

*SOCIAL LIBERATION, IDENTITY, AND THE
RECOVERY OF EARLY MARXIST THOUGHT:
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS*

Some preliminary considerations regarding the basic theoretical perspectives employed and pursued in this work can help clarify the principal arguments and positions developed in the study. In this chapter I begin by sketching some characteristics of the place occupied by the concept of social liberation within the broader notion of liberation theory as a whole. I then engage in a critical discussion of the notion of identity in order to clarify the way in which the concept of "identity" will be used in this study. The greater part of the chapter deals primarily with some historical considerations that provide a background for the initial set of philosophical themes and problems to be confronted. Of particular interest is the question of the "crisis" of Marxism today and the relevance of reassessing, from a contemporary perspective, some of the thoughts of the first important Latin American Marxist thinker, José Carlos Mariátegui. The chapter is intended to bridge the gap between the current philosophical concerns and interests of an educated North American reading public and the historical beginning point of my study, which is the thought of Mariátegui in the light of the problems facing Peruvian society in the 1920s. This look backward in time and across different cultures as well as differing ideological frameworks is not easy, but also not impossible, to achieve.

Social Liberation

Personal liberation, social liberation, and national liberation are the three major categories within which the topic of liberation arises in Latin American thought. The notion of personal liberation, in the sense of self-development for a life of freedom and creativity, is the outcome of Western humanist thought. This notion

may or may not overlap with the sense of personal liberation derived from religious concepts of redemption or salvation. In any case, the accent is on the individual person with his or her freedoms, rights, desires, and hopes. In general, this aspect of liberation theory will not be addressed here, but an exception will be made in the treatment of women's social liberation, which cannot be understood apart from the question of the repression of feminine sexuality and which therefore involves important issues regarding personal liberation. (The absence of an emphasis on personal liberation, however, does not mean that I underestimate its importance.) The focus of my analysis is on the notion of social liberation, understood broadly to include cultural, political, and economic aspects. Social liberation refers to the need to liberate individuals from structures of social oppression, particularly those that create or reproduce inequities due to economic class, sex, race, or national origin. Some of the groups seeking liberation in the context of Latin American social reality are the poor, women, indigenous people, blacks, peasants, and workers.

Social liberation needs to be distinguished from national liberation, which, in the context of leftist politics, is often taken to mean a "second" or "definitive" independence for the Latin American peoples in relation to Western imperialism or neocolonialism. In recent history, the political positions of the Marxist-Leninist government in Cuba, the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN) in Nicaragua, and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador have represented some of the political philosophies of national liberation movements. Such liberation movements are aimed at displacing from political power certain national governments characterized by the liberation groups as governments that for all practical purposes are controlled by U.S. economic and/or military interests. The strategy for implementing these views within a given society may range from the use of armed struggle to the use of peaceful political means. Advocates of leftist national liberation movements argue that true political independence for the Latin American countries cannot be achieved without breaking with the dominance of U.S. economic exploitation of the region. According to their argument, independence must proceed from a popular base that rejects the power of foreign capital over the region. This power has been achieved primarily through the exploitation of people's labor and various other national resources so as to bring profit to foreign capital or select classes within the state. In Latin America, national liberation ideologies have also

been found in "national popular" movements and right-wing movements, where the position of "enemy" switches from right to left according to the political entity targeted for destruction. In this study a distinct conceptual line will be drawn between philosophies of social liberation and those of national liberation.

It will be seen from this sketch, though, that in the case of leftist national liberation movements, there is a borderline area between social liberation and national liberation theories where the positions appear complementary, particularly if a democratic path to national liberation is chosen. There are, however, versions of national liberation theories stating that the *only* path to social liberation is through a revolution assuring national liberation, so that the goals of social liberation must take second place to those of national liberation. In contrast to the latter view, I take social and personal liberation as the fundamental goals of liberation, rejecting the argument that *only* a victory at the level of a national liberation movement can guarantee the former. In general, any argument taking the form that "only *x* can assure the path to liberation" is interpretable as a potentially new form of ideological and political domination. Nevertheless, I regard many specific goals of national liberation movements as not only reasonable but very worthwhile, so long as they are disengaged from an exclusivist claim to truth or justice. When analyzing liberation theory, it is therefore of critical importance to distinguish between the general framework of a theory and its particular claims. Given the overlapping area that in some cases governs the discourse of social and national liberation theories, I want to state clearly that the standpoint taken in this work is one concerned with the theme of social liberation, within the parameters outlined.

