the GEIN. It was actually quite hard for us to be able to speak to the GEIN leaders at all, Marco Miyashiro and Benedicto Jiménez. Miyashiro is a Fujimorista and now a congressman, and mistrustful of left-oriented academics like us. It was only because Miguel has some Fujimorista relatives and because I knew a secretary in the Congress who knew his secretary that we were able to talk to interview him. And I had to sneak into a police hospital to speak with Benedicto Jiménez, who was recovering from heart surgery and under surveillance as he is now accused of drug trafficking corruption.

Is our relating the story of GEIN a glamorization of Peruvian police and military? I think we are pretty explicit about the human rights horrors that were committed by the army and the military. And there was a dimension of heroism in the work of the GEIN, as imperfect as they were, because, in the final account, Shining Path was a cruel, bad business. It was a murderous, vicious insurgency that if it had won wanted to impose a kind of North Korea-like

totalitarian state in Peru. Call me a right-winger, conservative, lapsed leftist or whatever, but I am very glad that the Shining Path didn't win the war. This was thanks to the work of the men and women of the GEIN. If Guzmán and Iparraguirre hadn't been captured, the war could have gone on for a long time more, thousands more dead. I don't think the Shining Path would have ever been able to win – their hardline Marxism had become antiquated, and their actual strength in numbers was never that great. But there would have been a lot more murder and bloodshed.

KG and JM — When reading your book, one feels a post-Marxist approach, or in any case a critical approach of Marxist orthodoxies. You however do not reduce Marxist thought to the reading which the Shining Path gives of it – the so-called “Gonzalo Thought”. Today there are several currents in social sciences that update and adapt Marxist thought in order to decrypt the social world (for example the work of Daniel Bensaïd, or Toni Negri). How do you position yourself in relation to these approaches?

The more general question is perhaps that of the status of contemporary political anthropology or anthropology of politics: what is your understanding of this couple?

OS — Back in the 1980s, most of us with socialist sympathies viewed the Shining Path as a weird, exotic aberration from the Marxist tradition. Yes, they were Maoists, but we regarded their cruelty and their cult of personality, their dogma, their obsession with revisionism, as quite sui generis and a corruption of a more genuine Marxist revolutionary strategy. Perhaps the biggest learning experience for me in researching the book was realizing that there was really nothing very unusual at all about the Shining Path. Virtually all of its practices, dogma, and strategies were very orthodox, mainline, coming down from elements of twentieth century communist tradition, be it the party's cult of personality to “Chairman Gonzalo” or the assassination of “revisionist” leftists. When you look more closely at the experiences of Russian and Chinese revolutions, they set the template for the Shining Path. Indeed Shining Path regarded itself as the upholder of a true, uncorrupted Marxist tradition as against the “running dog reformism” of Deng Xiaoping or what it called the “social imperialism” of the Soviet Union after Stalin.

The violence of the Shining Path, in other words, was completely continuous with twentieth century Communist experiences. It was an axiom of revolutionary Marxist thought that bloodshed and terror were necessary to reach the promised land of socialism. Marx himself said it had been a mistake for revolutionaries not have used terror in 1848 to combat the imperial suppression of revolt. So the Shining Path violence – whether the massacre of Lucanamarca, or blowing up of Maria Elena Moyano in front of her kids – is part of a lineage that includes Lenin's Red Terror and the lynchings of the Cultural Revolution. And the Shining Path obsession with revisionism and ideological purity is very much in the style of the Cultural Revolution, not surprising since Guzmán, La Torre and other Shining Path leaders were in China at that time and much admired what was happening. All this made me think more critically about the twentieth century communist tradition, because I had grown up as a young radical for whom America and capitalism were the source of all evil. In the academy, and especially in anthropology, this view still holds to a degree. Who has ever met in the United States a Republican anthropologist? Capitalism is indeed a brutal and inhuman social form. But the black book of Communism is also very long.

