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E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, and the Antinomies of British Marxism Revisited

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Margaret Thatcher as prime minister reportedly complained that the most read histories of Britain are being produced by Marxists.1 On November 2, 1977, then speaking for the Loyal Opposition, she identified her future priorities as the Tory standard-bearer: “My job is to stop Britain going red.”2

In their own ways, Edward P. Thompson and Perry Anderson played pivotal roles in the efflorescence of Marxist ideas in Britain’s postwar intellectual culture. Their conflicts at times were conducted with a polemical ferocity that might astonish the contemporary political right, who often portray the left as marching in lockstep and mired in political correctness. On the 50th anniversary of the publication of The Making of the English Working Class, there can be valuable insights from revisiting this storm over the left and its significance for understanding Thompson’s masterwork.

The generational divides

Edward Thompson spoke of the divide between the old New Left, the generation of 1956, and the new New Left, who became known as the generation of 1968. In 1962, Anderson recalled being “cub editor” of New Left Review, a journal that Thompson had been one of the founders: “Edward seemed not just one, but two generations older... Never did differences of age, however slight, loom so large as in those particular years.”3 In retrospect, Anderson admits it is strange that “We freely spoke of the ‘Old Guard’ among ourselves.... at a time when Thompson was just over 35.”4 He added that Thompson often “viewed talk of generational differences impatiently, as a way of avoiding difficult arguments.”5 But Thompson’s military career in World War II and later building a railroad in postwar Yugoslavia provided him with early life experiences that allowed him to see British people in a heroic light and fired with an élan of social solidarity. In his final years, he burst out in anger against contemporary left intellectuals liking to invoke Orwell’s putdown of the

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English working class for exhibiting provincialism and xenophobia. Orwell disparaged the English working class in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1940) as “outstanding in their abhorrence of foreign habits…. In four years on French soil they did not even acquire a liking for wine.” To counter what he called “a tirade of Orwell’s,” Thompson remarked: “That Orwell said this does not prove it was so. In a reasonably long life I have not observed that the working class of Other Nations (for example, the French) is to be noted for its internationalism as contrasted with our own.” Thompson then discussed his World War II experience with generous behavior from British working-class men and women, and in particular pointed to a letter by his brother Frank a year before he was executed by marauding Bulgarian fascist forces. Having returned to Egypt, Frank Thompson wrote Iris Murdoch in August 1943 about his recent journey to Sicily:

“One of these Jewish girls works in an army hospital. She says she can’t find words to describe her admiration for Thomas Atkins. Among his numberless good points she lists a natural and almost unfailing courtesy to women. The other day she was treating a shell-shock patient when he had a sudden fit of convulsions. His first words when he recovered were, ‘I’m so sorry. I hope I haven’t upset you.’ Whomever one talks to – Pole, Greek, Frenchman, German, Jew, Italian – this theme, ‘the courtesy of the English’ (and English means British in European parlance), always recurs. ‘Bardzo szlachemy narod… sorridente, scherzosi, cortesi.’”

Edward Thompson then circles back to Orwell, “This no more qualifies as historical proof than does Orwell’s tirade. But it is very much the fashion these days to take the Orwell view, especially among Leftist intellectuals who wish to see the working class as racist, chauvinist, and (if male) sexist.” He closed with an irreverent Thompsonian flourish, “I am pissed off with this stereotyping which obscures contrary evidence from view.”

Contrast Thompson’s World War II era experience of an inspiring English working class with the life encounters of the New Left generation of 1968. At the Brooklyn memorial service in 2012 for *New Left Review* editorial board member Alexander Cockburn, his brother Patrick Cockburn and Tariq Ali conveyed Alex’s profound alienation from the suffocating conformity of so many aspects of English life during the 1950s and 1960s. Cockburn came to dislike North American elites who swooned at things British, and he called out *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis in particular for being “a turbid Anglophile.” He wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (26 May 1988) that “Lewis, a former *New York Times* bureau chief in London, still visits Glyndebourne every year and remits to his readers paens to the British Way of Life of a sentimentality unrivaled since Rupert Brooke’s World War I poem ‘Grantchester.’ A subsequent bureau chief, R.W. Apple, seems as determined as Mr. Lewis to savor an England perfumed with fine claret and the values of an eighteenth century squire.”

In an interview with *The Independent* (22 February 1994) and later in a diary entry for CounterPunch (2002), NLR stalwart Tariq Ali, immortalized in the Rolling Stones song “Street Fighting Man,” gave a stark portrait of Britain when he arrived as a student at Oxford in the early 1960s:

“…. the food was disgusting. There was only one Indian restaurant, imaginatively called ‘The Taj Mahal’. I ordered a meal. Inedible. Being young and arrogant I sent for

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the Manager and asked him in Urdu: ‘Why do you serve this shit?’ He was livid. Took me to his office and said: ‘Look The English love it. I’m making money and I don’t want you to come here again.’ Then he relented. ‘Have you just arrived here?’ I nodded. He gave me the name of a Punjabi woman in North Oxford who cooked for South Asian students every Sunday and we could select the menu. I rang her. And she was good, but it was an unsatisfactory arrangement. I had to teach myself to cook.”

Edward Thompson believed that the 1950s summoned the British left to some of its most heroic moments: the sounding of the death knell of Stalinism and the first mobilization of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In contrast, Perry Anderson refers to a “ parched decade,” marked by “reactionary consolidation” and “the narcotic effects of the prosperity of the 1950s.” Thompson’s homilies constantly reminding the radical left about the meaning of 1956 provoked Anderson to remark that this has become the saddest testimony to the “fossilization” of theory. Anderson’s New Left Review sidekick Tom Nairn condemned “English separateness and provincialism; English backwardness and traditionalism; English religiosity and moralistic vapouring, paltry English ‘empiricism,’ or instinctive distrust of reason.” He spoke of “the nullity of native intellectual traditions,” the “secular, insular stultification,” “the impenetrable blanket of complacency,” “the stony recesses of British trade union conservatism,” and “the centuries of stale constipation and sedimentary ancestor-worship.” Anderson added that:

“The two great chemical elements of this blanketing English fog are ‘traditionalism’ and ‘empiricism’: in it, visibility – of any social or historical reality – is always zero.... A comprehensive, coagulated conservatism is the result, covering the whole of society with a thick pall of simultaneous philistinism (towards ideas) and mystagogy (towards institutions), for which England has justly won an international reputation.”

Thompson cited every one of these specific outbursts in his counterblast “The Peculiarities of the English,” and he accused the Anderson-Nairn duo of practicing an inverse Podsnapery. Mr. Podsnap is the Dickens character who proudly declares England’s superiority in all things, and he tells foreigners so: “No Other Country is so favoured as this Country.” Thompson re-creates the Dickenisian dialogue and reports Mr. Podsnap being arraigned by Anderson and Nairn:

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“‘And other countries,’ said Mr. Podsnap remorsefully. ‘They do how?’

‘They do,’ returned Messrs. Anderson and Nairn severely: ‘They do – we are obliged to say it – in Every Respect Better. Their Bourgeois Revolutions have been Mature. Their Class Struggles have been Sanguinary and Unequivocal. Their intelligentsia has been Autonomous and Inverted Vertically. Their Morphology has been Typologically Concrete. Their Proletariat has been Hegemonic.’”14

In the 1960s, Anderson saw a parched intellectual landscape marked by the veneration of émigrés such as Isaiah Berlin, White Revolutionaries who interpreted Marx for the self-satisfied dons and middlebrows: “It is a staggering fact that for two decades the only widely available book on Marx in English, apart from Party brochures, was Berlin’s haplessly ignorant and amateur little commentary, which achieved the feat of discussing Marx’s work without once mentioning the concept ‘alienation,’ fundamental to the whole system. This slim volume ruled unchallenged in Britain for 20 years.”15 In contrast, Thompson sensed Britain had offered far more than this in the realm of socialist thought, and he went to work to discover it.

While Thompson recovered a contingent of radical dissident thinkers and activists in “the living English tradition,” Anderson through New Left Review sought to renovate British intellectual life by introducing the modern masters of continental European Marxism: Gramsci, Sartre, Althusser, Lefebvre, Poulantzas, Lukacs, Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, and many more. These frequent theoretical excursions to continental Europe faced the wrath of Thompson, who faulted the NLR “import agencies” with marginalizing British traditions.

**NLR and the Making of the English Working Class**

*The New Statesman* characterizes Perry Anderson’s ascendancy to the editorship of New Left Review as “a palace coup.”16 Edward Thompson probably contributed to that common imagery by his accusation that the Old Etonian Anderson had “dismissed” those members of the editorial board belonging to the generation of 1956. Anderson and his allies explain it differently. The early New Left Review had been built up with the growth of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which supplied many eager activists to New Left Clubs helping to sustain NLR and its political activities. As CND went into decline, the New Left Clubs also shriveled in membership and participation, ultimately harming the fledgling magazine’s finances. With this crisis and the resignation of Stuart Hall as editor in 1961, NLR turned to the youthful Anderson. Anderson argues that Thompson was much more accurate when he wrote that the old New Left members abandoned the board, “electing for its own administrative dissolution.”17

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17 Dennis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 112 speculates that Anderson may have pushed the board to take this vote on its dissolution as he called them an “irritant and distraction.”
New Left Review had started publication in 1960 as the result of a shotgun marriage between Universities and Left Review associated with Stuart Hall and the Thompson-dominated New Reasoner. The two merged boards did not work well together. The Yorkshire and northern England elements at the New Reasoner, particularly Thompson, were apt to be suspicious of the London-Oxford axis prominent among the Universities and Left Review alumni, many of whom seemed disconnected from the labour movement. Members of the 39 New Left Clubs throughout the U.K. were often frustrated that they had few mechanisms for influencing the content of the journal.18

Given all of the acrimony that ensued between Thompson and Anderson, the New Left Review leadership often saluted The Making of the English Working Class as a tremendous achievement. Anderson himself admitted that it made some sense for “the Old Guard” to pursue other projects, as the journal was in flux and had not re-established its identity. He asked, “Who can criticize them, when among other things they gave us The Making of the English Working Class, which was published the next year?”19 Robin Blackburn, Anderson’s successor at the helm of NLR, called The Making “magnificent.”20 Even though Thompson furiously denounced his efforts as a travesty, Tom Nairn produced an often admiring critique that early on declares: “British socialists are fortunate indeed to possess the great account of the origins of the English working class which has recently appeared: Edward Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class. Above all, because it concentrates attention upon what must be our primary concern, the role of the working class as the maker of history.”21

But Thompson was right to sense that, despite their pleasantries, both Anderson and Nairn had important issues to raise concerning the limitations of The Making. Anderson contrasted the richness of so many historical studies of the British past with the shallowness of the political analysis of contemporary Britain. He regarded his “Origins of the Present Crisis” essay as an effort to bridge that gap. Nairn observed that the greatness of Thompson’s book leaves one thirsting to understand how such a combative epoch (ca. 1780-1832) produced a working class that later was so susceptible to uninspiring reformism and bouts of chauvinistic support for British imperialism. There are brief observations in The Making where Thompson shows recognition of the problem, most notably when he admits “The strength of distinctions of class and status in 20th-century England is in part a consequence of the lack, in the 20th-century labour movement, of Jacobin virtues.”22

In philosophical and historiographical terms, Anderson and Thompson confronted each other on several grand issues:
1) Thompson’s English idioms marked by empiricism and the category of “Experience” vs. Anderson’s international field of view highlighting the power of theory;


19 Anderson, Arguments Within English Marxism, p. 137.


Thompson’s work represents one of the most profound intellectual statements about the power of “agency” and “experience” in shaping historical destiny. Anderson turned to the conservative thinker Michael Oakeshott, who observed in *Experience and Its Modes* (1933) that “Experience, of all the words in the philosophic vocabulary, is the most difficult to manage; and it must be the ambition of every writer reckless enough to use the word to escape the ambiguities it contains.” Thompson many years later retorted, “Oakeshott was a scoundrel.”

