

Indigenism & its Enemies

Primitivo Solis (David Watson)

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indigenous, adj. 1. Occurring or living naturally in an area; not introduced; native. 2. Intrinsic; innate.
[From Latin *indigena*, native. See indigene.]

Indigenism, which begins as a defense of the Indian within western political and literary discourse, ends as a form of conquest, the final assault of civilization on prehistory.

“...Again, you say, why do you not become civilized? We do not want your civilization!”

—Crazy Horse

History too often resembles a tragedy of destiny in which humanity, unaware of the forces in which it is enmeshed, starts out like Oedipus on the road to Thebes in search of its identity only to find at its destination that it has fulfilled a mission which is alien to its original intention. Protagonists of an historical movement seem to ironically transform themselves into its puppets, and the general expression of their activities into the palimpsest of ideology. Ideology is a false translation of the world; not only does it mask the forces which gave birth to it, but as it becomes a determining force in events, it mystifies the developments which it symbolically anticipates. In this way, what are taken as the instruments of liberation betray the user; the replies of the Sphinx become another, more compelling enigma. Every attempt to escape the labyrinth seems to draw us deeper into it. History comes to appear to be a terrible joke, a series of double meanings in which ideology turns every relation on its head, calls everything by the name of its own negation. If before the advent of history, “The world was so recent that many things lacked names,” [1] with the establishment of historical linear time, of development and mechanization, of measurement and valorization, the world was falsified. Whole worlds were transformed into cargo, into value. What remains is the motion of history, the code and language of development, the ideology of modernization.

The history of Latin America, like universal history, is a series of such events of ambivalent meaning. Octavio Paz, in his seminal book on the Mexican mind, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, observes the working of these ironies, pointing out the difficulty of interpreting them “because, once again, ideas disguise reality instead of clarifying it.” He points out how the Aztec political unification in Mexico facilitated the political and cultural (apart from the military) conquest. Also, he observes that the imperial and combative messianic Catholicism of Counter-Reformation Spain, which was the ideology, or a major component of the ideology of discovery and conquest of America, reached its apogee in the New World in the moment of its decadence in Europe: spreading out over new lands “at the very moment it had ceased to be creative.”

Latin American independence, beginning in the early 19th century, comes about slowly and through a series of ironies; most notably, the desire to create a new experience based on the realities of the American continent is transformed into a series of foreign imitations of French and English, classical, Jacobin, North American, and later, Soviet models. All of these—with certain superficial variations—are a negation and a refusal of the indigenous, American world. At the same time, they are a single model, the Western model, that is to say, the model of

capitalist industrial development. There is only one model, just as there is only one history, and the entire historical world follows it: that of industrialism and mechanization, the formation of the national state and the centralization of power, the accumulation of capital, the massification of life and the obliteration of the ancient communities, the universal bureaucratization, and the extermination of idiosyncratic, “pre-capitalist” peoples, that is to say, the indigene, the Other.

Communities of Western Europe Obliterated

This universal process, this road to Thebes, is progress, the runaway of capital, permanent conquest This process of universalization, this organization of the world under a single social system, is ironically incarnated in a series of profound ruptures. Cartesian logic proclaims the world a separate, inanimate entity to be manipulated and exploited, reflecting the emerging process of mechanization and alienation of human activity in the factory system. The internal psychic repression necessary to rationalize society and assure labor discipline in order to develop capitalism is mirrored in the external suppression of natural communities and economies and the enslavement of indigenous peoples both in Europe and in the colonies.

Forgetting the wisdom of prehistory, humanity surrenders to the dance macabre of production, transforming a world once filled with myth and spirit into a quarry of surplus value and economic necessity. As the little communities of Western Europe were obliterated by the forces of capital accumulation, the remnants and survivors were driven over the seas to perpetuate the same process on the indigenes of the Americas and elsewhere.

This process was psychic and internal as well as external and military. As Sylvia Wynter has said, “As western man ‘pacified’ New World nature, eliminated the ‘savage,’ penned them up in reservations, he did the same with whole areas of his Being. Indeed, it would be difficult to explain the extraordinary nature of his ferocity if we did not see that it was, first of all, a ferocity also wrought, in psychic terms, upon himself.” [2] Emerging capital accumulation and mechanization, through its agents, the bourgeois capitalists, repressed the remnants of community in their midst as they expanded overseas to new territories. The image of the master and the slave was repeated in brushstrokes of continental dimensions in the relations between the colonizing countries and the conquered areas. The result was a world cleft into two distinct sectors: that which was already conquered and integrated into the “world economy” and history, and that left to be conquered, which is to say, in the words of the first conscious agents of capital in Latin America in the early decades of the nineteenth century, civilization and barbarism.