As already suggested, the notion of liberation is also used by conservative and right-wing groups to indicate freedom or release from what they take to be oppressive situations and structures. The Far Right also has its theories of national liberation of the people against imperialism. In this case "imperialism" is prefaced by such adjectives as "Western," "Jewish," "Soviet," "Marxist," and so on. Expressions such as "the liberation of the soul before God," "democratic liberation from totalitarian Marxism," and "the liberation of woman for motherhood" are ways of addressing the overcoming of some perceived oppressions in terms of the old-fashioned struggle between Good and Evil. The use of a dualism of good and evil as a basis for liberation theory—whether used by the Right or the Left—will be rejected in this study because of its tendency to

result in a dogmatic or authoritarian orientation. The notion of social liberation to be pursued here presupposes "liberation" from such dualistic forms of reasoning.

Included in the types of liberation theory under discussion will be some perspectives on Latin American Marxism, theories of cultural or national identity, the theology of liberation, the so-called philosophy of liberation, and gender theory or feminist thought. Given the limits of time and resources, it is not possible to cover other topics of great interest, particularly the African heritage in Latin American culture. Still, what is said here about indigenous cultures and about the *mestizo* consciousness can be extended to the African heritage, which is an especially important cultural element throughout the Caribbean and in some countries like Brazil.

The "Identity" Issue in Liberation Theory

The "identity" component of liberation theories serves as a definitional factor in the struggle for freedom, self-determination, and social justice. It delineates boundaries between self and other, establishes trails of continuity back to a given origin, and very often creates rational links between the stated origin of the group's values and the goals and actions of its members. Identity can be an "arm" of liberation theory used to reinforce the goals of those struggling against oppression by a hostile or superior force. Yet identity is a powerful concept that can also be used to oppress people. Indeed, it is often used in this negative way. By means of an assigned "identity," people can be manipulated to act in a particular way in conformity with a given role or model. They can be easily rewarded or punished depending on whether they fit or fail to fit the desired role. Given this ambiguity in the use of the concept of identity, which can just as well serve to free up individuals or restrain them in extraordinarily subtle ways, I will explain briefly how one might approach the concept of cultural identity from a critical standpoint.

Cultural identity, like the concepts of ethnic identity or gender identity, can be used to distinguish the positive features uniting a number of individuals around something they hold to be a very valuable part of their selves. In this case, the values upheld refer to a certain cultural heritage to which individuals feel strongly attached by historical and/or affective ties. To speak of a Latin American cultural identity is to define a given system of values intended to preserve and enhance a specific cultural heritage, and

to promote, within the international community, an outlook favorable to recognizing the validity and integrity of these values. In the case of the North-South relation holding between the United States and Latin America, to speak of a Latin American cultural identity could also refer to a process aimed at rectifying an imbalance of power between the United States and Latin American countries, which, to a significant extent, puts at risk the cultural production of the latter. In other words, U.S. values "invade" Latin American societies through the media and entertainment industries and through the incessant push to create new markets for North American products. There is no corresponding penetration of U.S. culture by Latin American-oriented values or products. For example, the film industry in both continents is almost entirely controlled by Hollywood.

Some of the paradigms used to defend the integrity of Latin American culture are José Carlos Mariátegui's affirmation of the values of the continent's indigenous pre-Columbian heritage (chapter 2), Samuel Ramos's idea of a Mexican identity rid of resentment and feelings of inferiority toward European culture (chapter 3), Leopoldo Zea's notion of a continental Latin American identity as an affirmation of *mestizaje* (a cultural and/or racial mixture rooted in the region's history), and Arturo Andrés Roig's notion of a cultural legacy (*legado*) subject to critical evaluation and social reform by members of a cultural community (chapter 4). Sources of inspiration for some of these ideas can be found in José Martí's notion of *nuestra América* (our America) and José Vasconcelos's *raza cósmica* (cosmic race).¹ For Martí, "our America" refers to the concept of a Latin America for Latin Americans, a notion charged with important cultural implications whose contemporary political overtones are roughly equivalent to a rejection of U.S. domination in the area. Vasconcelos's metaphysical and rather mystical notion of a universal cosmic race was intended to symbolize the most spiritual evolution of humanity, which the Mexican thinker thought would someday be born from Indo-Hispanic America. The philosophical values attached to notions of cultural identity are very often linked to political movements for self-determination and to *indigenismo* or other expressions of native cultural ties in the arts and literature. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959—the latter strongly influenced by the political ideals of Martí—exemplify political struggles that had a significant impact on the arts and literature of the region.

In order to free as much as possible the concept of cultural identity from a dogmatic approach to values, it is important to con-

sider the notion of cultural identity as the result of a freely engaged in, collective interpretive process, always open to modification or transformation on the part of the members of a cultural community. As the Argentine philosopher Arturo Roig has pointed out, there is a cultural legacy into which every individual is born. Having experienced one's personal and social life in terms of this legacy, each individual is also empowered to transform it through the input of her or his creative work and social praxis. The urgent and critical problem for Latin Americans therefore has to do with salvaging the "weight" of regional cultural formations in view of foreign-imposed conditions for further growth. Various nations in Latin America face a burdensome foreign debt and other economic problems that place significant limits on the development of the cultural vitality of the people. The stunting of regional resources also leads to the "brain drain" of professionals to the North and to the confinement of the popular sectors to the single task of assuring their basic economic survival. All of this exacerbates further the cultural development of the region. It would seem that culture becomes entirely dependent on the movement and accumulation of capital. Just as environmentalists speak of endangered species, so we could speak of endangered cultures.

