

# MARIÁTEGUI, LATIN AMERICAN SOCIALISM, AND ASIA

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**Abstract:** José Carlos Mariátegui is the most prominent Marxist thinker of 20th century Latin America. His *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* is still considered a classical reference work, indispensable for understanding the political and economical structures of postcolonial Perú and, indirectly, of Latin America. His works range from a modern socialist project based on a critical understanding of modern colonialism and imperialism, an economic analysis of the development of capitalism, the feudal structures of property, and the growing social conflicts in his native Perú. Less well known is his exploration of the future geopolitical situation of Latin American peoples and cultures vis-à-vis Asia. His intellectual position can be summarized in one sentence: "Spiritually and materially, China is closer to us than Europe." This article deepens the notion of the "Oriental dimension" of Latin American cultures and its roots in anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and socialist movements until today. It then challenges both the modern traditional Eurocentric Westernization of Latin American cultures, as well as the neoconservative strategies of "Western-hemispheric" mapping of Latin American cultures and peoples.

**Key words:** Mariátegui; Latin American; socialism; Asia; Eurocentric Westernization; Western-hemispheric

*And in this serious and pregnant moment  
of human history, it seems that  
something of the Eastern soul  
is transmigrating to the West...*

José Carlos Mariátegui

## I

José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) is undoubtedly the most prominent Marxist thinker of 20th century Latin America. His *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* is still considered a classic reference work, indispensable for understanding the political and economical structures of postcolonial Perú and, indirectly, of Latin America. He was an intellectual of broad interests; his complete works range from poetry to journalism, philosophical essays to politico-economic analyses. He was a prominent politician and activist. He participated in the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, or ARPA). In 1926, he established the socialist journal *Amauta*. In 1928, Mariátegui created and became General Secretary of the Socialist Party of Perú, which was later transformed into the Communist Party. His intellectual and political influence has been indisputable all over Latin America up to the present day.

I will focus on three fundamental aspects of his work. The first is his construction of a solid analytical background for a modern socialist project based on a critical understanding of Spanish colonialism and North American imperialism, and also based on an economic analysis of the development of capitalism, the feudal structures of property, and the growing social and cultural conflicts in a progressively impoverished proletarian and peasant class in his native Perú. But there is another relevant aspect in his view of the socialist revolution: the so-called “Indian” question.

The second aspect I want to underline is his theoretical and political proposal of an integration of the cultural traditions of the Peruvian Indians and the “indigenous” social movements into a modern socialist project. Communal land uses, traditional agricultural knowledge, and cosmological, religious, and social values should become, after his view, the starting point of a wider modern socialist movement. These two aspects of Mariátegui’s work are well known. Influences by prominent European communist intellectuals such as Antonio Gramsci are also notorious in his social theory. However, his point is, in this respect, more radical. In Mariátegui’s own words: “we have inherited instinctively the idea of socialism...from the Inca world.”<sup>1</sup>

Mariátegui defined the Andean socialist revolution as a civilization process historically rooted in the Incan “communist” economic and social system that later experienced the colonial destruction of the Andean communities, and then evolved towards a modern independent republicanism, and finally would accomplish a socialist order that would restore the Inca-based popular indigenous traditions. On this point he wrote: “The revolution defends our most ancient traditions.”<sup>2</sup>

This sociological and economic analysis is even more crucial today in the Andean region, and Latin America in general, than it was in the mid-20th century. This is to say that contemporary social and political changes such as those taking place in

Bolivia, Paraguay and Ecuador can be much better understood from the concept of an “indigenous socialism” such as defined by Mariátegui.

There is another way to define Mariátegui’s approach to Peruvian and, by extension, Latin American socialism: he rooted his struggle for socialism in what can be deemed a “national tradition.” It has to be stressed that such a “nationalism” could never be related, much less equated, to 19th or 20th century European or North American nationalism and patriotism, which were essentially linked to a political project of global supremacy and/or imperialism. His idea of nationalism was instead rooted in the cultural memories, the wisdom, moral values and ways of life of ancient Andean civilizations, and his resistance against colonialism.