All Contact A Contagion

Latin American history is an oscillation between two approaches to this problem, one of denying its otherness, the indigenous self and culture to search for foreign models; and one of searching for its roots and fundamental identity within the indigenous in order to oppose foreign domination and local oppression. The newcomers begin by completely negating the Indian (and continue to do so wherever the forces of capital are powerful and the native populations small and scattered). Later, in countries with great Indian majorities such as Peru and Ecuador, revolutionaries like Jose Carlos Mariategui (1895–1930) come to identify with the indigenous peoples as a key figure of liberation. But both represent moments within the same cycle: that of development, that of capital. The subjectivity of the Indian—whose universe is equally undermined by the encroachments of civilization in its hideous oppressive form or in its “progressive,” reformist variety—continues in profound silence. Later still, indigenist anthropology, representing a sincere attempt to understand the indigene and even a strong identification with the indigenous peoples will come to play a central role in their incorporation into western civilization, which is to say, their eclipse. All contact becomes a form of contagion.

Indigenism, which begins as a defense of the Indian within western political and literary discourse, ends as a form of conquest, the final assault of civilization on prehistory. Just as Marxism, which begins as a “merciless criticism of all things” and an explication of Capital, came to metamorphose into the secular state religion of modern state capitalist regimes and the ideology of capital accumulation in the bureaucratic totalitarian regimes of

the East; just as “scientific management” and the expansion of mechanization, which were perceived by their originators such as Frederick Taylor as signaling improvements in the lives of workers, resulted in becoming central factors in the absolute degradation of their lives and labor; just as the freedoms and ideals of the bourgeois revolutionaries came to mean the freedom to exploit and to be exploited, the freedom to become things within the universal exchange of commodities; the “idea” becomes its concrete historical negation, and the triumph of the ideology of Indigenism signals the disappearance of the indigene as a distinct being. The Indian becomes, (assuming he survives at all) like all of us today, incorporated into civilization, a carrier of the plague of progress, an atom of capital, orphaned and solitary.

Civilization and Barbarism

It is useful to distinguish the Conquest as it is normally understood from the conquest of capital which was to come later. In reality, the Spanish conquistadores only prepared the terrain for the capitalist conquest, in a sense just as the political unification of the Aztec empire laid the basis for the arrival and precipitous triumph of the Spaniards. Spanish colonial civilization under the viceroyalty was almost as rotten and feeble as the Aztec had been, and collapsed almost as rapidly beneath the assault of Dutch and English commerce and French militarism. In the chaotic period following the wars of independence in Latin America, young liberal revolutionaries the likes of Juan Batista Alberdi (1810–1884) and Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811–1888) in Argentina, came to embody a rejection of that civilization and a search for new models to create capitalism in the new nations. [3]

It is Alberdi who represents most completely the spirit of capital. Man of action, nothing of the romantic in him, not even a particle of the ambivalence which would characterize the young Sarmiento, he doesn't speak “in the language of the poet, but in the language of the economist.” In Alberdi the unrestrained desire to drag the country out of its “backward conditions” reaches feverish heights. He consciously lays out the necessary method for creating or attracting capital to the country, consistently associating it with the crushing and extermination of the indigenous tribes. For him, development is an open war without quarter against those obstacles, and capital is a “magic wand,” “the heroic agent called upon to civilize this deserted continent.”

Alberdi identifies material “backwardness” with wilderness and wilderness with barbarism. The insecurity that he feels before the Argentine pampa is striking. It must be combated, dominated. His is the insecurity and restlessness of the Cartesian mentality before nature. He takes the practical application of science seriously, translating Descartes' future vision of humanity as “the lords and possessors of nature” into a political program, defending the practical sciences and techniques of mechanization which he admires so much in the English, as those which are necessary “to conquer this selvatic nature which dominates us everywhere, being the principal mission of our present culture that of converting and defeating it.”

According to Alberdi, the development of the nation demands two elements: capital and population, and in particular the population of northern European Protestant countries which embody the economic spirit of capitalism. The Indian and the gaucho are, on the other hand, a nullity, an obstacle which should be eradicated as soon as possible. For Alberdi, “populating” Argentina meant to depopulate it of Indians, to annihilate the Other. “The Indian does not figure nor does he make up a part within our political and civil society,” he declares. Even America itself is a European discovery.” And he adds, “In America, all of that which is not European is barbarian: there is no other division but this: first, the indigenous, that is to say, the savage; secondly, the European, that is, us.”

The “Great Hypocrisy”

Other currents in the same period and the period to follow attacked this inhuman vision, for example the Chilean Francisco Bilbao, who in 1863 censures severely “the great ‘hypocrisy in veiling all of the crimes and aggressions with the word civilization,” and the “prostitution of the word,” by which “the civilized demand the extermination of the Indians and the gauchos.” “What a beautiful civilization,” he writes the following year, “that which delivers slavery and shame on the railroad!”

In the liberal humanist vision of Bilbao, civilization is a two-edged sword, and science, industry and commerce “can produce good and evil.” Manuel Gonzalez Prada (1848–1918), from Peru, where the Indians represent a majority of the population, treats the question in the same manner. He attacks the notion of civilization and barbarism as a convenient slogan which assures the whites of their supposed racial superiority “and therefore their right to monopolize the government of the planet.” He criticizes the positivist ethnology of his day which provides facts without scientific foundations “in order to whitewash the negligence of the government and the inhumanity of the exploiters.” These pessimists, he continues, “mark a defamatory stigma on the forehead of the Indian: they accuse him of being an impediment to civilization.” But, he asks, “Let us see what is understood by civilization,” and answers by saying that “it consists in having transformed the struggle of man against man into a mutual consent in life.” He reverses the common formula, saying, “Where there is no justice, mercy, nor benevolence, there is no civilization; where the struggle for life is declared social law, barbarism reigns.”

