
Punishment and Extermination: The Massacre of Political Prisoners in Lima, Peru, June 1986¹

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On 18 June 1986, prisoners accused of belonging to the Peruvian Maoist guerrilla movement known as 'Shining Path' organised a synchronised mutiny in three prisons in or near Lima (two for men and one for women), took a few hostages in each of them, and presented the authorities with a 25-point petition that included demands ranging from ending abuses and mistreatment inside the prisons to stopping the 'disappearance' of persons, an already common practice in the state's counter-subversive campaign. By the time of the riots, the revolutionary war launched by Shining Path was about six years old, had already caused thousands of victims and millions of dollars in damages, and had triggered a brutal response on the part of the state, with widespread human rights violations, including extra-judicial detentions and executions, the ordinary use of torture and the massacre of innocent people, mostly in highland and Indigenous communities. The ongoing war had also produced thousands of prisoners accused of belonging to the Maoist group, and prisons had become potentially explosive scenarios of the war. Although the worst moments in the confrontation between the Shining Path and the Peruvian state were yet to come, Peruvian society was under considerable stress in June 1986.

The mutinies organised by Shining Path prisoners were carefully planned not only to occur simultaneously but also to coincide with the presence in Lima of dozens of foreign leaders who were coming to participate in an International Congress of Socialist and Social-Democrat parties, scheduled to start on 20 June, an event that the ruling party, Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, or American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA), and its young leader, President Alan García Pérez, expected to use as a showcase for their still young administration and the aspirations that García Pérez had of

1 All translations in this chapter are by the author.

becoming a leader of international dimensions. Not only prominent foreign political leaders, but also hundreds of journalists had arrived in Lima to attend the event. Shining Path wanted to use this opportunity to amplify its attacks against the government, embarrass the young and ambitious president, and denounce (and test) what they called the administration's 'genocidal' plan against political prisoners.

As soon as the news of the mutinies reached the highest levels of the Aprista administration, the president called an emergency cabinet meeting that also included the top military commanders of all three armed institutions (collectively known as the *Comando Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas* (CCFFAA; Joint Command of the Armed Forces). A series of decisions were made at that meeting, the most important being the determination to restore 'the disrupted national order' 'with energy and decision to reach the expected goals in the shortest possible time' (Presidencia de la Republica, 1986). The ultimate responsibility for conducting the operations to put down the mutinies was placed in the hands of the three armed institutions (army, navy and air force), one in each of the prisons affected by the mutinies, although it was also envisaged that the *Guardia Republicana* (GR), the police branch in charge of the prison system, would have to play a role.

The three prisons that were the scenario for the mutinies were the penal island of El Frontón (that had been recently re-named as San Juan Bautista), a few miles off-shore from Callao, the port just west of Lima, where an estimated 160 inmates accused of belonging to the Shining Path occupied the *Pabellón Azul* (Blue Pavilion); the Lurigancho prison (officially the San Pedro penitentiary), located in one of the most populous districts in Lima, whose Industrial Pavilion hosted 124 'terrorists'; and the Santa Bárbara women's prison in El Callao that hosted 64 female Shining Path interns. In all these prisons, Shining Path inmates occupied special areas, separate from common prisoners.

By the end of the day, on 19 June 1986, 124 inmates in Lurigancho, that is all of the Shining Path inmates, had been killed; at least 120 of the 160 El Frontón inmates had also died; and in the Santa Bárbara women's prison two Shining Path inmates had lost their lives. There were also a few military casualties and one of the hostages at El Frontón died. Most Lurigancho and El Frontón victims had been either shot after surrendering, or died as a result of the bombing of the *Pabellón Azul*, in the case of El Frontón. Altogether, close to 250 political prisoners had been killed, in what constitutes the deadliest massacre of political prisoners in Latin American history.

How could this happen? How and why did a democratically elected government, whose leader had promised to combat the insurgency while being respectful of human rights, opt for a military solution to a situation that could hardly be considered a threat to the security of the prisons, the

government, or the 'national order'? True, this was a provocation by the Shining Path, but it was neither unprecedented nor particularly belligerent. The militarisation of the crisis was the most tragic decision made at that cabinet meeting, and the responsibility went directly to the President of the Republic himself. But equally tragic was the fact that, at no point during the unfolding of the events, did civilian or military authorities make any meaningful effort to prevent the massacre. This chapter attempts to elucidate the reasons behind what Shining Path activists called (even before it happened) a 'genocide', and what came to be officially and euphemistically known as *los sucesos de los penales* ('the prison incidents').²

The Shining Path and the Maoist Revolution in Peru

Shining Path is the nickname for the Communist Party of Peru, a Maoist revolutionary organisation that was born out of the multiple divisions within the Peruvian left in the 1960s and started an armed struggle in May 1980. After the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, a pro-China group called *Bandera Roja* (Red Flag) saw the desertion of an even more radical faction, led by a philosophy professor, Abimael Guzmán, that gave birth to a party that claimed to be the 'real' Communist Party of Peru and whose initial base was the Universidad San Cristóbal de Huamanga, in Ayacucho, one of the poorest regions of Peru, where Guzmán began to recruit professors and students. The nickname, Shining Path, came from one of the slogans used by the party's university branch, 'Por el sendero luminoso de José Carlos Mariátegui' (Following the Shining Path of José Carlos Mariátegui), referring to the Marxist intellectual who is considered the founder of Peruvian communism. The name, however, was never officially embraced by the leadership or the members of the party (Degregori, 1990, 1996, 2013; Palmer, 1992; McClintock, 1998; Stern, 1998; Gorriti, 1999; Taylor, 2006).

Small cells worked in both ideological and military training throughout the 1970s in preparation for the armed struggle. Their ideology (known to its followers as 'Pensamiento Gonzalo' or 'Gonzalo Thought', after Guzmán's *nom de guerre* 'Gonzalo') was a mixture of Maoism with the ideas developed by José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s.

2 Although Shining Path referred to this episode as 'geneocide', I prefer to use the term 'prison massacre' instead of 'genocide'. It has become common in political debates to refer to waves of repression (such as those in Chile, Argentina or Central America) as 'genocide'. Scholars, however, disagree as to which cases would warrant the use of such a descriptor (Chapter 6 in this volume deals with the case of Guatemala). There are other interventions in this debate (Higonnet, 2009; Esparza, Huttenbach and Feierstein, 2010; Vezzetti, 2012).

On 17 May 1980, on the eve of the first presidential election in seventeen years, which would bring to an end a twelve-year military dictatorship, Shining Path announced the beginning of its armed revolution. Their goal was to destroy the rotten, exploitative and corrupted state, and to initiate what they thought was going to be the first step in the world's communist revolution. Shining Path's ideology and political strategy were extremely violent and confrontational, consciously seeking the polarisation of Peruvian society, and openly rejecting any possibility of negotiation with the state or the formation of political alliances with even the most progressive sectors of the legal left. A sort of 'everything or nothing' strategy informed Shining Path's almost fanatical crusade against the Peruvian state and what they considered its accomplices: legal political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and labour and peasant unions that did not yield to Shining Path's authoritarian and radical tactics.