Anderson remained committed to the idea that the construction of theory and concepts can help sharpen the understanding of the relationships between the overall social formation and various modes of production (capitalist, slave, and feudal). As will be seen later in this paper, he did not want the category of class to be determined by class consciousness or subjectivity. Though the *New Left Review* leadership engaged with Althusser’s conceptual universe, it is frequently ignored by Thompson’s partisans that Anderson thought the French Marxist had gone too far with his scientific pursuit of abstraction. Back in 1965, Thompson was alarmed that NLR had set up “lines... electrified for the speedy traffic of the marxistentialist Left Bank.” He may not have noticed that by the 1980s Anderson regarded Paris as “the capital of European intellectual reaction,” incidentally “in much the same way that London was thirty years ago.”

2) Thompson’s sympathy with the heritage of Romanticism vs. Anderson’s scientism;

E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams in various ways sought to establish Romanticism as a mainstream English tradition that reflected authentic moral outrage against the horrors of an unbridled industrial capitalism and its ideological accomplice, utilitarianism. The literary critic Williams is recognized as the leader of the Leavisite left, but Thompson made a point of backing Leavis in his dispute with C.P. Snow over science and *The Two Cultures*. Thompson regarded himself as a humanist-socialist arrayed against the scientific pretensions of what he liked to call “the Marxism of the heavy industrial base.”

Anderson condemned the amateurism of Britain’s ruling class and its frequent disdain for scientific and technical virtuosity. NLR also liked to remind its readership of the reactionary elements in the Romantic tradition, for instance in Carlyle’s support for the tyrannical Governor Eyre and in the anti-industrialism of D.H. Lawrence.

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3) Thompson’s interpretation of the unbroken continuity of bourgeois rule in Britain’s power structure vs. Anderson’s vision of aristocratic dominance and the persistence of the old regime.

Thompson stuck with the conventional Marxian view that a rising bourgeoisie since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had ascended to a position of class dominance in England. Anderson developed the idea that Britain’s bourgeoisie remained subordinate to the aristocracy well into the twentieth century. His vision of the persistence of the aristocracy influenced other radical historians such as Princeton’s Arno Mayer. The significance of this for the debate over *The Making* is the underlying assumption of Anderson and Nairn that a bourgeoisie which remains subordinate and deferential to a landed aristocracy influences the emerging proletariat to have similar qualities of servility. “In England, a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat. It handed on no impulse of liberation, no revolutionary values, no universal language.”

In the Anderson-Nairn worldview, the French working class accompanying bourgeois revolutionaries in the fight against landed elites would later help France’s laboring classes develop a more radical consciousness than their English counterparts.

On many occasions, Thompson assailed historical work attempting to demonstrate long-term patterns of political stability in Britain. When Lawrence Stone in Princeton’s Shelby Cullom Davis seminar attacked Thompson for his crude language about Walpole and other British elites, Thompson retorted that there is only one way to fight the new cult of “political stability” in British history led by J.H. Plumb and associates: “Why, Lawrence, a new deity has been erected in the land, and it is called ‘political stability.’ When someone creates new gods, the only proper response is – BLASPHEMY!”

Despite his clear respect for Thompson’s achievement, Anderson in 1980 took up several specific problems with *The Making of the English Working Class*. The very power of the book’s cultural analysis deflects attention from its failure to explore industrial production in an in-depth way, as one often searches in vain for basic numbers on the size of this emergent industrial proletariat. Anderson may score points in recognizing this lacuna, though Thompson acknowledged estimates of cotton handloom weavers in his chapter on “The Weavers” and the unreliability of data for much of this first phase of industrialization. Anderson decries the sparse and sometimes absent coverage of the three most important industries driving the first industrial revolution: cotton, iron, and coal. Charles Booth in his work on “The Occupations of the People of the United Kingdom 1801-1881” for the *Journal of the Statistical Society* (June 1886) had long ago delivered data that could be of help in this enterprise, though Thompson may have regarded some of its


periodization as too late for his needs. By 1841, Booth indicated that for England and Wales there were 210,000 workers in mining, 188,000 in metallurgy and 604,000 in textiles, with half of the latter toiling in cotton mills.  

Anderson reminds readers of labor history what seems to be expected of explorations of the formation of an industrial proletariat in other lands:

“... the speed and extent of industrialization should surely be woven into the very texture of any materialist study of a working class. If it is not taken as ‘external’ to the making of the Russian or Italian proletariat – as any glance at the labour history of Petrograd or Turin suffices to remind us – why should it be to the English proletariat?”

Thompson argues that Britain was close to the edge of a revolutionary crisis. He leaves one with a pervasive sense that the British state maintained control by a well-oiled apparatus of repression; that is to say, by relying primarily on coercion rather than consent. Anderson counters that ruling class control entailed a lot more than coercion. Consent was secured through retrograde appeals to nationalism throughout the long era of Napoleonic wars. Alas, many artisans and workers were not part of the Jacobin political ferment. As for the iron fist of coercion, Anderson notes that England, with a population of 12 million, had triple the population of Ireland; but the garrison in England had around 25,000 soldiers, with Castlereagh complaining in 1817 that the force at home was closer to 16,000 soldiers. Tiny Ireland was held down with far more troops, around 35,000. Revisiting the crisis of 1832, Halévy spoke of a few aristocrats backed with 11,000 mercenaries of dubious loyalty holding down domestic order in England.

Thompson's chapter on Methodism is his main effort to explain the sources of working-class conformity and consent. Anderson is not alone in regarding this as the book's least satisfactory contribution to understanding the rising working class. E.P. Thompson sometimes noted his own father's disenchantment late in life with the family's Protestant religious heritage, and this chapter perhaps is a reflection of that. And yet, Thompson in his later attacks on Althusser presents England's various Protestant rebellions as intellectually fruitful in resisting grand social theory, which he suggests has roots in the theological architecture of Roman Catholicism. In the later theory wars, Thompson seems to celebrate Protestantism and denigrates Roman Catholicism as a source of conformity and Scholasticist obscurantism.

Finally, Anderson recoiled against the Thompsonian tendency to define a social class by the attainment of class consciousness. He called attention to various oppressed peoples, Athenian slaves, caste-oppressed villagers in India, and Meiji era peasants who may well have lacked a fully formed class consciousness, but they still had a social location in a mode

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30 Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, p. 34.

of production. Though Anderson in the early 1980s briefly jumped too enthusiastically for some of the technological determinism in philosopher G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History – A Defence* (Oxford University Press, 1978), Cohen makes a sounder case when he says that consciousness does not determine a subaltern person's social class: “a person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations....”

In what has been called Anderson's "merciless laboratory of history," a primary duty of social science is to establish the structures and titanic social forces that provide constraints on human agency. For him, *The Making of the English Working Class* missed some of those structures and forces: the scale and scope of industrial capitalism, the transformative power of the American and French revolutions, and the elements leading to the unmaking and re-making of a British working class subsequently all too susceptible to uninspiring variants of reformism and surging support for late Victorian imperialism. 

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Haunted by the Legend of Better Days:

Romantic Marxism and Extractive Capitalism in the Andes

Jeffery R. Webber

This essay is concerned theoretically with the dialectic of Marxism and Romanticism, and it addresses this theme through a set of “elective affinities” in the work of the British Marxist historian E.P. Thompson and the Peruvian Marxist theorist of the early twentieth century, José Carlos Mariátegui. But the paper is not chiefly interested in an exhaustive exegesis of their works, or in simply tracing similitudes and differences in the development of their thought. Rather, it takes as its principal preoccupation the investigation of some select ideas and patterns in the Thompsonian and Mariáteguist frameworks that might provide a first step in the construction of an analytical counter-weight to a rather more concrete and immediate phenomenon in contemporary Andean politics – that is, the development of a new economistic and evolutionist dogma, deployed through a certain Marxist idiom, that seeks to defend as “progressive” the current intensification of extractive capitalism in the region – mining, natural gas and oil, and agro-industrial mono-cropping. It is possible to grasp the central elements of this perspective, I argue, in the writings and speeches of two of the most important South American state-ideologues of the new Latin American Left, Bolivian Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, and Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa. With all of this as a backdrop, the paper finally traces a connection between Thompson and Mariátegui, on the one hand, and the biographies of two contemporary indigenous, anti-capitalist activists and movement leaders in the Andes who similarly project a revolutionary romanticism against the New Left’s economism and evolutionism – they are, from Bolivia and Ecuador respectively, Felipe Quispe and Luis Macas.

The central argument here is that a utopian-revolutionary dialectic, looking backward to elements of a precapitalist past and pointing forward simultaneously to a socialist future, constitutes a connecting thread linking Thompson and Mariátegui. Thompson’s Romantic Marxism of the incipient working class of eighteenth century England, mediated through Mariátegui’s treatments of colonialism and imperialism, uneven and combined development, and racism and indigenous liberation in colonial and early republican Peru, offers a compelling antidote to the sterility of developmental evolutionism in the thinking
of many of the regimes of the new Latin American Left. We can see these fruitful Thompsonian-Mariáteguist combinations in movement in the lives of Quispe and Macas.

**Extractive Capitalism and the Compensatory State**

In 2010 and 2011, South America achieved an average growth rate of 6.4 percent, with Paraguay hitting 15 percent, Argentina 9.2 percent, and Uruguay 8 percent. Aggregate economic growth has been steady in Bolivia, averaging 4.8 percent between 2006 and 2012, with an apex of 6.1 in 2008, and a low of 3.4 in 2009, in the immediate fallout from the world crisis. The first semesters of 2013 have witnessed 6 percent growth, with above average projections for the year as a whole from the likes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Growth has been maintained in spite of a general and accelerating decline in mining mineral prices at the international level since April 2011, with prices of lead dropping 10 percent, tin 14 percent, and silver 28 percent in 2013 alone.\(^1\) A set of unique regional dynamics in South America over the last decade, related to patterns of accumulation elsewhere in the world market (notably high rates of growth in China), has set off a concerted shift towards the acceleration of mining, oil and gas extraction, and agro-industrial mono-crop cultivation throughout the continent.\(^2\) In other words, the uneven mutations of the ongoing economic crisis on a world scale have not resulted in low growth rates on an aggregate level across South America – at least not yet. Similar to the period normally described as “neoliberal,” massive multinational corporations are deeply imbricated in the extension of extraction at the heart of this primary-commodity-led growth everywhere in the region. Those cases in which centre-left regimes have entered into joint contracts between state-owned enterprises and multinationals, and negotiated relatively higher royalties and taxes on these extractive activities, are no exception.

Skimming from the rent generated, many South American governments have established what Uruguayan political economist Eduardo Gudynas terms “compensatory states,” whose legitimacy rests on the modest redistribution achieved through the priming of, often already existing, cash-transfer programs to the extremely poor, without touching the underlying class structure of society. Indeed, the very reproduction of these political economies depends upon states prioritizing the maintenance and security of private property rights and juridical environments in which multinationals can profit.\(^3\)

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Because the legitimacy function of relatively petty handouts runs on the blood of extraction, the compensatory state increasingly becomes a repressive state, on behalf of capital, as the expansion of extraction necessarily accelerates what David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession, and the variegated forms of resistance it regularly spawns. In the representative case of the TIPNIS in Bolivia, the steamrolling of the rights to self-governance of indigenous communities resisting highway construction through their territory illustrates the coercive wing of the compensatory state in action. Indigenous self-government in Bolivia is to be defended by President Evo Morales, it would seem, only when the claims are to territories marginal to the state’s development project.

The compensatory state co-opts and coerces in response to such signs of opposition, and builds an accompanying ideological apparatus to defend multinationals – an ideology in which communities of resistance are vilified as internal enemies acting in concert with the interests, or even in the pay of, various instruments of imperialism. The discursive gestures of state officials, of course, safely set to one side the obvious imperial character of the dispossessing activities of multinational corporations – now called “partners” rather than “bosses” in development – within the matrix of the new extractivism.