By no means could such an historical and cultural approach to modern socialism be understood as a sort of archaic reaction against modern science and the industrial revolution. Mariátegui repeatedly insisted that founding socialist movements based on cultural memory and ancient socialist traditions, which go back to pre-colonial ways of life, does not mean a rejection, but rather an appropriation and redefinition of the “advancements of modern man” under national terms.<sup>3</sup> The main question that Mariátegui’s theoretical approach to modern socialism raises has another completely different and much more challenging consequence: not the rejection of progress, but the rejection of a Western unilateralist conception of a single world order and a singular historical objective.

Mariátegui’s socialist project radically opposed the Eurocentric conception of a singular “civilization process.” Such an ideal presupposed the linear categories of the progress of humanity as formulated by the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, as well as by the supposedly liberal political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke, and most particularly under the “Bildungs” ideal of Hegel and Hegelianism. The conception of a single universal “civilization process” also takes for granted the expansion of the West, the dissolution of Earth’s cultures in the name of capitalist Reason, and providential destiny through the Spirit of Christianity.

Mariátegui’s socialism reversed the historical sequence of this “civilization process” starting with the colonial destruction of the Inca civilization, and the establishment of a Western colonial power, first under Spanish colonialism and later under English and American imperialism. He did so by linking the republican and national independence from colonial rule with the construction of a socialist system, which goes back to the ancient political and social traditions of the Incas, without losing its connection to modern science and industrialism.

The third topic of Mariátegui’s theoretical socialism explicitly concerns the relationship between Latin America and Asia. But it is also relevant as a departing point for a new and more radical conception of cultural and political multilateralism in a new socialist world order.

Despite its relevance to the new global political balances marking the 21st century, very little attention has been paid to Mariátegui's thinking on the geopolitical situation of Latin American peoples and cultures vis-à-vis Asia, which he pursued in a series of articles and essays written in the 1920s. Asian, and particularly Chinese, immigration has been extremely important along the American Pacific coast from Lima to Acapulco, since colonial times, and became even more intense in the 19th and 20th centuries expanding over the whole territory of the Americas. Despite the social and cultural relevance of this permanent immigration, it has rather infrequently been the topic of open political and sociological discussion and analysis. It must be underlined that Mariátegui's interpretation of this relationship between the Andean and Asian cultures is deeper than a typical sociological approach focused on successive migration flows and their cultural influence on the development of American cultures.

In his articles published in Lima's daily newspaper *El Tiempo* between 1910 and 1922, in a series of lectures at the Popular University Gonzales Prada delivered in 1923 and 1924, and in the essays published during these years in the socialist magazine *Amauta*, which he founded, Mariátegui reconstructed the troublesome world political panorama after the Soviet and Mexican Revolutions, and related to the growing political and military power of the United States of America, as well as a series of imperialist wars beginning with the so-called Boxer Uprising of 1900–01 against Russian, French, German, Austrian, Italian, North American and Japanese Imperialism in China. In these articles and lectures he exposed first of all an internationalist commitment. But he also stressed a more important issue. Mariátegui did not recognize the European socialist movements that started with the First International and reached their peak with the Russian Revolution, as well as with the constitution of the Second and Third Internationals, as the most fundamental historical phenomena *per se*. From his Latin American point of view the effect of these socialist movements and revolutions on the colonized world was far more important than the European developments after the *Soviets* in Russia and the *Räte* in Germany. The influence of the Revolution of the Soviets on the Chinese revolutionary process, and on the Indian Independence, and subsequently the influence of both in African anti-colonial movements: this was the question! "The Third International promotes and supports the insurrection of the oriental people..." he wrote in 1920. The uprising of anti-colonial and socialist movements in Asia became even more important in his later analyses written from 1925 to 1927.<sup>4</sup>

Mariátegui's intellectual and political position with regard to Asia can be summarized in two main arguments. In 1924 he wrote: "The Eastern soul is trans-migrating to the West."<sup>5</sup> What did he mean by such an unusual statement? Why did he insist so much on the extension of the Soviet Revolution eastwards and

not westwards in his socialist magazine *Amauta*? Why was China's struggle for independence and socialism so central in his view?