During the next twenty years or so, but especially during the period 1980–1992, a bloody confrontation would take place between the Shining Path and the Peruvian armed forces. The 2003 report by the Peruvian Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR; Truth and Reconciliation Commission) concluded that almost 70,000 Peruvians lost their lives, the majority of them of indigenous descent (CVR, 2003a). The CVR report also documented the atrocities committed by all sides in what can truly be described as a contest between alternative forms of terror and intimidation. The Shining Path used a combination of guerrilla warfare, selective assassinations and indiscriminate terror to advance their agenda. They killed state authorities, military officers, police agents, labour and community leaders, NGO workers, individuals accused of abusive behaviour in villages and towns in the Andes, and others. They perpetrated some of the worst massacres committed by insurgent groups in the history of twentieth-century Latin America. In fact, according to the CVR, 54 percent of all the deaths during the war can be attributed to the Shining Path, the highest percentage among all Latin American revolutionary and insurgent groups. The Peruvian state responded with ever growing ferocity, usually by engaging in systematic abuses against not only Shining Path activists but also innocent people. The CVR concluded emphatically that:

'The fight against subversion reinforced among members of the police forces pre-existing authoritarian and repressive practices. Torture during interrogation and undue detentions, which had been common in their actions against common criminals, acquired a massive character during the counter-insurgent campaign. In addition, the CVR has confirmed that the most serious violations of human rights by members of the police forces included extrajudicial executions, forced disappearance of persons, torture, and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment of

individuals. The CVR condemns in particular the extended sexual violence against women' (CVR, 2003d: 360–361).

Most of the victims of the systematic violence applied by both the Shining Path and the forces of the state were members of indigenous communities. The rivalry between the two groups, although also fought in the terrain of ideas, propaganda, symbolism and political agendas, became essentially a contest between two forms of intimidation and coercion, as several scholars have argued.

'The Shining Trenches'

As the war unfolded, Peruvian jails and prisons began to be filled with individuals accused of being members of the guerrilla. According to the CVR, at least 20,000 people accused of belonging to 'terrorist' groups entered Peruvian jails and prisons during the period of war (1980–2000). Many of them were completely innocent people, and most never received a judicial sentence. A network of prisons throughout the country was used to host Shining Path suspects, but gradually most of them were concentrated in Lima, especially in the Lurigancho prison (still one of the largest and most overcrowded prisons in Latin America) and El Frontón penal island (established in the early twentieth century, closed in the 1970s, but re-opened in 1982). Later, other prisons were also used, most notably the Canto Grande high-security prison on the outskirts of Lima, and the Yanamayo prison in the highlands of Puno, in southern Peru, where inmates endured freezing temperatures and brutal isolation. Top leaders of the movement, including Abimael Guzmán after his capture in September 1992, would be secluded in special cells located in the basement of the naval base of Callao. Women were held in the Santa Bárbara prison in El Callao and later in the Women's Prison in Chorrillos.

From the very beginning of the war, prisons were seen by the insurgents as 'shining trenches of struggle' (*luminosas trincheras de combate*), as Shining Path documents began to call them, quickly becoming arenas of confrontation with the state as well as spaces for different forms of political activity (Rénique, 2004). Shining Path staged a famous prison escape in Ayacucho, for instance, as early as 1981. In the largest and most secure prisons, such as Lurigancho and El Frontón, Shining Path's strategy sought to gradually 'liberate' the prison space they were held in, seeking to minimise both the state's control over their time and routine, and the possibilities of becoming victims of what they openly denounced as a 'genocidal plan' to exterminate them. While they clearly succeeded at liberating prison space from state control, they could not avoid the ferocity of state retaliation, most brutally in the form of prison massacres such as those that took place in October 1985, June 1986 and April 1992.

Shortly after El Frontón was re-opened to host Shining Path prisoners, journalist Gustavo Gorriti visited the so-called 'Blue Pavilion', the cellblock that housed them, and wrote a report in *Caretas*, the main political weekly magazine in Peru. Gorriti was impressed by the iron discipline shown by the 252 inmates whom he encountered and by the fact that they already controlled the internal space of the pavilion. Murals with revolutionary slogans and pictures of their leader, Abimael Guzmán, for instance, adorned the pavilion's walls (Gorriti, 1982). Two years later, in October 1984, a reporter for the *Oiga* weekly magazine also visited El Frontón, which he called 'Shining Path's Liberated Territory' (Barraza, 1984). He found about 400 inmates who exercised complete control over their daily routine without any interference from prison authorities or guards, except for the times when the doors were opened (6 a.m.) or closed (6 p.m.). Prison officers were no longer conducting searches (*requisas*) or even performing roll calls (*conteos*), and food preparation was carried on by the inmates, not by prison employees. During the daytime, Shining Path inmates, according to the report, could step out of the cellblock and bathe freely in the ocean without any supervision (escaping was almost impossible because of strong ocean currents). Inside the pavilion, and especially after the 6 p.m. curfew, inmates held assemblies, received indoctrination lectures, chanted their hymns and slogans, and even conducted military exercises. During the weekly visits by their relatives and lawyers, Shining Path inmates were in charge of the logistics, sometimes organising festivities and celebrations, and even allowing some visitors to stay overnight. Attempts by prison authorities to exercise greater control over visits, by issuing IDs to the inmates' relatives (*carnetización*) were defeated by Shining Path inmates. Even more seriously, they were able to dig tunnels and build underground shelters in the Blue Pavilion using construction materials that were introduced with the consent of prison authorities (Cristóbal, 1987: 58). A similar degree of control of their own space was also acquired in Lurigancho's Industrial Pavilion. Lawyer Martha Huatay, an outspoken defender of accused Shining Path prisoners and later a prisoner herself, described the functioning of prisons under Shining Path control as 'a monument and a spark of what collective work could do in a new society' (Huatay, 2002: 33).

How did Shining Path prisoners manage to secure control of their own cellblocks inside the prisons? Studies about political imprisonment in different societies show how political inmates tend to be exceptionally well organised and disciplined, and capable of developing structures of relative autonomy that allow them to resist the power of the prison system, strengthen their morale and preserve their cohesion (Buntman, 2003; Neier, 1995), but what Shining Path prisoners accomplished is well beyond any other case of which I know. Video footage from TV news reports and two documentaries

(*People of the Shining Path*, a 1992 documentary by the British Channel 4 and *Régimen Penitenciario* (2002), by the CVR) confirms what the journalistic reports quoted above depicted: except for external security, they controlled all aspects of their daily life. How could this happen? On the one hand, the functioning of prisons in Peru left much to be desired in terms of efficiency and security. There was a time, also in the 1980s, when the internal order of the Lurigancho prison was in the hands of prisoners, governed by the structures of hierarchy developed within the criminal population, as described in a fascinating book by anthropologist José Luis Pérez Guadalupe (1994). Poorly paid guards and employees, corrupted authorities, and a general state of abandonment characterised Peruvian prisons in the 1980s. A series of riots organised by common criminals, some of them quite deadly, had shocked the country, but little was done to reform the system. When Shining Path members began to fill the prisons, their discipline and determination sharply contrasted with the overall conditions of prisons and the situation of most common criminals; not surprisingly, they were able to challenge and subvert the rules that the state attempted to impose on them.