The writings and speeches of Bolivian Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, since he assumed the Vice-Presidential office in 2006, have made an important contribution to these ideological attempts at legitimation in contemporary South American countries led by governments describing themselves as Left or Centre-Left. As a former guerrilla, political prisoner, and author of a number of books on Marxism, indigenous movements, and social struggle in Bolivia, García Linera is closely associated in the public’s eye with the Bolivian radical left, especially as it expressed itself in the massive left-indigenous cycle of revolt between 2000 and 2005. That quasi-insurrectional cycle witnessed the overthrow of two neoliberal presidents and laid the groundwork for Evo Morales’s ascension to the presidency in 2006, as the country’s first indigenous head of state. García Linera’s leftist pedigree is, in many ways, unassailable.

García Linera took up his role as the preeminent proponent of state’s development model under Morales and his party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS), shortly after accepting the vice-presidential candidacy in the campaign leading up to the 2005 presidential elections: a light-skinned mestizo intellectual with calming, moderate rhetoric was thought to appeal to the middle and even upper middle class sectors, while Morales was expected to continue to bring out the popular indigenous vote. While Morales continued to invoke many of the symbols that conjured up the radical past of the MAS,

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6 García Linera was born in Cochabamba in 1962, and trained as a mathematician while in university in Mexico. Upon returning to Bolivia he participated in the short-lived Ejército Guerrillero Túpaj Katari (Túpaj Katari Guerrilla Army, EGTK), as a consequence of which he spent five years in jail, between 1992 and 1997. He was never charged and was tortured while imprisoned. Upon his release he became a sociology professor at the main public university in La Paz, a prolific writer on political affairs and social movements, and one of the most important TV personalities of the 2000s, perpetually making the rounds of the evening-news programs and talk shows.
García Linera became the primary public voice of the MAS’s new economic development program during the 2005 campaign. As part of this trajectory he began publishing and speaking in various forums about the impossibility of establishing socialism in Bolivia for at least 50 to 100 years. Instead, García Linera posited that Bolivia must first build an industrial capitalist base. The capitalist model he envisioned at the time – Andean-Amazonian Capitalism – projected a greater role for state intervention in the market. The formula essentially meant capitalist development with a stronger state to support a petty-bourgeoisie which would eventually become a powerful national bourgeoisie to drive Bolivia into successful capitalist development. That national bourgeoisie would be indigenous, or “Andean-Amazonian.” Only after this long intermediary phase of industrial capitalism had matured would the fulfilment of socialism be materially plausible.\(^7\)

Fernando Molina, a neoliberal critic of the MAS, correctly points out that in many respects Andean-Amazonian Capitalism closely resembles the old line of the Stalinist Partido Comunista Boliviano (Bolivian Communist Party, PCB), which stressed the necessity of a “revolution by stages”: feudalism to capitalism (bourgeois), and, in the long- to very-long run, capitalism to communism (communist).\(^8\)

García Linera expounded further on the character of the MAS after the party formed the government in 2006, attempting to define the ideology of “Evismo.” The indigenous, democratic and cultural “revolution,” he reminds us in one early text, does not imply “radical” economic change, or even transformative restructuring of political institutions. Rather, “modifications” in the existing political structures of power and elite rule are all that is promised in the current context:

> In the case of Evismo, we are before a political revolution that has its impact in the economic realm but not in a strictly radical manner. Evo Morales has himself conceptualized the process that he is leading as a democratic cultural revolution, or a decolonizing democratic revolution, that modifies the structures of power, modifies the composition of the elite, of power and rights, and with this the institutions of the state. It has an effect on the economic structure because all expansion of rights means the distribution of wealth.\(^9\)

More recently, as an increasing number of dissenting voices of a left-opposition have emerged and begun to challenge the political economy and governance model of Bolivia under Morales, García Linera has assumed the role of slanderer. After a group of left intellectuals and activists who had been a part of, or close to, the government released a joint manifesto in 2011 criticizing the government for abandoning the radical aims of the left-indigenous cycle of revolt between 2000 and 2005\(^10\), García Linera responded with a lengthy textual diatribe, dismissing the dissidents as “infantile” pawns of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who knowingly or unknowingly were guilty of


\(^8\) Fernando Molina, Evo Morales y el retorno de la izquierda nacionalista: Trayectoria de las ideologías antiliberales a través de la historia contemporánea de Bolivia, La Paz: Eureka, 2006, p. 127.


\(^10\) Por la recuperación del proceso de cambio para el pueblo y con el pueblo: Manifiesto de la coordinadora plurinacional de la reconducción, Cochabamba and La Paz, 2011.
strengthening counter-revolutionary social forces in Bolivia bent on the restoration of neoliberalism. More recently, García Linera focused squarely on the left-indigenous opposition to the highway development through the TIPNIS, associating them with the side of the domestic right and US imperialism, although leaving it open as to whether this was a case of willing collusion on their part, or if they had merely been reduced to useful idiots.

In Ecuador, Rafael Correa first scraped his way into the presidency in the second-round of elections in 2006. This was a political contest scheduled in a time when the prestige of the indigenous movement – by far the most important popular force in Ecuador for several decades – had still to recover from the acute setback it suffered as a consequence of the movement’s participation in the ill-fated government of Lucio Gutiérrez. The wildly popular process of a Constituent Assembly in 2007 and 2008 offered up an extended honeymoon for Correa and large cross-sections of society. A new, progressive Constitution received the approval of 64 percent of voters in a referendum in September 2008, and Correa was re-elected – this time in the first round – with 52 percent of the popular vote in April 2009. Things began to sour soon after, however, when Correa’s failure to break with the quotidian banalities of the neoliberal economics he had inherited was difficult to reconcile with the President’s romantic and ostentatious slogans of “twenty-first century socialism” and a “Citizen’s Revolution.” Indeed, the President would strain to align his practical commitment to aggressively reorienting the Ecuadoran economy toward the extraction of minerals by multinational corporations with his preferred rhetorical schemas for the next several years.

In an interview Correa conducted recently with the Argentine newspaper Página 12, we find a resonant echo of García Linera. In response to the reporter’s query on how Correa responds to critique from sectors of the left and the indigenous movement who oppose the continuation of the extractivist model of accumulation, the Ecuadoran president made his position clear: “First let’s define what the Left is. Because there is a pseudo-Left that has always been functional to the system, which is conservative. Because they don’t want to change anything, they oppose everything, and they subsist off of this, maintaining conflict, and maintain misery and lack of education. In any case, tell me what type of Marxism-Leninism this is, because I can’t find where it says that the non-exploitation of non-renewable resources is a socialist principle.... So much natural wealth without exploitation,

1 Álvaro García Linera, El “Oenegismo,” enfermedad infantil del derechismo (O cómo la “reconducción” del Proceso de Cambio es la restauración neoliberal), La Paz: Vicepresidente del Estado Plurinacional, 2011; several of the left oppositionists then responded with a second pamphlet, La MASCara del poder, Cochabamba and La Paz, 2011.


13 Gutiérrez, of the Patriotic Society Party (PSP), had run his 2002 electoral campaign on an anti-neoliberal platform but immediately capitulated to the neoliberal policy prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund once in office. CONAIE supported the party’s election and even provided ministers for the government’s first cabinet, although within seven months the rapidly intensifying rupture between the indigenous movement and the now evidently neoliberal Gutiérrez had been formally played out with the resignation of these ministers.

what kind of leftist principle is that? They are infantile, fairytale enthusiasts, a pseudo-left which tries to maintain conflict because this is what gives it life.”

Romanticism, Marx and Marxism

Among the first critics of bourgeois modernity, of the civilization created by the development of capitalism and the concomitant onset of the Industrial Revolution, were the Romantic poets, writers, and philosophers of Western Europe borne out of the mechanizing cauldron of the second half of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth. Looking back nostalgically to a real or imagined past, Romanticism was constituted by both conservative and revolutionary currents and thinkers. It was a “cultural movement” – cutting across literature, philosophy, the arts, politics, religion, and history – that emerged as a “protest against the development of modern capitalist civilization and industrial bourgeois society, which are based on bureaucratic rationality, market reification, the quantification of social life, and the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (in the famous phrase of Max Weber).” Industrial bourgeois civilization was condemned through myriad appeals to social and cultural values of pre-capitalist ways of life.

Romanticism took as its shared basis the fundamental critique of “the quantification of life, i.e. the total domination of (quantitative) exchange-value, of the cold calculation of price and profit, and of the laws of the market, over the whole social fabric.” With the quantification of life in bourgeois civilization came the “decline of all qualitative values – social, religious, ethical, cultural or aesthetic ones – the dissolution of all qualitative human bonds, the death of imagination and romance, the dull uniformization of life, the purely ‘utilitarian’ – i.e. quantitatively calculable – relation of human beings to one another, and to nature.” This quality of quantification under capitalist social relations expressed itself in specific ways in the workplace and labour process of the Industrial Revolution. Precapitalist handicraft, and its association with creativity and imagination, was replaced by an increasingly strict division of labour, and dull and repetitious toil, in which the worker, losing what made her human, became a mere appendage to the machine.

Marx himself drew with gusto from Romantic novelists, economists, and philosophers, even if the pull of the Enlightenment and classical political economy on his thinking would make

19 Ibid, p. 894.
it erroneous to label him a romantic anti-capitalist. “Neither apologetic of bourgeois civilization nor blind to its achievements,” the Brazilian-French theorist Michael Löwy notes of Marx, “he aims at a higher form of social organization, which would integrate both the technical advances of modern society and some of the human qualities of pre-capitalist communities – as well as opening a new and boundless field for the development and enrichment of human life. A new conception of labor as a free, non-alienated, and creative activity – as against the dull and narrow toil of mechanical industrial work – is a central feature of his socialist utopia.”

The trajectory of Marxism after the death of Marx, according to Löwy, has been dominated by a productivist, economistic, and evolutionist determinism, a “modernist” Marxism which “took over only one side of the Marxian heritage and developed an un-critical cult of technical progress, industrialism, machinism, Fordism, and Taylorism. Stalinism, with its alienated productivism and its obsession with heavy industry is the sad caricature of this kind of ‘cold stream’ in Marxism (to paraphrase Ernst Bloch).” A Romantic Marxism, a warmer stream that drew both from Marx and the revolutionary romantic tradition, lived on, however, as a minority presence, insisting “on the essential break and discontinuity between the socialist utopia – as a qualitatively different way of life and work – and the present industrial society... looking toward certain pre-capitalist social or cultural forms.”

If the cold embraced Plekhanov, Kautsky and the majority of the Second and Third Internationals, the Romantic Marxists included – in all their variety – Luxemburg, Gramsci, Lukács, and Benjamin – and, central for our purposes, both José Carlos Mariátegui and E.P. Thompson. Central to the revolutionary romantic worldview of both Thompson and Mariátegui is a simultaneous critique of “illusions of progress” and a sketch of a “utopian-revolutionary dialectic between the precapitalist past and the socialist future.”

**Backward and Forward Looking Utopias in *The Making of the English Working Class***

According to Ellen Meiksins Wood, “There are really only two ways of thinking theoretically about class: either as a structural *location* or as a social *relation*.” Static structural pictures may be useful as a starting point for the determining logic of class relations, but there is a very long way to travel in order to identify how a class “in itself” becomes a class “for itself,” to use Marx’s terminology for the movement between an objective class situation and class consciousness, or from social being to social

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21 Ibid, p. 900.
22 Ibid., p. 901.
23 Löwy, “Marxism and Romanticism in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui,” pp. 77-78.
In order to get there, we need to think of class as a social-historical process and relationship. “The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time,” E.P. Thompson famously argues in *The Making of the English Working Class*, “It was present at its own making.” Here he is firmly asserting the importance of human agency in the class struggle, agency that is however bounded by the logic of a set of class situations that each person enters into involuntarily. Understanding class as a relationship in which the common experiences of real people living in real contexts matter, and which takes place in historical time, means that it “evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomise its structure.”

