

## Existence and Liberation: On José Mariátegui's Postcolonial Marxism

by Sebastian Purcell

### English Abstract

Although José Mariátegui holds the distinction of being the first significant Marxist thinker in Latin America, the continuing importance of his contributions to a theory of social and political liberation has recently been questioned. Specifically among Anglophone commentators, Susana Nuccetelli has argued that while Mariátegui succeeded in broaching the problem of the indigenous in an original way, his commitments to scientific socialism have made his socio-critical analyses largely invalid. By examining Mariátegui's central work, the *Seven Essays*, in its relation to two of his principle intellectual teachers, Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, the present essay demonstrates in response that Mariátegui was not at all committed to any form of scientific socialism. Furthermore, it is argued that beyond his particular solutions Mariátegui elaborated an account of political intervention that might yet be useful today.

### Resumen en español

Aunque José Mariátegui tiene la distinción de ser el primer significativo pensador marxista en América Latina, la importancia continua de sus contribuciones a la teoría de la liberación social y política ha sido cuestionada recientemente. Específicamente entre los comentaristas de habla inglesa, Susana Nuccetelli ha argumentado que, si bien Mariátegui logró abordar el problema de los indígenas de una manera original, sus compromisos con el socialismo científico han hecho sus análisis socio-críticos carecer de validez. Al examinar la obra central de Mariátegui, los *Siete Ensayos*, en su relación con dos de sus profesores de principio intelectual, Karl Marx y Antonio Gramsci, el presente ensayo en respuesta demuestra que Mariátegui no estaba en lo absoluto comprometido con ninguna forma de socialismo científico. Por otra parte, se argumenta que más allá de sus soluciones particulares Mariátegui elaboró una cuenta de la intervención política que todavía puede ser útil hoy en día.

### Resumo em português

Embora José Mariátegui detenha a honra de ter sido o primeiro pensador marxista importante na América Latina, a importância contínua de suas contribuições para uma teoria da libertação social e política foi recentemente questionada. Especificamente dentre os comentaristas de língua inglesa, Susana Nuccetelli tem defendido que, embora Mariátegui tenha conseguido abordar o problema dos indígenas de maneira original, seus compromimentos com o socialismo científico tornaram suas análises sócio-críticas amplamente inválidas. O presente ensaio, ao examinar a obra central de Mariátegui, os *Siete Ensayos*, na sua relação com dois de seus principais mestres intelectuais, Karl Marx e Antonio Gramsci, demonstra, em resposta, que Mariátegui não estava de maneira alguma comprometido com qualquer forma de socialismo científico.

Ademais, defende-se que além de suas soluções particulares, Mariátegui elaborou uma interpretação da intervenção política que poderia ser útil ainda hoje.

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José Mariátegui holds the distinction of being recognized as “the first Marxist” thinker in Latin America, not because he was in fact the first, but because of the tremendous insight and novelty of his sense of Marxism.[1] Given the immense influence Marxist doctrines have had in the history of Latin American philosophy, Mariátegui’s position as the first significant thinker at the beginning of its history marks his work with distinct historiographical value. It is thus not surprising to find his work represented in the major anthologies on Latin American philosophy in English; neither is it surprising that his work has been the focus of recent scholarly scrutiny.[2] Some measure of this scrutiny has been positive. Omar Rivera’s “From Revolving Time to the Time of Revolution,” for example, attempts to resolve the apparent discrepancies occasioned by what appears to be Mariátegui’s simultaneous endorsement of Friedrich Nietzsche’s unsystematic style and his own departure from it through his open (and markedly anti-Nietzschean) commitment to socialist ideals.[3] Yet some measure of this scholarly scrutiny is critical. What is arguably the most famous critique of Mariátegui in English is Susanna Nuccetelli’s argument, found in her *Latin American Thought*. [4] Despite the advances made by Rivera’s work, it does little to respond to her type of criticism. Nuccetelli argues that while Mariátegui deserves some scholarly attention on account of having defined “the indigenous problem” in a clear and original way, his commitment to scientific socialism invalidates most of his sociocritical analyses as well as any of his proposals for political intervention.[5]

It is in light of this critical scrutiny that the present essay aims to provide a response to Nuccetelli’s critical evaluation by demonstrating how Mariátegui departs from the scientific Marxism that she claims he supports. This is not to claim that I understand Mariátegui’s work to be wholly free from tensions, but that it is at least not fraught with the debilitating kind that Nuccetelli suggests. In order to make my case I examine some of the peculiar features of Mariátegui’s Marxism, and I especially note how his account of liberation is at the same time grounded in a sense of existence. While this might incline one to think that he is a kind of existentialist Marxist, I rather argue that he is a postcolonial Marxist, and that his commitment to Nietzsche functions within this larger context. One consequence of my response, then, is that it will provide a provisional framework for the interpretation of Mariátegui’s major work *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*. Another is to retrieve an account of sociopolitical intervention that I believe may yet be useful today.