José Martí (1853–1895) also takes up the battle, aiming his attacks at the mature Sarmiento, when he says, in 1884, that the Conquest destroyed great civilizations in the bud, “an historical misfortune and a natural crime,” declaring, “The conquerors robbed a page from the universe!” But defending the indigenous world and reversing the terms of the question for moral reasons, could not stop the wheel of progress. The fact is that “real existing civilization,” to borrow a phrase from Brezhnev, was not an ideal in the minds of the humanitarians, but a social and historical reality. This is why Sarmiento speaks in the voice of capital when he responds to his critics in the course of the debates, in 1883:

It is perhaps unjust to exterminate savages, suffocate nascent civilizations, conquer peoples in possession of a privileged land, but thanks to this injustice, America, instead of remaining abandoned to the savages incapable of progress, is occupied by the Caucasian race, the, most perfect, the most intelligent, the most beautiful, and the most progressive that inhabits the earth... Thus, the population of the world is subject to revolutions which recognize immutable laws; the strong races exterminate the weak ones, the civilized peoples dispossess the savages.

The words of Sarmiento make it very clear that civilization has received the name that it deserves.

The “Problem of the Indian”: Socialist Indigenism

The indigenist current begins as a literary tendency and reflects a new turn towards native American values by the Latin American intelligentsia and a repudiation of the slavish imitation of foreign literary and political models which characterizes the late modernista movements of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. But it becomes a social and political preoccupation, particularly due to the influence of Gonzalez Prada, who attacks the oppression and servitude of the Indians, observing, “The Indian will redeem himself by the mercy of his own efforts, and not by the humanization of his oppressors.” In the same essay he clarifies what kind of efforts he means: “If the Indian were to use all of the money that he wastes in alcohol and celebrations for rifles and ammunition, if in a corner of his hut or in an opening in the rocks he were to hide a weapon, he would change his conditions, making his life and his property respected.” [4]

But it is in the figure of José Carlos Mariátegui that the indigenist movement encounters its most sophisticated spokesman, and it is he who influences most the development and the intellectual formation of the new revolutionary generations in Peru. Inspired by the revolutions in Mexico and Russia in the second decade of the 20th century, he denounces the Peruvian oligarchy and identifies the problem of Peru as precisely the problem of the Indian, and the problem of the Indian as a social-economic problem.

Mariátegui’s criticism, though containing revolutionary elements for its time, remains within the current of the Communist Third International (with which he affiliated, though despite claims to the contrary, he did not found the Communist Party in Peru). [5] The program of Stalin’s Comintern proposed national revolutions in the colonies and socialist uprisings in the metropolis. Mariátegui’s idea of revolutionary praxis was tripartite: no cooperation with the bourgeois-liberal order, necessity of a “myth” to guide and strengthen the masses on the road to revolution, and the important role of an audacious minority of intellectuals who would direct the revolution. The ideas of Mariátegui conform with other anti-colonialist outlooks: nationalism, some variation of socialism, national industrial development and the creation of a modern secular society which would at the same time conserve

the native values—in other words, they contain all the components of the ideology of emerging capital throughout the “underdeveloped” neo-colonial world.

For Mariátegui, the problems of Peru are historical and economic. The problem of the Indian has its roots in the system of land tenure, and any other explanation is a sterile theoretical exercise or a conscious obfuscation. The Indian question is at bottom the question of feudalism. In order to resolve it, servitude must be liquidated, but “Servitude...cannot be abolished unless the latifundium is abolished.” It is a class question, and its resolution is to be found in the class struggle.

His collection of essays, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, is reminiscent of Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, in its criticism of feudalism, and its analysis of the relative backwardness of the Peruvian bourgeoisie. But what is most notable is his recognition of the enduring remnants of primitive communist economy in the indigenous communities: “Underneath the feudal economy inherited from the colonial period, vestiges of the indigenous communal economy can still be found in the sierra.”

The idealization of Inca civilization is the point of departure for Mariátegui’s indigenism. His defense of the Indian of the present is based on the glory of the past and an anticipation of the future seen by way of his concept of ancient “Quechua socialism.” The confusion that he suffers in identifying the communism of the village community with the military-priestly state which appropriated the products of its labor, anticipates the-modern Marxist mystification of the relations of production under bureaucratic totalitarian collectivized capital. Mariátegui cites the book of Cesar Antonio Ugarte, *Bosquejo de la historia economica del Peru*, to describe the ancient communities: Collective ownership of farmland by the ayllu or group of related families, although the property was divided into individual and non-transferable lots collective ownership of waters, pasture, and woodlands by the marca or tribe, or the federation of ayllus settled around a village; cooperative labor, individual allotment of harvests and produce. He argues that this system coexisted with the colonial economy of the viceroyalty as a remnant of Inca Socialism, but does not even consider the possibility that this primitive communist agrarian community could have also coexisted with the Inca empire, in this way confusing the exploitative political structure with the society at the base. Umberto Melotti has pointed out that this misconception of “Inca Socialism” was widespread, particularly among Third World revolutionaries who tried to discover an ancient socialist society in the pre-conquest civilizations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Melotti writes, “In the historical experience of the West, classes happen to be tied to private ownership of the means of production. Wherever these forms of private ownership are absent, there is a naive tendency to believe that exploitation and social classes do not exist. Caught in this type of reasoning, there are some who view as socialist even ancient societies of oriental despotism founded on the Asiatic mode of production...However, exploitation and classes in no way depend on the existence of private ownership in a juridical-formal sense, but antagonistic relations of production.” [6]