Shining Path inmates started by enforcing an iron discipline and an almost religious mystique among their fellow activists, something that was in fact a characteristic of the party as a whole. Prisoners who were not willing to yield to the authority of the party were either expelled from the cellblock or subjected to constant harassment and violence. Whenever a prison authority or guard attempted to implement measures that Shining Path considered unfair, restrictive or arbitrary, they and their families were threatened with retaliation. Not only guards, but even higher authorities preferred not to risk their, or their relatives', safety because they knew that the insurgents were capable of identifying their residences and whereabouts, and could cause a great deal of harm. Shining Path inmates also convinced prison authorities that they were indeed willing to fight until the end if they attempted to impose drastic measures against them. It was clearly a contest of wills. *Requisas*, for instance, were strenuously resisted, with Shining Path inmates threatening that, if they attempted new searches, it would lead to a situation of 'total confrontation' in which they were willing to die. Not surprisingly, the El Frontón authorities decided to discontinue them.

Prison mutinies were a common tactic used by Shining Path prisoners to negotiate their conditions of incarceration and obtain from the authorities certain privileges. There were eight such instances before June 1986, and all of them were solved after negotiations between inmates and the authorities, which always included concessions on the part of the authorities or the promise of improvement in prison conditions. We must clarify, however, that the fact that Shining Path inmates controlled their own cellblocks or that the authorities were forced to accept certain conditions does not mean that

prisoners necessarily enjoyed a comfortable life or were free of harassment and even violence from prison personnel. They were still vulnerable in many ways. They suffered from shortages of water, food and medicines, for instance, and their relatives were mistreated during weekly visits or harassed, and treated as suspects by police and prison employees. Prisons, thus, were always on the brink of erupting into violence and, as such, they mirrored the war going on outside their walls. But riots and negotiations almost always ended with prison authorities surrendering a piece of their power and Shining Path inmates gaining increasing control over their lives, time and space. While, from a certain perspective, this was a sign of weakness on the part of state and prison authorities, the truth is that they were willing to go that way in order to avoid a much more serious confrontation.

The *Oiga* reporter had ended his 1984 article with an ominous question (and prediction):

Will the final hour arrive? Everybody is prepared: the terrorist inmates, the guards, and the prison employees. The latter say that they are ready to put an end to the 'liberated territory' of the Shining Path in El Frontón with the use of paralysing gases that would cause no victims. But they are afraid that the Guardias Republicanos would intervene to take revenge for the victims of the Shining Path that belonged to their institution. When will the ticking bomb explode? (Barraza, 1984: 35)

The first sign that things began to change with the new Aprista administration would come just a few months after its inauguration in July 1985. On 4 October 1985, a riot erupted in Lurigancho when the authorities attempted a *requisa*. About 30 prisoners were killed during the operation to put down the mutiny. A few days later, delegates of Shining Path inmates and prison authorities agreed to honour the July 1985 accord of 24 points, signed by the previous administration. While negotiation was still possible, as the signing of a new document illustrates, the government signalled that it was less willing to yield to the Shining Path's strategy of confrontation and challenge. Tensions were heightened when the APRA government announced the transfer of Shining Path prisoners to the new high-security Canto Grande prison. Shining Path denounced this as part of a 'genocidal' plan put in motion by the 'fascist' state, and made the decision to resist it to the point of death. On 7 June 1986, a communiqué written by female Shining Path inmates 'secluded in this dark concentration camp of Callao' denounced the 'genocidal plan against political prisoners'. The transfer to Canto Grande was viewed as an attempt to isolate them from their relatives and to apply 'total annihilation'. Speaking for themselves, but also for their fellow male inmates, they announced that they were 'willing to resist and let the blood pour in El Frontón,

Lurigancho, and El Callao' (Cristóbal, 1987: 17–18). Antonio Díaz Martínez, a prominent member of the Shining Path, denounced, two days before the mutiny (he obviously knew of the preparations for it), 'the new genocidal plan that the government is preparing against inmates in various prisons' (Mora, 2003: 11). Unfortunately, the events that unfolded shortly afterwards would tragically fulfil their prophecy.

In the perception of large sectors of the public opinion, on the other hand, the state was too tolerant with 'subversion'. The dirty war was imposing its logic to the conflict and the voices demanding respect for human and legal rights for Shining Path inmates, and other suspects were increasingly being questioned as the insurgents' attacks escalated. The picture emerging from media reports about the state of prisons was alarming for both state authorities and the general public: there was too much leniency with 'terrorists', who used prisons to indoctrinate activists, prepare new attacks and challenge the authority of the state. The president of the CCFFAA saw El Frontón as 'a center where subversive or terrorist acts could be planned' (CVR: 2003c: 240). Both sides seemed to be ready for a violent clash when the mutinies erupted in June 1986.

The Dirty War

The overall confrontational strategy pursued by the Shining Path – total war against the Peruvian state and its allies – included a conscious tactic of provoking the harshest response on the part of the Peruvian state: this would show what actually lay behind its façade and would convince the population of its 'genocidal' nature. A fierce response by the state was actually welcomed by the Shining Path, as they believed that it served its political and military strategy. 'The forces of reaction are dreaming when they try to drown the revolution in blood. They should know that they are nourishing it, and that this is an inexorable law', declared Guzmán in 1988 (Guzmán, [1988] 1991: 45). On 23 March 1986, during a meeting with Shining Path cadres, Abimael Guzmán ordered them to 'induce the genocide. This is the mandate of the IV Plenary [of the party] [...] Let's destroy their [the government's] plan. And as we destroy their plan, they will apply genocide!' (CVR, 2003c: 239). After the events of June 1986, Abimael Guzmán would admit that one of their tactics was 'to induce the forces of order into greater repression' (CVR, 2003e: 14).

The progress made by the Shining Path in its military strategy and the increasing number of terrorist attacks and selective assassinations, coupled with the seeming inability of the state to stop them, led to growing frustration and the conviction among members of the armed forces, certain sectors of the political establishment and at least part of the general public that the

only way to end subversion was to utilise *mano dura* (firm hand): harsher counter-subversive tactics, intimidation methods and brutal repression. The niceties of the rule of law and the respect for human rights were increasingly seen as obstacles in the fight against terrorism and a luxury that Peruvian society could not afford. Various massacres of people considered suspect were committed during the Belaúnde administration (1980–1985), and the number of victims of political violence spiralled after the December 1982 decision to send the army to combat the guerrillas. From 47 in 1982, the number of victims considered to be members of Shining Path grew to 1,398.