## Mariátegui as a Scientific Socialist?

Because the central scholarly aim of the present essay is to defend Mariátegui's work from Nuccetelli's critique, I begin with a review of that critique in some detail in order to be sure the charges are met adequately. Both in order to organize Nuccetelli's criticisms and as a result of the fact that this critique is primarily concerned with Mariátegui's *Seven Essays*, I prepare the way by noting some of the basic questions that I think anyone must ask when reading that work.

The title of Mariátegui's work in its original Spanish, *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de La Realidad Peruana*, suggests *at least* two points of focus. First, these essays are interpretive, which is to say that each of the essays is an exercise in hermeneutics. What kind of hermeneutics or whether each essay employs the same hermeneutics is not immediately indicated. Second, the interpretations are *of* Peruvian reality. Yet just as the character of the interpretation is left unspecified, so too is the character of Peruvian reality. The very title of the work thus suggests that anyone who wants to read the *Seven Essays* ought to have in mind two basic questions: (1) Just what kind of interpretation is this? and (2) What is the sense of Peruvian reality?

Nuccetelli's criticisms are based on two plausible answers to these questions. In response to the first question, she answers that Mariátegui's hermeneutic key is Marxist in the strict sense of scientific socialism.[6] Under this kind of interpretation it is considered a scientific fact that socialism will be an inevitable replacement for capitalism. She quotes a statement that Mariátegui made in 1923 to make the point: "I share the opinion of those who believe that humanity is living through a revolutionary period. And I am convinced of the imminent collapse of all social-democratic, reformist, evolutionist theses." [7] In response to the second question, she answers that Mariátegui is adapting the general Marxist program to address a "reality" specific to Peru because at the heart of that reality stands "the indigenous problem," or the problem of the Indian.[8]

Before moving to her critique of Mariátegui, Nuccetelli notes that his work contains two points of pivotal interest. First, "rather than invoke some general flaws of capitalism to account for the destitution of the Indians, he considered the problem in its Peruvian context, identifying it as part of the legacy of colonialism." [9] This is significant, she notes, because Mariátegui is not simply using a prefabricated Marxist framework that he then applies to the situation in Peru, but instead actually modifies Marx with postcolonial considerations. Second, she notes that unlike other Latin American thinkers, Mariátegui does not approach the problem of the Indian primarily on racial terms. To his mind, they are not the best race in regard to holding promise for political action. In this sense, at least, he cannot be accused of romanticizing the problem of the Indian.

In another crucial respect, however, Nuccetelli argues that Mariátegui *does* romanticize the problem of the Indian, namely by supposing that they desire his own socialist aims. She argues that Mariátegui

assumed that the Peruvian Indians valued progress and integration in Latin American societies, but why should they? After all, progress and integration are Western goals, held valuable by descendants of the very Europeans who had been responsible for the destruction of Indian cultures. Furthermore ... Mariátegui's solution to the "indigenous question" appears to presuppose a false picture of the relation between the material conditions of a certain group and their psychology. Those who are oppressed, it seems, are not always interested in revolution.[10]

Nuccetelli makes it clear that in her estimation Mariátegui's analysis is guilty of two unfounded assumptions: the first concerns the values of integration, and the second concerns the psychology of the oppressed. It should be noted, however, that in order to make the second claim she appears to impute to Mariátegui a rather strict adherence to the base-superstructure model of socioeconomic analysis, which Marx proposes in the "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. [11] This model of hermeneutics, one recalls, interprets all phenomena that are not economic as mere superstructure, mere scaffolding, on the edifice of economic reality itself. No real revolutionary action, then, can occur at the superstructural level, and so nothing significant can be gained by reflecting on such scaffolding as art or religious expression. I note that Nuccetelli imputes such a kind of analysis to Mariátegui because it is only by this assumption that she can maintain that Mariátegui failed to recognize that the "'indigenous question' was more complex than Mariátegui imagined." [12]

An additional assumption underlining Nuccetelli's critique is that Mariátegui was a *scientific* socialist in a very strict sense. In order to make her case that Mariátegui failed to understand the psychology of the oppressed Indians, she argues from a number of historical examples in which the oppressed simply did not rise up and revolt. There is, of course, a well-known Marxist answer to such a phenomenon, namely that the oppressed in these cases have simply developed an ideological false consciousness. In order to rebut this possibility she writes:

We can scarcely doubt that Mariátegui was a devoted Marxist, and a corollary of that fact is that he held Marxism to be a theory that is scientific. It is a well-known principle of scientific method that, when a theory has been clearly refuted by the evidence, if its proponents attempt to save it by adding further assumptions so that the theory is thereby made invulnerable to counter-examples, they have at the same time made that theory non-scientific.[13]

In short, she argues that "false consciousness" is not a possible response since that would make Mariátegui's position nonscientific. The end result is that if Mariátegui is to be given the benefit of the doubt, and it is supposed his position was a scientific one, then he supported a clearly falsified position. On Nuccetelli's reasoning, and it is

understandable why she would hold this point, it is preferable to be scientific and wrong than mystical and unprobably right or wrong.