The fatal confusion that Mariátegui suffers in identifying the Inca state with the social relations within the Indian communities that it exploited, demonstrates the defect in his notion of communism and his incapacity to defend the Indian against the permanent conquest of civilization. Indeed, he does not even criticize the colonial regime for destroying the community but, on the contrary, because it simply did not replace it with “superior forms”: “Colonization unquestionably must bear the responsibility for the disappearance of this communist economy, together with the culture it nourished, not because it destroyed autochthonous forms but because it brought no superior substitutes. The colonial regime disrupted and demolished the Inca agrarian economy without replacing it with an economy of higher yields.” Later, in terminology characterized by its Marxist cynicism towards “abstract” or “sentimental” human values, he denounces the latifundium because it “is unable to create wealth or progress,” because it is “constitutionally incapable of technical progress.” Mariátegui comes out against the national bourgeoisie because it is unable to construct modern capitalism. This constitutes his indigenism: technical progress and greater yields. He doesn’t criticize social domination, claiming that “Inca communism...cannot be negated or disparaged for having developed under the autocratic regime of the Incas,” but on the contrary praises despotism and forced labor as socialist models. The hated system of the mita or forced road construction, which the Indian regards as a weapon of the landowner, under the Inca regime results in being “a compulsory public service, entirely compatible with the principles of modern socialism.” Nor will he admit that the Inca hierarchy exploited the fruits of labor of the village communities. By means of an absurd mechanistic logic, he reasons that since the Inca system was a form of socialism, and since socialism is not exploitative, the wealth that constituted the state

deposits had to be some kind of a general fund for the welfare of the people, “a typically and singularly socialist provision.”

In the outlook of Mariátegui the Indian comes to be mere cannon fodder for the revolution which the modern princes like himself will direct. He concurs with the statement made by another writer that the “Indian proletariat awaits its Lenin;” and as John Baines has pointed out, it is evident that Mariátegui intended to be that Lenin. He pays lip service to the notion that the liberation of the Indians must be the work of the Indians themselves, but qualifies this statement with the notion of the necessity of urban intellectual leadership. And the project of this class in the “underdeveloped” world has always been the project of capital, but in a much more efficient form than that of the enfeebled, servile bourgeoisie of the neo-colonies: that of industrialization and mechanization, formation of the national state, massification, proletarianization, regimentation and accumulation of capital under the iron fist of a socialist-military regime. [7] Mariátegui faults the bourgeoisie mainly for failing to accomplish this “historical task,” and realizes that it will take socialism to do the job: “The surprise of capitalism’s advocates will be extraordinary when they learn that the function of socialism in the governing of the nation according to its historic course and direction will be in large measures that of realizing capitalism—that is to say, the still historically vital possibilities—in the sense that it is suitable to the interests of social progress.” The modern princes, of course, will decide what is “suitable” for social progress, and what is in the interest of the revolutionary state. State capitalism, or bureaucratic collectivism (there is no need to quibble over the terms) will be the result.

Thus it should come as no surprise that the revolutionary government of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua has already intervened in autonomous indigenous groups, arresting leaders of the Miskita, Sumu and Rama peoples, attempting to continue a project of the Somoza government to build a highway through that region against the wishes of the native peoples, and accusing their opponents of being CIA-instigated. The Sandinistas, however, would agree with Mariátegui, who writes, “A centralized network of highways and railroads is as indispensable to industry as it is to trade.” [8]

The vision of Mariátegui is thoroughly state capitalist and productionist. His vision is that of capital, his dream that of Lenin. “Lenin dreamed of the day his entire country would have electric power... Neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat can conceive of a civilization that is not based on industry.” His reduction of the problem of the Indian to simple economic factors ends by reducing the crisis which all humanity confronts to...the electrification of the country. He follows the road of Alberdi, which is the road of mechanization and progress, and the inevitable annihilation of the primitive community—be it by private or state capital. Both variants reduce the human being to an object. Beneath the veil of indigenist ideology, this Leninist defense of the Indian serves as a Trojan Horse for civilization and for capital. Socialism, too, has earned the title that it deserves.

Beginning of the End: indigenism & Anthropology

In reality Mariátegui and his contemporaries in the Indigenist movement did not study the Indian of their day. Within the tendency to idealize the indigenous civilizations of the pre-conquest era lay a temptation to look down upon the Indians of the present. The Peruvian anthropologist José María Arguedas criticized this idealization as a “monstrous contradiction,” basing his defense of the Indian on the present-day conditions of the community (his work was done in the ‘fifties and early ‘sixties), and upon the process of mestizaje, that is, the crossbreeding of Indian, black and European races and their respective cultures.