Thompson has been criticised for neglecting the objective structure of productive relations in favour of a conception of class which centres on consciousness and subjectivity. However, as David Camfield points out, in Thompson’s framework, common experience, human agency, culture, and subjectivity “are not free-floating. They have a material foundation.” For Thompson, “The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter into involuntarily.” Yet, as Camfield suggests, in Thompson’s schema, “The relations of production are only the point of departure.” “Class consciousness,” writes Thompson, “is the way in which these experiences,” the experiences of being thrust through birth or an alternative form of involuntary entry into a class situation, “are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms.” Ultimately, class analysis requires looking at real people in real contexts: “Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is the only definition.” Working classes are not constructed abstractly out of theoretical structures, but rather are formed “out of pre-existing social groups whose particular traditions, aspirations and cultural practices – modified by the devastating experience of proletarianisation – will be those of an emergent proletariat.” If we take these insights seriously it follows necessarily that any serious approach to class-formation will require a “profound appreciation of the society in question,” and a deep understanding that “[n]ational particularities have real significance.”

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27 Ibid.
33 Thompson 1963, p. 11.
34 Ibid.
Among the themes running through Thompson’s _oeuvre_, and not least in his multiple writings that theorize and historicize different components of class formation, is precisely the utopian-revolutionary dialectic between the pre-capitalist past and the socialist future that Löwy identifies as a hallmark of the Romantic Marxist tradition. Thompson’s engagement with Romanticism is perhaps most obvious in his book-length treatments of William Morris and William Blake\(^{36}\), but we can also identify the utopian-revolutionary dialectic as a theme running throughout his most famous text, _The Making of the English Working Class_. Thompson announces in the preface that he is “seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver, the ‘utopian’ artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.”\(^{37}\) They were the “casualties of history,” the casualties of the Industrial Revolution, whose simultaneously backward- and forward-looking visions Thompson hopes to retrieve from the dustbin of a historiography utterly seduced by “economic progress” and “inevitability.”

In his meditation on exploitation, in the first chapter of Part Two, “The Curse of Adam,” Thompson begins with a critique of the economic determinism of much of the extant historiography of the Industrial Revolution, in which the dynamic of economic growth of the cotton industry in Lancashire determines, more or less automatically, the dynamic of social and cultural life.\(^{38}\) Where the classic perspective was in error, in Thompson’s view, was in its emphasis on the economic newness of the cotton-mills to the detriment of adequate appreciation for the “continuity of political and cultural traditions in the making of working-class communities.”\(^{39}\) He seeks to bring to the foreground the political and cultural features of the making of the working class, as against the automatism of certain economic accounts. “The changing productive relations and working conditions of the Industrial Revolution were imposed,” Thompson writes, “not upon raw material, but upon the free-born Englishman – and the free-born Englishman as Paine had left him or as the Methodists had moulded him. The factory hand or stockinger was also the inheritor of Bunyan, of remembered village rights, of notions of equality before the law, of craft traditions. He was the object of massive religious indoctrination and the creator of new political traditions. The working class made itself as much as it was made.”\(^{40}\) It was perhaps more the violation – inherent in the advance of industrial capitalism – of persisting pre-capitalist values, customs, and notions of justice, independence, and security, than it was merely bread and butter issues, which explain for Thompson the scope and intensity of various modes of resistance surging up from the working-class communities in formation.\(^{41}\)


\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 192.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 193.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 194.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 203.
Against the prevailing free market rhetoric of the advancing industrialists, the dissenters mobilized a language of a new moral order, one which drew resolutely from specific customs and values of the past. According to Thompson, "It is because alternative and irreconcilable views of human order – one based on mutuality, the other on competition – confronted each other between 1814 and 1850 that the historian today still feels the need to take sides." Exemplifying the Romantic critique of the quantification of life under bourgeois civilization, Thompson here maps out the evident possibility for "statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. As per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time." And then, shifting registers slightly, Thompson offers a summative assessment of the Industrial Revolution which captures at its core the Marxist dialectic: "Thus it is perfectly possible to maintain two propositions which, on a casual view, appear to be contradictory. Over the period 1790-1840 there was a slight improvement in average material standards. Over the same period there was intensified exploitation, greater insecurity, and increasing human misery."

In the following chapter, on the field labourers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Thompson makes his first concerted defence of the logic of machine-breaking, as against "futurist homilies" that painted the breakers as antiquated irrationalists futilely confronting progress. "While corns ricks and other property was destroyed (as well as some industrial machinery in country districts)," writes Thompson of a labourers' revolt in 1830, "the main assault was on the threshing-machine, which ... patently was displacing the already starving labourers. Hence the destruction of the machines did in fact effect some immediate relief." Later in the same chapter, the dialectic of past and future arises again, when Thompson explains the "historical irony" of urban workers, rather than rural labourers, launching "the greatest coherent national agitation for the return of land," through reference to the "new bitterness of deprivation" they suffered as a consequence of "hard times and unemployment in the brick wastes of the growing towns," and their associated recalling of "the memories of lost rights" for use in the advancement of novel forms of struggle.

And, again, as the plight of the artisans and weavers are taken up, the Romantic problematic of quantification of social life features centrally, this time in the changing workplace and labour process. Artisanal traditions of craftsmanship were imbued with "vestigial notions of a 'fair' price and 'just' wage," Thompson reminds us. "Social and moral criteria – subsistence, self-respect, pride in certain standards of workmanship, customary rewards for different grades of skill – these are as prominent in early trade union disputes

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42 Ibid., p. 206.
43 Ibid., p. 211.
44 Ibid., p. 212.
46 Ibid, p. 231.
as strictly ‘economic’ arguments.”47 As these criteria were imposed upon by the advance of large-scale sweatwork, the revolution in factory production and steam, and the growing numbers of unskilled and child labourers in their old trades, the artisans were radicalized politically. “Ideal and real grievances combined to shape their anger – lost prestige, direct economic degradation, loss of pride as craftsmanship was debased, lost aspirations to rise to being masters,” were moral factors of the past that fuelled novel contestation for rights, and defensive acts of resistance.48

Thompson’s lament for the fate of the handloom weavers is similarly burdened with a recovery of their history of resistance, which drew on the poetry of the past to challenge their debasement and dehumanization as industrialization rolled over them. Traditional historiography is eviscerated for its blasé encouragement in passing the reader’s eye over phrases like “the decline of the handloom weavers,” “without any realisation of the scale of the tragedy that was enacted. Weaving communities – some in the West Country and the Pennines, with 300 and 400 years of continuous existence, some of much more recent date but with, none the less, their own cultural patterns and traditions – were literally extinguished.... Until these final agonies, the older weaving communities offered a way of life which their members greatly preferred to the higher material standards of the factory town.”49 Avoiding naive sentimentality, but punching back against the disparagers of the weavers’ tragedy, Thompson notes the “unique blend of social conservatism, local pride, and cultural attainment,” which, “made up the way of life of the Yorkshire or Lancashire weaving community.” For Thompson, “these communities were certainly ‘backward’” in the sense that “they clung with equal tenacity to their dialect traditions and regional customs and to gross medical ignorance and superstitions.” But a story that ended there would be too partial and reductive. The “closer we look at their way of life,” Thompson urges, “the more inadequate simple notions of economic progress and ‘backwardness’ appear. Moreover, there was certainly a leaven amongst the northern weavers of self-educated and articulate men of considerable attainments. Every weaving district had its weaver-poets, biologists, mathematicians, musicians, geologists, botanists,” and so on.50

The threat to this way of life encapsulated in the Industrial Revolution, drew the weavers into the Lancashire Radicalism of 1816-1820, and contributed to its character and content in myriad ways. “They had, like the city artisan, a sense of lost status, as memories of their ‘golden age’ lingered,” Thompson suggests.

But they had, more than the city artisan, a deep social egalitarianism. As their way of life, in the better years, had been shared by the community, so their sufferings were those of the whole community; and they were reduced so low

48 Ibid., p. 262.
49 Ibid., pp. 290-291.
50 Ibid., p. 291.
that there was no class of unskilled or casual labourers below them against which they had erected economic or social protective walls. This gave a particular moral resonance to their protest, whether voiced in Owenite or biblical language; they appealed to essential rights and elementary notions of human fellowship and conduct rather than to sectional interests.\footnote{Ibid., p. 295.}

Countering casual celebration of industrialization – and especially the historians who mistake economic growth for human progress – Thompson returns to a dialectical method that can record the tragedy even as it registers the possibility of justification for the obsolescence of their craftsmanship.

If we see the hand-loom weaver’s work in this light, it was certainly painful and obsolete, and any transition, however full of suffering, might be justified. But this is an argument which discounts the suffering of one generation against the gains of the future. For those who suffered, this retrospective comfort is cold.\footnote{Ibid, p. 313.}

Of particular note later in Part two, in the chapter on the complications of measuring standards and experiences over the course of the Industrial Revolution, is the way in which the utopian-revolutionary dialectic of past and present is juxtaposed with a reactionary dialectic, one that seems to borrow the most exploitative and retrograde features of earlier historical forms and solder them onto the emergent configurations of power and domination in the present. For example, “The crime of the factory system,” Thompson argues in a section surveying the features of an earlier family economy, “was to inherit the worst features of the domestic system in a context which had none of the domestic compensations.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 335.} It is in this panoramic account of standards and experiences that Thompson most expressly engages the Romantic key of certain currents “of traditionalist social radicalism,” moving “from Wordsworth and Southney through to Carlyle and beyond, [which] seems, in its origin and in its growth, to contain a dialectic by which it is continually prompting revolutionary conclusions. The starting-point of traditionalist and Jacobin was the same.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 343.} When prompted to move from thought to praxis, the Romantic might be edged into a revolutionary logic. “Whenever the traditionalist Tory passed beyond reflective argument about the factory system,” Thompson observes, “and attempted to give vet to his feelings in action, he found himself forced into an embarrassing alliance with trade unionists or working-class Radicals.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 344.}
Over the course of the concluding chapter of Part Two, on community, Thompson repeatedly gestures at the necessity of striking a balance between the recovery and valuation of specific cultural customs and traditions of the past without descending into sentimental idealization, or the concealment of precapitalist systems of oppression and domination. At the same time as he praises aspects of William Cobbett and Friedrich Engels’ respective laments for the passing of English customs, Thompson is careful to point out that “it is foolish to see the matter only in idyllic terms. These customs were not all harmless or quaint.... The passing of Gin Lane, Tyburn Fair, orgiastic drunkenness, animal sexuality, and mortal combat for prize-money in iron-studded clogs, calls for no lament.”

Similarly, in his overly brief discussion of gender, Thompson notes that it is most difficult to draw a balance. On the one hand, the claim that the Industrial Revolution raised the status of women would seem to have little meaning when set beside the record of excessive hours of labour, cramped housing, excessive child-bearing and terrifying rates of child mortality. On the other hand, the abundant opportunities for female employment in the textile districts gave to women the status of independent wage-earners. The spinster or the widow was freed from dependence upon relatives or upon parish relief. Even the unmarried mother might be able, through the laxness of ‘moral discipline’ in many mills, to achieve an independence unknown before.... The period reveals many such paradoxes.