In response to Nuccetelli's criticisms it is of course possible to point out that after Thomas Kuhn it has generally been recognized that it is scientifically rational to hold onto a theory in the face of counterevidence.[14] Such a tactic might take one down the road of the philosophy of science. Instead, however, I want to approach the issue from a more strictly exegetical standpoint, since it appears to me that some of Nuccetelli's assumptions in reading Mariátegui are not as well supported as they first appear to be.

## Exegetical Concerns

Pursuing the exegetical path of response to Nuccetelli, it appears to me that the problems she identifies in Mariátegui's work turn on her two implicit answers to the basic questions that allow one to gain one's bearings in the *Seven Essays*. Despite the plausibility of her responses to those questions, I nevertheless think they are unfounded.

To begin, I note that there are really *three* questions one must ask, given the title of the work. In addition to the two mentioned, one must also ask: why seven essays? I believe that it is Rivera who gives the definitive answer to this question in his essay "From Revolving Time to the Time of Revolution." The lynchpin of his analysis turns on his ability to demonstrate that Mariátegui's interest in and use of Nietzsche is not accidental. The work begins with a quotation from Nietzsche's *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, and is followed by Mariátegui's own statement that these seven essays do not constitute a completed work. Instead, they must be understood as essays in the Nietzschean sense of stylistic trials, written "with all my blood." [15] What this immediately suggests is that the collection *is not* a systematic piece. While there is a certain coherence to the work as a whole, it is not a *systematic* coherence. Already the possibility that Mariátegui's work is "scientific," in the relevant Hegelian sense of "*Wissenschaft*," is thus undercut. The Popperian critique of falsifiability, whatever its merits, does not constitute immanent grounds for criticizing Mariátegui's work. Beyond that point, it does not appear that Mariátegui aspired to scientificity even in the Hegelian-Marxist sense since this latter aspiration would require *strict* adherence to dialectical reasoning, which is not only absent in the piece (there is not a single Hegelian triad in the whole work) but also undercut by the Nietzschean fragmentary style.

This point is weighty, so I pause to consider two plausible responses. One might object to the foregoing by arguing that to forego adherence to "scientific materialism" is simply to forego any claim to Marxism. As a result, it is unconvincing that Mariátegui could have given up this claim so easily. Additionally, as Nuccetelli notes, Mariátegui was certainly convinced that a revolution would occur. Does this not suggest that Mariátegui did hold to a scientific Marxism?

In response, I first note that it is the textual evidence that suggests Mariátegui did not hold to any kind of scientific materialism. My goals here are largely exegetical, and it is his written statements that support my conclusion. How else can one make sense of his straightforward embrace of Nietzschean antisystematics and fragmentary style? Next, it is possible to hold that a revolution would occur and still forego the claim to scientificity. One may have inductive reasons to hold such a position, so that recourse to a dialectical method is not required to underwrite such a judgment. Finally, while one kind of Marxism does maintain that this kind of scientificity is a constitutive component of its "hard core," it is not clear to me that all Marxisms do. One need only think of Slavoj Žižek today, or of Enrique Dussel, or perhaps most pertinently Antonio Gramsci who was Mariátegui's teacher on these matters. At least in the *Seven Essays*, Mariátegui seems to have given up the claim to scientific materialism in favor of a kind of Nietzschean-Marxism.

This insight thus raises questions about the adequacy of the other two answers Nuccetelli provides. Nuccetelli supposes that Mariátegui's interpretations of social reality function by means of strict adherence to the base-superstructure thesis, but why then does Mariátegui spend most of the *Seven Essays* on what would be considered superstructure? Why is the longest essay by far on literature? Since these essays are included all in one piece, the explanation that Mariátegui's position developed from an earlier aesthetic period to a later "card-carrying" Marxist period is not available. Furthermore, while the question of the Indian shows up throughout all seven essays, why, if this problem can be solved by focusing exclusively on land that should supposedly be turned over to the Indian, does Mariátegui focus on education, religion, and other factors that would appear to be extraneous to this problem, mere scaffolding on the economic edifice? In short, it does not seem that Mariátegui held strictly to the base-superstructure thesis; neither does it appear to be the case that he thought the basic issue of Peruvian reality was "the Indian problem."

I propose both that the reality with which Mariátegui was concerned is not as Nuccetelli suggests, and that his basic hermeneutic key was also altogether different. To be clear, my alternative interpretation is one that I hold to be the account that (a) most charitably interprets what Mariátegui wrote, and (b) follows from what Mariátegui has in fact written. I believe it is the position that he did hold, given the stated arguments in the *Seven Essays*. Whether his statements elsewhere in his corpus are consistent with this interpretation is a matter that I cannot broach here (though I would argue that they are consistent in general). In the two sections that follow I spell out my own proposals to these basic questions.