Simultaneously, the number of injured suspects taken alive decreased dramatically, which clearly reflects a deliberate tactic of getting rid of ‘terrorists’ without mercy. The disappearance of people and the use of clandestine burial sites became common practice (Flores Galindo, 1994: 323–324). General Luis Cisneros Vizquerra, Minister of War, described the situation in the following terms:

[The Army] would have to kill both terrorists and non-terrorists because [that] would be the only way to guarantee their success. They kill 60 people and maybe there are three senderistas [among them] [...] and most likely the police will say that the 60 were terrorists [...] I think that it would be the worst choice and that is why I’m opposed to the Army entering into this struggle until it is strictly necessary. (González, 1983: 50)

The army did indeed enter the war, and the ‘worst choice’ became a reality. After a top naval officer, Carlos Ponce Canessa, was killed by the Shining Path on 5 May 1986 (a little over a month before the June 1986 prison mutinies), the Minister of the Navy, Julio Pacheco Concha, stated: ‘The subversives should know that they have caused a deep injury to the Institution and to the entire country, and they should know that they have woken up the lion’ (CVR, 2003c: 237). Although the new administration of García Pérez promised to be respectful of human rights in its efforts to end subversion, the situation did not improve. A massacre of innocent people in Accomarca, during which a two-year old child was thrown into a fire, an act justified by one of the perpetrators, Lieutenant Telmo Hurtado, because ‘at that age they [the indigenous inhabitants of the Peruvian highlands] are already terrorists’, led to the dismissal of three army officers, but other similarly brutal actions did not generate any meaningful response on the part of the government (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 16). The army was allowed a free hand to employ its own tactics, which included systematic and indiscriminate violence against civilians and innocent people, especially in the highlands. Frustration with the lack of progress in the war against the Shining Path led to demands for

swift justice, the application of the death penalty, and other radical measures. Conservative commentator Manuel D'Ornellas had stated on TV just a few days before the June 1986 riots that prisons were 'subversive centers' and that inmates should be 'annihilated' (Cristóbal, 1987: 173). When asked about the Shining Path's decision to die if necessary in order to avoid their transfer to Canto Grande, General Cisneros Vizquerra said: 'I think we should satisfy their wish [to die]. It is one of the few satisfactions we could grant to the subversives. If they prefer that, let them sign a document and let's proceed. The state will satisfy their personal wishes' (Cristóbal, 1987: 30).

Even President García had declared, when asked about a wave of strikes in the country, that his patience had reached the limit. This was on 23 May 1986, less than a month before the massacre of prisoners (Cristóbal, 1987: 101). When the mutinies erupted in June 1986, very few voices within the state were willing to speak in the language of dialogue, tolerance or patience, and public opinion seemed to share the same impatience towards subversion. Isolated voices were raised in an effort to stop the spiral of violence. A public statement signed by prominent Peruvian intellectuals – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Antonio Cornejo Polar, Alberto Flores Galindo, Max Hernández, Mirko Lauer, and many others – and entitled *United for life* (*Unidos por la vida*) was published on 15 June 1986. 'The voices that demand eye for an eye are growing', they warned, and asked Peruvians to unite behind the defence of life against the forces of both *senderista* violence and indiscriminate repression (Cristóbal, 1987: 23). Tragically, their invocation was not heard, and just a few days later more ominous signs that the eye for an eye approach was gaining momentum would shock their conscience.

Official and media depictions of the Shining Path contributed to the demonising of its members and sympathisers, and made the repeated calls for harsher responses to their insurgency look more acceptable. Insurgents were almost always described as 'terrorists', with other terms such as insurgents, revolutionaries, rebels or subversives considered soft, or even sympathetic to their cause, and thus gradually obliterated. The visual display of the effects of its violent actions in TV and other media – destroyed buildings, bridges, or electrical towers, suffering victims, bloody attacks against innocent people – helped reinforce the depiction of them as inhuman murderers who had no political agenda and were only interested in causing damage and destruction. They were constantly referred to as enemies of the fatherland, as a minuscule group of insane people in a war against the entire nation. This campaign was quite successful, because of the Shining Path's own brutality and terrorist methods but also because of the (real or attributed) ethnic background of most Shining Path members and suspects, who were seen as indigenous or *serranos* (people from the highlands) and, thus, dangerous, deceitful, and undeserving. Although the main leaders of the Shining Path

and many of its members were 'white' or *mestizos*, the fact that the insurgency started in Ayacucho, one of the areas with the largest percentage of indigenous population, and many of its members were Quechua-speaking and had indigenous racial features, contributed to the widely held perception of 'terrorists' as 'Indians' and, thus, to reinforcing the notion that Shining Path activists were sub-human, savage, and undeserving of the protection that the law (in theory) accorded Peruvian citizens (Aguirre, 2011). As cultural critic Jean Franco has emphasised, the widespread view of Indians as 'alien to modernity' greatly contributed not only to state indiscriminate repression against peoples of indigenous descent, but also to popular support for harsh repression against the Maoist movement (Franco, 2006).

Calls to protect their human rights were dismissed as signs of weakness or open collaboration with the 'enemy'. Peruvians of all walks of life who suffered in one way or another from their actions were clearly willing to justify each and all forms of repression against Shining Path militants. There was no other way of eliminating subversion, they seemed to believe, than using the strongest (even if illegal) weapons available to authorities. As the war moved to Lima, the capital of the country and the centre of political and economic power, that idea became much more entrenched in the minds of various sectors of Peruvian society. Although few people could have predicted what happened in Lima's prisons on 18–19 June 1986, the scenario was ripe for a tragedy of enormous proportions.

The Unfolding of a Massacre

As stated above, the mutinies started simultaneously in three prisons in the Lima-Callao area. At Lurigancho, the mutiny started when one penitentiary agent was taken hostage at 6 a.m.³ Judicial authorities arrived to inquire about the situation, but were unable to make any progress in solving the situation. Tension began to mount, as more GR troops were sent to the prison and relatives grew impatient as a result of the cancellation of visits. Penitentiary agents were reassured by the rebels that the hostage was being well treated. Around 11.30 a.m. the rebels presented to a prosecutor (*fiscal*) a 26-point platform, showed him the hostage, and announced that he would be freed only if their petitions were satisfied. In the next few hours, a series of attempts by prison and judicial authorities to convince the prisoners to end their mutiny did not lead to changes in the situation. Around 2 p.m.,

3 In the text that follows, I summarize the events using information contained in the report written by the Peruvian Congress's commission formed in the aftermath of the massacre (Ames, 1988; CVR, 2003c: 234–263; CVR, 2003e).

military commanders were notified of the government's decision to bring in the army to reestablish order in Lurigancho, with support from the GR, and military personnel began to be mobilised towards the prison. At 5.15 p.m., the CCFFAA issued a series of directives to the GR, detailing the objectives of the operation: to recover control of the prison, to rescue the hostages (referred to in the plural, although there was just one), to recover weapons seized by the rebels (who actually had none) and to facilitate the transfer of inmates to Canto Grande. It was also decided that it was going to be the duty of the GR to intervene in the Industrial Pavilion, with the army providing critical support in the use of explosives to facilitate such mission. A total of 159 GR troops were chosen to carry out the mission. A government-sponsored Peace Commission, formed in 1985, arrived at Lurigancho but could not talk to the director or the inmates and left the prison after 30 minutes. In the meantime, a series of communications indicated the mounting level of impatience among several military authorities. It is clear that military and GR commanders felt compelled to demand a more rapid intervention: they had been instructed to try to solve the crisis as soon as possible, but lack of coordination and of a well-thought plan made the operation much more difficult.