The whole of Part Two ultimately comes back around, however, to a finale that turns on the revolutionary romantic critique of the totality of bourgeois civilization which capitalist industrialization introduced through coercion, dispossession, and the abject violation of pre-capitalist social mores, values, institutions, and traditions. “Any evaluation of the quality of life must entail an assessment of the total life-experience, the manifold satisfactions or deprivations, cultural as well as material, of the people concerned.” When Thompson carries out this evaluation, when he examines the totality of experience, when he looks at the Industrial Revolution and he “sees it whole,” he cannot escape the thoroughly suffering and ugliness it entailed. “During the years between 1780 and 1840,” Thompson concludes,

the people of Britain suffered an experience of immiseration, even if it is possible to show a small statistical improvement in material conditions. Some were lured from the countryside by the glitter and promise of wages of the industrial town; but the old village economy was crumbling at their backs. They moved less by their own will than at the dictate of external compulsions which

56 Ibid., pp. 410-411.
57 Ibid., p. 414.
58 Ibid, p. 444.
they could not question: the enclosures, the Wars, the Poor Laws, the decline of rural industries, the counter-revolutionary stance of their rulers.60

Even though “new skills were arising,” and the fact that “old satisfactions persisted,” the overarching sentiment carried away from a close reading of this period is “the general pressure of long hours of unsatisfying labour under severe discipline for alien purposes.... After all other impressions fade, this one remains; together with that of the loss of any felt cohesions in the community, save that which the working people, in antagonism to their labour and to their masters, built for themselves.”61

It is in Part Three of The Making of the English Working Class, however, in its vast, qualitative measurement of working-class presence, where we encounter the most suggestive passages on the utopian-revolutionary dialectic of the precapitalist past and socialist future. Specifically, we find these insights in Thompson’s defence of Luddism as a quasi-insurrectionary movement, which he offers as a substitute for the view that “lingers in the popular mind,” according to which Luddism is “an uncouth, spontaneous affair of illiterate handworkers, blindly resisting machinery.”62 In the Thompsonian framework, the Luddism of the croppers, and above all of the framework-knitters, or stockingers, must be understood as “arising at the crisis-point in the abrogation of paternalist legislation and the imposition of the political economy of laissez faire upon, and against the will and conscience of, the working people.”63 The long transition prior to the crisis-point stretches back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the stockingers’ memory of certain ideals of a benevolent corporate state may “never have been much more than ideals; by the end of the 18th century they may have been threadbare. But they had a powerful reality, none the less, in the notion of what ought to be, to which artisans, journeymen, and many small masters appealed. More than this, the ideals lived in the sanctions and customs of the more traditional manufacturing communities.”64

What is most crucial in Thompson’s portrayal of Luddism is his description of this struggle as a transitional conflict. “On the one hand,” Thompson meant by this, “it looked backward to old customs and paternalist legislation which could never be revived; on the other hand, it tried to revive ancient rights in order to establish new precedents.”65 Luddism was “a violent eruption of feeling against unrestrained industrial capitalism, harking back to an obsolescent paternalist code, and sanctioned by traditions of the working community.”66 Unlike in the view that lingers in the popular imagination, Luddism for Thompson was not, in this light, “blind opposition to machinery,” but rather a fight against the “‘freedom’ of the

61 Ibid., p. 447.
63 Ibid., p. 543.
64 Ibid, p. 544.
65 Ibid., pp. 551-552.
capitalist to destroy the customs of the trade, whether by new machinery, by the factory-
system, or by unrestricted competition, beating-down wages, undercutting his rivals, and
undermining standards of craftsmanship."⁶⁷ Viewed through a Thompsonian lens, "one is
struck not so much by" the movement’s “backwardness as by its growing maturity. Far
from being ‘primitive’ it exhibited, in Nottingham and Yorkshire, discipline, and self-
restraint of a high order."⁶⁸ As it drew from the partially imagined and remembered social
rights of the past, croppers and stockingers resisted their debasement under the advance of
bourgeois civilization, and began to shift offensively to the organized and disciplined
struggle for new rights and social criteria. The Luddite movement, as Thompson resurrects
it in all its quasi-insurrectionary form, features the myriad elements of Löwy’s utopian-
revolutionary dialectic, the cornerstone of Romantic Marxism.

A central feature, for fifty years, in the making of the English working class was precisely a
mass resistance to proletarianization. “When they knew that this cause was lost,” notes
Thompson, “yet they reached out again, in the Thirties and Forties [of the nineteenth
century], and sought to achieve new and only imagined forms of social control.”⁶⁹
Thompson concludes his exceptional survey of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth
centuries in England as comfortably at home with paradox and contradiction as he is at its
beginning. The years of capitalist industrialization in Britain were characterized first by
tragedy, “not a revolutionary challenge, but a resistance movement, in which the Romantics
and the Radical craftsmen opposed the annunciation of Acquisitive Man. In the failure of
the two traditions to come to a point of junction, something was lost. How much we cannot
be sure, for we are among the losers.”⁷⁰ But through tragedy Thompson arrives at a partial
redemption of the working class, explaining that “the working people should not be seen
only as the lost myriads of eternity. They had also nourished, for fifty years, and with
incomparable fortitude, the Liberty Tree. We may thank them for these years of heroic
culture.”⁷¹

The Indigenous Socialism of Mariátegui

As I hope to demonstrate, there are a number of elective affinities in the work of Thompson
and Mariátegui. But it is perhaps Mariátegui’s strong emphases on the history of
colonialism, the world market and the dynamics of imperialism in a an asymmetrially
patterned world system of states, the uneven and combined development of capitalism in
late-developing societies, and the enduring legacies of racism through slavery and
conquest, themes that are absent or marginal in the work of Thompson, that distinguish the
two figures from one another. These areas of discrepancy point precisely to those elements

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 549.
⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 601.
⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 831.
⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 832.
⁷¹ Ibid., p. 832.
in Mariátegui’s thought that allow for a fruitful mediation of the Thompsonian framework into the environment of contemporary Andean capitalism.

One way of framing this set of divergences is through their distinct attempts at balancing the universal and the particular. Whereas Mariátegui moves freely between the two in his method, Thompson delves more heavily and more singularly into the particularities of the English experience. Mariátegui was scorned in the 1920s by Peruvian nationalists for his deviations into European Marxism, while the defenders of orthodoxy in the Comintern’s Latin American Bureau simultaneously condemned him for his romantic nationalism and populism. “In reality,” Löwy contends, “his thought was an attempt to move dialectically beyond this type of dualist thinking, caught between the universal and the particular.” He defended the universal character of the struggle for socialism, seeing it as a possibility opened up by global capitalist processes. In a 1928 essay, originally appearing in the journal he edited, *Amauta*, for example, we can read the following:

Socialism is certainly not an Indo-American doctrine. But no doctrine, no contemporary system is or could be. And although socialism, like capitalism, may have been born in Europe it is not specifically or particularly European. It is a worldwide movement in which none of the countries that move within the orbit of Western civilization are excluded. This civilization drives toward universality with the force and means that no other civilization possessed. Indo-America can and should have individuality and style in this new world order, but not its own culture or fate that is unique. And at the same time, the specificity of socialism in Peru, and Latin America more generally, is repeatedly seized upon in his writings. He warns of the danger of mimicry: “We certainly do not want socialism in Latin America to be a copy or imitation. It should be a heroic creation. We have to give life to Indo-American socialism with our own reality, in our own language.” A year earlier, in 1927, in an address to the Peruvian Workers’ Congress, Mariátegui stresses the Marxist method’s attention to concrete variability across different national realities:

Marxism, of which all speak but few know or above all comprehend, is a fundamentally dialectic method. It is a method that is completely based in reality, on facts. It is not, as some erroneously suppose, a body of principles of rigid consequences, the same for all historical climates and all social latitudes.

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72 Löwy, “Marxism and Romanticism in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui,” p. 86.
74 Ibid., p. 130.
Marx extracted his method from history’s guts. Marxism, in every country, in every people, operates and acts on the environment, on the medium, without neglecting any of its modalities.\textsuperscript{75}

The universal and the particular are also forged in complex unison in Mariátegui’s repeated references to the necessity of studying Peru’s “deep history” or “deep reality,” and his insistence that such an acquaintance with the particularities of the national setting actually enables a thoroughgoing internationalism, and vice versa. “The internationalist feels, more than many nationalists,” Mariátegui argues, “the Indigenous, the Peruvian; that the things Indigenous, Peruvian are not the esprit of the Jirón de la Unión or the Lima soireés, rather something much deeper and more transcendent.”\textsuperscript{76} A similar bridge across the divide appears in the Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party, drafted by Mariátegui in the same period. “The international character of the contemporary economy,” he writes, “does not allow any country to escape the transformations flowing from the current conditions of production.”\textsuperscript{77} Out of this emerges the material basis for the “international character of the revolutionary proletarian movement.” The document insists that the party “adapts its practice to the country’s specific circumstances, but it follows a broad class vision and its national context is subordinated to the rhythm of world history.”\textsuperscript{78} A final example can be found in one of Mariátegui’s lectures, The World Crisis and the Peruvian Proletariat, delivered as part of a series at the González Prada Popular University in Lima in 1923 and 1924, after Mariátegui had returned from several years in Europe. “Above all, capitalist civilization has internationalized the life of humanity,” Mariátegui explains; “it has created the material connections among all peoples that establish an inevitable solidarity among them. Internationalism is not only an idea, it is a historical reality. Progress makes interests, ideas, customs, the peoples’ regimes unify and merge. Peru, like the other peoples of the Americas, is not, then, outside the crisis, it is inside it.”\textsuperscript{79}

A second set of themes running throughout Mariátegui’s writings, and largely absent from those of Thompson, turns on the history of colonialism and the subsequent dynamics of economic imperialism and the asymmetries of the world market. He begins from the premise that the Spanish conquest of Peru “destroyed economic and social forms that were born spontaneously from the Peruvian land and people,” forms which were “nourished by an indigenous sense of life.”\textsuperscript{80} The conquest was, above all, “a terrible carnage,” after which

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 237.
the “political and economic organization of the colony... continued the extermination of the Indigenous race. The viceroyalty established a system of brutal exploitation.”\textsuperscript{81} In what is probably his most famous essay, “The Land Problem,” Mariátegui distinguishes between the feudal economy introduced to Peru through Spanish colonization, and the later capitalist colonization of North America by the British. “Whereas in North America,” Mariátegui explains, “colonization planted the seeds of a spirit and an economy then growing in Europe and to which the future belonged, the Spanish brought to America the effects and methods of a declining spirit and economy that belonged to the past.”\textsuperscript{82} Despite the fact that this concern with colonialism and the subsequent role of imperialism in the world system has been understood in recent commentary to be an anticipation of “much of the subsequent neo-Marxist and dependency literature,”\textsuperscript{83} in fact, I would argue, Mariátegui’s analysis of the uneven combinations of pre-capitalist indigenous communal production, feudalism, and capitalism in Peru is much more refined and sophisticated than much of subsequent dependency theory, particularly its crudest versions which date the origin of capitalism in Latin America as far back as the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{84}

At one point in the same essay, Mariátegui describes Peru’s economy in the early twentieth century as “colonial,” in the sense that its “movement, its development, are subordinated to the interests and the necessities of the markets in London and New York.”\textsuperscript{85} Peru is reduced to supplying the primary products to the dominant imperial powers, as well as serving as a market for their manufactured goods. Elsewhere he charts a large part of the flow of profits from mining, commerce, and transportation leaving Peru for capitals based in the imperial countries, forcing the South American country into a position of requesting them back through loans and the acquisition of debt.\textsuperscript{86} Elsewhere, Mariátegui notes the way in which imperialism “does not allow any of these semicolonial peoples, whom it exploits as a market for capital and goods and as a source for raw materials, to have an economic program of nationalization and industrialization.” The recurring crisis of the Peruvian economy “arises from this rigid determination of national production created by forces of the world capitalist market.”\textsuperscript{87}

His analytical conclusions on the history of colonialism and the ongoing imperialist character of the global capitalist system in the early twentieth century led Mariátegui logically to develop an associated strategy of anti-imperialism, laid out most fully in the


\textsuperscript{85} Mariátegui, “The Land Problem,” p. 111.


\textsuperscript{87} Mariátegui, “Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party,” p. 238.
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document, “Anti-Imperialist Point of View,” submitted to the First Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires in June 1929. The most notable aspect of this document is its condemnation of the complicit role played by Latin American national bourgeoisies in the perpetuation of imperialism, which they saw as “the best source” of their own profits and the continuity of their own political power. As a result, any ostensible anti-imperialist alliance led by bourgeois or petite-bourgeois forces under the banner of nationalism could never successfully break with imperialism. What was needed instead was an alliance between workers and peasants, in a movement that combined the perspective of anti-imperialism with a commitment to socialist revolution at home. “We are anti-imperialists,” Mariátegui insists, “because we are revolutionaries, because we oppose capitalism with socialism as an adversarial system called to succeed it. In the struggle against foreign imperialism we are fulfilling our duties of solidarity with the revolutionary masses of Europe.”