Thus for liberation theory dealing with the North-South tension there arises the problem of how to assess the weight of European or North American culture vis-à-vis cultures of particular Latin American nations. Advocates of a universal view of reason in history generally hold that the most rational civilization prevails in the end. When their attention turns toward Latin America, they tend to be drawn to the "universal" values found in Latin American philosophy rather than to the philosophical importance of culture-specific values found in Latin American thought. Their respect for a particular cultural formation is only a consequence of the respect for the universality of human reason, with the latter usually defined and understood in exclusively Western terms. Diversity is therefore seen as an offspring of oneness. In contrast, advocates of a cultural pluralism would be more willing to accept the peaceful coexistence of various culturally identified groups without prior appeal to a universal norm that would grant each group its particular legitimacy. According to this view, each group would have access to its own cultural legacy in a relationship of parity and mutual respect toward other groups. If we take the latter approach, it is easier to see that the question of cultural identity cannot be set apart from the question of difference. Difference

is a fundamental factor making possible the conditions for identity. "One" is always an abstraction and departure from the rich manifold of experience. Moreover, culture cannot exist without a significant and constant amount of grass-roots activity; it should not be reduced to a definition that is applied normatively from the top down or from the established parts of society to peripheral sectors. If it weren't for the periphery, the center could not exist.

Seen from this context, the question of cultural identity acts as a buffer between models of "liberation" based on the notion of full assimilation of minorities and marginal sectors into the already constituted framework of values of the society at large, and a defense of the particular interests of disadvantaged groups. A favorable weight is given to the knowledge, traditions, and skills possessed by the marginal sectors, in contrast to the tendency of the dominant culture to depreciate or reject their value precisely because they are different or marginal. In short, the standpoint of identity adopted here refers ultimately to a differential reality, not to a centrally controlled regulative force. The "identity" of which I speak here is not derived from a fixed origin, but is a result of multiple configurations always in the process of reorganizing and redefining themselves. In terms of liberation theory, such identities-in-the-making result from a process of selecting endangered or forgotten differences and bringing them to public attention. This involves breaking through the silence imposed on some forms of thought and only subsequently trying to "position" such differences within the general purview of the culture for the enrichment and benefit of all.

One kind of discourse that is breaking out of its imposed silence is that of feminist thought. A feminist perspective belongs within liberation theory but at the same time transforms it. The introduction of this perspective aims at rethinking the nature of the cultural legacy in terms no longer tied to the masculine values characterizing patriarchal thought. Moreover, a feminist perspective guarantees that the needs, desires, and interests of women will be given weight equal to those of men. Until recently, feminism itself has been an underdeveloped area of study in Latin American thought. The prevalent perception is that feminism is alien to Latin American cultural values, which allegedly are tainted hopelessly with machismo: I intend to show, however, that feminist values have strong cultural roots in the region (chapter 7). The major problem in Latin American cultural life is not the absence of great courage, individual creativity, and independence among

women, but the public silence that often hovers over women's most intimate vision of the world. Up to the present time the discourses of liberation and cultural identity theory have continued to reproduce for the most part a male view of what it would mean to liberate the region from social oppression. There is a great need to break out of this pattern of cultural interpretation, which assigns the value "cultural identity" to a discourse produced almost exclusively by men, while "gender identity" becomes the specialized province of women's theorizing. Insofar as women are to be considered equal participants in the process of liberation and full participants in the process of the formation of new cultural values, it is essential to incorporate the contribution of feminist perspectives into this branch of Latin American thought.

Historical Roots of Liberation and Cultural Identity

One of the many problems generated by underdevelopment is the lack of an established collective "memory" where the legacy of a society or a people may find its recognizable roots. To compensate for this problem, for example, newly liberated groups shaking off the chains of oppression often make a conscious effort to establish genealogical accounts of their struggles for freedom and justice, showing how these struggles embody a collective meaning and rise above the passing of time. Similarly, in response to skeptics' remarks regarding the so-called nonexistence of Latin American philosophy, scholarly research is careful to point out that more than one generation of thinkers has received recognition in this field both at home and abroad. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a study such as this one, attempting to encompass a wide spectrum of contributions to the subject of cultural identity and social liberation in Latin America, should also embark on the historically conscious path of theoretical "recollection." Apart from its intrinsic interest, this approach will allow us to refer to a body of knowledge to which we can turn on subsequent occasions as new aspects and implications of this problem are explored.