Indigenist anthropology is a closer and more sympathetic approach to the Indians, seeing them as more human, more complete, more autonomous. It reflects a general respect for their way of looking at the world and a genuine interest in preserving and defending their way of life from the encroachments of western technological civilization. For the sympathetic anthropologist, the Indians are not reduced to mere ciphers of the historic process as they were for the anti-imperialist theoreticians of the ‘thirties. But anthropology, being primarily a system of comparison which starts from the pseudo-objective “superiority” of modern scientific civilization, has come to signify for the indigene what the early theoretical tracts of agriculture meant in terms of the ultimate mechanization of that activity: it describes, catalogues and tags a society which is being torn asunder. Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote in the conclusion of his *Tristes Tropiques*, “When we make an effort to understand, we destroy the object of

our attachment, substituting another whose nature is very different.” Anthropology intuitively feels the indigenous world at the moment of its disappearance. [9]

Anthropology Carries the Contagion

Anthropology has also in general failed to turn its own methods of analysis on the civilization which spawned it; nor has it offered insights to the people that it studied into the nature of the juggernaut which threatens their existence. It has carried the contagion,

has been reduced to describing the dolorous results of the clash of cultures and the furious assault of civilization, and to softening these effects as best it can, when it can. When Arguedas, for example, points to the “new unity” of the mestizaje and the incorporation of the Indians into the modern world by the “more and more intense link between the regions and provinces of Peru, and between the nation and the world,” the process of destruction can be clearly seen.

Arguedas centers his approach to the question on two levels: the capacity of the “economically strong” community to resist total westernization while at the same time incorporating western elements within its experience, and the mestizaje, which serves as a sort of defensive “antibody” in order to avoid the brutal destruction of the original culture. He argues a flexibility and a vigor in the culture based on a long and profound history and a permanence which the nomadic tribes were not considered to have.

The settled Quechua and Aymara cultures of the Andes absorbed the plants and the exotic beasts of the Spaniards in their life and their art, just as they adopted the musical instruments and religion. According to Arguedas, who fails to understand that modern technology is a form of social relations and a culture which admits no other, these cultures can even adopt advanced methods of technology such as radio and television without losing their roots by way of cultural syncretism: “The very elements of western civilization were converted into forces of support of the invaded culture, because the latter conserved in all its integrity its fundamental base.” He praises the Hispanicisms and the changes they wrought as enrichments of indigenous music and art.

It is “economic independence” and the mestizaje, according to Arguedas, which have made it possible for some communities to avoid the implantation of servitude. In these communities, “a class of merchant mestizos has formed, an active relationship of cooperation has been established between the merchant mestizos and the Indians,” while in communities which are economically poor and dependent, “a strong hostility exists on the part of the Indians against the masters and the mestizos” In the economically independent” communities “there is no conflict between the economy of the traders and that of the Indians”.

The communities most integrated into the national economy are those in which this situation is most notable. In these communities, “the development of the economic potential of the Indians as a consequence of the exchange with the coast, and the change that this very contact has wrought on the mentality of the landowners, which has been converted from a conservative and seigniorial attitude into that of an industrial and entrepreneurial type, has caused the Indians and mestizos, and even land owners, to dedicate themselves to business and competition.”

Primitive Communism and the Colonial Economy

Arguedas is essentially describing two moments within the same motion of capital: the brutalizing, original form which enslaves the local population in order to extract every ounce of blood from them for profit (which Mariátegui had exposed as ultimately unproductive and anti-progressive), and that which is more advanced, more “progressive,” which results in the deeper penetration of capitalist techniques and relations into the community. Both represent forms of dependence, the mercantilism of one community just as much as the servitude of the other. Economic “strength” facilitates a community’s integration into capital. He is not at all convincing when he claims that this “economic independence” assures the transmission of cultural values to the younger generations. His description of the crisis which the seigniorial classes are suffering before westernization, and the crisis that the

mestizo who has recently emerged from the Indian community suffers, indicates that the so-called independence brings about the disappearance of the Indian and his world perhaps even more rapidly than servitude.

In the strong communities such as Chaupi and Puquio, he reports, prosperity has made possible the realization of many public works, schools and urban developments, such that in 1955 the Indians complained “of the hundreds of donated payless work days which they considered an excessive quota, while the mestizos had only contributed some few hundred soles (Peruvian currency) for the purchase of materials.” This is the description of “a cultural change brought on by the growth of commerce and the direct contact with the cities of the coast,” by which the mestizos come to be the “leaders” of the community and the Indians the proletarians—or rather, it is the description of the disintegration of that primitive communist community which had been praised by Mariátegui.

The primitive communism of the Quechua and Aymara was able to co-exist with the colonial economy because this economy was too weak to intervene in them. The “formal” domination of backward, “underdeveloped” Peruvian capital was not able to penetrate into these communities; with the greater linking of world, national and local economies comes the “real” domination of capital, the penetration of the economy into even the most isolated communities, and the destruction of the last vestiges of primitive community.