### **Which Peruvian Reality?**

As the title of Mariátegui's work attests, it is an insight into the failure of standard Marxist analysis to address Peruvian reality that prompted his work. If he merits consideration as a serious thinker on social liberation at all, in the tradition that Olfelia

Schutte outlines in her research, it is because in addressing Peruvian reality Mariátegui does *more* than adapt Marx to a specific location.[16]

In order to get a better sense of what kind of “Peruvian reality” he had in mind, one must recall a basic point about Marx’s characterization of the bourgeoisie. It is often forgotten that in their “Communist Manifesto” Marx and Engels begin their account by recalling the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary role. They are considered revolutionary not simply because they are the outcome of various political revolutions in Europe, such as the revolutions in England in the 1600s, the Dutch Republic, or even the late 1789 French Revolution. Even more to the point, they are revolutionary because they remove the feudal structure and replace it with a capitalist world market. Marx and Engels write the following:

Where it has come to power the bourgeoisie has obliterated all relations that were feudal, patriarchal, idyllic. It has pitilessly severed the motley bonds of feudalism that have joined men to their natural superiors, and has left intact no other bond between one man and another than naked self-interest, unfeeling “hard cash.” It has drowned the ecstasies of religious fervor, of zealous chivalry, of philistine sentiment in the icy waters of egoistic calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in the place of countless attested and hard-won freedoms it has established a single freedom – conscienceless free trade. In a word, for exploitation cloaked by religious and political illusions, it has substituted unashamed, direct brutal exploitation.[17]

The bourgeoisie are revolutionary because they have broken up the bonds of feudalism, and substituted egoistic calculation. Where religion at least used to foster an illusion about its character, the free market is open about its direct exploitation.

When confronted with the existential reality in Peru, however, Mariátegui is forced to question precisely the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary role. On Mariátegui’s reasoning the sequence of transition that Marx describes from feudalism to contemporary society *might* be right for Europe, but it does *not* describe the sociopolitical reality in Peru. The fallout of the colonial legacy has simultaneously created a state in which republics are supposed to rule, yet feudalism remains in place economically. “The hacienda owner, the *latifundista*,” Mariátegui writes “is a feudal lord.”[18] The basic problem of the Indian is the existence of *gamonalismo*, this bizarre combination of economic feudalism and political “republicanism.” Mariátegui comes out and says just this: “*Gamonalism* inevitably invalidates any law or ordinance for indigenous protection.”[19] Just to be clear, then, the “Peruvian Reality” that is the subject of interpretation throughout the seven essays is *the fallout of colonialism in Peru*, which *results in* both “the problem of the Indian” and “the problem of land.” This makes Mariátegui’s work principally one that would today be called postcolonial critique.

The implication of this point is that Mariátegui supposes that there is no necessary way that history proceeds. Given the history of Europe, much of what Marx says is correct, but given the reality of Peru something else is the case entirely. In reply

to quotations such as the one above, it should be noted that in *the same* summary of points Mariátegui *also* remarks that the most recent act by the state to fund tobacco plantations “shows better than any other that the liberal laissez-faire thesis, which has yielded such poor fruits in Peru, should be definitively replaced by a social policy of nationalizing our natural resources.”[20] Two points are in order here. First, this suggests that the economic goal Mariátegui envisions is a socialist one—of some sort. But second, it simultaneously undercuts the notion that he understands history as proceeding along a single track. If he did hold to such a sequential understanding of history, why would he suggest that the whole phase of capitalism should simply be ignored and economic socialism should be taken up? His notion of history appears to be one that is open, and this point supports his Nietzschean style.

These considerations reframe “the problem of the Indian.” For Marx, the bourgeoisie were revolutionary because they undercut the feudal system through their establishing of free-market capitalism. The proletariat, as a result, became the classless class that would carry out the revolutionary transformation to socialism. But given both Mariátegui's open conception of history (which is simultaneously the death of social *Wissenschaft*) and his argument that the bourgeoisie have been useless in Peru, how is a transformation to socialism to occur? Who does he suppose will undertake such a heroic struggle?

The answer to these questions requires that one make complementary insights into the makeup of the class structure of Peruvian reality. If the capitalists are the problem for Marx, it is the *gamonal* who is the problem for Mariátegui.[21] He does acknowledge that there is a class of bourgeoisie present in Peru that Mariátegui sometimes identifies with *criollos*, but in his estimation they are useless for revolutionary purposes.[22] For Marx the main economic concern is the accumulation of capital that accrues to the capitalist through his collection of surplus value from the proletariat's *labor*. Given the fallout of Spanish colonization (and it should be noted that Mariátegui does not consider the Spanish to be capitalists, but feudal and ecclesiastical warriors), [23] the main problem that Mariátegui identifies is the accumulation of *land* to the *gamonal*. This is the land problem, and it is quite distinct from Marx's analysis of labor. Finally, if there is one class of people that has suffered most from the class structure in Europe, for Marx it is *the proletariat*. However, as Mariátegui identifies, if there is one class of people that has suffered most in Peru it is *the Indian*, which is the heart of the indigenous problem.

