Allegorical painting of the First Shining Path Military Academy, with Abimael Guzmán delivering the day's lesson (ca. 1980). PC: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

The Final Sheathing of *La Cuarta Espada*

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Abimael Guzmán liked to present himself as a studious man who dedicated himself, body and soul, to learning and teaching Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, a doctrine that he held aloft as insurmountable truth. In this sense, he was more of a prophet, or messiah, than a scientist. He was someone who felt that he was called, due to his exceptional intellectual gifts, to lead the socialist revolution in Perú. Thus, he assumed the mantle of representing the poor, strongly condemned the social order, and cried out for justice. His statement was categorical. From his in-depth knowledge of Marxism, it was impossible to be wrong. There was no room for doubt. And this sense of his convictions gave him a poise and security that enhanced his power to convince others, even more so because Guzmán said what people wanted to hear. Children starve and people suffer while the powerful exploit and monopolise the fruits of everyone's efforts. Only a radical revolution could change this abject situation.

— Gonzalo Portocarrero,

Profetas del Odio [Prophets of Hate], 2012

The future lies in guns and cannons! The armed revolution has begun! Glory to the Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought! Let us initiate the armed struggle!" (Guzmán 2005: 330). So concluded Abimael Guzmán's famous 'We Are the Initiators' speech at the conclusion of the First Military School of the Partido

Comunista del Perú–Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Perú–Shining Path, hereinafter CPP-SP) on 19 April 1980, signalling the beginning of the party’s move from theory to practice. Barely a few months after the fall of the Maoist Communist Party of Kampuchea (the so-called Khmer Rouge), as the world was taking toll of the tragedy that had enfolded Cambodia, Guzmán was putting Perú, Latin America, and the world on notice (Degregori 2012: 4). Guzmán (2005: 327) continued:

Marxism, reaching the great pinnacle of Mao Zedong Thought, has brought us a new moment: the powerful international workers’ movement, the foaming waves of national liberation movements, the development of communist parties. We are entering the strategic offensive of the World Revolution.

Less than one month later, young CPP-SP guerillas (known as Senderistas) would burn ballot boxes and voting lists in the public square of the Ayacucho *pueblo* of Chuschi. In the decade that followed, Guzmán ‘obtained an indisputable national presence that transcended party lines, and he kept his organization united until his capture’ (Hinojosa 1998: 67–68) while ushering in an era of violence during which between 48,000 and 70,000 people were killed and 600,000 more were displaced (CVR 2001–03; Rendon 2019a, 2019b).

Manuel Rubén Abimael Guzmán Reynoso was born on 3 December 1934 in the southern Peruvian port town of Mollendo, Islay Province, Arequipa Region. The man who would adopt the nom de guerre Presidente Gonzalo, around which he built a cult of personality, and who would regard himself as the inheritor of Mao’s revolution and who viewed his own ‘Gonzalo Thought’ (*pensamiento Gonzalo*) or *Gonzaloismo* as the ‘Fourth Sword of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism’ (*La cuarta espada del marxismo-leninismo-pensamiento Mao Tse-tung*), came from a middle-class background. His family broke apart when he was very young. In 1942, when Abimael was eight years old, his mother, Berenice Reynoso, left. Abimael lived with an uncle in El Callao (near Lima) and, in 1945, returned to Arequipa to live with his father and study at the private Catholic Colegio De La Salle (Roncagliolo 2007: 44, 249; Degregori 2012: 200–1). After graduating in 1953, Guzmán attended the National University of San Agustín (Universidad Nacional de San Agustín) to study philosophy and law.

At university, Guzmán gravitated towards charismatic thinkers within his immediate orbit. Two scholars at the university left a lasting impression on Guzmán: philosophy professor Miguel Angel Rodríguez Rivas and ‘Stalinist painter’ Carlos de la Riva. Rodríguez Rivas influenced Guzmán’s decision to write his thesis on the Kantian theory of space, whereas de la Riva’s shift from Stalinism to Maoism during the Soviet Union’s de-Stalinisation

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inspired a similar shift in Guzmán's ideological affinity (La Serna 2012: 140). But undoubtedly, the strongest influence on Guzmán at this stage—and the one who facilitated his appreciation of Maoism—was Marxist intellectual and Peruvian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Peruano, PCP) founder, José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930). Mariátegui's 1928 'Seven Essays on the Interpretation of the Peruvian Reality' (*Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana*) struck a sympathetic chord with, and left a lasting imprint on, Guzmán (Portocarrero 2012: 33). As historian Gonzalo Portocarrero (2012: 34) recounts, Guzmán's writings reflected the role played by Mariátegui in shaping his world view:

Guzmán tried to fashion the image of a monolithic Mariátegui of whom he was the true follower. That is, a Mariátegui who was functional to his expectations of leadership and power ... Anyone who read Mariátegui, from a position of sensitivity to social change and with a minimal knowledge of Marxism, would reach the same conclusions. Guzmán's supposed honesty was, however, relevant because there were comic and manipulative undertones to his emphasis [on Mariátegui] ... For Guzmán, Mariátegui represented a 'prophet' who had hitherto been maliciously understood.