Around 8 p.m., the director of the prison made contact with the rebels, who told him that they would rather die than suspend the mutiny to negotiate with the authorities. The order to start the attack against the Industrial Pavilion was given to Army General Jorge Rabanal Portilla, who was in charge of the operation, around 8.40 p.m.. The GR would execute the plan, and an army unit (CEC 501) was going to be available in case they were needed. The director of the prison asked for a written order, but he was told to leave formalities aside. GR and army troops arrived in Lurigancho around 9 p.m.

It was only around 10 p.m. that an actual plan began to develop. The idea was to have CEC 501 open two holes (*boquetes* or *forados*) in the Industrial Pavilion's walls to allow GR personnel to enter the building, rescue the hostage and force the rebels out. Shortly after midnight, a final contact was made by the prison director with the rebels, with no results. They were told that a military operation was about to start, but the rebels responded that they already knew the army's 'genocidal' intentions. The final operation started around 12.30 a.m. Two explosives opened only a small hole, and GRs began to shoot through it. Army commanders began to throw grenades, while snipers began to fire towards the Industrial Pavilion from nearby locations. Additional explosives were used to try to open bigger holes, without positive results. At 1.40 a.m., Colonel Cabezas, commander of the GR's anti-subversive unit, arrived at the scene. More powerful explosives brought by the army were able to finally open a huge hole. When GRs entered the Industrial Pavilion, inmates attacked them with home-made weapons, but a group of GRs, under the command of Lieutenant Jorge Loyola Felipe,

was able to enter the pavilion, rescue the hostage, encircle the rebels and force them to surrender. There were already about 30 inmates dead as a result of the exchange of fire during the attack. The survivors began to leave the pavilion through the hole. When the hostage left the pavilion, police members mistakenly took him for a rebel, and began to hit him violently, until somebody recognised him.

It is at this point that surrendered inmates began to be executed by a GR squad, commanded by Colonel Cabezas. As soon as they left the Industrial Pavilion, they were asked to lie on the floor and were shot in the head. The executions were witnessed by members of the army unit, GRs and penitentiary agents. The order had come, apparently, from Colonel Cabezas. GR Corporal Roque David Huanca Condori declared that he saw 'how the interns from the Industrial Pavillion were leaving; some did it crawling, others stooped, and others with their hands over their heads; later I have seen how these interns were executed' (Ministerio del Interior, 1986). GR guard Baltazar Ramos Paival also saw members of the GR and the army 'shooting at interns that were lying face-down on the floor'. GR guard Félix César Romani Yactayo stated that 'the officers that shot against the interns that were lying on the floor were about 15 to 20, including GR and army personnel'. Another GR guard, Marco Antonio Rimapa Jiménez, reported that, as the inmates left the Pavilion they were surrounded by members of the GR and the army, and that he heard the order to kill them: 'elimínenlos' ('eliminate them!'). He added that one officer ordered other guards to 'see who is alive', and whoever was found alive was killed, but he could not identify who actually fired the shots. Other witnesses confirmed that members of the army also participated in the massacre, shooting against injured and surrendered inmates. GR guard Pedro Quilla Mendivil testified that he saw that 'about thirty subversives were taken out and were lying on the floor with their hands behind their necks; under those circumstances, GR and army personnel on their own initiative decided to shot and kill them, [and] that nobody, neither Colonel Cabezas nor the Army commanders attempted to impede [the executions]'. He actually testified that he saw Cabezas shoot two subversives. Another guard asserted that he heard a rumour saying 'just do it, we are protected by the government' ('actúen nomás, estamos amparados por el gobierno'). GR guard Máximo Retuerto Moreno said that he thought that the order came from Cabezas because 'he witnessed the events' and he saw Cabezas shoot an inmate who was holding his hands against his neck two metres away. GR Lieutenant Justino Campos Alarcón testified that he asked Cabezas (without knowing that it was him, since he was wearing a mask) who had given the order to kill, but that Cabezas only responded with expletives. When Cabezas tried to leave, Campos removed his (Cabezas's) mask, and only then he was able to identify the Colonel. Campos even apologised to him. Penitentiary

Agent Willy Ríos also offered a first-hand account: 'There must have been more than one hundred. A lot of them were leaving [the Pavilion]. All of them were alive. They left with their hands behind their necks. They had surrendered, they were giving themselves in. They took all of them out, they left little by little.' Later, he continued, it was ordered that the terrorists return to the pavilion and then that they should leave in groups of five. They were ordered to kneel and asked for the whereabouts of Abimael Guzmán. As they did not respond, 'I saw a GR guard shoot one of them in the head. He did the same with the other four that were on their knees [. . .] When I saw this I felt repugnance.' He told another agent: 'Hey, they are killing them, they are killing them.' A policeman, in tears, told him that they were being forced to kill, but that he did not want to do it, and stayed with Ríos (Ramírez, 2003).

By dawn, all Shining Path prisoners who had surrendered had been executed. Ríos gave a reporter his impressions: 'At dawn I was able to enter the scene. I was shocked. All the terrorists were dead. There were piles of them. It was a mountain of corpses, a sort of human pyramid. It was a macabre spectacle' (Ramírez, 2003).

At El Frontón, on the other hand, rebels took three hostages, all of them members of the GR, and seized their weapons (three G3 rifles and one FMK-3 automatic rifle). Attempts were made to establish a dialogue with the rebels, but they did not respond. At 2.30 p.m., the Peace Commission arrived and spoke to the rebels through an amplifier, invoking them to end their mutiny. When they got no response, they left. Between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., a special naval squad called FOES arrived on the island. Deputy-Minister of the Interior, Agustín Mantilla, also arrived and remained in El Frontón for the entire duration of the operation. The attack against the Blue Pavilion started around 5.15 p.m. Two rockets were launched to open a hole that would allow the troops to enter the pavilion. Rebels were well-protected by internal structures which they had built, and responded to the firing using the weapons they had seized, injuring several members of the navy. Inmates never stopped singing and shouting their hymns and slogans ('Long live the armed struggle, President Gonzalo, Communism!') and insulting marines ('mass murderers, cowards') (Pocorpachi Vallejos, 2002). But this was clearly an uneven battle. More powerful explosives were used and a hole was finally opened at 6 p.m. Exchange of fire continued. At 8 p.m. more army and GR troops arrived. One inmate was able to leave the pavilion and told officers that the prisoners who wanted to surrender were being stabbed by Shining Path prisoners. He also told officers that there were ditches used by the rebels to protect themselves against the attacks. The exchange of fire and fierce resistance on the part of Shining Path prisoners continued. At around 3 a.m., FOES took over the operation, under the command of Rear-Admiral Luis Giampietri. They began using much more powerful weaponry. One

more time the rebels were asked to surrender, but once again they refused. At some point, FOES forces were replaced by marines, under the command of Rear-Admiral Vega Llona. At about 6.00 a.m. the final assault started and marines finally entered the Blue Pavilion around 8.30 a.m., shooting and throwing grenades.