Arguedas mentions the bitterness with which the old Indians complain of the “extreme difference between the conduct and the ideals of the young members of the community and those of the old people.” The mestizo, on the other hand, identifies with the western culture, “having turned into an individual who really participates in our [modern] culture.” It is necessary and important to underline that servitude and desperation reign in the poor, “economically weak” communities. The Indian community finds itself in this dilemma, but prosperity does not save it either. Arguedas: “It is considered that within twenty years there will be no Indians in Puquio and the calculation seems very realistic to us.”

In 1951 Arguedas described the effects of the invasion of western industrial culture in the area of Huamanga (Ayacucho). The landowning class of Huamanga, famous for its virtuosity in traditional music, was now suffering a situation of chaos, “from an unbalanced mental state,” due to the penetration of western jazz, dancing and fashions, and the subsequent negation of traditional culture by the younger generations. In that period Arguedas did not detect such insecurity among the mestizos, but tourism was just becoming a factor in the economy of the region and the influence of modern culture could not have done anything but continue growing. This occurred thirty years ago. One can imagine the changes which have taken place since then!

The indigenist anthropologists find themselves caught between the dominant invading culture and the indigenous cultures which are in the process of disintegration, or which are about to feel the effects of the invasion. Luis Villoro treats this problem in his book *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* (Great Moments of indigenism in Mexico, 1950), particularly within his discussion of the works of the indigenist anthropologist Manuel M. Gamio. The contradictions within modern anthropology are rapidly revealed by this discussion. According to Villoro, Gamio’s confrontation with Indian culture presents him with a contradictory demand: “on the one hand that which is proper and original to the aborigine must be conserved, while on the other hand it is indispensable to draw him closer to us, make him progress so that he will abandon his harmful estrangement.”

The problem is, naturally, how to defend the particularity of the Indian while allowing him to “progress” and enjoy the benefits of civilization. “The demand for particularity,” observes Villoro, “seems to clash irremissibly with the demands of progress.” How to resolve the problem? Gamio explains that this depends on the “cultural territories” which are in question. If it is a matter of art, then there should be absolute liberty and autonomy for the primitive. But if scientific or medical matters are in question, or “practical utility,” “we should substitute in every base the backward materials of the indigene for western materials.” This substitution looks only for the destruction, Villoro adds, “of that which is backward and harmful.”

The paternalism of the anthropologists who decide for the Indians what is necessary for their “progress” and what is worthy of being preserved is obvious, if the manner in which they are going to accomplish the preservation of what is “proper” while destroying that which is “harmful” is not. They seem not to question whether it is possible to commit such violence against one area of a culture without-undermining the rest—a violence not only in the separation of cultural elements which are organically linked to ‘a whole vision, but in the contempt revealed by the arbitrary and automatic exercise of authority by the scientists over the indigenous community, an authority strikingly reminiscent of that of the missionaries and the exploiters. “The Indian,” says Gamio, “cannot be incorpo-

rated into modern civilization in a single stroke any more than the child can reach adulthood overnight.” For these anthropologists, the primitive is a child who lacks the guidance of modern man, who with his Cartesian scientific method and industrial progress will lead him to the universal destiny of civilization and the universal will of history. Not surprising that many of the Mexican Indian tribes are “backward,” and miserable—they have enjoyed nearly five centuries of civilization!

“Intense and Rapid Changes”

The traditional anthropologists are concerned with the conservation of aboriginal art and handicrafts. Gamio expresses indignation, for example, at the “fordization” (or mass production and distribution techniques) of indigenous artifacts, but he does not realize that whatever the particular forms of the art may be, it is this very contact with civilization which “fordizes” art, which mechanizes and regiment its production and transforms it into a commodity.

This process of “fordization” is the substitution of indigenous “backward materials” (non-economic production for use) for western methods, which Gamio had demanded in other fields of human activity.

By 1966, however, many anthropologists come to see the urgency of the problem. Arguedas, before the 34th Congress of Americanists, describes the avalanche of western culture (which is to say, the culture of capital), speaking of ethnic groups, which, “due to the penetration of so-called western culture, are subject to a process of change so violent that they risk disappearing.” He points out the situation in Peru as an example of “intense and rapid changes” which threaten even “less vulnerable” cultures such as the Quechua and Aymara, changes that “are taking directions which are still confusing. He blames the greater contact with the cities as well as the disdain for traditional values and the incursion of western fashions and culture, and concludes that ethnological studies are of “great urgency...because ancient codes of conduct, forms of artistic expression, agricultural techniques, and knowledge in every field of human activity are being forgotten.”

If westernization is inevitable, if it is the only road for the indigenous peoples, the anthropologists, who most wish to defend them, in many cases become the administrators of their surrender. Anthropology is reduced to a mere description, an inventory of the eclipse of its object.

Where Are We Going?

In Mexico and in Peru indigenism and mestizaje, the notion of the “cosmic race,” became elements of state ideology in the process of developing national capital. While in many cases, mestizo leaders and representatives have inherited the indigenist mantle, and even occasionally positions of government, the ancient community has gone through such destructive transformations that there is no one left who can even remember the old ways.

