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Project, Prophecy, Problems: José Carlos Mariátegui's Readings of Revolution and Nation in 1920s Peru

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Abstract

José Carlos Mariátegui, Latin America's foremost political thinker and writer, developed a Marxist critique of sociopolitical conditions in 1920s Peru advocating radical change. But his call to develop an inventive critical imagination, a "new spirit," through innovative forms of expression shows his recognition of revolutionary European politics and avant-garde aesthetics for forging a new political consciousness. Key writings—"El hombre y el mito," "El problema del indio"—reveal his interconnected political and aesthetic interests, his efforts to construct a Peruvian Marxism resolving the problems of nationhood by embracing intellectuals, workers and peasants alike. This article examines the interplay of Mariátegui's analytical and imaginative thinking, his aestheticized political discourse and non-orthodox Marxist perspective. It shows how his very language, politico-poetic, quasi-mythic, inspired by Gramsci and Sorel, fostered a revolution in sensibility as well as in society and politics, while critique reveals that his "myth" of the Indian contains unhistorical reductive aspects compromising his argument.

Keywords: Mariátegui, Peruvian Marxism, The Indian problem, Indigenist, Andean myth, Revolutionary language

Independent and innovative, José Carlos Mariátegui is one of Latin America's foremost Marxist thinkers. Known in his native Peru for forging a new Marxist position, he is credited throughout the continent with developing what might be called a "flexible Socialism." This approach is rooted in a critical analysis of national and local socioeconomic and cultural realities within a Marxist conceptual framework. In particular, Mariátegui broadened the parameters of classical Marxist thinking embedded in the experience of European class struggle, to allow for a systematic critique of neo-colonial/imperialist practices, specifically the issue of uneven development in postcolonial contexts. Arguing that the "problem of nation" was inseparable from that of the "Indian question"—the historical marginalization of the Peruvian indigenous peasantry from national politics—he shaped a revolutionary, both an analytical and a visionary, way of thinking and writing about country and continent at a time of growing social crisis (1919-1930) in Peru. This gave impetus to the sociopolitical and cultural movement of Indigenism founded several decades before.¹ But Mariátegui was a self-professed nationalist who advocated cosmopolitanism as a path to nationhood. His peregrinations in Europe (1919-1923) and his European influences were key to the development of his political and aesthetic consciousness, and a practical and unorthodox Marxism, relevant at both national and continental levels.² Mariátegui's political thought and writings have attracted much scholarship, although this has not fully recognized the quantity and quality of his aesthetic writings, and the inextricability of his artistic and political concerns.³ While his advancement of Marxist aesthetic and cultural analysis has been acknowledged by various scholars, few have systematically studied this subject and its shaping of his interpretation of Marxism.⁴ This article focuses on the conjunction of the political and aesthetic in Mariátegui's work, expressed through his imaginative use of language.

Working as a correspondent in Europe for the Peruvian newspaper *El Tiempo* marked a turning point in the intellectual trajectory of Mariátegui. He left Peru something of a political ingénue and returned as a left-wing radical, galvanized by the revolutionary ideals and practices of the mainly Marxist intellectuals he met there.⁵ From 1923, he became a staunch political activist, advocate of the experimental arts and one of his country's and continent's most inspirational thinkers and cultural figures. Central to this transformation and the forging of his highly personal, Peruvian Marxist thinking and way of writing was a receptiveness to Marxist and Modernist ideas and movements rooted in European intellectual traditions. Of Mariátegui's many European influences, Georges Sorel and Henri Barbusse are prominent, as evidenced in his essays and editorials of 1923-1928. But these writings also reveal his ability to build on and make their thinking his own. In "El hombre y el mito" (1925), for example, he echoes Sorel's impassioned defense of Socialist ideology on the grounds that, like religion, it satisfies a fundamental human need

for spiritual certainty and fulfillment in a modern age of skepticism. But he goes one step further by calling for a Marxist revolution in the language of popular religion, addressing national problems of underdevelopment and a broadly *mestizo*, (semi-)proletarianized and professional public, hungry for political change but also swayed by quasi-religious lexis and symbols.⁶ From 1924, Mariátegui displays a growing preoccupation with the “problems” of nation and of the Indian, which attests to his reading of works by his compatriot Manuel González Prada (1844-1918). However, his method of responding to these questions, through a pedagogical project and journal (*Claridad*) inspired by González Prada and Barbusse, shows an aptitude for developing intellectual conceptions at home and abroad by relating them to the conditions of his day.⁷

Mariátegui's Peruvian-style Marxism was consolidated through his pioneering monthly journal *Amauta* from 1926-1930 and the Peruvian Socialist Party (PSP) he founded in 1928. His Marxism drew as much on European ideas about left-wing rebellion and the revolutionary potential of intellectuals, workers and peasants—Gramsci's influence was also important in conciliating proletarian/anarcho-syndicalist and peasant concerns—as on domestic notions of the need for national reconciliation and close observation of autochthonous realities.⁸ It was aimed at integrating large swathes of Peruvian society, especially the disenfranchised indigenous peasant majority, and building a Gramscian-like national-popular hegemony. Ultimately, it was intended as a political alternative to prevailing ideological positions: President Augusto B. Leguía's Positivist, technocratic, neo-colonial rule, in alliance with the oligarchic *civilistas*, and an *Apra* party seeking a dubious “third way” between capitalism and Socialism.⁹ Thus while Mariátegui is remembered for his construction of a Peruvian and Latin American Marxism, and his contribution to an independent tradition of Marxist thought, the influence of European thinkers, such as Sorel, Barbusse and Gramsci, was crucial in shaping his understanding of national-continental realities.¹⁰ And he developed this through an innovative form of political, indeed politico-poetic, expression.

Artful Encounters: The Politics and Poetics of Representation

Mariátegui's new cosmopolitan-cum-national Peruvian Marxist position was influenced by prevailing European political trends, while seeking independence from the Soviet Comintern.¹¹ But his experience of the radically politicized aesthetic practices of those involved in the avant-garde movement while he was in Europe was also pivotal.¹² Mariátegui recognized the revolutionary value of their attempts to challenge restrictive forms of rationalist-capitalist production/representation through experimental forms of aesthetic and political expression and he actively encouraged avant-garde writers and artists on his return to Peru in his journal *Amauta*, especially *aprista* and Socialist Indigenists concerned with the plight of the Indian community.¹³ These endeavors and his own writings on literature, the (visual) arts, and cultural figures and movements from Europe, North and Latin America, point to the inseparability of aesthetic and political concerns in the forging of his Marxism. This developed into an interplay of interests creatively consolidated through the very language shaped to communicate them. Mariátegui's unorthodox political and aesthetic, theoretical and practical perspective is in fact most manifest in his singular politico-poetic form of expression. Exposed to the intellectual ferment and artistic experiments of Europe in the interwar years, Mariátegui was attentive to the transformative potentiality of a poetically-charged discourse. Here lies the source of his independence and originality: in his efforts to construct a conjoined politico-poetic interpretive approach through a new language and conceptual outlook, drawing on the very substance and malleability of language. Mariátegui focused on addressing imaginatively the problems of a fragmented Peruvian modernity and he laid the foundations for an independent tradition of Marxism in Latin America. This opposed Comintern orthodoxy while advancing European Marxist thinking by expanding its theoretical focus and practical applications.