Most importantly, Mariátegui's writings provided Guzmán with a local reference with which to interpret Maoism. 'In Mariátegui', Guzmán averred in a 1988 interview,

we find similar theses to those that President Mao has established at the universal level. For me specifically, Mariátegui would be Marxist-Leninist-Maoist today; and this is not speculation, it is simply a product of the understanding of the life and work of José Carlos Mariátegui. (CCPCP 1988: 11)

Mao's emphasis on creative adaptation of Marxism-Leninism, Guzmán noted, led him to value Mariátegui as a 'first rate Marxist-Leninist who had thoroughly analysed our society' (CCPCP 1988: 132–33; see also de la Cadena 1998: 53).

On completing his studies, Guzmán shifted from theory to practice. The 'reserved yet self-confident' Guzmán, who, according to Orin Starn (1995: 404) 'favored the conservative suit of an Andean intellectual', relocated to Huamanga (now Ayacucho) in 1962 to take up a position as philosophy professor at the recently reopened San Cristóbal de Huamanga National University (Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga) (see also Roncagliolo 2007: 47–48). While he taught classes in philosophy, Guzmán linked up with Peruvian communists and worked towards earning his revolutionary bona fides. An avowed Marxist who held Marxism as something of 'grandiose importance and transcendence' (CCPCP 1988: 11),

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Guzmán devoted this stage of his life to 'fighting for the ideology of the proletariat, for Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, as it was said (and that our Party defined as Maoism in 1981)' (Guzmán and Iparraguirre 2013: 25). Indeed, as historian Iván Hinojosa (1998: 65) recounts, Guzmán found in Marxism 'the answer to any question, even questions about daily life'.

Guzmán joined the Mariátegui-founded PCP and visited China between 1965 and 1967 on trips that affirmed his affinity for Maoism and the Chinese revolution. In Beijing, he stayed at the Asia, Africa, and Latin America Training Centre (亚非拉培训中心), 'studied Mao's works closely', trained in Chinese military tactics, and 'received small arms training at a Chinese cadre school' in Nanjing (Galway 2019: 185; see also Rothwell 2020: 116–18). On his return to Perú, Guzmán left the PCP to become a leader of its splinter party, the pro-Beijing Communist Party of Perú–Red Flag (Partido Comunista Peruano–Bandera Roja), only to leave 'over issues of political line, strategy, and revisionism of leftist currents in Perú' (Galway 2019: 186). He founded the Maoist Communist Party of Perú–Shining Path, the name for which he drew from Mariátegui's axiom that 'Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to revolution [*El Marxismo-Leninismo abrirá el sendero luminoso hacia la revolución*]'.

Although Guzmán echoed Mao's emphasis on a proletarian-led revolution, CPP-SP recruitment efforts drew largely young and impressionable university and secondary school students who believed Guzmán's self-representation as the 'Fourth Sword of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought'. As Starn (1999: 7) describes, the recruits' 'absolute commitment to revolution made them ready to kill and die to cross what Guzmán announced would be "a river of blood" to the promised land of a Communist utopia'. But the CPP-SP did not draw solely from universities and high schools. Peruvian anthropologist Stefano Varese once described the Shining Path's war as one 'waged by the children of indigenous peasants, by proletarianized rural peoples, and by provincial "mestizos" against the creole and urbanized mestizos perceived as part of the oppressive bourgeois system and state'. It was '[u]ndoubtedly a class struggle in the most orthodox Marxist tradition', he continues, but it was 'nonetheless a class struggle permeated, shaped, and mobilized by ethnic grievances' (Varese 1996: 65; see also Portocarrero 2012: 133–34; Berg 1986–87).