Individuals as well as communities have succumbed to the economy and the state; in many cases, representatives appointed by the state lease or sell off tribal lands, or become the administrators of industrial exploitation and the agents of development, or agents of Christian churches or bureaucrats of western political parties. Indigenism becomes a form of nationalism in many cases, which reflects the extinction of the innumerable little communities ‘and their diverse ways of being.

The permanent conquest of capital seems like an hourglass, drawing the particles of sand irrevocably downward into time, into history. We are all drawn through that vortex, are all reduced to the same being, vagabond, solitary, proletarian fragments. What defense, when so often the forms of resistance betray us? How to oppose this inertia towards the abyss? We, who are the exiles of a remote and vague age, are already in the labyrinth. We continue wandering in our technological desert. There is no turning back on this “trail of tears” once the journey has commenced. If we cannot return to that which we were, what shall we become?

We who went before are only domesticated primitives, and the primitive is our otherness. According to Arguedas, the Indian “does not aspire to any of the characteristic forms of modern life: he is never a regular consumer;

he presents himself as an obscure obstacle to our economy.” And Villoro notes the “pre-logical” mentality of the Indian, “that has not been able to assimilate the categories of a logical mentality.” Which is to say that the primitives have not surrendered totally to the categories of economic necessity nor to the Cartesian cognition which uproots us from the universe. They remain an integral element in a living universe, a universe threatened by industrial society, unraveled by progress.

Octavio Paz has observed the gravity of the situation for the Mexican, but the preoccupation is universal. “Nothing,” he writes in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, “except a historical change, daily more remote and unlikely, can prevent the Mexican—who is still a problem, an enigmatic figure—from becoming one more abstraction.” Arguedas makes use of a different metaphor, but the idea is the same when he speaks of “the methods of reducing [the indigenes] to the condition of simple instruments.”

Both Modern and Primitive Worlds Threatened

But if it is true that indigenous society is threatened with destruction by modern civilization, modern society is no less threatened by the same forces—by the pulverization of the natural and human terrain, the homogenization and urbanization of the environment, the degradation of the soil and the poisoning of the water and air, by the generalized inertia towards the abyss of nuclear holocaust. It is astonishing to see the condescension of the modern outlook which by means of its scientific mystifications sees the primitive as the confused and vacillating object of historical forces, while the modern world is disintegrating and threatens to be annihilated within a matter of moments. Modern subjectivity remains no less confused than the peoples of the Brazilian rain forest: the powers it faces seem just as irresistible, just as gargantuan as the deadly magic of western civilization must seem to the primitives. And this should not be surprising: it is the very same deadly magic.

As long as indigenism remains within the categories of civilization—either as a nationalist political program to mobilize people for industrial development, or as a specialized, alienated study by scientific experts of disappearing peoples—it will remain an element of conquest and annihilation rather than one of defense. The true values of indigenism and primitivism are transcultural; we must become indigenes once again. Indigenism must become a form of post-modernity, a post-modern self-consciousness. We must see ourselves as part of a continuum which begins in the paleolith, recognize ourselves as the children of the conquered. In this way we can oppose the thrust of this civilization, oppose the “revolutionary ideals” which are only more advanced forms of the plague, oppose the process of automatic mechanization and the reduction of human problems to technical dimensions.

We can only begin by confronting the otherness in ourselves, and in this way perhaps we can commune with the primitive universe without destroying it. If we allow the cycle of capital to be completed and all of the primitive, nomadic, non-Cartesian peoples to be destroyed or conquered, we will see irrevocably destroyed a part of ourselves. We will have lost any ability to know how much we have actually lost. Wildness, and not civilization, must become our cultural model. To paraphrase Wendell Berry, only if we know how we were can we tell how we are. Modern technological civilization, by uprooting every last tribe of natural peoples, will set us all permanently adrift. As Paz has pointed out, “The extinction of every marginal society and each ethnic and cultural difference signifies the extinction of one possibility for survival of the entire species. With each society that disappears—destroyed or devoured by industrial civilization—a human possibility disappears, not only a past and a present, but a future.” [10]

A new and critical anthropology, a new critique, a new “planetary indigenism,” can only signify a qualitative break with civilization, with modern technological social relations, and must signify a reconciliation with prehistory. It will take its poetry not only from the future, but also from a distant past which is here among us, in the marginal territories where primitives still live the great genetic ceremony of the organic universe, and also within ourselves; a past and a future in which modern and primitive will be reconciled in the search for human possibilities beyond everything that we have imagined. For the primitive, it will be an exploration, and a refusal, a resistance against modernization. For the modern, it must first of all be a defense of every little community, every ecological niche, every single possibility; it must be a resistance against the categories of capital and its ideology of technological progress, a refusal to become “mere instruments,” a repudiation of the odious temptation to rationalize the

world; it must be a struggle for solidarity and a renewal of community; and finally, it must be an exploration, too, of the non-logical optic which is magic and poetry, an exploration of human possibilities, of the wisdom which resides in dreams. Levi-Strauss writes in *Tristes Tropiques*, “The sources of strength on which our remote ancestors drew are present also in ourselves,” and he adds, quoting Rousseau: “The golden age which blind superstition situated behind or ahead of us is in us.”

