



A potential contribution to human identification using peri-mortem trauma: An example from Peru



Jose P. Baraybar

Regional Forensic Coordinator, International Committee of the Red Cross, 10 Bis Passage d'Enfer, 75014 Paris, France

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study into the need for additional lines of forensic evidence in humanitarian cases using applied research. One hundred and twenty four, still unidentified terrorism inmates, were killed after surrendering to the Peruvian Army once it took control of the San Pedro-Lurigancho prison in Lima, Peru in 1986. Two questions are put forward: first, to what extent mechanism of injury (gunshot, blunt, sharp force) and bodily distribution of those injuries allow us to classify individuals into discrete sub-groups of people? The second question is to what respect can such a classification become an additional line of evidence assisting in generating hypotheses of identity regarding those individuals?

The analysis of the 109 recovered bodies and their associated evidence show a sub group of four individuals differentiated from the rest based on the combination of injuries (gunshot and blunt force trauma), opposing trajectories and weapons. While the results do not constitute *per se* proof of identity, they suggest that such a small group of people could have been singled out from the crowd and treated differently. Such information constitutes an additional line of evidence to formulate hypotheses of identity for certain individuals that could have been ring leaders/cadres of the Shining Path, a Maoist movement that started the Internal Armed Conflict (1980–2000) in Peru.

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Any approach to the issue of persons whose identities were lost due to mass disasters, situations of internal or international armed conflict or other situations of violence should focus on their identification using every possible scientific mean; such an approach (humanitarian forensic action) is necessary to enforce the right to know of surviving relatives and dignify their memory as human beings [1–3].

The identification of remains is a comparative process in which one or more variables pertaining to an individual while alive is matched with those recorded in the remains being examined. While the identification process integrates all possible lines of evidence, the techniques themselves can be primary or secondary. Primary techniques consist of fingerprints, dental comparison and DNA testing [4–6]; secondary techniques assist on the other hand to establish the provenance placing an individual within a geographical area (i.e. isotopes) or a haplogroup [7–9]; the use of the context in which the remains were found is also useful to include or exclude an individual into or from. The combination of primary and secondary techniques at large is indispensable for any integrated approach to identify since specific techniques on their own may corroborate individual identity but not used alone

identify an individual [10,11]. While recommendations of best practice to work in contexts with financial and technological limitations [12] have been proposed, it is a fact however that further research is necessary for providing elements to assist in the identification process under those conditions. More often than not, humanitarian forensic action occurs in contexts characterized by demands from surviving family members to identify their missing relatives and marred by multiple constraints including but not limited to, little or non-existent resources, absence of records and sometimes little contextual information. Considering that such situation is the norm rather than the exception [13], it is necessary to develop means derived from applied research to generate multiple lines of evidence (identifiers) that used in combination may shed light on the identity of the missing. In that respect “closed” cases, synchronic or context-specific events, where the group but not individual identity of the dead is known, could benefit from hypotheses based on such “identifiers”. The present study points out the usefulness of these additional identifiers towards the identification of human remains. This exploratory study puts forward two rather unusual questions: first, to what extent mechanism of injury (gunshot, blunt, sharp force) and bodily distribution of those injuries allow us to classify individuals into discrete sub-groups of people? Second, to what respect can such a classification become an additional line of evidence

E-mail addresses: jbaraybar@icrc.org, baraybarjp@gmail.com (J.P. Baraybar).

assisting in generating hypotheses of identity regarding those individuals?

1. A brief introduction to the historical context

The internal armed conflict in Peru lasted for twenty years and was formally initiated by the so-called Partido Comunista del Peru-Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path), a Maoist group that started the Internal Armed Conflict in Peru [14] in 1980. A couple of years later another insurgent group, Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (MRTA) entered the scene [14]. The estimated toll of the conflict is over 60,000 people [14]. While the contemporary history of the Peruvian Internal Armed Conflict is too vast to go into much detail, the context for the case reviewed is established so that the interpretations are meaningful and clear. On June 18th 1986 during the meeting of the 3rd International Socialist Organization in Lima, Peru, inmates accused of terrorism in three prisons in the capital organized a simultaneous mutiny. Most of the inmates belonged to the “Shining Path” (SL), being also known however that among this population many were imprisoned without a formal trial [14]. On June 19th in an attempt to stop a Shining Path international media stunt, President Alan Garcia gave control of the three prisons to the armed forces (the Navy took control of the island prison of El Fronton, the Army of Lurigancho and the Air Force of Santa Barbara). The toll of the operation was 245 inmates dead (124 at Lurigancho, 119 at El Fronton and 2 at Santa Barbara; CVR [14]).

At Lurigancho inmates were housed in the so-called “industrial” block where they had entrenched themselves, reinforcing walls and sealing off windows; inmates were in possession of improvised weapons, such as slings, spear-throwers and sharp objects (Figs. 1–3). After negotiations failed to release the only hostage (a corrections officer), the Republican Guard (Guardia Republicana in charge at the time of the perimeter security of correctional facilities) and army commandoes blasted craters into the walls, entered the building and after a brief skirmish suffocated the mutiny. On the evening of June 19th the first official account of the events indicated that the death of the inmates occurred due to their unwillingness to leave the cellblock resulting in asphyxia and burns [14]. Shortly after the facts there was no mention of “crimes” but “excesses” (*excesos*). Conceptually the word is a euphemism referring to something that exceeds a tolerated amount; hence



Fig. 1. Darts in pouch for dart-thrower. Photo ©EPAF.



Fig. 2. Dart thrower. Photo ©EPAF.

while during the operation to take the control of the prisons, it was expected that force would be used and as a consequence life could be lost. However the fact that at Lurigancho all the inmates in the pavilion died, exceeded the loss of life “expected” in such situation. Further investigations demonstrated however that upon taking control of the pavilion security personnel took inmates to the yard, forced them to lay face down, shot and killed them [14,15]. Ticona was “buried” in the cemetery of Puente Piedra (Lima) with death certificate number 398. While laying on the courtyard Ticona posed as dead after his fellow inmate was shot next to him; he got covered with blood and awaited until the Guardia Republicana



Fig. 3. Sling. Photo ©EPAF.

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