A loosely structured historical orientation has therefore been used both to aid in the narrative development of the study and to highlight particularly interesting or relevant theories of liberation appearing in the region throughout the last few decades. Following the preliminary observations given in chapter 1, an analysis will be undertaken of José Carlos Mariátegui's socialist anthropology in the 1920s (chapter 2). Chapter 3 will cover selections from the 1930s

and subsequent years of Mexican-based studies in cultural identity, as represented primarily by the work of Samuel Ramos and the early Leopoldo Zea. The theme is extended into the second part of the century, especially the decade of the 1960s, which experienced the impact of the Cuban Revolution and the death of Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Bolivia in 1967. During this period we see the debate between Augusto Salazar Bondy and Leopoldo Zea regarding underdevelopment and how underdevelopment affects the existence, productivity, and vitality of a Latin American philosophy.

In the late sixties and early seventies there was a proliferation of liberation-oriented themes among philosophers, Christian activists, and theologians in Latin America. An analysis of some representative works and themes from this broad intellectual movement will be given in chapters 4, 5, and 6. For such philosophers as Leopoldo Zea, the issue of asserting a national identity—which in the early part of the century had a strong impact on cultural identity theory—expanded into that of adopting a continental "Latin American" identity. This perspective is associated primarily with a post-Hegelian approach to the philosophy of history (chapter 4). For others, including the precursors and creators of the theology of liberation (chapter 5), specific issues such as poverty, marginality, and oppression came to represent the point of departure for a contemporary Latin American philosophy. In addition, a "philosophy of liberation" emerged in Argentina in the 1970s, marked by a highly ambiguous and potentially repressive use of the term "liberation." An examination of certain basic arguments offered by "the philosophy of liberation"—as this wing of liberation theory chooses to call itself—shows that some of the positions it advocated carried authoritarian and absolutist elements not wholly incompatible with the use of repressive political force (chapter 6). Finally, the importance of including feminist theory as a component of Latin American perspectives on cultural identity and liberation will be examined. The needs of women in the region for equality and the protection of their basic rights and liberties correspond well with the process of democratization affecting many social and political structures (chapter 7).

The approach outlined is highly selective of the material potentially available to an investigation such as this one. For any one of the major thinkers or issues selected, there is a wealth of related material that could not be covered. The decision to move through different figures and schools of thought, choosing to discuss only a certain fragment of a potentially vast reserve of mater-

ial, was made so as to emphasize the rich tradition and high degree of interest in liberation thought existing for decades now in the continent. Moreover, it is rare to see a study attempt to incorporate as many different perspectives as are included here. This is due precisely to the richness that each perspective holds on its own and to the internal "loyalties" binding the members of each school to a certain group of intellectual predecessors. Often these loyalties are determined through a form of patrilineal heritage from the "founders" of a certain perspective or school down to the present members. Thus Mariátegui, a journalist and political organizer, has only recently become of interest to mainstream sectors of Latin American philosophy. Past studies of Mariátegui have often linked his thought to that of other early twentieth-century Marxists, to the broader legacy of Latin American Marxism, or to the development of Peruvian thought. A study of Ramos's ideas is usually preceded by an analysis of the work of the Mexican philosophers Antonio Caso, José Vasconcelos, or Alfonso Reyes, rather than by a chapter on Mariátegui's thought. The study of feminism has often been excluded from a discussion of Latin American philosophy and the philosophy of liberation, particularly as these fields are studied in Latin America.² The theology of liberation until most recently has not been given a status of paramount importance within the study of Latin American philosophy.³ Each tradition has followed its own "founders" and discourse in a relationship more or less parallel to other traditions. The different traditions are brought together here because they all speak to basic philosophical queries related to a critical assessment of Latin American social reality. All of them provide special insights on approaches to liberation theory.

The Crisis of Contemporary Marxism and the Relevance of Mariátegui's Work

Of special interest to the study of Latin American cultural identity and liberation is the thought of José Carlos Mariátegui. His thought is often considered to lie at the margins of philosophy, but in some respects this very fact only adds to its interest. Though marginal to philosophy, Mariátegui's thought occupies a central place in the history of Latin American Marxism. He becomes a suitable candidate for inclusion in this study because a study of liberation theory should not do without some analysis of Marxism, and Mariátegui holds one of the most original Marxist

positions in the history of the continent. Moreover, his views, while not always completely persuasive, are most interesting for our time. The so-called crisis of Marxism today should not deter us from an appreciation of the works of Mariátegui. If we think of Marxism as being in a crisis today due in large part to its separation from the will of the people and to its pursuit of a dogmatic rather than pragmatic approach to social reality, then there is much to be learned from a thinker such as Mariátegui. Leninist in his day but remarkably unorthodox in his philosophical orientation, Mariátegui showed a strong preference for ideas associated with William James, Bergson, and Nietzsche. His thought symbolizes the openness, creativity, and innovativeness with which Marxist ideas can be applied to an analysis of Latin America's specific problems. He is regarded as someone who had an exceptional understanding of the specific needs of his native land.