Mariátegui's awareness of the dynamic political possibilities of language may have drawn on the iconoclastic ventures of his European counterparts, but it was honed through painstaking practice. He devised a form of political writing that was analytical and visionary, which informed and inspired his readers. His recognition of the need for a new mode of representation and conceptual outlook in Peru can be seen in his appeal to poets to cultivate an “espíritu nuevo” (Mariátegui 1974a, 121) in the manifesto-like essay “Arte, revolución y decadencia” (1926).¹⁴ A close reading of this piece and “El hombre y el mito” shows the interplay of both his political and material, and aesthetic and metaphysical concerns at a textual level.¹⁵ The seminal *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928) offers further evidence of these intertwined interests.¹⁶ Its very Prologue (“Advertencia”) (Mariátegui 1972a) explains the unorthodox, spontaneous manner in which these would be expressed: by responding to “un imperioso mandato vital.” It is in this opening piece, where he states emotively that he has written with his blood, that Mariátegui reveals another important intellectual influence: Nietzsche. Mariátegui's references to the latter in this Prologue, and in “El hombre,” though here he does not cite him by name, are not surprising given Nietzsche's key writings on the equivocal nature of language and reality, the material and immaterial. Even a cursory reading of “El hombre” shows significant echoes of Nietzsche's endorsement of the metaphysical value of religious and secular myth in an age of excessive rationalism and growing skepticism, or “nihilism.”¹⁷ The recourse to Nietzschean terms and concepts in this essay, the most obvious examples being “escepticismo,” “superhumana,” “voluntad de creer” and even “nihilista,” confirms this philosopher's impact on the development of his politico-poetic approach, as does Nietzsche's style of writing, with its use of analogy, aphorism and anecdote, and

dialectical mode of argumentation. Mariátegui drew on this terminology and these stylistic forms. He attempted to shape a poeticized form of writing and thinking through which his political and artistic concerns could be creatively conjoined. “El hombre” thus affirms the restorative, renewing properties of political myth and also asserts the transforming potential of a poetically-inflected language, which Mariátegui develops in this and other essays.

For Nietzsche, myth provided a means of spiritual affirmation and regeneration in a late nineteenth-century Europe that increasingly questioned Liberal(-Positivist) precepts and religious certainties. Like Sorel, however, Mariátegui saw the added political value of a mythical perspective in a fractured postwar society in need of rehabilitation.¹⁸ As seen in “El hombre,” the growing crisis of confidence in scientific rationalism, technological progress and organized religion, namely, “la crisis de la civilización burguesa,” together with the prospect of reactionary utopias (“mitos pretéritos”) (Mariátegui 1987b, 24; 26), made the construction of new narratives by the Left all the more important. Furthermore, he seems fully aware that for these myths to be truly new, different from those at both ends of the political spectrum and capable of generating change, like a poeticized language they had to speak as much to the senses, to sentiment, as to rationality. By drawing on and appealing to sensory (imagination) and cognitive (reason) forms of thinking, a Marxist myth expressed through a politico-poetic language would be able to raise an awareness of present-day realities, to anticipate a better future. Mariátegui knew that this was as necessary in Peru as it was in postwar Europe for countering sterile skepticism and false myths of Positivist rationalism, nationalism and religion.¹⁹ He thus conjures in “El hombre” the notion of a new Marxist mythical narrative through abstract lexis and ambiguity of tone. This myth would inspire a sense of spiritual and secular possibility, of prophesy, a consciousness of what might be and of what has come about, which appealed both to imagination and to memory.

This impression of latency and awareness, the dawning of an alternative reality and way of thinking, connoted by the adjective “matinal,” is conveyed through a metaphor, that of “el alba.” Combined with the noun “alma,” these terms communicate the notion of a nascent consciousness and suggest that Marxist myth, and the politico-poetic language evoking it, would heighten awareness and strengthen conviction (“fe”), necessary for satisfying a Nietzschean “need to believe” at personal and political levels.²⁰ Mariátegui thereby confirms the regenerative potential of this myth and way of writing, their capacity for consolidating a new sense of “deep self,” “yo profundo,” and community, and effecting revolutionary change. Through the writing’s idealist-realist tone, he conceives consciousness-raising and transformation as a political and cultural project and process. In contrast to Sorel’s anarcho-syndicalist myth of a general strike, aimed at polarizing the middle and working classes, and precipitating a revolutionary struggle through increased violence on both sides, Mariátegui’s idea of social revolution intended to reconcile these groups and the indigenous peasantry.²¹ His conception of revolution, like Gramsci’s (1999, 238-40), as a lasting process, akin to Trotsky’s notion of “permanent revolution,” *and* as a single cataclysmic event, also diverges from Sorel’s, which leans toward the second interpretation. In Mariátegui’s hands, Sorel’s syndicalist myth of urban class conflict is reconstituted as a politico-religious narrative of long-term Marxist revolution and reconstruction. Capable of rallying, with its cross-class and inter-ethnic reach and millenarian dimensions, a growing number of disaffected workers and peasants during the *oncenio*, the broad appeal of this myth would cement the necessary alliance between these social groups.²² Like Gramsci, Mariátegui builds on Sorel’s ideas of proletarian consciousness and class conflict, seeking to reconcile city/coast and countryside/*sierra* in Peru through his narrative of social revolution.

Central to Gramsci’s notion of a worker-peasant alliance is the formation of a “national-popular collective will” and the development of a dramatic form of expression that would serve as a rhetorical “exemplification” of this “will” or hegemony (2005, 130). His recognition of the political value of an aestheticized discourse could not be closer to Mariátegui’s awareness of the potential for forging a new Marxist outlook through a poetic, or politico-poetic, mode of representation and narrative of social revolution. Furthermore, the claim made in the Prologue to *Siete ensayos* that this form of expression responds to the dictates of his imagination in addition to those of reason, seems to answer Gramsci’s call for Communist Party leaders to adopt a more direct, emotive form of political address. It is in fact in this Prologue, particularly in mentioning Nietzsche, that Mariátegui signals the diverse political and critical, poetic and creative elements that comprise his emergent analytical *and* visionary way of writing, and show his concern to politicize his readers, ultimately heightening their awareness of a possible revolution involving workers and peasants. The crucial role he assigned to the indigenous peasantry in this revolutionary struggle is implicit throughout *Siete ensayos* in his attentiveness to the Indian question. The essay “El problema del indio. Su nuevo planteamiento,” in particular, shows his aim to tackle this question in a new way, as part of the broader problem of nation and representation during the *oncenio*.