There is a consistency here as well between Mariátegui’s reflections on twentieth century anti-imperialist strategy, and his reading of the limited social achievements flowing out of the War of Independence between 1811 and 1821. While formal independence from Spain was achieved, the internal hierarchies of class and racial stratification remained intact, and new forms of economic subordination to different dominant powers emerged on an international scale as Peru was inserted ever more thoroughly into the machinations of the world market. The independence revolution, Mariátegui is at pains to point out, was carried forward for the benefit of creoles (descendents of Spanish colonialists born in Peru), and expressly against the indigenous peasant majority, even if the indigenous masses were enlisted in the battles. The Peruvian independence revolution “did not bring in a new ruling class.... The colony's landholding aristocracy, the owner of power, retained their feudal rights over land and, therefore, over the Indians. All provisions apparently designed to protect them have not been able to do anything against feudalism even today.”

The intricate portrayal of post-independence economic development in Peru, which one finds throughout Mariátegui’s work, closely parallels what Leon Trotsky later theorized as uneven and combined development, most extensively in his History of the Russian Revolution. In place of a sterile advance through the various stages proscribed by the texts of cold stream Marxist orthodoxy, we discover the complicated intertwining and combining of different modes of production within the Peruvian social formation. The existing communal property of indigenous communities in the highlands is not replaced instantly through Spanish colonialism by the succession of individual property rights and onset of capitalism, but rather these communities are “stripped of their land” in the post-

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independence period “for the benefit of the feudal or semifeudal landholdings that are constitutionally incapable of technical progress.” Meanwhile, on the Pacific coast, large landholdings break the “feudal routine” and commence before anywhere else in the country “a capitalist technique” under the influence of foreign capital, uprooting indigenous communities from the land, and employing former African slaves as agrarian proletarians in the new agricultural industries of cotton and sugarcane.92

For Trotsky, arriving at an understanding of uneven and combined development analytically had significance politically in his formulation of a theory of permanent revolution, whereby the necessary evolution through discrete stages of development, advocated by the Marxism of the Second International, was countered with the possibility of “leaping” stages and fomenting socialist revolution in “backward” countries, such as Russia in the early twentieth century.93 Similarly, in the case of Mariátegui, the care with which he examined the Peruvian social formation and its development, and the disregard he exhibited for established orthodoxies, led him on a path against the rigid determinism of evolutionism. “The political advent of socialism,” he suggests, “does not presuppose the perfect or exact accomplishment of the liberal economic stage, according to a universal itinerary. Elsewhere, I have already said it is very possible that the destiny of socialism in Peru might be in part achieving certain tasks that are theoretically capitalist in accordance with the rhythm of history that guides us.”94

Unique to Mariátegui’s work in this period is the systematic treatment of the racialized character that uneven and combined development assumed in republican Peru. The colonial origins of the feudal mode of production in Peru gave rise to this specificity. “In Europe,” Mariátegui writes, “the feudal lord embodied, to some extent, the primitive patriarchal tradition, so that in respect to his servants he naturally felt higher, but not ethnically or nationally different from them.” As a result the European aristocracy “found it possible to accept a new concept and a new practice in their dealings with the agricultural worker. In colonial America, meanwhile, the white person’s arrogant and deep-rooted belief in the inferiority of people of color has stood in the way of this development.”95 If that was the form of racial oppression that characterized the feudal system in the highlands, the capitalist coast offered no reprieve on this score. Mariátegui notes of the Peruvian Pacific coastline of the period, “when the agricultural worker has not been an Indian he has been an African slave or Chinese coolie who is, if possible, held in more contempt.”96

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95 Ibid., p. 103.
96 Ibid.
“Feudal and bourgeois elements in our countries have the same contempt for the Indians, as well as for the blacks and mulattos, as do the white imperialists,” Mariátegui stresses again in his dissident address (read in his absence) to the First Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires in 1929:

The ruling class’s racist sentiment acts in a manner totally favorable to imperialist penetration. The native [Peruvian, not indigenous] lord or bourgeois has nothing in common with their pawns of color. Class solidarity is added to racial solidarity or prejudice to make the national bourgeoisie docile instruments of Yankee or British imperialism. And that feeling extends to much of the middle class, who imitate the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in their disdain for the plebeian of color, even when it is quite obvious that they come from a mixed background.  

“The republic has the responsibility to raise the status of the Indian,” Mariátegui notes in the essay “Peru’s Principal Problem”: “And contrary to this duty, the republic has impoverished the Indians. It has compounded their depression and exasperated their misery. The republic has meant for the Indians the ascent of a new ruling class that has systematically taken their lands.”

Considering the centrality to Mariátegui’s framework of the racialized character of economic and political development in Peru, it is not surprising that a politics of anti-racism, and especially of indigenous liberation, proliferates throughout his discussions of emancipatory strategy and the potential sources of liberation. Whereas the discussion above of colonialism and imperialism has drawn to the foreground certain absences in Thompson’s writings that need to be filled if we are to properly incorporate his insights into the Andean reality, in Mariátegui’s engagement with indigenous liberation we find our link back to Thompson. In particular, Mariátegui relies on a parallel version of Löwy’s utopian-revolutionary dialectic of the pre-capitalist past and socialist future when he interrogates the Andean ayllu (independent indigenous community) and, more problematically, “Inca communism.” The residual customs, values, and institutional forms of indigenous communities are mobilized in Mariátegui’s thinking as a transitional conflict against both feudalism and capitalism in Peru, in a manner that overlaps with the depiction of the Luddites in Thompson’s work, as a heroic, quasi-insurrectional force against the imposition of the factory system in eighteenth and nineteenth century England. It is through Mariátegui’s exploration of indigenous sources for socialist revolution in Peru, furthermore, that we encounter an emphasis on the self-activity, self-organization, and self-

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emancipation of the oppressed which finds its echo, if in a distinct idiom, throughout much of Thompson’s writing.

We need not accept the entirety of Mariátegui’s more or less blanket defence of “Inca communism” in his essay “The Land Problem,” to draw out from the surrounding discussion some essential kernels of insight into the way he conceptualized the utopian-socialist dialectic of past and future. As important as it is, the discussion of the greater yields achieved by the Inca’s agrarian economy compared to that of the colonial one which replaced it, more crucial are Mariátegui’s repeated invocations of the lasting institutional forms, values, and customs of the *ayllu*, or independent indigenous community, that survived, if only partially and in distorted form, the onslaught of feudalism and later capitalist development in highland Peru.99 “I believe that our agrarian problem has a fundamental indisputable and concrete factor that gives it a special character,” Mariátegui notes, “the survival of the community and elements of practical socialism in Indigenous agricultural life.”100

Writing of early twentieth century Peru, Mariátegui refers to the “vitality of Indigenous communism that invariably promotes various forms of cooperation and association for the aboriginals. Indians, despite the laws of one hundred years of the republican regime, have not become individualistic.”101 The indigenous community is “still a living organism,” Mariátegui argues, “despite the hostile environment that suffocates and deforms it.” But more than merely persisting, it helps point the way to a socialist future, insofar as the indigenous community “spontaneously manifests obvious possibilities for evolution and development.”102 In a passage that could have been extracted directly from *The Making of the English Working Class* - if we replaced indigenous communities with those of the handloom weavers - Mariátegui explains how, “in indigenous villages where families are grouped and bonds of heritage and communal work have been extinguished, strong and tenacious habits of cooperation and solidarity that are the empirical expression of a communist spirit still exist. The community draws on this spirit. It is their body. When expropriation and redivision seem about to liquidate the community, Indigenous socialism always finds a way to reject, resist, or evade it.”103 For Mariátegui, “The communities that have demonstrated a truly amazing persistence and resistance under the harshest conditions of oppression represent in Peru a natural factor for the socialization of the land.”104

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99 See, for example, ibid., p. 95.
101 Ibid., p. 98.
102 Ibid., p. 97.
103 Ibid., p. 98.
The persistence of cooperative bonds and customs of solidarity in the indigenous community are the building blocks of Mariátegui’s utopian-socialist dialectic of drawing selectively on the pre-capitalist past in order to forge new values and social forms in the future. Any return to the Inca period, even if that Empire is valorized as against the regime of Spanish colonial conquest that replaced it, is explicitly and emphatically rejected on a number of occasions by Mariátegui. “But this,” he writes for example,

like the stimulation that freely provides for the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, the creative manifestation of its forces and native spirit, does not mean at all a romantic and anti-historical trend of reconstructing or resurrecting Inca socialism, which corresponded to historical conditions completely bypassed, and which remains only as a favorable factor in a perfectly scientific production technique, that is, the habits of cooperation and socialism of Indigenous peasants. Socialism presupposes the technique, the science, the capitalist stage. It cannot permit any setbacks in the realization of the achievements of modern civilization, but on the contrary it must methodically accelerate the incorporations of these achievements into national life.

Just as Thompson scorns the top-down components of Owenite paternalism vis-à-vis the emerging English working class, and celebrates instead various instances of working class self-organization and activity, Mariátegui envisions the emancipation of the indigenous Peruvian majority flowing out of their own initiative. “The solution to the problem of the Indian must be a social solution. It must be worked out by the Indians themselves,” he writes in a passage addressing the organization of the first nation-wide congresses of the indigenous movement in Peru:

This concept leads to seeing the meeting of Indigenous congresses as a historical fact. The Indigenous congresses have not yet formed a program, but they do

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105 If one were registering any doubt that Mariátegui’s view is overly one-sided in its backward-looking character, this error of interpretation ought to be disabused with a close reading of the following passage: “These people are surprised that the most advanced ideas in Europe make their way to Peru; but they are not surprised, on the other hand, at the airplane, the transatlantic ocean liner, the wireless telegraph, the radio – in sum, all the most advanced expressions of material progress in Europe. The same kind of thinking that would ignore the socialist movement would have to ignore Einstein’s theory of relativity. And I am sure that it does not occur to the most reactionary of our intellectuals – almost all of them are galvanized reactionaries – that there should be a ban on studying and popularizing the new physics of which Einstein is the greatest and most eminent representative.” See José Carlos Mariátegui, “The World Crisis and the Peruvian Proletariat,” in in Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011, p. 297.

106 Mariátegui, “Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party,” p. 239. See also, Mariátegui, “The Land Problem,” p. 93, where he notes: “Modern communism is different from Inca communism. This is the first thing that a scholarly man who explores Tawantinsuyu needs to learn and understand. The two kinds of communism are products of different human experiences. They belong to different historical eras.”
represent a movement. They indicate that the Indians are beginning to gain a collective consciousness of their situation. The least important aspect of the Indian Congress is deliberations and its votes. The transcendent, historic aspect is the congress itself. The congress is an affirmation of the will of the race to make their own claims.\footnote{Mariátegui, “Peru’s Principal Problem,” p. 142.}

More emphatically, in his address to the Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires, Mariátegui blithely dismisses the view that lingers in the Peruvian imagination, of the passive and servile indigenous communities, “degraded and oppressed Indians are incapable of any form of struggle or resistance. The long history of Indigenous insurrections and mutinies, and the resulting massacres and repression, is sufficient in itself to dispel this impression.”\footnote{Mariátegui, “The Problems of Race in Latin America,” p. 320.} A similar sentiment expresses itself in a brief preface elsewhere: “The Indian, so easily accused of cowardice and submission, has not ceased to rebel against the semi-feudal regime that continues to oppress under the republic, the same as it did during the colonial period.”\footnote{José Carlos Mariátegui, “Preface to The Amauta Atusparia,” in Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011, p. 329.}

What is evident thus far in our discussion is the way in which Mariátegui’s emphasis on the colonial and the imperial, on race and uneven development, and on indigenous liberation, are all prisms through which Thompson’s insights into working class formation might be mediated such that they could speak fluently to the twenty-first century Andean context. The two thinkers’ parallels in their utopian-revolutionary dialectic, total critique of bourgeois civilization, and stress on the self-organization and emancipation of the oppressed are together elements of a shared Romantic Marxism. A research program into the dynamics of contemporary extractive capitalism and the Andean compensatory state which drew explicitly on this heritage, I want to argue, could expose a range of contradictions that the reigning evolutionism of García Linera and Correa hopes to conceal. More than merely a theoretical paradigm, or analytical research agenda, however, the thematics of Romantic Marxism running through Thompson and Mariátegui can be found as an already-existing, living praxis in the left-indigenous opposition to extractivism in the Andes. A brief portrayal of the lives of Felipe Quispe and Luis Macas might provide an initial insight into how this is true.