Despite this broad recruitment, the leadership of the CPP-SP Central Committee was almost exclusively white Peruvians—Guzmán included (Galway 2019: 187). Also, in contravention of Guzmán's 1980 declaration that the party would 'lift up the peasantry under the infallible banners of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought' (Guzmán 2005: 325–326), the Peruvian military's response pushed the CPP-SP revolution to intensify its violence towards 'impoverished villagers and respected local leaders' (Galway 2019: 187). By Guzmán's assessment, Perú's capitalist system was to

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blame for intraparty and revolutionary violence. The state, Guzmán charged, sent '60,000 infants a year to death before the age of one' (CCPCP 1988: 71). The 'blood cost' (*un costo de sangre*) or 'quota of blood' was a necessary sacrifice, in his view, to realise a more equitable, egalitarian Perú (CCPCP 1988: 48; La Serna 2012: 143; see also Smith 1994: 42). The result, Starn (1999: 144) intimates, was that Perú's rural poor were 'the Peruvians to suffer most from the revolution waged in their name'.

The CPP-SP people's war spearheaded by Guzmán began with the burning of ballot boxes in Chuschi to protest the first Peruvian election since 1964. This was the first of hundreds of CPP-SP guerilla actions in 1980. From the get-go, Guzmán called for the arrest and punishment of corrupt government officials, whereas party militants targeted, and killed, figures whom the party leadership had deemed representatives of the old order: elected officials, police officers, village leaders, and clergymen. As Miguel La Serna (2012: 142–43) describes:

Most of these attacks involved the use of explosives, as the insurgents confiscated dynamite and detonated specific targets. The day after the Chuschi incident, Senderistas destroyed the air control tower in Ayacucho City. A month later, they attacked the departmental capital's police station, a tourist hotel, and the headquarters of a rival political party ... On 16 June as many as 200 rebels surrounded the municipal building in Lima's San Martín de Porras district. After crying, 'People's War—From the Country to the City!' the rebels hurled Molotov cocktails at the building and watched it burn to the ground. Much of the guerrilla activity during these months was designed to raise awareness about the insurgency. In Ayacucho and elsewhere, rebels painted party slogans on public buildings and circulated communist pamphlets announcing the birth of the insurgency and exalting Presidente Gonzalo.

'In Lima', La Serna continues, 'party militants hung the corpses of dead dogs from lampposts with signs attached to their necks that read, "Deng Xiaoping, Son of a Bitch!" [*Teng Siao Ping hijo de perra*]' a reference to the CPP-SP's rejection of the Chinese leader's move away from hard-line Maoism' (La Serna 2012: 143). The CPP-SP had announced its arrival to Perú and, soon, the world.

Over the course of the following decade of protracted warfare, the CPP-SP people's war expanded gradually from its Andean base in Ayacucho. The Peruvian military matched—and, one scholar has argued, even exceeded—the Maoists' brutality towards peasants and non-combatants (Rendon 2019a, 2019b). By 1989, CPP-SP guerillas were in position to launch a final assault on Lima. The cult of personality around Guzmán—now going by his *nom du guerre*,

Imprisoned CPP-SP women guerrillas salute Presidente Gonzalo in Canto Grande Prison, 1992. Author's Photograph. Museo de la Nación, 2 August 2018.

Presidente Gonzalo—was at its height. Guzmán encouraged his devoted followers to commit themselves fully to the violent revolution: 'He who speaks of war speaks of sacrifice, he who speaks of sacrifice speaks of the quota [a commitment of one's life to the party's vision for Perú]' (La Serna 2012: 143). Yet Guzmán's capture in 1992 and the Peruvian military-backed rural resistance to the CPP-SP—as the Maoists were making their final push to seize the capital—effectively ended momentum and the Maoists never came close to capturing Lima again. Although the war was effectively over, Starn (1999: 144) writes: 'There were no winners in what would go down as one of Latin America's crudest twentieth-century wars.'

As for the movement's charismatic leader, Abimael Guzmán spent the next 29 years serving two life sentences for terrorism and treason in a dungeon on San Lorenzo Island, off the coast of Lima. He died on 11 September 2021 at the Maximum Safety Centre of Callao Naval Base (Arango 2021). After his arrest, the Peruvian Government branded Guzmán a terrorist and immortalised him as such in 'Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar', the only permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Nation (Museo de la Nación) in Lima. The exhibition documents the internal conflict in Perú and portrays Guzmán as the *capo di tutti capi* (chief of all chiefs) of Peruvian terrorist leaders. While such a portrayal wilfully neglects how, in his time, Guzmán invigorated a previously disjointed base of disaffected indigenous and *mestizo* peasants, as well as left-curious students, inspiring them to rally behind him and his utopian vision for Perú, it is as a bloodthirsty terrorist that he is often remembered in Perú today (Arango 2021). This is also how he is represented in most commentaries that have appeared in the wake of his passing—the ideals of yore and the root causes that prompted the uprising obfuscated by the tragedy of decades of violent struggle. ■

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