Siete ensayos constitutes a systematic Marxist critique of colonial and postcolonial experience in Peru, the first of its kind in the country if not also in Latin America. It provides a broad yet detailed historical-materialist reading of a fractured nation carrying a legacy of dependent (neo-)colonial and capitalist rule. The essays develop an overarching political thesis and a Peruvian Marxist position through an idiosyncratic use of language. The central

argument rests on attributing Peru's political and socioeconomic divisions and underdevelopment to long-standing feudal structures (*gamonalismo*, or despotism) perpetuated by a landowning oligarchy, which had wielded political power since colonial times. Social revolution and agrarian reform are equated, explicitly or not, with the liberation of the indigenous peasantry from this feudalism and posed as putative solutions to the twin problems of nation and of the Indian. Dismantling the oligarchy and restoring land to the Indian community (*ayllu*), viewed as a viable socioeconomic institution, are specifically posited as necessary for achieving national unity and sustainable development. This would lead to an independent Peruvian nation. Mariátegui thus identifies the underlying economic basis of Peru's fragmentation and its peasantry's marginalization, tracing their history from a (semi-)feudal colonial past to an uneven capitalist modernity. By reading national contemporary realities through the lens of a history of (neo-)colonial rule, he moves beyond a classical European Marxist analysis of capitalist development. A historical-materialist inquiry combines with a postcolonial critical outlook to produce a new Peruvian Marxist theoretical perspective that resonates with and seeks to consolidate the growing anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist sentiments of workers and peasant activists in Peru.

Mariátegui was mindful of these attitudes, among the proletariat at least in Lima and along the coast, through his journalistic and political pursuits.²³ He launched *Labor*, a monthly newspaper for workers, in 1928 and with his Socialist Party founded the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) the following year.²⁴ While less involved in peasant politics and indigenous culture, he was still eager to promote them through his writings and his journal *Amauta*. A preoccupation with Indian (political) culture, past and present, provided the impetus for this journal and his Peruvian Marxist position. Mariátegui recognized the political potential of the indigenous peasantry for realizing social revolution and national reconstruction in Peru, as well as the need to include it in these processes. The peasant land invasions in the southern *sierra* during the early 1920s, with their appeal to the provincial *mestizo* middle classes, eager to contest oligarchic-capitalist monopolies in local areas, only signaled for him their capacity for challenging and reversing entrenched forms of subordination and dependence at regional and national levels.²⁵ He saw in this peasant insurgency, fuelled by millenarian beliefs in the reinstatement of an Inca state, an Andean Utopia, embodied in the post-Columbian myth of *Inkarrí* and the mythical notion of *pachacuti* (total transformation), concepts which could further galvanize and unify peasants, workers and the middle classes.²⁶ He was attuned to these ideas, as he had written on the Inca-inspired *Rumi Maqui* peasant uprising of 1915-1916 before he embarked for Europe, and on his return he had close contact with prominent Socialist Indigenist intellectuals, such as Luis E. Valcárcel (1891-1987) and Gamaliel Churata (1897-1969) in Cusco and Puno. In 1923, he met the charismatic peasant activist, a Gramsci-like "organic" intellectual, Ezequiel Urviola, who embodied the prototypical "nuevo indio," educated and politicized (an anarcho-syndicalist-cum-Socialist), yet deeply rooted in his native Quechua-speaking culture.²⁷ Inspired perhaps by Urviola, to whom he pays tribute in the Prologue to Valcárcel's (1975) influential essay *Tempestad en los Andes*, of 1927, Mariátegui, like other (non-Indian) Indigenist intellectuals of his day, such as Valcárcel himself, asserted the links between the peasant insurgency of the time and that of decades, even centuries, before. He recognized their shared recourse to utopian thinking and, like Valcárcel, he saw that the notion of restoring an Inca state could be merged with that of founding a post-capitalist Socialist order through the idea and praxis of a revolutionary struggle paralleling an Andean *pachacuti*.²⁸ Significantly, this appealed to both Indian peasants, and workers familiar with anarcho-syndicalist precepts.

Mariátegui was aware of the capacity of both a Marxist myth and a politico-religious notion of an Andean Utopia for radicalizing and uniting peasants and workers for revolution. His endorsement of these myths, through a "Mito" conjoining them, a secular narrative of social revolution, is evident in "El hombre," of 1925, where he conceives this as capable of fulfilling the function of religious myth in a postcolonial, postwar Peru. Significantly, however, his choice of words in this essay highlights another important insight on his part: the potentially energizing power of language, particularly in articulating this myth. Apparent in "El hombre," this way of writing is also manifest in *Siete ensayos*, its very Prologue implicitly equating a search for style with an ontological and political struggle for self-determination through the metaphorical, Nietzschean-inspired association made between writing, creativity and life, and self-sacrifice, connoted by the image of blood connecting them all.

From the beginning, *Siete ensayos* signals a break with orthodox Marxist writing and thinking by professing an adherence to alternative modes of representation and conceptualization, those following the dictates of an imagination unfettered by rationality: "no soy un crítico imparcial y objetivo. Mis juicios se nutren de mis ideales, de mis sentimientos, de mis pasiones" (1972a, 12). But self-asserted passion and spontaneity in the Prologue are soon disavowed by the structured nature of the language and thoughts inscribed on subsequent pages, pointing to an overriding aim not to follow the impulses of sentiment alone, but those of an emotion, a creative imagination, enhanced by the analytical properties of reason. A rationalist-political lexicon predominates in most essays, but in others, or in some passages, there is evidence, however attenuated, of a more inventive use of language: the conjoined politico-poetic mode of expression seen in "El hombre." Such is the case with the essay "El problema del indio. Su nuevo planteamiento," where, as will be seen, analytical-political and politico-poetic discourses run parallel

to each other, the second evoking, particularly in the crucial, lengthy first footnote of this text, a mythical narrative of Marxist revolution in which the indigenous peasantry plays a pivotal role. This introduces a strain of idealism into an otherwise somewhat doctrinaire piece of writing.²⁹

In Other Words: Revolutionary Myths of Nationhood and the Indian

“El problema” is a key essay in *Siete ensayos*, offering a diagnosis of and a possible solution to the vexing Indian problem, posited as inextricably linked to the wider question of nation.³⁰ Mariátegui discerns the cause of these problems as the persistence of (neo-)colonial feudalism (*gamonalismo*)—affecting land tenure, labor practices and relations of rule—in the *sierra*, and their consequences as dependence and division. But his reading also diverges from a classical Marxist critique in his casting of the Indian peasantry as a protagonist in a narrative of revolution and national reconstruction.³¹ The nation’s problems and the means of resolving or responding to them through a popular revolutionary struggle are thus conceived in socioeconomic and political-cultural terms, while this new Marxist perspective is articulated in a different way: through a politico-poetic form of expression. The latter’s originality and its value for elucidating the problems and advancing the possibilities of Peruvian nationhood can only be determined after a brief examination of its analytical-political discursive counterpart in the body of the essay.