As much as the Shining Path forced me to reexamine the legacies of Marxism and Communism, these are, of course, very heterodox traditions – of Gramsci as well as Stalin, of Benjamin as well as Mao. A bit like Catholicism, Communism includes everything from the right-wing conservatism of Opus Dei to liberation theology. I still consider myself as a Marxist in many ways. Analytically, Marxism remains a powerful tool for thinking about capitalism, but also about the relationship between culture, ideology, structures of feeling and economics. So it is not a matter of anti-marxism or anti-communism, but it is a matter of recognizing the awful actions that have been pretty important in the Communist traditions, especially in Leninism and Maoism. Our more mixed view of the Marxist tradition may be one reason that some leftist readers do not like our book.

At the same time in Peru, the establishment, the conservatives, Fujimoristas hate the book, too. They think it is too kind to the Shining Path, because we humanize them, we are not just depicting them as deranged terrorists. There have already been viral tweets in Peru about the book as an “apology for terrorism”, and a campaign to keep it out of bookstores. In the Librería Ibérica in the airport, in Lima, they were promoting the book by having the cover on a big TV screen, as an advertisement. And someone took a picture and put it on Instagram and Facebook, saying “this is disgusting, the terrorists who killed thousands of people in our country look like movie stars. They are on the cover of the book...”

The Spanish translation of the book will appear in Peru next year. It will be interesting to see the reaction. There is still a lot of reluctance in Peru to any kind of treatment of the Shining Path as human beings, however misguided, and not terrorist monsters. Anything that tries to portray them in a way that talks about the murders and the violence but also about Shining Path leaders as real people is taboo. The war is still an open wound, and there is a lot of knee-jerk, know-nothingness amongst certain conservative sectors.

*KG and JM — And the last question... In the title of the book, the term “revolution” is associated to those of “love” and “madness” – terms which connect politics to subjectivity and emotions. Why choose these terms (instead of “friendship” and/or “ideology” for example)? What can an anthropological approach to love contribute to the analysis of politics, such as that influences from the work of Elizabeth Povinelli in *The Empire of Love* (2006)?*

Concerning madness: the use of this term has a normative connotation... Does it not somehow deprive the protagonists of their agency, therefore allowing readers not to take them seriously?

OS — “Affect” has become a keyword and motor of debate in American anthropology, of course. It offers new ways of thinking about love, attachment and desire. And all of us came of academic age reading Foucault and work after him about discourses about normality and madness and how those lines are politically as well as historically and institutionally drawn.

But I’m afraid the reader looking for any more academic theorization of love, madness, or affect in the book will be disappointed... to be frank, in our title they are marketing devices. Love, because who doesn’t want to read a love story? And madness, because craziness always has an appeal, provoke curiosity. Those words in the title were really an effort to invite the readership that would not be very interested in the book.

But the words aren't exactly misleading either. The book is indeed about love, in a double sense: one, the love triangle between Abimael Guzmán, Elena Aguirre and Augusta La Torre; and at the same time, love in the political sense, for the people. Augusta La Torre's brother told me that Augusta had "died for her love for the people". This may seem counterintuitive because the Shining Path meant death for so many people. Yet they saw their revolution as an act of sacrifice and dedication to "the masses". So "love" for us has the dual sense of interpersonal attachment and political ideology.

And madness is certainly part of the story. The Shining Path began with the most reasonable and best of intentions to make a new world, yet ended up chopping people to pieces with machetes (one militant even carved a hammer and sickle into the head of a peasant), blowing up people with bombs. It was sheer madness that a group claiming to want to liberate the peasantry ended up killing thousands of indigenous villagers, the impoverished farm people in the Andes who have suffered and survived so much. They were the vast majority of the victims of the war, not the middle class, bourgeois, business people, and conservative politicians you would have thought would be the Shining Path target. The sane idea of a better world turned to insanity by the end.

1 GAVILÁN SÁNCHEZ Lurgio *et al.*, *When Rains Became Floods: A Child Soldier's Story*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015.

2 AGÜERO José Carlos, *Los Rendidos. Sobre en don del perdonar*, Lima, IEP, 2015.

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