### Which Hermeneutic Key?

A great deal has already been noted to suggest that Mariátegui departs substantially from Marx and his socioeconomic analyses, but the suggestion that history has an open structure for Mariátegui requires complementary adjustments to his hermeneutics. If these are seven essays of interpretation, then the character of that interpretation goes well beyond base-superstructure analysis. If postcolonialism is the

basic reality of Peru, then it is a peculiar form of *genealogy* that is necessary to discern this fact. I believe four points are especially noteworthy concerning this hermeneutics.

First, Mariátegui's socioeconomic analysis can best be characterized as *genealogical stratification*. Because he abandons the Marxist dialectical account of history, the attempt to identify contradictions in the economic "base" simply does not make any sense. Instead, his essays generally consist in tracing the *coincidence* of historical events that have yielded the Peruvian reality. For example, in his essay "The Problem of Land" he notes that the Incas had a kind of agrarian communism, and he argues that "the destruction of this economy—and equally of the culture that it nourished—is one of the results least discussed about colonization." [24] Nothing either required the existence of this distinct form of communism or its annihilation, but both in fact occurred, and it is Mariátegui's goal to discern how these facts establish the present problem of land. Or again, in his essay "The Process of Public Instruction" he writes: "Capitalism more and more appears to be a phenomenon consubstantial and in solidarity with liberalism and Protestantism. This is not, properly, a principle and neither is it a theory, but better an experimental, empirical, observation." [25] Here he makes it clear that his analyses are empirical observations, not deductions from principles. Because there is no great dialectical force at work in history for Mariátegui, his genealogies only track the coincidental aggregates of events that form the strata of history.

Second, Mariátegui appears to support a *weak* base-superstructure thesis. He does explicitly argue that by "locating [the Indian problem] as fundamentally a socio-economic one, we take up the attitude that is the least lyrical and literary possible. We are not content to assert [*reivindicar*] the Indian's right to education, culture, progress, love, and sky. We begin by categorically asserting [*reivindicar*] his right to land." [26] Nevertheless, he goes on to consider the character of "super-structural" items and especially the liberatory power of indigenism. "Indigenism in our literature," he writes, "as may be gathered from my earlier statements, has fundamentally the sense of a reevaluation of the autochthonous." [27] The resolutions to this apparent discrepancy are multiple, but one way that Mariátegui could consider the relation of economic strata to literary strata is by supervenience. [28] If this were the case, then, he would be wholly justified in examining the economic base as necessary (and unlyrical), and at the same time consider superstructural matters as irreducibly important.

Third, while I think that Nuccetelli is right to argue that Mariátegui did not hold to the idea of an intrinsically superior race, it appears to me that he nevertheless subscribed to a kind of *racialism*. Anthony Appiah rather famously defines "racialism" as the view "that there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into small sets of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race." [29] Appiah is clear to point out that racialism and racism are not the same, but that racialism is nevertheless (a) false and (b) a dangerous stepping-stone to full-blown racism. Unfortunately, it does seem to be the

case that Mariátegui subscribed to a kind of racialism. Consider his treatment of the imported Negro slave:

The Negro race is one of the human alluvia deposited on the coast by colonization. ... The Negro has always looked at the sierra with distrust and hostility, where he has not been able to acclimatize himself physically or spiritually. When he has mixed with the Indian it has been to bastardize him by communicating to him his servile domesticity and his exteriorizing and morbid psychology.[30]

Nor are statements such as these isolated remarks; they make up an integral part of Mariátegui's hermeneutics. In evaluating Dr. Villarán's proposal for education, for example, he remarks that "Dr. Villarán in his academic discourse of 1900 [shows himself to be of] Spanish heritage. Dr. Villarán admitted this much in his speech, although his affiliation with civilism did not let him express much intellectual independence." [31] The Spanish make up a race, and so express a certain spirit that limits Villarán's ideological perspective. It is this thought that accounts for Mariátegui's statement that the Indian's "mixing" with the imported black slave corrupts the former.

Finally, I note that while Mariátegui does engage in a strategy of "unmasking" based on the ideological position of his adversaries, Mariátegui's hermeneutic aim is to isolate blockages to his socialist goal as well as solutions to those blockages. For example, he argues that there is an agrarian problem only because the way to socialism is unclear in Peru: "The agrarian problem presents itself, before anything else, as the problem of the liquidation of feudalism in Peru. This liquidation should have been realized already by the democratic-bourgeois regime formally established by the War of Independence." [32] In turning to indigenous art as a "solution," he writes, "Our 'nativism,' which is also necessary literarily as revolution and emancipation, cannot be a simple 'criollo-ism.'" [33]

There is something refreshing in Mariátegui's hermeneutics since he prefers a rather Foucauldian grey and empirical genealogy to a kind of dialectical structuralism. Nevertheless, his racialism does make his position less compelling than it would be otherwise. Yet as the last point in Mariátegui's hermeneutics brings out most prominently, the question that remains unaddressed is precisely what character this social revolution should have. I now turn to this matter.