Mariátegui’s analytical-critical interpretive approach, which defines his theoretical judgments, conveys a historical-materialist and revisionist preoccupation with socioeconomic structures and political relations of rule, colonial and Republican. This Marxist orientation is expressed through lexical repetition and juxtaposition. As expected, the political signifiers “feudalidad” and “feudal,” from the first page on, are paired with those of “gamonales” and “gamonalismo,” referring to long-standing landowning and mining interests. But words such as “servidumbre” and “explotación” emphasize the adverse socioeconomic and cultural effects of sustained local despotism on the Indian population. These terms, linked to those of “individualista” and “liberal,” indicate a Liberal (neo-)colonial political system. However, they are juxtaposed with other signifiers that signal an alternative Marxist order: “socialista” and “solidaridad.” Furthermore, “crítica,” “estructura económica,” “masas” and “hecho histórico” suggest a classical Marxist theoretical position intent on critical structural analysis and assessment, and wholesale, material and cultural, change (“reorganización”) (38). But their usage and predictable combinations also risk rendering Mariátegui’s reading reductive and deterministic. Overall, this lexis projects a didactic, pessimistic and at times depersonalized tone, in tune with a more doctrinaire line of argument, one that distances writer and reader from each other and from the creative process of interpretation.³²

In contrast, an alternative, emergent, politico-poetic perspective aimed at forming “juicios” and expressing “ideales,” “sentimientos” and “pasiones” (Mariátegui 1972a, 12) can also be seen in “El problema.” Most evident in the long first footnote, the quality and content of its discourse, and the attention it deserves, far outweigh its subordinated position in the text. Through its figurative language, combining spiritual, metaphysical, political and material values and concerns, and analytical and creative reflection, this approach strives to shape an inventive critical imagination. Significantly, the spatio-temporal framework evoked by this lexis is one in which the lines between external and internal, past and future categories have collapsed. Personal and social realities are thus connected, while a sense of reciprocity and the future is also conveyed.

One such suggestive signifier is “despertar” (35), associated with the Indian community and the stirring of a new sociopolitical consciousness, referenced in the second footnote by the term “conciencia.” “Despertar” also appears alongside “fe” and “esperanza” (35), linked to the notions of resolving the Indian problem and an impending revolution. This lexis, which appeals to sentiment, personal and collective, connoted by the phrase “emoción mundial” (35), suggests the manner in which a fresh political awareness is to be achieved: through emotional understanding. However, the essay carries a hidden subtext: the idea that emotion must be accompanied by rational thought (denoted by the verbs “reflexiona” and “pensar” [44]) so that it can be personally and politically effective. The interplay of individual and communal emotion, and intuitional and rational thinking, inferred by the juxtaposition of all these signifiers, points to the possibility of an enhanced form of enlightenment.³³ Implicit in the latter, therefore, is the notion of a consciousness deriving from within, from self-knowledge (“se reflexiona”) (44), and influenced from outside by Marxist thought. The emphasis placed on self- and political awareness and enlightenment, and the proposed ways in which these can be attained, give the related nouns “redención” (37) and “reivindicación” (36) potent political as well as spiritual-metaphysical meaning.

Significantly, a politico-religious sense of restitution is also conveyed by the term “mito” (35) in the first footnote, which is likewise equated with emotion and thought, and the dawning (“despertar”) of a new political consciousness. “Mito,” alongside “alma,” connoting a metaphysical, existential sense of self, both intuitional and cognizant, signals the possible connection between sentiment and thinking, imaginary and rational. This might imply the emergence of a heightened form of awareness and understanding. Together with the signifier “fe” (35), these terms echo those of “El hombre,” reinforcing the conceptual link made in the latter between spiritual awakening and self-fulfillment, and political consciousness and self-determination. With their dual metaphysical and material, imaginative and

rationalist, personal and political dimensions, these words elucidate the phrases “nuevo planteamiento,” in the essay’s title, and “nueva conciencia.” Furthermore, they offer compelling evidence for Mariátegui’s perception that language itself, one engaging the senses and emotion, and intellectual and imaginative thought, could provide an answer or an instrument for responding to the problems of his time. In fact, he implicitly credits a revitalized Marxist lexicon (“nuevos términos”) (36), and its associated concepts, with offering the creative means for developing a new understanding of these questions: “he llegado al entendimiento y a la valorización justa de lo indígena por la vía del socialismo” (35-36). A politico-poetic interpretive perspective is indirectly posited as providing an enhanced framework for rethinking the diverse aspects of these problems, especially that of the Indian: “El socialismo nos ha enseñado a plantear el problema indígena en nuevos términos [...] como problema social, económico y político” (36).

Mariátegui thus recognizes a capacity for devising long-lasting metaphysical and material, political solutions to the problem of being (Indian, Creole, or *mestizo*) in Peru through innovative forms of writing and thinking, rooted in revolutionary Marxist dialectics.³⁴ But a closer look at his politico-poetic approach in “El problema” reveals a tendency that threatens its implied inherent equivalence—a primacy given to immediate party-political concerns over broader poetic, philosophical and political ones. Conscious or not, this inclination inevitably calls into question this perspective’s value for developing an improved critical understanding of the problems being addressed. As will be seen, this is particularly the case when its abstract lexis is mobilized for conjuring an Indo-Marxist myth of social revolution in the important first footnote.

In “El hombre,” Mariátegui, drawing on Sorel, vigorously affirms the transformative potential of Socialist ideas and, by implication, language, conceptualizing them as a form of secular myth. Like its religious counterpart, Marxist myth would foster belief (“fe”), a Nietzschean “will to life,” necessary for a sense of self (“alma;” “yo profundo”) and agency (“Acción”), all-too-attenuated in a postwar modernity. But he goes one step further in “El problema,” by invoking a Marxist mythical narrative of wholesale social revolution with an indigenous peasantry at its helm. The spatio-temporal parameters of this myth encompass local (*sierra*) and national (*sierra* and coast), (pre-)colonial past and present-future spheres. This widened sense of space and time is evoked through lexis, politico-poetic, or politico-religious, tenses (present and perfect) and tone (utopian idealism), particularly in relation to the Indian community and a revolutionary struggle.³⁵ The conceptual connections made between spatial and temporal categories, the peasantry and a Marxist revolution are reinforced by implicitly associating the latter with national redemption (“redención”) (37), lending Mariátegui’s Marxist myth millenarian dimensions. This Indo-Marxist narrative of revolutionary struggle, and the struggle itself, are in turn legitimized as being the only viable solution, tacitly the “fórmula salvadora” (44), to the problems of nation through the pairing of the adjective “revolucionario” with those of “nacionalista” and “socialista” (“no es posible ser efectivamente nacionalista y revolucionario sin ser socialista”) (38).³⁶ These terms are all indirectly linked to that of “indígena” (35).