—P. Solis

Detroit/Karontaen, May 1981

Notes

1. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *100 Years of Solitude*. A brief note on language in this article: Many words have ambiguous and culturally charged meanings: Indian, indigene, modern, primitive, civilization. A careful reading should take into account the textual meaning and the use of these words in the article. The problem with the words “native,” or “indigene,” from the Spanish *indigene*, for example, is that they replace the diversity and the myriad experiences of the peoples of America with a false homogenous category which includes them all within one group. The word “primitive” is another culturally charged term which implies a lack of complexity or interrelatedness on the one hand, and the existence of a scale of development from “primitive” to “advanced,” on the other. Though I tend to use them interchangeably at times, there were cultures indigenous to the Americas which were statist authoritarian cultures, such as the Aztec and the Inca empires, so there are important differences. I use primitive to mean exclusively non-rational, non-economic, small-scale, communal and tribal cultures. These could also be described as “inhabitory” cultures, which have found a specific mode of life in harmony with the surrounding ecosystem, whose peoples have a sense of place, and a direct sense of relation to the whole land. See Gary Snyder’s *The Old Ways*. If so-called primitive cultures have been considered prehistorical, then the reader must also note the slight differentiation in my use of the word “history,” at times in a “neutral,” commonly accepted manner, as a sum of human events, but at other times as events which take place in the historical and economic realm, after the emergence of state societies and relations of domination, and particularly with the growth and triumph of technological civilization.

2. Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” in *Alcheringa: A First International Symposium, 1976. Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* is published from Boston University, 775 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

3. Alberdi and Sarmiento played important roles in the period of national unification in Argentina after the independence struggles at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Alberdi helped formulate the constitution of Argentina; his comments here come from his work *Bases y puntos de partida para la constitucion de la Republica Argentina* (Foundations and Points of Departure for the Constitution of the Argentine Republic). He was also a signer of the Constitution, a senator, and a diplomat. Sarmiento, like Alberdi, took part in the struggle against the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas; he was a journalist, educator and politician. He was also a governor, a minister to Chile, Peru, and the U.S., President of Argentina during 1868–1874, a senator, minister of the interior, and national superintendent of schools.

4. Gonzalez Prada is an extremely interesting figure. Atheist, anarchist, naturalist, partisan of the Indian and the worker, he once described Marx as “one of the greatest social agitators of the nineteenth century,” but his preferences lay with Kropotkin.

5. A decent biography and treatment of Mariátegui’s ideas can be found in *Revolution in Peru: Mariátegui and the Myth*, by John M. Baines.

6. See Umberto Melotti, “Socialism and Bureaucratic Collectivism in the Third World,” in *Telos* No. 43. Wittfogel’s and others’ theories of “Asiatic despotism” may obscure more than they clarify in the long run. Using modern terms of comparison to categorize what were undoubtedly very diverse societies in Egypt, China, Peru and elsewhere leads to many problems which lie beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that their contribution is to emphasize the enormous gulf between formal juridical property relations and the true relations of domination.

7. Hence, the Marxist cliché that the “petty bourgeoisie has no characteristic mode of production,” and that therefore a regime is either bourgeois or proletarian, is incoherent. Modern history has demonstrated that it is the

petty bourgeois Jacobin intellectuals, and later the managerial technocrats, who have come to power everywhere in the “developing world,” from Lenin’s party to various “revolutionary” military and party regimes across the globe.

8. See *Akwesasne Notes*, Vol. 13, No. 7, Early Spring 1981. The Sandinistas also agree with the military President of Brazil, General Emilio Garrastazu Medici, who proclaimed in 1970 at the inauguration of construction on the Trans-Amazon Highway, “The initial problem of the Amazon is to really get to know it. To do so, it is vital to make it more accessible and more open. Thus the policy of my government is directed primarily to the undertaking of a gigantic integration program with the two-fold objective of exploration and settlement.” (Quoted in *Victims of the Miracle: Development and the Indians of Brazil*, by Shelton H. Davis, Cambridge University Press, 1977.) Akwesasne Notes can be contacted c/o Mohawk Nation, Rooseveltown, New York 13683; one year sub is \$6.001

9. Anthropology, of course, is a contradictory movement, and though it has played a role in conquest, much admirable work has been done by anthropologists, particularly in exposing the destruction of indigenous and primitive worlds and in making us aware that another world exists beyond this modern life. But the unhappy fact remains that they have spread the disease wherever they have gone. The example of the great Brazilian humanitarian and defender of the Indians in the nineteenth century, Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, who founded the Indian Protection Service (SPI) in the first part of this century, shows the chasm between the intentions of the anthropologists and the results of their activities. Davis points out in his book *Victims of the Miracle*, “The SPI tried to mediate in these encounters [between settlers and natives] by establishing Indian posts in several areas, but more often than not Indian agents were ineffective in holding back settlers and in influencing state governments to provide legal titles for Indian lands. As a result, in almost every area of Brazil where the SPI functioned, Indians were wiped out by disease or became marginalized ethnic populations on minuscule parcels of land.”

10. Quoted in an interview in *Re/Search*, 20 Romolo B, San Francisco, Cal 94133.

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