### **What Kind of Socialist Revolution?**

Absolutely no one can deny that Mariátegui was a committed socialist. Yet given the open character of history as he understands it, the elimination of dialectical analysis in his work, and the shift in focus to land rather than labor, the question that one must face squarely is: just what kind of socialist goal did Mariátegui have in mind? He simply could not have intended some aim such as turning the means of production over to the proletariat. First, he would have in mind the Indian, not the proletariat. Second, he would

have to say that it is the land itself that is to be socialized, since the means of production simply is not important, given the Peruvian postcolonial reality. But third, in what sense would this be considered a solution? Without a sense of contradictions driving historical progress, how would this be an overcoming of anything other than a contingent state of affairs, and in that case what grounds for progress would one have?

I want to make this last point crystal clear since it concerns the very goal of Mariátegui's political activism. Returning again to the *Manifesto*, since I believe it is the very basic points in Marx that are most important, the solution that Marx and Engels prescribe is the "*Aufhebung* of private property."<sup>[34]</sup> The dialectical meaning of this statement is that private property is to be *both* maintained *and* overcome. Understood rightly, this is *not* a call for abolishing (*Abschaffung*) private property as is often thought; instead, it is a call to *retain* private property and eliminate its *class character*. Here, then, is the source for the often-repeated but little-understood distinction between "vulgar Marxism," which hopes to abolish private property, and actual Marxism, which understands that the goal is a *dialectical* one. Thus what the goal comes down to is that capital must be made a classless product, which is the same thing as saying it must be socialized. The point of contention from which all *Marxisms* have emerged is *how* this declassification is to be achieved. It is not simply the maintenance of property as *private* that makes it classed, since private property is to be retained on a dialectical Marxist view. So in what specifically does the classing of property consist?

It seems reasonable to me, despite Mariátegui's departure from Marxist dialectics, to regard his work as providing a response to this question. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Mariátegui does hold that classes exist and that it is *gamonalismo* that is to be overcome by the oppressed Indian. Second, as he repeatedly claims, it is his own ideological commitment that allows him to make evaluations.<sup>[35]</sup> Even if an *Aufhebung* of private property is not to be achieved strictly, the goal of removing its class character still makes sense in light of these commitments. In more Nietzschean language, the goal might be expressed as: the transvaluation of private property.

The heart of Mariátegui's proposal for the declassification of private property may be understood if one turns to his most immediate intellectual teacher on these matters, Antonio Gramsci. Despite the well-known fact that Gramsci's thought was influential for Mariátegui, too few Anglophone commentators on the Peruvian thinker have bothered to trace the connection, especially on the socialist goal he seems to have envisioned.<sup>[36]</sup> The point that I consider essential concerns Gramsci's understanding of the term "hegemony." Despite its use today, "hegemony" in Gramsci's work did *not* mean the domination of one group over another; instead, it meant the formation of collective will (and, by implication, political associations) from diverse groups in civil society. In redressing the Marxist base-superstructure account of structural conflict, for example, Gramsci writes: "The *realization* of a hegemonic apparatus, insofar as it *creates* new ideological terrain, *determines* a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge."<sup>[37]</sup> In short, *hegemony is an activity*. Implicit here is a sort of "gestalt shift" in viewing social problems. Rather than waiting around for an already existing class (say

the proletariat) to rise up, Gramsci's understanding of hegemony suggests that political groups are to be *formed*.

The same point is to be found in Mariátegui's work. For example, in his statements concerning indigenist literature Mariátegui draws a distinction between authentic and inauthentic indigenists: "The authentic indigenists, who should not be confused with those who exploit indigenous themes out of mere 'exoticism,' deliberately or unknowingly collaborate in a political and economic task of reevaluation [*reivindicación*], not in a task of restoration or resurrection."<sup>[38]</sup> A little later he states: "Indigenism in our literature ... has as its fundamental sense a reevaluation [*reivindicación*] of the autochthonous."<sup>[39]</sup> I believe that one finds in these statements exactly the same kind of "gestalt shift" in the viewing of the Indian that one finds in Gramsci's account of hegemony. By drawing a distinction between authentic and inauthentic indigenists, Mariátegui is suggesting that Indians are not so much an already existing group of people—a group that, if they only could "get their act together," could serve as the revolutionary force for righting social injustice they are instead *a group of people that must be formed* as an acting political body. This is why he argues that this literature is predominantly mestizo literature, and that for at least the time being it will have to be the mestizos who form the principal constituents of this acting body, as opposed to the Indian himself. In short, the revolutionary class *is a task* and not a given of social reality.

Mariátegui's political goal can thus be understood as a second-order goal: the declassification/*reivindicación* of private property may be understood as a heuristic telling one how to go about finding grounds for political intervention, rather than specifying a direct first-order solution to all social ills.