The impression of imminence and viability conveyed by this myth of national restitution is bolstered by the notion of a dormant, or incipient, indigenous-national political consciousness waiting to be roused (“despertar”). The implication is that this political awareness will, through a forthcoming Marxist revolution, bring about the reinstatement and propagation of autochthonous “communistic” (“comunista”) (35) forms of organization fractured by the forces of *gamonalismo* and capitalism alike. This suggestion is strengthened by allusions to a rising tide of Indian rebellions (“el resurgimiento indígena”) (35) in the present, inspired by “la idea de la revolución socialista” (35). If the idea/myth of Indo-Marxist revolution is posed as a remedy for the nation’s problems, references to currents of international Marxism (“las corrientes revolucionarias mundiales”) (35) and capitalism (“capitalismos imperialistas extranjeros”) (38) expand its spatial possibilities, indicating that, much like its cosmopolitan Marxist counterpart, it is capable of inspiring resistance against neo-colonial/capitalist interests in Peru and beyond. Through this mythic construct, a Marxist revolutionary struggle is rendered as an unfolding collective project and process of nation-building. This involves an objectified body of Indians (“[d]el indio”) (35), and *mestizos* and Creoles—the presumed readers of the text, connoted by the first-person plural voice—at local and (inter-)national levels, in both the present and the future.³⁷

Through spatial, temporal and conceptual convergence, evoked by politico-poetic terminology, a myth of a Peruvian Marxist revolution is validated as an inevitable, all-embracing, lasting solution to the parallel problems of a marginalized majority and a broken wider body politic. Ultimately, it is posited as a means of enabling national integration and reconstruction, these acquiring politico-religious dimensions through the use of emotive, evocative signifiers, such as “redención,” while those of “fe” and “esperanza” (35) impart a sense of political and metaphysical idealism or utopianism.³⁸ This mood is compounded by the use of rhetorical devices—interrogation and exclamation marks—and switches between the first-person singular and plural narrative voices toward the end of the first footnote.³⁹ This footnote thus reads like a manifesto for Mariátegui’s Peruvian Marxism. But while imminence and idealism might suggest a Nietzschean sense of the “eternal return”—offered as a philosophical and

secular antidote to or compensation for skepticism—and a utopian Marxist notion of impending sociopolitical restoration, they may also ultimately militate against the very analytical-visionary, politico-poetic reading of national (and continental) historical development sought by Mariátegui through his new Marxist lexis (“nuevos términos”). This is because the language used to express a sense of transcendence and proximity also conveys an idealized, partisan representation of the Indian community and its role in revolution and nation-formation. As such, Mariátegui risks reproducing essentialist (Romantic Indianist or class-based Marxist) and binary (*sierra/coast*; Indian/Creole) conceptions of them and the Peruvian nation.⁴⁰

Contrary to expectations, a close look at the Indo-Marxist myth embedded in the first footnote reveals its rootedness in an elevated, homogeneous and anachronistic depiction of the indigenous body politic (“[d]el indio”) that only seems to undercut its historical and political legitimacy. Implicitly located in a distant past and remote rural setting, their socioeconomic and cultural practices and relations dehistoricized (viewed as Inca) and imputed with Marxist value (“sistema comunista”), the Indians’ (“el pueblo incaico”) assumed predisposition to Marxism—given the survival of their pre-Columbian forms of collectivism—is misguidedly naturalized.⁴¹ Cast as a uniform class of peasants, they are also seemingly divested of cultural, or ethnic, specificity and diversity: their identity as new Indians, or *mestizos*. The complex realities of migration and cultural *mestizaje*—the many (semi-)proletarianized Indians and *mestizos* involved in mining, commercial agriculture and trade, in and in-between highland communities and coastal cities—appear to be disregarded by this mythic construct, which imparts a reductive, class-based and deterministic reading of revolution and historical development, and the part played by the indigenous peasantry in these processes. There is some irony, then, in Mariátegui’s critique of a Liberal-bourgeois (Romantic Indianist) language (“lenguaje pseudo-idealista”) (36) that diminishes this population and its experience of modernity.⁴² In the absence of an established bourgeoisie, Mariátegui rightly saw the Indian peasantry as playing a crucial part, alongside the proletariat, in a forthcoming Marxist revolution in Peru.⁴³ However, while he rendered indigenous socioeconomic structures and cultural values as compatible with Marxist ones, this gesture only seems to sanction his idea of a Peruvian Marxist political order and his myth of the revolutionary struggle that will bring it about. Posed as the only tenable solution to the country’s problems, this revolution and its mythical narrative are irrevocably equated with national political and cultural restitution.

Mariátegui’s ahistorical, idealized reading of the indigenous community and social revolution in “El problema” raises an important question, however: what, other than a personal resolve to promulgate a set of party-political, Peruvian Marxist notions of national development can account for its conceptual and representational shortcomings? Political exigencies, due to mounting state repression and polarization, as much within as outside the left-wing opposition—evidenced in his year-long stand-off with Haya de la Torre and the founding of his Socialist Party, both in 1928—clearly had a hand in hardening his ideological position. Limited knowledge, personal and social scientific, of the Indian people may also account for a reliance on cultural and class-based stereotypes of them.⁴⁴ But a scrutiny of the politico-poetic interpretive approach in “El problema” suggests that the philosophical idealism and critical-creative thinking and language apparent in “El hombre” were indeed compromised by his growing party militancy and that of others on both sides of the political divide toward the end of the decade. The all-too-elevated, emotive and didactic rhetoric deployed in the conjuring of a myth of a Peruvian Marxist revolution involving both peasants and the proletariat in “El problema,” speaks persuasively not just of a journalist’s or an activist’s attempt to galvanize a public into radical action, but also of a political leader’s partisan concern to garner support for his party.⁴⁵

In many ways, the lexis, tenses and tone of the politico-poetic perspective in “El problema” seem to be mobilized for evoking an Indo-Marxist mythical narrative aimed as much at orienting political sentiments in a party direction as promoting self-consciousness and independent thinking. Party-political idealism and motivations—manifest in the powerful sense of imminent revolution and the prominence given to the Indians’ role in this and the task of national reconstruction—threaten to short-circuit the transforming potential of this myth, undercutting the hermeneutic value of an interpretive approach aimed at tackling creatively the problems it was devised to address.⁴⁶ If the revolutionary capacity of this perspective also rests on its engaging his contemporary readers in an interactive process of interpretation, one should ponder the likely identity of Mariátegui’s readership. The first-person plural voice and the pronouns “nos” (36) and “nuestro” (38) suggest a body of urban (*mestizo*) Peruvians, sympathetic to the Indigenist cause and assumed Marxist adherents. The indigenous community itself seems largely to have been written out of this narrative of its self-liberation, by having its voice suppressed and being passed over as a possible readership. In the essay “El proceso de la literatura,” also in *Siete ensayos*, Mariátegui censures an inauthentic Indigenist poetry and prose penned by intellectuals outside or on the fringes of native culture: “La literatura indigenista no puede darnos una versión rigurosamente verista del indio” (1972c, 335). Only when Indian writers and artists themselves contribute to these artistic forms—termed “indígena” rather than “indigenista”—he argues, would these constitute a representative account of indigenous experience and, by implication, shape a new Indian(-*mestizo*) readership. While he asserts this, however, his own mythologizing, his naturalizing of the

indigenous community may only have perpetuated what he criticized. It is for the modern reader of “El problema” to judge how far autochthonous authorship and readership have fostered new narratives of social revolution and liberation in Peru, fulfilling the creative possibilities of Mariátegui’s politico-poetic perspective to find fresh solutions to the problems of nationhood.⁴⁷