There were still prisoners resisting the assault, many of them injured. Testimonies of Shining Path survivors described the carnage: there were inmates who had been decapitated or had lost arms and legs. One of them, who had lost both legs, begged to be killed. It was about 2 p.m. when the surviving inmates finally surrendered. They threw away their weapons, released two of the hostages (the other had been killed in the exchange of fire), and began to leave the pavilion. They were ordered to lie on the floor, but some of them were removed from the group and then executed. Witnesses have stated that inmates who looked like leaders were among those picked for execution. Others were found in the tunnels, taken out of the building and shot, while others were stabbed with knives in different parts of the body. Testimonies of both Shining Path survivors and GRs coincide in the description of what happened. An anonymous marine who was present blames Vega Llona for giving the order to execute prisoners: 'Mátenlos' (Kill them!) is what he would have said (Anonymous, 2003). According to Jesús Mejía Huerta, who miraculously survived the massacre, the bodies of those executed were thrown into ditches, showered with fuel and burned.

But then another decision was made: to completely demolish the Blue Pavilion. There are contradictory versions as to who gave the order. Deputy-Minister Mantilla is mentioned by several witnesses as the person who ordered the demolition (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 32; CVR, 2003a). Attorney General Elejalde was present on the island when the demolition started, along with a member of the Supreme Court, but they did nothing to stop it, even if they knew that there were inmates still alive inside. Several powerful explosions were heard. The building collapsed, burying both dead and alive prisoners inside the Blue Pavilion. That was considered the end of the operation. Officially, there were 34 survivors. The rest, 117, were dead, 90 of them executed after they had surrendered. Three marines were dead and five were injured. One of the hostages also died (CVR, 2003e).

In the Santa Bárbara prison, the air force was in charge of the operation. Their entrance was swift and much easier than in the other two prisons, because they found virtually no resistance. A GR officer blindly shot against the cells from where Shining Path inmates were insulting and harassing the troops, killing two inmates (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 47).

The bodies of most victims of the massacre were never returned to their relatives for proper burial. Only four out of the 97 recovered bodies from El

Frontón were identified. They were secretly buried in several cemeteries in localities near Lima.

The Aftermath

President García Pérez praised the armed forces for a job well done and added that 'the operation's outcome is regrettable, but it has demonstrated to the country that the authority has been imposed' (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 49). The CVR concluded that the government already knew about the extrajudicial executions when they issued the congratulatory declaration. The government and the armed forces issued various statements that contained false or misleading information. On 19 June, for instance, the CCFFAA's press office informed the country that 'many of them [died in Lurigancho] due to asphyxia and burnings that occurred inside the fortifications they had built and that they refused to leave, offering resistance with explosives, fire guns, and cutting instruments for twelve hours'. The same communiqué declared prisons as 'military zones', with the clear goal of placing the investigation in the hands of a military tribunal and preventing civilian and judicial authorities and political opposition leaders from entering it (Cristobal, 1987:160). This was clearly an anti-constitutional measure that reveals the intention of covering up the massacre.

Initial reactions by political leaders and public opinion seem to coincide in their satisfaction with the 'solution' which the government had found to the crisis, lamenting the loss of lives but basically expressing their support for the energy used to put down the mutinies. A daily newspaper summarised these sentiments with the following headline: 'From their own medicine' (Cristóbal, 1987: 97). Even leftist opposition leader and Mayor of Lima Alfonso Barrantes gave the impression of endorsing the official version of the events: 'The mutiny had to be put down', he declared to a local newspaper (Elejalde, 1986). 'Those who mutinied are the ones that violated the law', he told another paper, suggesting that the government had done the right thing in swiftly eliminating the rebellion (Elejalde, 1986). Attorney general Elejalde did not hesitate to state that 'the lives of those that surrendered were respected' (Elejalde, 1986). Archbishop of Lima Augusto Vargas Alzamora concurred: 'I wouldn't condemn the government' ('No me atrevería a condenar al gobierno') (*Oiga*, 1986). Gradually, though, human rights activists, victims' relatives, opposition leaders and independent journalists began to unearth the truth, and began to raise their voices in condemnation of the massacre (Cristóbal, 1987). The independent weekly magazine *Caretas* (in no way sympathetic to the Shining Path) called the government's actions 'deliberate extermination' ('exterminio deliberado') (Cristóbal, 1987: 63). The

government, after its initial complacent statement, finally admitted that some 'excesses' had been committed and promised both a full investigation and sanctions to those that may be found guilty. President García Pérez visited Lurigancho (but not El Frontón) and emphatically declared: 'Either the ones responsible for this or I will have to go' ('O se van todos los responsables o me voy yo') On 24 June, the president spoke to the nation, insisting that the outcome was 'terrible but inevitable', admitting that between 30 and 40 inmates in Lurigancho had been executed by GRs, and announcing an investigation. Later, he called the GRs 'assassins' and demanded a 'historical sanction' against those responsible for the murders (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 57).

The official investigation was placed in the hands of a military tribunal, which found Colonel Cabezas and 52 GR personnel responsible for the execution of inmates in Lurigancho. But the army, which was in charge of the operation along with the GR, was relieved, by both García and the military tribunal, of any responsibility (Haya de la Torre, 1988: 37). The report of a special commission named by the Minister of the Interior concluded: 'There is clear evidence to conclude that there have been excesses in the intervention of the police in these events' and found responsible, among others, Colonel Cabezas and 52 members of the Anti-Subversive unit under his command. It also found responsibility on the part of Martínez Lara and other officers who, even if they did not participate in the executions, 'from their locations they saw the excesses committed against the prisoners that left alive from the Industrial Pavilion and did not adopt effective measures to impede them' (Ministerio del Interior, 1986: 32). In El Frontón, the tribunal found no blame for the Navy in the massacre, despite an internal investigation report that blamed Vega Llona for the decision to execute prisoners and destroy the Pavilion (Vega Llona was murdered by a Shining Path squad in La Paz on 9 December 1988). The sentence, issued on 6 July 1987, stated that the navy had fulfilled the mission given to them and that it had respected the life of the 34 inmates who had surrendered. The collapse of the Blue Pavilion, the military judge concluded, should be attributed to the weakening of its structures resulting from the changes made by the inmates themselves and the detonation of explosives stored by the prisoners inside the building (CVR, 2003e: 77). Later, a commission formed by the Peruvian Congress and presided over by a member of the opposition, Senator Rolando Ames, ended up issuing two reports. Both agreed on the reconstruction of the facts, but disagreed on the attribution of responsibilities. The minority report, signed by Ames and other members of the opposition, suggested that political responsibility should reach the president and his cabinet for making a series of decisions that allowed the massacres to happen. The Congress approved the majority report that, not surprisingly,

denied any responsibility on the part of the president and his cabinet. In 2003, the CVR report shared the conclusions of the minority report, attributing 'serious political responsibility' to García Pérez and his cabinet members (CVR, 2003c: 261).