This insight, I think, may still be the best account available for understanding the aims of radical or contentious politics. It is also, however, encumbered by Mariátegui's continued use of racialism to make his case. For example, he writes: "The Indian does not represent solely a type, a theme, a motive, a personality; he represents a community [*pueblo*], a race, a tradition, a spirit [*espíritu*]."<sup>[40]</sup> Or a little later: "If the Indian occupies the foundational level in Peruvian literature and art, this will not be, surely, because of his literary or plastic qualities, but because the new forces and vital impulses of the nation tend to reevaluate him [*reivindicarlo*]."<sup>[41]</sup> In this case I think the statement still expresses a second-order goal, but only by his commitment to racialism. It is the reevaluation of the spirit of the Indian that here functions as the heuristic for intervention. Thus, while his second-order account of political intervention is strikingly original, it is nevertheless entrenched in a false and problematic racialism.

## Concluding Thoughts

I have suggested that any interpretation of Mariátegui's *Seven Essays* ought to answer three questions: (1) Why seven essays? (2) What is the character of the Peruvian reality he investigates? and (3) What form of interpretation is used? Omar

Rivera's essay, I argued, lays the grounds for answering the first question: there are seven essays because they are written in the Nietzschean style of philosophy, and they indicate that Mariátegui abandons any dialectical account of history—any history that could be understood as *Wissenschaft*. The immediate implication of this thesis is that Nuccetelli's criticism of Mariátegui's work as *scientific* socialism is misplaced, and that her use of Popper's falsifiability fails to reproach his work on immanent grounds. Yet I have also argued that it is only by noting how Mariátegui departs from Marxism that one can grasp which Peruvian reality he was after. Rather than argue that this reality is "the indigenous problem" as Nuccetelli suggests, I argue that the problem of the Indian and the problem of land were subordinated to Mariátegui's estimation of the systematic effects of Spain's colonial legacy. After the revolution this legacy produced a mixed state of economic feudalism and a certain kind of republican politics. Critical to this reality are: that the bourgeoisie has no revolutionary function in Peru, that as a complementary insight it is the Indian that must take the place of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, that the *gamonal* is to be opposed rather than the capitalist, and that land and not labor is the major source of economic value.

The consequence of answering the first two questions in the above fashion is that one's answer to the third question cannot make use of the base-superstructure analysis Nuccetelli suggests. My own response to this question has two aspects: one centering strictly on what appears to be Mariátegui's hermeneutics, the other centering on the aim of his political critique. With respect to the former, I have argued that Mariátegui employs a critique by genealogical stratification. It is genealogical since in Mariátegui's estimation history has no dialectical structure, with the result that one can do nothing save making acute empirical observations. It is stratificational since he must trace the cumulative effects of these chance occurrences as they produce results, which are thus like the earth's strata. His aim with this form of critique is to isolate blockages to a socialist solution to the Peruvian reality.

Yet because he has altered so much of Marx's framework, one is forced to ask a fourth question in addition to the first three, namely what kind of socialist revolution does Mariátegui have in mind? The answer I have suggested is that he hopes to produce a kind of second-order account of political intervention. The matter is not to determine an absolute solution, which would be Hegelian rather than Nietzschean, but to produce a solution that will suggest ways to determine concrete solutions. The heart of this matter requires that one make the "gestalt shift" from viewing the revolutionary class as some group that already exists to viewing this group as one that *will have been*, should intervention prove successful. The Indian is a future for Mariátegui, and the fact that the Indian did not materialize as a revolutionary class, as Nuccetelli argues, only shows that the (second-order) political aims Mariátegui hoped to achieve remain hopes yet.

This last insight of Mariátegui's is something that I think may be of sociopolitical value today, and it is an additional consequence of the present investigation. If radical politics can be understood as the politics that exist primarily beyond the state institution, and that struggles to correct the systematic injustices wrought by the state that the state

has no *interest* in correcting, then Mariátegui suggests that in each such case one must work to form an active political agent who will undertake to intervene in the political reality of that world and transform it. In Gramscian language, one must work to form a hegemonic political class.

Returning to Mariátegui's concerns in Peru, he shows time and again that the basic problem in addressing the Indian is ignored because the Peruvian state, and particularly the *gamonal*, has no interest in rectifying the social injustices suffered by the Indian. They argue that it is rather a problem of an intractable spirit, or education, or laziness. At this point one can see just how Mariátegui's account of political intervention differs from more contemporary accounts, such as what one finds in John Rawls. What he does not do is try to provide theoretical grounds that would legitimate the rights of the oppressed in some universal form; rather, in sticking to his Nietzschean Marxism he takes each outcry as a point of injustice that could serve as the grounds for the formation of a revolutionary social body. By working to form a group that the state must come to recognize, the agent of political intervention will become who she is, if she is successful. Furthermore, knowledge of exactly how and where to intervene is only possible (a) by reflecting on the coincidental aggregate of events that make up social reality, and (b) by reflecting on the interests of those who would want to retain that reality as it is. This is not to argue that Rawlsian concerns with justice have no place, but only that they can be augmented with an account of political intervention, which seems to have been Mariátegui's focus.