An Aymara Condor

There is little doubt that Felipe Quispe has been one of the most prominent and important leaders of indigenous struggle in the last two decades of Bolivian history, even if he more or
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less receded from the political scene once Evo Morales assumed office in January 2006. During the mobilizations of the Aymara peasantry in 2000 and 2001 – against the commodification of communal lands and the privatization of water resources – Quispe was the central focal point of popular struggle, more or less embodying and personifying the revolutionary sentiments of those blocking the roads and bringing the country to a standstill. Quispe articulated this collective voice audaciously and confrontationally in full view of the media and the Bolivian citizenry, and in the face of racist Bolivian elites. For Aymara and other indigenous radicals Quispe’s public expressions provoked and inspired indigenous pride, and solidified a consciousness around the necessity of popular struggle. For the q’aras, or non-indigenous white and mestizo élites, the same expressions from Quispe elicited reactions of fear, hatred and racism. His personal political trajectory sheds at least partial light on the collective history of indigenous movements over the last few decades in Bolivia, their ideological transitions, infrastructures of struggle, and their important contribution to the cycle of combined liberation across the country.

By all accounts, Quispe has led a seditious life, one that embodies the utopian-revolutionary dialectic of the pre-capitalist past and socialist future. He was born in the community of Jisk’a Axariya, outside Achacachi. After having been educated politically in revolutionary Marxist organizations in the 1970s, he gravitated later in that decade to the small political party Movimiento Indio Tupaj Katari (Tupaj Katari Indian Movement, MITKA). MITKA was situated in the indianista wing of the broader katarista movement. MITKA was therefore distinct from the katarista currents closer to the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Bolivian Peasant Trade Union Confederation, CSUTCB) of the time, and the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupaj Katari (de liberación) (Tupaj Katari Revolutionary Liberation Movement, MRTK[L]). The latter currents maintained some residual peasantist, or campesinista, class-based ideological characteristics, alongside the elements of ethnic revindication common throughout katarismo.

Quispe was an important player in semi-clandestine indigenous popular politics in the 1970s and early 1980s. But his real ascent probably began with the Extraordinary Congress of the CSUTCB in Potosí in 1988, where he was a representative for a new militant organization, Ofensiva Roja de Ayllus Kataristas (Red Offensive of Katarista Ayllus, also

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110 On a national scale, only Evo Morales has enjoyed a parallel status to Quispe in contemporary indigenous politics, as measured by the intensity of sentiments coming from various sectors of the population. Quispe was perhaps the figure most reviled and feared by the Bolivian ruling class in the early 2000s. By contrast, in the Aymara indigenous countryside of La Paz and Oruro, he received enthusiastic respect from the peasantry for his militant defense of indigenous self–determination and dignity in the face of racism and neoliberal capitalism.


112 Many of the basic biographical details of Quispe’s life narrated here are drawn from Xavier Albó, Pueblos indios en la política, La Paz: Plural editors, 2002.

113 Ibid., p. 79; Personal Interview, Felipe Quispe, La Paz, Bolivia, May 12, 2005.
known as *Ayllus Rojos*, Red Ayllus). The *Ayllus Rojos* were an eclectic amalgamation of Marxist-indigenous activists, bringing together indígenista Aymaras, miners, and urban Marxists.\textsuperscript{114} As noted, in 1991-1992 an armed wing of the *Ayllus Rojos*, the Ejército Guerrillero Tupaj Katari (Tupaj Katari Guerrilla Army, EGTK), emerged and Quispe was a leading figure alongside Álvaro García Linera and Raquél Gutiérrez. Although EGTK never matured into a successful or large guerrilla army, it did develop a popular base of sympathisers among the Aymara peasantry in Achacachi and the surrounding area, influenced some of the internal politics of the CSUTCB, and deposited ideological seeds of Aymara nationalism, the fruits of which were seen in the mobilisations of 2000 and 2001 in the altiplano.\textsuperscript{115} In jail, Quispe gained popular credibility and respect among Aymara and other indigenous-peasants for his guerrilla past, and his fervent denunciations of the neocolonial nature of the Bolivian state.\textsuperscript{116}

Already in the 1980s Quispe had evoked the heroic collective memory of Tupaj Katari and the 1781 anti-colonial rebellion he led. This was evident in Quispe’s book, *Tupaj Katari vive y vuelve, carajo* (Tupaj Katari is Alive and Returning), published in that period. However, as a result of his devotion to political study in jail, when Quispe was released, his political oratory was now more markedly replete with historical references. Moreover, his credibility, gained through years of activism, guerrilla struggle, and, now, incarceration, remained intact, indeed strengthened.\textsuperscript{117}

In the First Extraordinary Congress of the CSUTCB, between November 26 and 28, 1998, Quispe was elected Executive Secretary, essentially because he was seen as the consensus candidate between the internally feuding factions of the CSUTCB aligned behind either Evo Morales or Alejo Véliz.\textsuperscript{118} By this stage, Quispe had already become known in popular parlance by the moniker, “el Mallku”, “leader” or “Condor” in Aymara.\textsuperscript{119} The CSUTCB developed a radical indigenous politics once again under the leadership of Quispe. From

\textsuperscript{114} Quispe once remarked: ‘When we speak about the indigenous, Aymara or Quechua, revindicating our ancestral culture, at the same time we are automatically embracing our brothers who work in the cities as workers or proletarians’ (Quispe 2001, p. 189).

\textsuperscript{115} At the same time, Quispe is not prone to romanticising the historical impact of the EGTK: “... in the 1990s we had a revolutionary organization called Tupaj Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK). It was a political–military organization that we thought would arrive in power through armed struggle and by being the vanguard of the people. It turns out that, with time, we saw that wasn’t support from the population. So, we ended up in jail for five years. I was captured on August 19, 1992 and remained in jail until 1997. When I left I returned to my community, like any other comunario, like any other peasant. From there the people chose me and told me that I had to be leader of the CSUTCB.” Personal Interview, Felipe Quispe, La Paz, Bolivia, May 12, 2005.

\textsuperscript{116} While incarcerated, Quispe read and studied, completing his high school diploma. He was granted provisional freedom to attend classes in History at the Universidad Mayor de San Andres (UMSA) in La Paz, eventually completing his bachelor’s degree.

\textsuperscript{117} Albó, *Pueblos indios*, p. 81.


\textsuperscript{119} The name refers to a principal title of authority in traditional Aymara organizational structures. Albó, *Pueblos indios*, p. 81.
1998 to 2000 the organizational groundwork was laid for the 2000–2001 uprisings. A process emerged through which the very state institutions of the Bolivian republic were called into question for their failure to reflect the multinational character of Bolivian society and the basic oppression of the indigenous majority.\textsuperscript{120}

Building on longstanding, historical, collective memories of indigenous rebellion was a key facet of organising the capacity for mobilization and the political consciousness of the movement’s rank and file:

So, we knew of the uprising of Manco II of 1536–1544. We knew of the uprising of Juan Santos Atahualpa from 1742–1755. We also knew about the uprisings of Túpac Amaru, Túpac Katari of 1780–1783, and Zárate Willca in 1899... we see Katari as an example, as a model. He spent ten years preparing the Indian rebellion, and like that, successively, with other men, rose up against colonial power, and against the republic.\textsuperscript{121}

Quispe’s writings and interviews highlight both the role of a militant layer of CSUTCB organisers travelling to different rural communities, politicizing, and raising the consciousness of the bases over months and years. At the same time, he emphasizes the radicalisation of the grassroots themselves, their capacity to self-organize and mobilize, and ultimately to disobey the high command of the CSUTCB when it refused at times to sanction radical action against the state.\textsuperscript{122} Quispe reflects in one interview on his own political and ideological trajectory away from isolated guerrilla action and toward the power of mass mobilisation as a basis for indigenous liberation. Originally he put his faith in the possibility of forming a small vanguard of armed revolutionaries within the indigenous communities. “But, you know what, it turned out that the mobilisations of April and September have clarified things for us,” Quispe points out, “in rebellion, I have learned that the true struggle has not been of a few people, but has been taken up by millions and millions of indigenous.”\textsuperscript{123} He calls for an insurrection “supported by our own resources from the communities and the unions,” a rebellion of a “communal and indigenous” character, which employs “our own philosophical thought” and traditions.\textsuperscript{124} Quispe points to the authentic protagonists of the uprisings in April and September:

The true actors of the indigenous uprising have been the communities themselves.... The cause was not only water, coca, territory, land. Rather, the

\textsuperscript{121} Quispe 2001, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{122} Quispe 2001, pp. 166–167.
\textsuperscript{123} Quispe 2001, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
cause already has sown the seeds to takeover political power, to govern ourselves with a communitarian socialist system based in our ayllus and communities.\footnote{Quispe 2001, p. 178.}

The Aymara struggle for communitarian collective sovereignty and self-governance, on the one hand, was increasingly pitted against the capitalist, white-mestizo state, on the other.\footnote{Felix Patzi, “Rebelión indígena contra la colonialidad y la transnacionalización de la economía: Triunfos y vicisitudes del movimiento indígena desde 2000 a 2003,” in Forrest Hylton, Feliz Patzi, Sergio Serulnikov, and Sinclair Thomson, eds., \textit{Ya es otro tiempo el presente: Cuatro momentos de insurgencia indígena}, La Paz: Muela del Diablo, 2005, p. 217.} In the regions of northern La Paz and central and southern altiplano, the whiphala – the multicoloured, chequered Aymara flag – is probably the most important political symbol of this struggle. It differentiates collective Aymara identity from the Bolivian identity promoted by the state and represented by the Bolivian flag. Further, the wiphala was understood over the course of the 2000-2005 left-indigenous cycle of revolt as a symbol of war and social struggle, as well as a commitment to communitarian social life and the ayllus.\footnote{Mamani Ramírez, \textit{El Rugir de las Multitudes}, p. 35. At the same time, it ought to be noted that the whiphala is a paradigmatic case of invented tradition (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The flag was not used by indigenous radicals in 1899, 1927, or 1946–47, for example. Thanks to Forrest Hylton for drawing my attention to this point.}

The more radical sectors of the rebellions of 2000 and 2001 were ideologically oriented towards a fundamental, revolutionary challenge to the neoliberal capitalist model in place since 1985. Large sections of the Aymara altiplano, aligned with Quispe in these contentious moments of confrontation with the state, were building the incipient ideological and organizational foundations for an alternative revolutionary and democratic state.\footnote{Patzi, “Rebelión indígena contra la colonialidad,” p. 66.} This alternative democracy envisioned by the indigenous activists on the road blockades has been expressed intellectually by scholars working in the Bolivian context as ayllu or communal democracy versus liberal-capitalist representative democracy.\footnote{Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí,” \textit{Journal of Development Studies}, 25, 4, p. 20.} Quispe, as we have seen, conceives of the rebellions as a communitarian socialist challenge to the neocolonial capitalist Bolivian state. He speaks of the reassertion of the communal system of the ayllu, adapted to the twenty-first century context, as a way of replacing the colonial institutions and practices inherited by the republicans at Bolivian independence in 1825.\footnote{Felipe Quispe, “Las luchas de los ayllus kataristas hoy,” in Fabiola Escárzaga and Raquel Gutiérrez, eds., \textit{Movimiento indígena en América Latina: resistencia y proyecto alternativo}, Puebla: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2005, pp. 71–5.}

In many respects, this notion of communitarian socialism in the countryside was the rural counterpart to the revolutionary, assembleist forms of urban democracy experienced during the other explosive moments in the nation-wide cycle of uprisings, such as the Water-War in Cochabamba in 2000, and the so-called Gas Wars in La Paz and El Alto in 2003 and 2005, with their mass meetings in the streets and plazas. We can trace parallel
trends in action and consciousness in twentieth and twenty-first century left-indigenous struggle in Ecuador. And the life of Luis Macas is one important reflection of this reality.