Explaining the Horror

The collective decision made by the government and the commanders of the armed forces to militarise the problem, without serious concern for the lives of the prisoners, and their reluctance to even attempt a different solution to the crisis were the driving force behind the unfolding of this tragedy. Agustín Haya de la Torre (1988: 39) put it this way: 'The motivation to intervene militarily determines and precipitates everything.' This decision was coupled by an almost desperate preoccupation with solving the crisis at the earliest possible moment, which came from the highest authority: the President of the Republic. The signals were clear: he wanted a swift operation. According to the President of the CCFFAA, 'there was a direct interest on the part of the President of the Republic that the intervention started as soon as possible' (CVR, 2003e: 54). Lieutenant Loyola declared that, once the operation was over, Colonel Cabezas told him that 'there are times in which you don't like the orders, but you have to obey them', and added that one day he would understand that 'if the President so orders, what can we do?' According to journalist Augusto Zimmermann, during a breakfast he had with President García Pérez and Minister of Justice González Posada on 16 June 1986, two days before the massacre, the president had asked, as if thinking aloud, 'What would happen if we get rid of all the Senderistas?' Then he answered his own question (which he later denied: Alava, 2003): 'Nothing, absolutely nothing'. While the responsibility of the president continues to be debated in legal and political terms, he certainly sent a clear message to the effect that he expected this crisis to be solved quickly and militarily, not through dialogue or the use of peaceful measures to dissuade the insurgents.

Although the imminent arrival of dozens of foreign visitors, and the impending inauguration of the Congress of socialist and social-democrat parties undoubtedly contributed to that sense of urgency, much more important in the decision to militarise the conflict and demand a quick 'solution' was the perception that doing otherwise would send a wrong message and that the time had arrived to 'satisfy' the subversives' 'wishes', as General Cisneros Vizquerra had put it, or to give them 'some of their own medicine'. A swift solution was in tune with the president's loss of patience and the disregard for human lives stemming from perceptions about their inhumanity and undeserving nature. If 'terrorists' were winning the war because, as

many thought, of the lack of energy on the part of the state, then this was the time to give them a lesson. The mutinies had to be put down at any cost. As many commentators have emphasised, at no time did the government make any meaningful effort to minimise the loss of life or to conduct the operation following strictly legal procedures.

Officers in charge of the operation knew (or expected) that the use of extreme force and the disregard for human life were not going to be questioned and that, if they were, they could get away with it. They felt reassured that they were doing the right thing. They interpreted the orders as meaning a 'direct military' operation and a 'combat action', as Army General Guillermo Monzón Arrunátegui stated (CVR, 2003c: 247). After all, civilians had put the solution of the crisis almost entirely in their hands. In an interview after the June 1986 events, Deputy-Minister of the Interior Agustín Mantilla undoubtedly trying to minimise his own role in the massacre, declared that, when the Navy took control of the El Frontón island, 'we [i.e. the government] had nothing, absolutely nothing to do there' (Cristóbal, 1987:106). The Attorney General (Fiscal de la Nación) was present on the island when the bombing of the Blue Pavilion started and did nothing to stop it. According to the CVR, judicial and penitentiary authorities were prevented from exercising their functions and were excluded from any decision about the management of the crisis. 'The haste demanded from the Armed Forces and their lack of experience in this kind of situation prevented an adequate preparation of the operations; this, along with the 'military' character of the operation, brought about an improvised and violent intervention that caused unnecessary injuries and deaths among the rebels and the armed forces' (CVR, 2003c: 248).

Putting down the mutinies thus became a military operation: the government chose the cruelest, the harshest and the most punitive solution. Senator Armando Villanueva del Campo, an important leader of the ruling party, justified the decision by saying that 'there was no alternative' (Cristóbal, 1987: 188), but clearly there were other possible avenues to solve the crisis. Former member of the Peace Commission Diego García Sayán lamented that other methods were not used: 'Was it, he wondered, to satisfy the thirst for revenge within military institutions, instead of pursuing an effective project to pacify the country?' (Cristóbal, 1987: 323). And when asked whether the armed forces went out with the intention of killing, he responded affirmatively (Cristóbal, 1987: 323). Agustín Haya de la Torre (1988: 34), then a member of the opposition (and now a member of APRA), condemned the fact that 'the goal was to eliminate them'. After the events, Fernando Cabieses, a member of the Peace Commission, admitted that their efforts in trying to avoid the massacre were 'childish'. 'This was a battle that was already coming', he added ('una batalla que ya se venía') (Cristóbal, 1987: 187).

Thus, on the part of state officers, an authoritarian, militaristic reaction, shared by civilians and army officers alike and nurtured by frustration with the lack of success in the war against the Shining Path and a perception of 'terrorists' as undeserving and sub-human, led to the unfolding of the tragedy. Prisons were seen as spaces where the state had surrendered its authority and the insurgents had taken advantage; mutinies like the ones that erupted in June 1986 reinforced the perception that prisoners were being too defiant and that it was time to restore order and authority.

But the massacre also responded to Shining Path's strategy of confrontation and provocation. They pushed the government's tolerance to the limit and consciously and explicitly inserted the 'genocide' option within their strategy. A communiqué issued by prisoners' relatives after the massacre stated that 'this was a planned rebellion ('*rebelión preparada*') because they knew that the genocide was coming' (Cristóbal, 1987: 227). Indeed, they seemed to work to make it happen. They prepared for it, and when they saw it coming, they felt that it was the realisation of a plan and the fulfillment of a prophecy: if they died, it was for a cause, and their death would further confirm that they had been right.