Mariátegui's popularity among a wide variety of intellectual and political sectors—including critical Marxists, historians of Peruvian thought, literary critics, and revolutionary Marxists—reached a peak in the 1970s and early 1980s. In *Marxist Thought in Latin America*, Sheldon Liss remarks: "No Latin American Marxist receives more acknowledgment of intellectual indebtedness than José Carlos Mariátegui."⁴ Michael Löwy calls him "undoubtedly, the most vigorous and most original [Marxist] thinker from Latin America."⁵ Mariátegui's legacy is claimed by both Leninist and critical Marxists. For example, the Argentine writer José Aricó, a sharp critic of Marxist dogmatism, calls Mariátegui's *Seven Essays* "the only theoretical work which is really significant for Latin American Marxism" half a century after its publication.⁶ A recently published Cuban anthology, *Marxistas de América*, refers to him as "the first figure of Marxism-Leninism in our continent, both in terms of the sharpness and quality of his expression and the profundity of his thought."⁷ Perhaps because of the untimely appropriation of his name by the extremist group Sendero Luminoso of Peru, there is less attention focused on Mariátegui today than there would be otherwise. This circumstantial factor, however, shall not deter or hinder me from engaging in an analysis of his thought.

Mariátegui's Position within Marxist Theory

With the political changes in the world today, Mariátegui's thought acquires new relevance. His thinking, however, was very

much a part of the political realities of his day. In order to understand its theoretical context, a look at some of the conditions out of which it sprang is necessary.⁸

Born in 1894 in the southern part of Peru, he came from a modest background. He was raised by his mother, a woman of partly Indian origin. When he was eight years old, an injury left him crippled in one leg. As a teenager, Mariátegui began to work as a linotypist's assistant for a major newspaper in Lima. He worked his way up in the newspaper business, eventually becoming a well-known journalist and editor. Most of his writing was done for publication in newspapers and political journals, including the cultural and political review *Amauta* (1926–30), of which he was founding editor.⁹ In 1924 Mariátegui suffered a significant personal blow when a major illness forced the amputation of his left leg. Confined to a wheelchair for the remaining years of his short life, he continued to write, edit, and engage in labor organizing. In 1928 he founded the Socialist party of Peru. He died in 1930, at the age of 35.

Mariátegui's complete works fill several volumes, but during his lifetime only two of his books appeared in print, *La escena contemporánea* (1925) and *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928).¹⁰ The latter, his masterpiece, is actually a collection of seven essays (as the title indicates) that were published earlier as journal articles. The study was not intended as a narrowly conceived "objective" account of Peruvian social reality. "Once again I repeat that I am not an impartial, objective, critic," he states in the preface to this work. "My judgments are nourished by my ideals, my sentiments, my passions. I have an avowed and resolute ambition: to assist in the creation of Peruvian socialism. I am far removed from the academic techniques of the university."¹¹

Though not a scholar by profession, Mariátegui's learning was exceptional, particularly in view of the fact that he was self-taught. He himself attributed his most important "schooling" (*aprendizaje*) to the circumstances surrounding a three-and-a-half year tour of Europe from 1920 to 1923. He visited several countries, including France and Germany, but for the most part he lived in Italy, where he pursued his work as a journalist. It was in Italy that he made two very important commitments—one personal—he married—and the other political—he became a Marxist. Contemporary Marxist scholars argue that the most important theoretical influence on him during his stay in Italy came from the Gramscian publication *L'ordine nuovo*. (There is much speculation

about the unresolved issue of whether Mariátegui knew Gramsci.)¹² He was also highly influenced by the philosopher Benedetto Croce, whom he knew personally, and who encouraged Mariátegui to study the work of Georges Sorel. Mariátegui associated freely with the European political and literary avant-garde wherever he traveled, establishing a rich network of acquaintances within leftist circles in France, Italy, and Germany. At the time, the Left was reading Nietzsche, Freud, and Unamuno as well as Marx and Engels. Mariátegui imbibed this spirit and brought it back with him to Peru, where his main task, as he put it, was to assist in the creation of an Indo-Hispanic socialism.

Mariátegui's Interpretation of Peruvian Economic Reality

Mariátegui turned to socialism as a solution for Peru's economic and social problems because he judged that capitalism would not be able to help his country develop out of a "feudal" type of backwardness. In particular, he wanted to see different living conditions for Peruvian workers and peasants. Though critical of capitalism, he also modified the existing conception of socialism. First, he argued for the incorporation of peasants, not just workers, into the socialist movement. Second, he observed that the majority of Peruvian peasants were of indigenous origin, which lent a special character to Peru's national reality that was altogether missing from European societies. Mariátegui's appreciation of the Peruvian indigenous heritage led him to place an accent on the respect for the cultural diversity of the region and on political organizing based on grass-roots coalitions rather than on centrally controlled, foreign-dominated political parties.