**Turning Colonial Capitalism Upside Down**

I met up with Luis Macas in his office at the Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures, ICCI) in Quito, on July 14, 2010. Macas, arguably the most renowned indigenous leader in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first Ecuador, was born in 1951 in Saraguro, in the Province of Loja. A lawyer by training, he is currently executive director of ICCI. Macas is an ex-president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the most important nation-wide organization body of the indigenous movement, and former congressional deputy (in the late 1990s) and presidential candidate (2006) for the Movimiento Pachakutik (Pachakutik Movement, MP) party.

“I learned most of what’s guided me for the better part of my life in the community where I was born and raised,” Macas told me when I asked him if he could describe the long process of his political formation.

My father was a leader in the community at various points. He participated a great deal in the collective leadership of the community. There was no single leadership in the community, no type of caudillismo (big man leadership), but rather collective leadership. There are various people, men and women, who lead a process of organization, of unity in the community. This is what I learned about simply by watching. I was raised with all of these lessons.... So my first steps in learning how to conduct myself were these experiences – in my own community, with the elders.

Macas describes the communitarian traditions and obligations that he was raised with as having “diminished since that time in many communities, even disappearing in some,” but he repeatedly returned to them in the interview, marking them off as formative features of his present day political identity.

For most of his time in elementary school Macas went outside of his rural community to a small town, where he was first introduced to the Spanish language, having been raised speaking exclusively in Kichwa. “In this new urban school,” Macas explained, “I encountered things that were very strange, very distinct from our practices, beginning with the language itself. I had a very generous, very good teacher. She spoke Spanish very
slowly. But nonetheless, I couldn’t understand. It was quite a dehumanizing experience, as the educational experience has been for indigenous people.” After a dispute between his mother and father over whether Macas ought to return to their community after elementary school and take up agricultural work, his mother won, and Macas was sent to Cuenca, Ecuador’s third largest city, to get a high school diploma.

With hindsight, this move reveals itself as a decisive moment in the future indigenous leader’s political formation. At high school in Cuenca – the same high school attended by Ecuador’s most important Marxist intellectual of the twentieth century, Agustín Cueva – Macas first encountered Marxism, both as theory and praxis. Together with his ongoing ties to the customs, values, and traditions of the indigenous community, Marxism would shape how he came to understand and act in the world from there forward. “In this secondary school,” Macas said, “I came into contact with a few interesting teachers. They talked about the community, the system, poverty, how poverty comes about, and so on. And I became friends with some of my teachers.”

The teachers in question were heavily involved land reclamation struggles in neighbouring rural indigenous areas. They introduced Macas to the ideas of socialism and communism. “I was a little afraid,” Macas said to me laughing, “because back in my community my parents had been very conservative insofar as their political, ideological orientation. My father always voted for the Conservative Party. But he didn’t do it with bad faith. He did it with good faith, saying ‘it seems to us that this man is correct.’ The motivation had more to do with the person than conservative ideology. And so I was a little afraid. ‘What’s going to happen, I’m learning about these types of things,’ I asked myself. I’d been told that these things were bad, that socialists and communists go to hell,” Macas said, still laughing. “God was going to punish me.”

Nonetheless, Macas persevered and became accustomed to navigating the libraries of Cuenca. “Because the teachers had talked to me about socialism, communism, and Marxism,” he explained, “I went to the libraries and started making my way through the range of literature associated with these ideas. I read away like that, but I didn’t understand anything. I read for hours and hours, but I didn’t understand what they were trying to say.” Later in life, when studying in Quito, the capital, at the Central University, he “read historical materialism, dialectical materialism, and so on, and by that point, yeah, I understood. But I had tons of enthusiasm [during the high school period in Cuenca] to know, to study. And at the same time, I was always tightly linked to the community. Every weekend I would return to my community, participate in the collective work, in the meetings, in community decision making, and so on.”

After finishing high school, Macas returned to his community once again. The community reportedly saw him as a “rare bird,” someone who had learned things of very little practical
application during his high school education. All the same, they needed an elementary school teacher. Overcoming initial trepidation, Macas took up the work and stuck with it for one year. “What I accomplished I don’t know. But I learned a lot from the kids. The simplicity and innocence of children is a beautiful world. During this period there was a big gathering in Quito, called the First Educational Gathering of Mother Languages and Bilingual Education. Interesting, I thought. An invitation came to our community, and they said to me, ‘do you want to go?’ I said yes, and went.”

At the gathering in Quito, Macas met with “indigenous comrades from all over” the country; “it was a discovery” for him to share ideas and learn of the mutual if differentiated experiences of indigenous communities in the rest of Ecuador. The rector of the Catholic University where the seminar was being held happened to be a leftist priest influenced by liberation theology, and after talking with Macas the priest offered to try to arrange a full scholarship for him. Macas eventually did attend the university, studying applied anthropology of indigenous languages, the field in which the scholarship was available. Macas “learned a lot about the different indigenous peoples of the country and finished the degree,” and stayed on at the university teaching Kichwa for a period, before beginning a law degree at the same university.

The experience was alienating. “I started my law degree at the Catholic University, but the Faculty of Law at the Catholic University is very elite. The children of ambassadors and government officials go there. I felt more comfortable at the Central University. There were comrades there who spoke my language, who came from the same province, other people from the countryside, and so on. So the Central University was something else from the Catholic University.” The Central University was also a centre of Marxist studies at the time, and Macas “began to learn a lot about historical materialism and dialectical materialism from the professors,” carrying with him until today “the idea that Marxism is helpful as a way of systematizing, interpreting reality. Not to simply apply Marxism as such. But to apply Marxist methodology to understand reality and to apply some of the theory’s content.”

During this university period in Quito, Macas became more deeply imbricated in the organized indigenous movement, by far the strongest extra-parliamentary social force in Ecuador at the time.131 In particular, he was an activist within the Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI), the most important indigenous organization of the Andean highlands in the country, and part of CONAIE at the national level. “The struggle then was the struggle for land,” Macas explained, “the defence of indigenous territories in the Andean Sierra – the struggle for identity and education of indigenous peoples, an education that would correspond to the identity and culture of the indigenous peoples.”

Returning to themes of the universal and the particular, as well as the utopian-revolutionary dialectic of past and future, what is striking in Macas’ recollection of the period and his ongoing commitment to the indigenous movement, is the way in which he conceives of it as simultaneously drawing from the communal practices and customs of the past while reaching forward in a revolutionary commitment to transform the entirety of structures of domination and oppression in Ecuador as a whole. As an indigenous person coming from an impoverished rural community, Macas notes how his life in Quito was both unique and particularly fruitful for his political development. He was “learning theoretically” on the one hand, while “always [being] involved in the communities.”

It became evident to Macas that the indigenous resistance he was a part of was “not merely a reformist struggle,” but a combination of socio-cultural reclamation of indigenous liberation and a simultaneous assault on the wider patterns of capitalist exploitation and oppression in the country.

The revindication of our identities is important for the reproduction of our historical cultures as peoples – for example the struggle for land is a vital element, because without land there can be neither our culture nor identity, absolutely nothing – but the constant of the indigenous movement has been what I call the global struggle, a proposal of an alternative to the entire system.

For Macas, the indigenous movement was thoroughly and simultaneously interlinked with the class struggle and left-rearticulation in Ecuadoran politics. “None of us doubt that there were these two joined lines of struggle,” he told me, “the struggle for revindication, and the strategic struggle for change. The indigenous movement has always balanced these two lines.”

Summing up these biographical vignettes and what they have meant for his political consciousness over time, Macas notes again the significance of his introduction to the praxis and theory of Marxism in high school, the university, and city as crucial to his ideological orientation and grounding, but returns, ultimately, to his childhood as the axiomatic point of departure. “The whole process I’ve described of learning has been important for me... but my formation was in the community.” In 2010, at the time of the interview, the priority for Macas was how to reconcile these two traditions in practice: “The main point for me is how to combine two central struggles: the indigenous struggle – the struggle for identity, the historical struggle of the indigenous peoples – and the class struggle. This is what needs to be understood, this is what we need to do so that neither struggle is isolated.”
For Macas, there are two conditions of struggle: “One is to make visible and to transcend coloniality. Coloniality is still very much alive in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and in all parts of Latin America – the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of being. This is one major component of what has to be overcome through political struggle. But,” Macas continues, “there’s another arm of struggle, which has to do with the condition of this economic model, the capitalist model. If we don’t destroy both, one is going to remain.” A combined liberation struggle capable of “the elimination of both these conditions of oppression and exploitation is what has to be done when we’re thinking of the transformation of society, of social and political transformation.”

Coloniality and capitalism, then, are, in this worldview, intricately intertwined systems of exploitation and oppression in contemporary Ecuador. In describing the theoretical framework emerging out of the Ecuadoran indigenous movement, Macas returns repeatedly both to a total critique of bourgeois civilization, and a perennial dialectic between the utopian characteristics of specific pre-capitalists practices and values of indigenous life, and a future which will abolish capitalism, while expropriating and subordinating its technological and productive advancements to human and environmental needs. “There are two civilizational models that are confronting one another in the current moment,” Macas stresses, “two distinct paradigms – a western paradigm, and a paradigm from here. But the paradigm from here has everything to lose because no one values it whatsoever. ‘It’s those Indians again, trying to recover their notion of *buen vivir*, or living well’.... These paradigms of ‘living well,’ of harmony between humankind and nature – it’s from these indigenous paradigms that, in part, an alternative must emerge. I’m not saying that everything in the Western paradigm is crap. Humanity has evolved and grown. And there are many things worth saving from the Western paradigm.”

**Conclusion**

In light of the intensification of extractive capitalism in the Andes, and the role of leftist figures of state appropriating a language of Marxism to defend the “progressive” character of the new model of accumulation, this paper has called for a return and reappraisal of Romantic Marxism through a close study of E.P. Thompson and José Carlos Mariátegui. Against the seductive and determinist rhetoric of progress and the evolutionism of stages, it has suggested instead a reconsideration of the total critique of bourgeois civilization in a revolutionary mode. The utopian-revolutionary dialectic of forging selectively in the values and practices of the pre-capitalist past while struggling for a socialist future is an element common to the Thompsonian and Mariáteguist frameworks, and increasingly alien to the extractivist ideology of figures such as Álvaro García Linera and Rafael Correa. Thompson’s resurrection of the casualties of history of eighteenth century England, his agency-centred narrative of the making of the working class, and his celebration of heroic forms
transitional resistance, such as the quasi-insurrectional Luddites, resonate powerfully in the contemporary reality of Ecuador and Bolivia, where left-indigenous movements increasingly come into confrontation with the compensatory state and the extractive model of accumulation. But Thompson’s insights, if they are to contribute to a new research agenda in the study of contemporary conflict in the Andes and its deep origins, are best mediated through the Mariáteguist lenses of colonialism and imperialism, uneven and combined development, racialized capitalism, and indigenous liberation. Far from an abstract theory alien to the concrete struggles of subaltern actors on the ground in Bolivia and Ecuador, the discussion of the lives of Felipe Quispe and Luis Macas has demonstrated the living character of an anti-colonial, Romantic Marxism in the Andes, whose logic necessarily confronts the logics of state, capital, and imperialism on a day to day basis.