Historian Pablo Macera wrote shortly after the events that this was 'the greatest political victory for the Shining Path' (Macera, 1986: 39). Was this actually the case? The insurgents lost 250 members (in a way, they had already lost them, because they were locked away in prisons from which it was very hard to escape, and many had received lengthy sentences), but they won a moral victory that reinforced the mystique among their members: 18 June became the 'Day of Heroism' in Shining Path's calendar. Accounts given to the CVR by survivors of the El Frontón massacre highlighted the heroism and resolution of Shining Path prisoners. One of them (Nicolás) emphasised how '*arrancamos lauros a la misma muerte para gloria del Presidente Gonzalo, del Partido, de la Revolución*' ('we took honour in death, for the glory of President Gonzalo, the Party, and the Revolution'). They had resisted as the Party had taught us, we had agitated and sung our song "We are the initiators", which is very appropriate: "If we die in battle with our bodies mutilated, if we die in battle with our bodies in pieces (*desgarrado*), death will be welcomed, because it is a dignified death (*muerte digna*)". [...] They have not silenced us even in our agony [...] My morale is now higher, my class hatred is stronger now, to annihilate this genocidal regime' (CVR, n.d).

On the other hand, the massacre did certainly prove to be a serious moral and political defeat for the government, but it was only temporary and, with the exception of Colonel Cabezas and the GR guards acting under his command, everybody else was shielded from any legal responsibilities. In the long run, the massacre did not erode the legitimacy or popularity of the García Pérez administration, and it definitely did not decrease the

population's support for harsh measures and *mano dura*. A year later, the government's decision to nationalise the bank system would generate a much stronger response on the part of large sectors of the population and the political opposition. Clearly, economic decisions were much more important in the imaginary of the population than 'excesses' in the anti-subversive war that targetted Shining Path prisoners. The voices condemning the massacre and demanding both an investigation and punishment of the perpetrators were few and almost muted.

Shining Path, ultimately, did not significantly improve its image as a result of this massacre. It gave them cohesion and reinforced their mystique; it allowed Guzmán to insist that they were going in the right direction by combatting a genocidal state, and it confirmed them in the conviction that this was a war to the death with the 'fascist' state. But, in the larger context of a society under the stress of the war, the events of 18–19 June did not translate into more sympathetic views of the insurgents. The massacre was just one more incident – a horrendous one, indeed – in a long list of atrocities committed by the state and the insurgents during the war. In fact, the June 1986 massacre did not trigger a wave of indignation among the Peruvian public. Sadly but not surprisingly, the imposition of brutal state repression seems to have been approved by large sectors of the population. A poll taken in Lima shortly after the massacre showed that 75 percent of people supported the government's handling of the prison crisis, although that percentage declined sharply later, when more complete information about the atrocities was revealed (Flores Galindo, 1988: 245). Opposition parties and media, as well as human rights activists, forced the issue and the government had to at least offer the impression that it did not condone the 'excesses' and that it was willing to punish those responsible for them.

However, there was no wave of indignation among large sectors of the population, certainly not one comparable to the reaction to the brutal assassination by Shining Path, in February 1992, of María Elena Moyano, a leftist grassroots organiser in a shanty town in Lima. In the latter case, massive demonstrations of popular indignation repudiated Moyano's murder. Popular sensibility did not visibly express a similar condemnation of the prison massacre in June 1986. I suggest that the war brought to the surface what I would call a popular version of authoritarianism, one that was not actually new – it has been historically applied to children, delinquents, women, slaves, students, domestic servants and other subaltern groups – but that acquired a new dimension in the context of a war that was causing destruction, suffering and the forced relocation of people. Shining Path was blamed for all this, so the massacre was interpreted as an appropriate and justified way of dealing with 'terrorism'. This 'popular authoritarianism' would be even more perceptible during the Fujimori administration (1990–2000). Popular support for

mano dura was readily available for Fujimori from ordinary people, eager to get quick solutions to their daily torment of having to deal with assassinations, blackouts, strikes and other forms of Shining Path violence. It actually increased as Fujimori was able to show 'results'. His April 1992 closure of the Peruvian Congress and judiciary, which led him to his dictatorial and anti-constitutional rule (known as the *auto-golpe*), as well as his 'success' in the war against subversion – much of it resulting from the use of extrajudicial mechanisms, such as torture and the disappearance of persons, for which he has since been condemned to 25 years in prison – were backed, at least temporarily, by a majority of the Peruvian population (Burt, 2007).

What we can call a 'clash of authoritarianisms' found its deadly climax in Lima's prisons in June 1986. The Shining Path's political project implied a top-down, authoritarian and fundamentalist view of society, to be imposed by the use of violence even against innocent, ordinary and working-class populations. The state's response made use of similarly violent and authoritarian methods. State repression included intimidation, assassination, illegal executions, disappearance of persons, massacres of innocent people and a general disregard for the rule of law and the protection of human rights of all individuals involved. Many scholars have not hesitated to refer to this clash as a 'dirty war'. The massacre of Shining Path prisoners revealed the militaristic conception with which the state responded to the insurgency, but also the brutality of Shining Path's political methods. At the end, Peruvians confronted a twofold tragedy: first, 250 people lost their lives in one of the deadliest prison massacres in world history and, second, in the perception of most Peruvians – and certainly that of state administrators – it did not really resonate as a real, regrettable tragedy.

Conclusion

As the war launched by the Shining Path in May 1980 escalated, prisons became also arenas of struggle, *luminosas trincheras de combate* (literally, 'shining trenches of struggle'), as they called them. Prisons were not isolated or marginal components of the Shining Path's overall political struggle; quite the opposite. They consciously used prisons as weapons in their radical confrontation with the state. In other words, instead of symbols of their defeat, prisons became arenas of struggle and even weapons to advance their cause. Shining Path did this by dramatically exploiting the aura of horror and resistance that surrounded the prisons so that the outside world would not overlook what was going on inside their walls. Denunciation campaigns about the atrocities that political prisoners faced became not only a way of forcing the authorities to change those conditions, but also – and

probably more importantly – a means for undermining the legitimacy of the government. Simultaneously, the heroism and fortitude of political prisoners were widely publicised by the party, in an effort to demonstrate that, despite the ferocious repression, they were still strong and willing to persist in their struggle.

At the same time, though, the radical and confrontational strategy used by the Shining Path – the ‘everything or nothing’ kind of approach – and the way in which its goals and its members were demonised in media and public opinion debates, made it much more vulnerable to state repression. Shining Path’s success in controlling prisons turned out to be one of the main justifications for the extremely violent response by the García Pérez administration (and, later, the Fujimori administration): prisoners were seen as too defiant and prison conditions were denounced as too lenient, so the government decided that this situation should come to an end and that it was time to apply *mano dura*. It seems as though the Peruvian state did not manage to escape the vicious circle in which it was trapped, the pendulum that oscillated between leniency and brutality.

Finally, it is revealing that the worst massacre of political prisoners in Peru happened under a democratically elected government. This gloomy corroboration speaks to the fragile nature of civilian rule, the restrictive observance of democratic and civil rights, especially for the most vulnerable sectors of the population, and the pervasive influence of a militaristic approach to social and political issues. Peruvian ‘democracy’ – the one that allowed the massacre to happen, and the one that refused to punish the perpetrators – failed to show its moral superiority vis-à-vis those that were trying to destroy it.

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