Conclusions

Mariátegui’s originality, his revolutionary contribution to Peruvian Marxism and nationhood, lies partly in his adapting an orthodox Marxist critique to socioeconomic conditions in Peru during the *oncenio*. But he also realized the crucial importance of melding this political-philosophical analysis to a language, a form of representation, which could appeal to the broadest political community. His critique and writing sought to embrace the middle-class intelligentsia, Creoles, *mestizos*, the proletariat and, most importantly, the under-represented Peruvian Indians. He hoped that they would all be engaged in a unified project of Marxist revolution. This he strove to achieve through a European-inspired Socialist thinking, embedded within the potentially fertile ground of indigenous, Andean mythical notions of community, generation and rebirth. Such thinking was articulated in an invigorated language that appealed to a myth of restitution, through a political but also a poetic rhetoric. This became the mainspring for a revolutionary spirit and a force for change.

Key writings on politics and the arts, such as “El hombre” (1925), “Arte” (1926) and “El problema” (1928) implicitly answer his call for a “new spirit” of revolution in Peru. The interplay of political and aesthetic conceptions, and analytical and imaginative thinking is evident in his politico-poetic approach. This signals an attempt to consolidate a new political consciousness, necessary for wholesale change—a revolution in sensibility as well as in society and politics. Serving to ascribe quasi-religious, even mystical, dimensions to political and material conceptions and concerns, thereby enhancing these, this perspective highlights Mariátegui’s propensity to think and write poetically and metaphysically about Marxist politics. As seen in “El hombre,” a political conception of consciousness, belief and change—revolution—is articulated through a metaphysical, religious vocabulary (“espíritu”/“alma”/“fe”) culled from a politico-poetic lexicon. Drawing on Sorel’s ideas about the affinity between religious myth and Socialist ideology, through their shared ability to stir passions and induce faith in the face of growing secularism and class conflict, Mariátegui’s mythic Marxism reveals another important source of inspiration, however: millenarian notions of an Andean Utopia fuelling indigenous peasant insurgency in the southern *sierra*. Recasting Sorel’s anarcho-syndicalism in terms of an Indo-Marxist myth of social revolution and restoration, expressed through a spiritually-inflected political language in “El problema,” Mariátegui sought to appeal to and conciliate proletarian and peasant interests alike, and those of individuals like him—(non-Indian) Indigenist intellectuals and sympathizers.⁴⁸ His evocation of a revolutionary struggle in the language of Andean utopianism places the Indian community at its forefront. In “El problema,” the nation’s problems—unequal relations of rule and landownership (*gamonalismo*)—and their possible solution—social revolution—are conceived in Indo-Peruvian Marxist terms. The recent wave of peasant land invasions confirmed for him the Indians’ political agency. But, expressed through a politico-religious-poetic lexis, Mariátegui’s reading of the challenges of nation-building also affirms the transformative possibilities of language. Evident in both “El problema” and “El hombre,” this lexis embodies these energies, focusing attention on itself as well as on the socioeconomic and political realities it is representing.

Significantly though, this does not appear to be the case when mobilized for delineating his myth of Indo-Marxist revolution, where Mariátegui’s new perspective seems primed for consolidating party-political allegiances. Thus while the abstract, suggestive terminology of “El hombre,” and at times “El problema,” may inspire a critical and creative outlook in his assumed readers, underlying partisan motivations also seem to diminish this prospect. In the long first footnote of “El problema,” a Peruvian Marxist mythical narrative of revolution implicitly yet effectively denies the indigenous peasants their notional active participation in this struggle. In fact, their idealization writes them out of this process. Through references to a bygone pre-Columbian era and continued communitarian practices, Mariátegui’s politico-poetic approach connects this population and its world, natural and social, with a would-be Peruvian Marxist order by ascribing Marxist dimensions to them. Represented as an undifferentiated, dehistoricized indigenous community, partly coinciding with Romantic (“noble savage”) or Social Realist (“passive victim”) Indianist or intellectual Indigenist constructs, this people’s ontological and political specificity and agency seem disconcertingly disavowed. Furthermore, by assigning them a pre-destined role in the presaged revolution and a future, re-envisioned, integrated nation, the reader’s attention is deflected from the concrete details of this role, the alliances having to be formed and the aims and outcomes being fought for.⁴⁹ With an Indian peasantry allegedly pre-disposed to Marxism and cast in a leading position in a Peruvian Marxist revolution reinstating a putative Socialist order, the revolutionary struggle is legitimized by being naturalized. This dispels the need for historical-materialist analysis and strategy.

Growing party-political preoccupations and exigencies from early 1928—repression and tensions with *Apra* and the Comintern—may account for this reductive mythical reading of revolution and national reconstruction, pre-establishing its purpose and complexion. After all, this over-rhetorical evocation speaks persuasively of an attempt

to inspire more than the party faithful. Nevertheless, while seemingly compromised for partisan ends, the language invoking this myth may also, by drawing attention to itself and its limitations, paradoxically affirm its unrealized creative potential. A close, critical reading of “El problema” and other writings in which Mariátegui hones his politico-poetic perspective sharpens this awareness in the reader. While he may have been unaware of the ambiguities and contradictions of his own evolving discourse, these become a creative source of tension and agency for his readers, endorsing its interpretive, revolutionary value, however more in theory than in outcome.

But Mariátegui’s own attentiveness to the transforming possibilities of a revitalized language and thought is also an important stimulus for his readers. This awareness is seen in his efforts to develop new ideas through the very substance of this language, and in his attempt to construct a new paradigm (“nuevo planteamiento”) for understanding the Indian problem and promote wholesale change. His restless search for a fresh mode of expression, for reframing familiar questions, created new opportunities, not just for the ways in which this language and its referents could be understood and used, but also for molding critical readers of his work—readers who could become new political subjects by writing, and writing themselves into, their own narratives of revolution and liberation. Like Gramsci, Mariátegui recognized the potency of an aestheticized political discourse for galvanizing his followers and forging an alliance of forces through which the proletariat, the peasantry and their “organic” intellectuals would shape fresh sociopolitical and cultural roles and realities for themselves. This insight and these efforts, however fledgling and fragmentary, ultimately confirm the fundamental value of his writerly language. A hybrid form of expression, which, rooted in ambiguity, both lexical and political, elicits diverse readings and new narratives of a Peruvian nation in flux and re-formation during and after his lifetime.