Mariátegui reasoned that the choice of a capitalist model of development in Peru could not offer any realistic solutions for the indigenous peasants, who constituted the majority of the population. Linking the exploitation of the Indians to Peru's "feudal" agrarian economy, he argues that despite Peru's liberal constitution, the exploitation of the Indians remained intact:

The agrarian problem is first and foremost the problem of eliminating feudalism in Peru, which should have been done by the democratic-bourgeois regime that followed the War of Independence. But, in its one hundred years as a republic, Peru has not had a genuine bourgeois class, a true capitalist class. The old feudal class—camouflaged or disguised as a

republican bourgeoisie—has kept its position.... The old land-holding class has not lost its supremacy. The survival of the *latifundistas*, in practice, preserved the *latifundium*.¹³

His basic argument is that the democratic-liberal path to economic and political development in Peru had never been strong enough to dislodge older patterns of land use and peasant exploitation. Liberalism as such could not solve the nation's problems.

Linked to this analysis, Mariátegui offers a second argument for which he has become renowned: the key to the solution of Peru's problems is tied to the liberation of the Indian peasants, and socialism is the most appropriate contemporary system to meet the Indians' needs. He places the argument in support of socialism side by side with the argument for the liberation of the Peruvian Indians:

In keeping with my ideological position, I believe that the moment for attempting the liberal, individualist method in Peru has already passed. *Aside from reasons of doctrine* [emphasis added], I consider that our agrarian problem has a special character due to an indisputable and concrete factor: the survival of the Indian "community" and of elements of practical socialism in indigenous agriculture and life.¹⁴

His capacity to value what is different from the norm ("aside from reasons of doctrine") allows him to note in this case the positive features of the indigenous presence in the land. With this view he stands in sharp contrast to those who view the same presence negatively or project upon the Indians a role alien to the historical and cultural development of the region.

Thus his understanding of socialism was quite different from the normative one in which a Western paradigm of scientific progress is superimposed on a given reality in the name of a higher truth. With its unquestioned concept of "science" derived from a linear interpretation of history, such an approach would merely supplant capitalist with socialist economic policies, without regard for grass-roots-level knowledge gained from centuries of experience. Yet, to Mariátegui, the Indians' relation to the land appeared sufficiently "socialist" that he fought to rescue and preserve its meaning.

At the political level, Mariátegui resisted adopting a one-sided approach to social liberation. He believed in working with a

united front.¹⁵ On his return to Peru, he collaborated with Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, an important leader of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), a leftist political movement. The Apristas promoted the notion of a nationalist anti-imperialist movement, a cause Mariátegui supported. But, from his standpoint, the Apristas represented primarily the interests of the national bourgeoisie.¹⁶ When they began to change the status of their organization from that of a "movement" to that of a political party, Mariátegui broke with them and founded the Socialist party of Peru (*Partido Socialista Peruano*). Arguing against the Apristas, he charged that there was a link between a nationalistic (capitalist) anti-imperialism and racism. The racism of this nationalist sector consisted in a tendency to value foreign capital over the needs of the majority of the Peruvian people, who were not white. In "Anti-imperialist Point of View," a paper delivered by the Peruvian delegation to the first Latin American conference of the Communist International in 1929, Mariátegui argued that the Peruvian bourgeoisie identified primarily with "white" values and did not feel it shared a common culture and history with the rest of the Peruvian people, whose ancestors were Indian. This meant that the anti-imperialist identity to which the Apristas appealed could only be one of words, not deeds. "They pretend to situate themselves at the level of the economic struggle, yet in reality they appeal particularly to racial and sentimental factors."¹⁷ Noticing that a genuine anti-imperialist movement should not be founded either on nationalistic or racial sentiments, Mariátegui argued that a class analysis was needed to identify the cause of Peru's economic problems. In other words, the national bourgeoisie could not act to resolve the country's problems because it was bound to find the power of foreign capital much more attractive than the needs of Peru's own *mestizo* and Indian population.

Thus, Mariátegui realized that the cultural values tilted in the direction of capitalism were loaded with racial values that underestimated the civilizing potential of indigenous cultures. Yet, one might ask, can socialism understand this problem and situate itself on the side of what is indigenous? It would seem that, politically, socialism cannot do so without breaking with foreign control over regional parties (the type of control exercised by Moscow at the time). Moreover, and most ironically, socialism could not appreciate the contribution of an indigenous heritage of the sort valued by Mariátegui without assimilating a large dose of antipositivist Western thought, often labeled "irrationalist" by traditional

Marxists. Mariátegui's conception of socialism therefore challenged ruling Marxist orthodoxy both politically and ideologically.

