

Chapter 9: The Terror

Cuba's Revolution deepened the polarization in Latin America. After 1959 the revolutionary left grew increasingly optimistic and more willing than in the past to turn to violent means. The right responded with anxiety, and was likewise increasingly willing to pursue their interests through violence. These conflicts were fueled by global cold-war politics and the growing crisis of Latin American economic models (particularly Import Substitution Industrialization) and the results, in certain cases, were cataclysmic. This chapter focuses on one particular case, the war between *Sendero Luminoso* and the Peruvian state during the 1980s and 1990s.

Most instructors tend to focus on Argentina or Chile when they introduce the dirty wars. We also have some very compelling texts that can be used to teach this period, including Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*, Eric Carlson's *I Remember Julia*, Marguerite Feitlowitz' *A Lexicon of Terror*, and Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*. Some also read Horacio Verbitsky's *The Flight*, a fascinating if deeply troubling text. This chapter acts as both a complement and an alternative to these texts. We ask students to think of the dirty wars both in terms of the cold war and US intervention in Latin America, and in terms of the larger societal terrors that characterized these years. It is easier to dismiss bourgeois fears of the revolutionary left in Argentina, Chile, and even Mexico and Brazil than it is in Peru. Peru does not stand in for other cases, but it does complicate the way we approach the dirty wars as a whole.

The story of Peru's civil conflict does not easily lend itself to Manichean tales of good and evil. Both *Sendero* and the Peruvian state embraced violence in particularly troubling ways during these years, leaving other Peruvians, both rural and urban, to find their way through the chaos. This chapter explores the history of that violence, various responses to it, and the gradual return of civil society in its aftermath.

The documents chosen for this chapter convey something of the ways that certain kinds of language both justified and enacted their own varieties of violence in Peru during these years. We begin with an excerpt from an essay written by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, titled "Inquest in the Andes," which was published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1983. The essay was the outcome of an investigation that Vargas Llosa led into the deaths of eight journalists earlier that year in the village of Uchuraccay. Vargas Llosa was appointed to discover why the journalists were killed, but his critics suggested that his essay did more to occlude our understandings of Andean life than they did to explain it. Furthermore, critics complained that his essay somehow justified the use of violence against rural Andean people.

The second document comes from an interview given by *Sendero* leader Abimael Guzmán to the *senderista* newspaper *El Diario* in 1988. Dubbed "The Interview of the Century," the essay is a rambling justification of a war to the end of the world, but also captures something of what made Guzmán a heroic figure to some. More importantly for our purposes, this section of the interview included mention of *senderista* reprisals against peasants, and explains his own embrace of a kind of annihilating violence against all enemies.

The third text is the statement that accompanied Alberto Fujimori's *autogolpe* in 1992. Following on the first two documents, we can again see the ways in which Fujimori justifies his views through an act of rhetorical (and ultimately physical) violence.

Lastly, we have a brief commentary written by Carolina Huamán Oyague, whose sister was murdered by the secret police in the Cantuta massacre, carried out on July 18, 1992. This text offers a reminder that, for all the dehumanizing language that became so critical in the politics of the era, for all the accusations of terrorism, corruption, and evil, the victims of all this were real people who left behind grieving families.

The juxtaposition of these documents reminds us of a number of things. First, we can see how dehumanizing rhetoric is connected to actual acts of violence. Second, readers are given the opportunity to understand this practice as societal, and not simply the preserve of one political point of view or another. In reading these texts together we are invited to move away from the Manichean tendencies so evident in the texts and imagine the violence itself as a problem.

Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

Is it possible to identify similar tendencies to rationalize violence against an enemy in Vargas Llosa, Guzmán, and Fujimori?

To what extent should we understand these texts and the larger phenomena to which they are connected through reference to the cold war?

Is what happened in Peru related to dirty wars that occurred elsewhere, or should it be considered a distinct phenomenon?

What is to be gained by including the voices of victims in this story?

Was Fujimori's response to *Sendero* proportionate and reasonable?

How do you explain *Sendero*?

Are truth and reconciliation commissions the way out of this morass, or is some other response necessary?