Notes

- 1 This movement generally comprised non-Indian, educated, urban and mainly provincial *mestizos* and Creoles who, celebrating pre-Columbian indigenous-Inca culture, bemoaned the deprivation suffered by the Indian community in contemporary times due to a legacy of colonial rule. Purporting to represent this people, and redeem them from their impoverishment, *indigenismo* also sought to protect, if not further, the sociopolitical interests of those Indigenist intellectuals within its ranks.
- 2 Mariátegui (1894-1930) was primarily an essayist, a journalist and a political activist, not a philosopher. His originality and the value of his contribution to Western Marxism lie elsewhere: in his shaping of an applied Marxist position and in conciliating Marxist theory and praxis, even if this led him to prioritize the latter over the former.
- 3 See Baines (1972), Chavarría (1979), Vanden (1975; 1986), Aricó (1980), Flores Galindo (1991) and Portocarrero et al. (1995) for important studies on his Marxist politics.
- 4 Schutte (1993), D’Allemand (2001) and Beigel (2003; 2006) are significant exceptions.
- 5 His time in Lima’s bohemian circles before 1919 was later termed by him his “edad de piedra,” a pre-political phase.
- 6 Similarly, in his editorship of the last three issues of the journal *Claridad* and his involvement in the González Prada Popular Universities program from 1923, Mariátegui pays homage to Barbusse, whom he met in Paris in 1919, but advances his ideas about the alliance and leadership of enlightened intellectuals and urban workers in a future Socialist revolution by speaking to a Peruvian populace of workers and professionals, metropolitan and rural, in a radicalizing language.
- 7 The period 1919-1930, known as the *oncenio*, the eleven-year presidency of Augusto B. Leguía, saw the demise of an oligarchic *civilista* order, in power for almost fifty years from 1872, and the emergence of nationalist, populist parties, such as *Apra* (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), formed by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre (1895-1979) in 1924. The term “problem” in the singular and plural, but not in double quotation marks, will henceforth refer to those of nation and the Indian, which were much debated during the *oncenio*.
- 8 It also derived from a consciousness acquired in Europe of the perils of (Fascist) demagoguery, raising his suspicions of the populist, corporatist stance of *Apra* on his return in 1923, and culminating in a nine-month-long dispute with Haya in 1928. See Flores Galindo (1979) and Luna Vegas (1988) for details. Significantly, Mariátegui’s Socialist Party split just after his death in 1930 and a separate Communist Party was formed, becoming affiliated to the Comintern. See Flores Galindo (1991) for more on his polemic with the latter in 1929.
- 9 It was also opposed to the Hispanists, many of whom, as *civilistas*, lent their support to Leguía. The term “national-popular” refers to Gramsci (1999, 364-70).

- 10** Gramsci's ideas probably became an important stimulus through Mariátegui's reading of the former's journal *L'ordine nuovo*, founded in 1919. Mariátegui also possibly saw Gramsci at the Socialist Party Congress of Livorno in 1921 when the Italian Communist Party was formed.
- 11** See the last sentence of "El proceso de la literatura" (Mariátegui 1972c, 351) for his endorsement of cosmopolitanism as a path to national self-determination.
- 12** Although Mariátegui did not meet André Breton while in Paris in 1919, he was aware of his and his followers' activities through acquaintances such as Barbusse. See Mariátegui (1974b) on Breton's Surrealism.
- 13** *Amauta* offered Mariátegui the means by which to propagate Socialist values, promote a critical Marxist understanding of national problems and put a Peruvian readership in touch with cultural developments at home and beyond, providing an important forum for debate and a boost to the intellectual life of the time. See Wise (1987), Flores Galindo (1991, 85-104) and Beigel (2003, 51-73; 2006) for details.
- 14** This piece, henceforth abbreviated as "Arte," was published as an editorial in *Amauta*, no. 3, November 1926, and marks Mariátegui's contribution to the polemic on an avant-garde aesthetic, played out in journals from 1926-1928. In this essay, Mariátegui urges poets in Peru to shape a new form of expression inspired by revolutionary (European) Marxist aesthetic developments (Russian Futurism/French Surrealism), asserting the value of harnessing their creative energies for a new Marxist Peruvian politics and arts. See Lauer (2001) for details on the debate. The phrase "espíritu nuevo" will hereafter refer to Mariátegui (1974a, 121).
- 15** The essay "El hombre y el mito" will henceforth be abbreviated as "El hombre."
- 16** The title of this influential work, a collection of essays previously published in *Mundial* and *Amauta*, will hereafter be abbreviated as *Siete ensayos*. See Baines (1972, 79-103), Chavarría (1979, 107-30) and Falcón (1985) for readings of this collection.
- 17** Nietzsche attributes myth with regenerative ontological qualities in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). See *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873) for his Relativist reflections on language.
- 18** Peru suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Chile during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), re-opening the debate on the question of nation initiated on Independence. González Prada led this discussion, focusing attention on the Indian community's peripheral position in national society and politics. Identifying the Indians' lack of integration as a national problem, he linked this to the wider question of nation-formation since Independence. See Kristal (1991, 112-19) for details.
- 19** In this essay, as elsewhere (e.g. "El proceso de la literatura," Mariátegui 1972c, 275-81; "Nacionalismo y vanguardismo"), Mariátegui highlights the Catholic nationalist myths revived, or reinvented, by Fascists across Europe in the wake of the First World War. During the *oncenio*, *civilista* Liberal Creole Republican mythical narratives of nation coexisted with Hispanist dreams of Monarchy and a Spanish Motherland, their common goal being to further only the interests of a Creole minority.
- 20** "El hombre" was first published in the magazine *Mundial* in 1925 and posthumously in 1950, in the collection *El alma matinal y otras estaciones del hombre de hoy*. This title echoes one of its essays ("El alma matinal," 1928), reinforcing its central metaphor.
- 21** Mariátegui was clearly attuned to national realities, the Indian peasantry an increasingly powerful political force in the southern *sierra*. Sorel was addressing a different set of (French) sociopolitical circumstances. See Schutte (1993, 41-45) for details.
- 22** Mariátegui understood the politico-religious function of myth in Andean and national culture. Somewhat akin to Gramsci (2005, 123-33) in Italy, he sought to bring the peasant masses into national political life through a worker-peasant pact, thus encouraging national unity.
- 23** In 1923 he was involved in mass protests in Lima, along with Haya and other members of a popular opposition with roots in an emergent labor movement, against Leguía's consecration of the nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, namely, his alignment with the Catholic Church, which also consolidated his ties with the *civilista* oligarchy.
- 24** *Labor* (1928-1929) was a less doctrinaire, parallel journal to *Amauta*, which was aimed at a middle-class intelligentsia. The CGTP was a Marxist-leaning federation of trade unions.
- 25** This Indian peasant militancy, particularly acute from 1919-1923, alerted him to the political advantages of

channeling its energies toward the struggle for independence and integration. He saw that it was not just a reaction to *hacienda* expansion at the turn of the century, but also a response to Leguía's "pro-Indigenist" policies, introduced to placate peasant demands and rein in large landowning interests in the region. See Flores Galindo (2008, 277-307).