One must be careful with a recovery of Mariátegui's work, however, since his hermeneutics is overtly committed to what Appiah has called "racialism," which provides grounds for racism. Even his second-order solution oscillates between the kernel I have suggested is present in it, and a sense that the Indian is a future because he exhibits a certain spirit that is a destiny. It is at this point that Nucetelli's criticisms of Mariátegui's romanticizing of the Indian hit their mark. Nevertheless, I find that Mariátegui's work is not only free from the other encumbrances Nucetelli identifies, but provides a sense of radical politics that may be helpful to those who are trying to conceive what radical politics might look like today, especially after the collapse of its state form.[42]

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## Notes

[1] This point is, essentially, Aníbal Quijano's argument in his "*José Carlos Mariátegui: Reencuentro y Debate*," which serves as the introduction to Mariátegui's *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979), ix-lxxxii. Translations of this essay are my own. Specifically, Quijano writes: "*Es el marxismo de Mariátegui y menos el atraso o adelanto relativos del Perú y otros países, lo que da cuenta del valor y de la vigencia de su obra*" (xliv).

[2] I have in mind here both Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert's *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), and Susana Nuccetelli's own *Latin American Philosophy: An Introduction with Readings* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004).

[3] Omar Rivera, "From Revolving Time to the Time of Revolution: Mariátegui's Encounter with Nietzsche," *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issue in Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2008): xx-xx.

[4] Susana Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002).

[5] I would like to underline that Nuccetelli's conclusion thus stands in opposition to a survey undertaken in 1991 by a Peruvian magazine, which asked Peruvian intellectuals, scholars, and artists about Mariátegui and concluded that his work "constituted the most important analysis of the principle problems of the Peruvian reality," and equally that "many of his points of view have not lost their force"; cited in *Anuario Mariateguiano* 3 (1991): 155.

[6] She is not alone in this approach to Mariátegui. For a review of some of the main ways in which Mariátegui's thought has been received, see Hugo Neira's article "*El pensamiento de José Carlos Mariátegui: los mariateguismos*," *Socialismo y Participación* 23 (September 1983): 55-76. For an even more thorough review one could look to the Argentinean Marxist José Aricó and his summary review in *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano*, 2nd ed. (México: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1980).

[7] José Carlos Mariátegui, "The World Crisis and the Peruvian Working Crisis," in *The Heroic and Creative Meaning of Socialism*, ed. M. Pearlman, 7 (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996).

[8] Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought*, 207.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*, 211.

[11] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2010).

[12] Nuccetelli, *Latin American Thought*, 207.

[13] *Ibid.*, 211-12.

[14] I have in mind Kuhn's arguments in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) and related works.

[15] Mariátegui, *Siete Ensayos*, 3.

[16] I have in mind, of course, Schutte's *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993). Throughout this exposition it should be noted that I have found Schutte's work to be invaluable on numerous points, but especially with respect to the proper orientation to the Peruvian economic reality that Mariátegui addresses.

[17] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Marx, Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver, 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[18] Mariátegui, *Siete Ensayos*, 21.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 66.

[21] Ibid., 65.

[22] Ibid., 69.

[23] Ibid., 68.

[24] Ibid., 34.

[25] Ibid., 71.

[26] Ibid., 31.

[27] Ibid., 220.

[28] I have in mind an account of supervenience like the one present in Jaegwon Kim's "Supervenience as a Philosophical Concept," *Metaphilosophy* 21 (1990): 1-27.

[29] Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13.

[30] *Siete Ensayos*, 220-21.

[31] Ibid., 72.

[32] Ibid., 31.

[33] Ibid., 219.

[34] Marx and Engels, *Marx-Engels, Werke*, Band4 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), 475; English in *Marx, Later Political Writings*, 13.

[35] He of course claims this much in his opening warning to the reader, and reiterates this point as the crucial grounds for his literary analysis at the beginning of the seventh essay: "I declare without hesitation that I bring to literary exegesis all my political passions and ideas" (183).

[36] A book-length study that is an exception to this statement is Marc Becker's *Mariátegui and Latin American Marxist Theory* (Athens: Center for International Studies, 1993), though his approach is historical rather than philosophical. For some better pieces in Spanish that at least look in this direction see Osvaldo Fernández Díaz, "Gramsci y Mariátegui: frente a la ortodoxia," *Nueva Sociedad* 115 (September-October 1991): 135-44; and Rafael Roncagliolo, "Gramsci, marxista y nacional," *Quehacer* 3 (March 1980): 118-28.

[37] Antonio Gramsci, "Structure and Superstructure," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 365 (New York: International Publishers, 2010). Emphasis added.

[38] Mariátegui, *Siete Ensayos*, 272.

[39] Ibid., 220.

[40] Ibid., 219.

[41] Ibid., 220.

[42] I am thankful to Michael Smith for his patient advice in developing this article as well as an anonymous reviewer who pushed me to formulate my arguments with more clarity.