Mariátegui's Political Activity

As noted, in 1928, after splitting with Haya de la Torre over the issue of how to constitute the national movement against imperialism, Mariátegui founded the Socialist party of Peru. He sought to have this party affiliated with the Third International. His proposals for the constitution of the Socialist party, however, met with little sympathy from this group.

A study by the Peruvian Marxist Alberto Flores Galindo of the relationship between Mariátegui and the Comintern offers some helpful information. Flores Galindo notes that even in 1927 the International was not aware of Mariátegui's work. When he and some other intellectuals were arrested for a brief period that year, accused by the government of promoting a communist conspiracy (charges denied by Mariátegui), the telegrams sent in solidarity with the group came from distinguished writers and intellectuals like Gabriela Mistral, Alfredo Palacios, José Vasconcelos, Manuel Ugarte, Waldo Frank, and Miguel de Unamuno.¹⁸ After a delegation of Peruvian workers was invited to participate in a workers' congress held in Moscow in May 1928, Mariátegui received an invitation to attend the First Latin American Syndicalist Conference and the first Latin American Communist Conference, held in Uruguay and Argentina, respectively, in 1929. He could not attend either meeting because of his poor health. Yet at the Buenos Aires meeting, two of his papers, "The Problem of the Races in Latin America" and "Anti-imperialist Point of View," were presented by the Peruvian delegation.¹⁹

Among the discrepancies between the views of Mariátegui and the Third International were issues related to the local autonomy of the Peruvian party and the composition of its membership. Flores Galindo notes that "the positions of the Peruvian representatives were very much criticized by the IC [Communist International]."²⁰ Flores Galindo refers to three major discrepancies: the desire of the Peruvians to ground their position in a historical appreciation of the social conditions of the Andine region, as opposed to adopting a Eurocentric notion of Marxism; the understanding of the role of intellectuals as organic, rather than officialistic or bureaucratic; and the issue of the constitution of the party. With respect to the latter point, Mariátegui's Socialist party was

formed around the idea that a political vanguard would unite and lead a diversity of progressive regional groups, in contrast to the idea of a Communist party with a predefined identity imposed uniformly from abroad on all Latin American countries.

These points raise the question of the meaning of a Latin American political Marxism as conceived by Mariátegui and subscribed to by his Peruvian colleagues. Flores Galindo points out that Mariátegui's position shows a new way for Latin American Marxists.

Our way was not the European way. This is why Mariátegui situates himself on a radically different plane of analysis and reflection: in contrast to both the Apristas and the orthodox Communists, the problem [for him] was not how to develop capitalism (and therefore repeat the history of Europe in Latin America), but rather how to follow an autonomous way. From this it can be concluded that without the connection with the poets and essayists of the indigenist school and without the rural uprisings, Mariátegui's Marxism would lack a crucial trait: his challenge to [capitalist] progress and his rejection of the linear and Eurocentric image of universal history.²¹

Up to a point Flores Galindo understands Mariátegui's critique of the European ideology of progress, but he forgets to note how indebted Mariátegui was to other forms of European and even North American thought, including Bergson's philosophy of creativity and William James's pragmatism. These influences would make Mariátegui's thought just as controversial among traditional Marxists as his grass-roots orientation and indigenist perspective would scandalize the Stalinist-dominated Comintern.

An insightful perspective on Mariátegui's political Marxism is offered by the Argentine writer José Aricó. From a standpoint critical of orthodox Marxism, Aricó notes that the debate regarding the name of the party Mariátegui insisted on calling "Socialist" rather than "Communist" had important theoretical and political implications.

The socialist definition of the party was not a simple problem of nomenclature. It was linked to (1) a particular conception of [political] alliances; (2) a decision that diverged from the Comintern in terms of the party's class components, insofar

as it wanted to be the political organ of Peruvian workers, peasants, and intellectuals; (3) a rather heterodox vision of its process of constitution, in that its leadership, rather than being the cause, ought to be the result of grass-roots activity in the different centers of the country. This explains why, until the end of his life, Mariátegui insisted...on the socialist, popular, and autonomous character of the new organization.²²

Aricó's analysis confirms the point made earlier about the concept of identity to be pursued in my analysis of liberation, which takes identity as a result of a life-oriented process of activity, rather than a fixed origin or point of departure that must be duplicated indefinitely for the identity to hold. If Aricó is right, Mariátegui's concept of a socialist political identity would stand out in sharp contrast to top-down notions of identity imposed by doctrinaire parties on their members.