26 The post-Conquest messianic myth of *Inkarri* presages the return of a deposed/decapitated leader, the restoration of a past Golden Age of Inca rule and the reintegration a broken (indigenous) body politic. This and other mythical beliefs, such as the pre-Columbian notion of *pachacuti* (wholesale transformation, or inversion of the existing order), contribute to what Flores Galindo (2008) and other Peruvian historians have termed an "Andean Utopia," which has inspired Indian and *mestizo* rebellions, however sporadic, against the ruling classes in the *sierra* since the early colonial era. For more on the possible influence of the *Inkarri* myth on Mariátegui's conception of a Marxist revolution, see Coronado (2002).

27 See Coronado (2009, 47) for details on Mariátegui's encounter with Urviola.

28 See Flores Galindo's (2008, 285) and Cornejo Polar's (1994, 181-87) comments on Valcárcel's essay.

29 This footnote comprises a substantial portion of Mariátegui's Prologue to Valcárcel's *Tempestad en los Andes*, its insertion compensating for a perceived lack of poetic language in the main body of the essay. The title "El problema del indio. Su nuevo planteamiento" will henceforth be abbreviated as "El problema," referring to Mariátegui (1972b).

30 This piece builds on ideas developed in articles on the Indian question in the section "Peruanicemos al Perú" of the magazine *Mundial*, such as "El problema primario del Perú," published in December 1924. From 1952, the Editors of Mariátegui's *Obras completas/Siete ensayos* added the text "Sumaria revisión histórica," previously published in *Labor* (as "Sobre el problema indígena. Sumaria revisión histórica") and in the US magazine *The Nation* (as "The New Peru") in 1928 and 1929 respectively, which Mariátegui considered complementary to "El problema." My analysis of the latter will focus on the essay as it was originally conceived by Mariátegui, i.e. without this extra section. For a discussion of the essay as it appears in *Siete ensayos* from 1952, see my monograph (Moore 2014).

31 Mariátegui thus distances himself from prevailing orthodox Comintern notions of historical development, which gave prominence to the proletariat's enhanced capacity for revolutionary action and political leadership.

32 This, ironically, comes despite Mariátegui's criticism at the start of the essay of an approach given to sterile theory and empty rhetoric: "estériles ejercicios teóricos,—y a veces sólo verbales" (Mariátegui 1972b, 35).

33 The reciprocity between imaginative and conscious reflection is also suggested by the words "lo hemos sentido [...] esclarecido y demarcado" (36) in the first footnote, while the verb "hemos" underscores the personal and shared nature of the emotion and understanding being espoused by Mariátegui.

34 Mariátegui's politico-poetic mode of representation may have been aimed at supplanting the overly rationalist, realist discourse ("galimatías crítico") (36) of his Liberal-Positivist *civilista* (and Comintern Communist) counterparts, but it is thus no less politicized, although less doctrinaire, than that of his political opponents, especially in the first footnote of "El problema."

35 The prevalent use of the present tense creates the sense of a "recurrent" present in which past and future intersect.

36 In "Sumaria revisión histórica," Mariátegui argues that any response other than a Marxist one to the nation's problems would be inauthentic on the grounds that it would not be "Peruvian" ("no será peruano") (48).

37 Mariátegui asserts the need for a myth of Indo-Marxist revolution given the failure of Liberal-Positivist capitalism to provide any answers to the nation's problems, other than those of law and education for a few.

38 These national and nationalist implications are reinforced by associations made between the words "nación," "nacionalista" and "socialista," and those of "autónomo" and "quechua" (36; 38), intimating that a Peruvian Marxist revolution will resume a process of nation-building interrupted by Conquest and Independence. The mood of political idealism, meanwhile, arguably echoes the philosophical idealism of the Prologue to *Siete ensayos*, where theoretical "ideas" are equated with inspirational guiding "ideales."

39 These alternating narrative voices connect personal and collective perspectives, communicating a sense of self and community bound by a shared sense of revolutionary purpose.

- 40** See Mallon (2002) for more on the dualistic notions of nation perpetuated by Peruvian Indigenist intellectuals.
- 41** This community's alleged propensity for Marxism, due to the continuity of Inca "communistic" structures and practices, suggested by the term "comunista" and the conflation of past and present times, is asserted in the first essay of *Siete ensayos*: "la tendencia natural de los indígenas al comunismo" (Mariátegui 1972d, 15).
- 42** Mariátegui seems to draw on established Romantic Indianist, Social Realist Indigenist, Valcárcel's, and Hildebrando Castro Pozo's (author of *Nuestra comunidad indígena*, 1924, cited in "El problema de la tierra" in *Siete ensayos*) representations, in a somewhat derivative and reductive reading of this people.
- 43** While idealistic and decontextualized, Mariátegui's conception of the indigenous peasantry as a revolutionary force arguably counters and compensates for a contrasting perception of it in orthodox Marxist/Comintern readings of revolution and nation.
- 44** Social scientific understanding of indigenous culture was lacking at this time, as anthropology was in its infancy and the concept and study of *mestizaje* embryonic until the 1940s. José Uriel García's (1894-1965) essay *El nuevo indio*, of 1930, (1973) marks an early attempt to engage with this sociocultural phenomenon. While critics (e.g. Manrique 1999; Coronado 2009) have noted Mariátegui's refutation of *mestizos* and *mestizaje*, his views may be explained by the growing "orthodoxy" and nationalism of his Peruvian Marxist outlook, which located revolutionary energy in the Indian community rather than in *mestizos*.
- 45** This is despite a strain of realism, or skepticism, perceptible in a brief description of Indian councils and a neo-Indigenist literature and arts in "Sumaria revisión histórica." While the first are presented as localized and fragmented (49), the second is depicted as merely nascent (48), making both vulnerable to government repression or co-option.
- 46** In "Sumaria revisión histórica," this sense of political idealism is also apparent in phrases connoting the Indians' capacity for resistance, such as "no desespera nunca de su porvenir" (49).
- 47** These narratives convey an Andean worldview based on the principle of reciprocity, and allude to the pre- and post-Columbian notion and myth of *pachacuti* and *Inkarrí*, as seen in the writings of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (c. 1535-c. 1615), Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616) and José María Arguedas (1911-1969). Testimonial narratives (e.g. Valderrama Fernández and Escalante Gutiérrez [1977]) represent a quasi-literary form of "indigenous writing" in Peru today.
- 48** These Indigenists were increasingly fractured along Socialist and *aprista* lines from 1926, as manifest in the polemic on an avant-garde aesthetic. See Lauer (2001) for details.
- 49** There is much evasiveness in Mariátegui's writings regarding key political notions, such as that of a Marxist revolution, which is never fully defined in terms of what it constitutes and how it will be carried out. Miller (1999, 120; 162) suggests that his view of the Indian population as representative of the peasantry (and part of the proletariat) is not properly explicated either and is even undermined by a "bi-culturalist" approach to reading national reality/identity, which posits Indian against Creole, equating the former with the autochthonous and ignoring the process of cultural *mestizaje*. Likewise, other ideas and metaphors, such as those of "alma" and "alba," are only half elucidated. Arguably, these are all left to the reader's imagination, making room for political idealism.

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