With his life-oriented concept of socialism, which still merits significant consideration today, Mariátegui was fighting an uphill battle, whose successful conclusion was not to be attained in his lifetime. A month after his death, the Socialist party, led by its newly elected secretary Eudocio Ravines, changed its name to the Communist party. Ironically, Ravines, who did everything in his power to destroy Mariátegui's influence during his term of office, was expelled from the Party in the 1940s. He later became an anti-communist propagandist.²³ In contrast, the brilliance of Mariátegui's work has withstood the years as a testimony to his rich, controversial, and dynamic vision of society.

The European Avant-garde and a New Vision of Peruvian Reality

Mariátegui's claim that a liberal, individualist perspective was one whose "time" had passed for Peru appears to be derived in large part from his political experiences in Europe in the early 1920s. He never subjects his postindividualist perspective, however, to a rigorous, critical examination. Three theoretical-political influences appear to be combined in it—one derived from a Leninist revolutionary orientation in Marxism, another from the rise of the fascist movement in Italy, and yet another from the literary avant-garde. Fascism, which he opposed, was strongly anti-individualistic. Leninism, interpreted by Mariátegui as postindividualistic, has operated historically as an anti-individualist and antiliberal force rather than as a postindividual or liberal force. This

leaves one category, that of the literary avant-garde, as the most probable source of inspiration for Mariátegui's open-minded, anti-normative Marxism. Let us explore for a moment this aspect of Mariátegui's thought, which is rarely understood in connection with his capacity for producing a truly original interpretation of Latin American social reality. His remarks in the preface to the *Seven Essays* shed some light on this problem.

Highly unusual about the *Seven Essays* are the opening comments in which Mariátegui expresses a very strong affinity with Nietzsche. This Marxist book, celebrated as the most original and profound of its time by fellow Marxists, is headed by a Nietzschean aphorism from the period of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*: "I will never again read an author of whom one can suspect that he *wanted* to make a book, but only those writers whose thoughts unexpectedly became a book."²⁴ What does this mean? Mariátegui seems to be referring to an intentional and goal-oriented rationality that, as the organizational structure of a text, is displaced by a grouping of thoughts assembled together by virtue of some other principle. The element of spontaneity is mentioned by Mariátegui, but one could equally talk about the creative drives of the unconscious or perhaps even an existential imperative. Mariátegui is more explicit in the body of the preface, where he refers once again to Nietzsche as an author whose spirit of literary creation is interlaced with his own:

I bring together in this book, organized and annotated in seven essays, the articles that I published in *Mundial* and *Amauta* concerning some essential aspects of Peruvian reality. Like *La escena contemporánea*, therefore, this was not conceived of as a book. Better this way. My work has developed as Nietzsche would have wished, for he did not love authors who strained after the intentional, deliberate production of a book, but rather those whose thoughts formed a book spontaneously and without premeditation. Many projects for books occur to me as I lie awake, but I know beforehand that I shall carry out only those to which I am summoned by an imperious force [sólo realizaré los que un imperioso mandato vital me ordene]. My thought and my life are one process [Mi pensamiento y mi vida constituyen una sola cosa, un único proceso]. And if I hope to have some merit recognized, it is that—following another of Nietzsche's precepts—I have written with my blood [Y si algún mérito espero y reclamo que me

sea reconocido es el de—también conforme un principio de Nietzsche—meter toda mi sangre en mis ideas].²⁵

He understands his creativity as an author as a uniquely personal expression of his passion for life—"I have written with my blood." In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche had stated: "Of all that is written I love only what a man has written with his blood. Write with blood, and you will experience that blood is spirit."²⁶

To some extent, the conception that "authentic" writing emerges from the author's life force, without being subjected to an intentional "cut" redirecting the energy to the satisfaction of a self-consciously teleological reason, is analogous to the conception of the relation between the Spanish conquest and pre-Columbian civilization presented in the very first sentence of the *Seven Essays*.

The degree to which the history of Peru was severed by the conquest can be seen better on an economic than on any other level. Here the conquest most clearly appears to be a break in continuity. Until the conquest, an economy developed in Peru that sprang spontaneously and freely from the Peruvian soil and people. The most interesting aspect of the empire of the Incas, which was a grouping of agricultural and sedentary communities, was its economy.... With abundant food their population increased. The Malthusian problem was completely unknown to the empire.... Collective work and common effort were employed fruitfully for social purposes.²⁷

He goes on to say that the Spanish destroyed this carefully built economic system without being able to replace it with anything better. The conquistadors were concerned primarily with what made them wealthy. They plundered the temples and used up the land at will, without any regard for the indigenous society and economy they were dismantling. The disintegration of the indigenous society that resulted from the conquest left the nation fragmented and unable to recover a strong economic system. Mariátegui's vision emerges from a Marxist perspective, but its significance is much broader than that of Marxism. In particular, his view of the conquest as a "cut" into a non-Western self-sustaining economy of material wealth based on attachment to the land as "mother" reveals some affinities Mariátegui has with postmodern feminists and Nietzsche in the treatment of such concepts as continuity, abundance, and violence.