Through his political articles it is clear that Mariátegui considered the Peruvian socialist movement much closer to the political and social struggle for independence and democracy in Asian countries like China and India (as well as the African countries) than to the Russian Revolution in 1917 and its intellectual and political extension towards Western Europe, including Spain. He clearly anticipated the growing cultural and political influence that Asia was going to have in Latin America through the profound cultural, social and political transformations pursued by its anti-colonial and socialist movements. The subsequent worldwide impact of Indian Independence and China's Communist Revolution in the second half of the 20th century can hardly be ignored in this regard.

Mariátegui's Peruvian socialist project was as concerned about the positive cultural and social relevance of the ancient popular traditions and ways of life, as it was about the historical, cultural and psychological similarities between the Andean and Asian traditional cultures. He was one of the few Latin American intellectuals to recognize and stress a deep cultural link between ancient and popular American cultures and peoples and Asia.

Mariátegui did not explicitly develop these ideas about the "oriental" character of ancient American cultures and popular Latin American ways of life on an anthropological or archeological basis. But instead, on a literary, cultural and political level. To be more exact he did it in his defense of "indigenismo." Such an "indigenism" was a wide and somewhat ambiguous cultural process involving different social groups and classes, and political processes. It can be defined as a widespread cultural and political movement all over Latin America throughout the 20th century involving prominent social activists, writers and artists who defended a political renewal of postcolonial Latin American cultures with the languages, religious and social traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas as a starting point. Many of the Latin American writers belonging to the 20th century literary canon, from the Brazilian Mario de Andrade and João Guimarães Rosa, to the Mexican Juan Rulfo, or the Guatemalan Nobel Prize winner Miguel Angel Asturias, have been labeled or accused of "indigenism" because of this double character, both aesthetic and anti-colonial. Particularly, the Peruvian poet and novelist José María Arguedas should be considered among the leading figures of this movement.

"Indigenism" has been, and still is, a controversial intellectual and social movement in Latin America. Its manifestly anti-colonial character has always been challenged by the conservative intelligentsia. And for very good reasons. Its roots can be traced to an Indian resistance movement, which was known by the Quechuan name *Taqui Onkoy*,<sup>6</sup> that sought to reestablish the ancient Incan social and cosmological order during the 16th and 17th centuries. It is also linked to the

anti-colonial wars against Spanish rule in the Andean region led by *Tupak Amaru* in the 18th century. The letter to the President of the United States written by the Chief Seattle in the 19th century could also be labeled as indigenist philosophy and political commitment. The movements and social or literary expressions related to “Indigenism” were by no means a human rights defense movement. They were not a socialist movement in a modern sense either. But they comprehended a struggle for the right to ancient ways of life, which nevertheless included those socialist aspects Mariátegui emphasized so much.

Conservative wisdom has always attacked “indigenismo,” or Indigenism, as a backward movement opposed to the values of civilization and progress. Needless to say, Mariátegui, who defended Indigenism because of his “socialist idea” (“we have instinctively inherited (the socialist idea) from the extinct Incan civilization”—which was his celebrated statement on this subject), also opposed the criticism of backwardness.<sup>7</sup> His socialist “Indigenism” at the same time incorporates the advances of modern science and technologies, as well as the progressive aspects of so-called Western civilization. Such a view of “Indigenism” was also shared by other prominent Latin American writers such as Oswald de Andrade in Brazil or Augusto Roa Bastos in Paraguay.

But Indigenism also has deeper roots, which are cosmological and metaphysical in their nature, and both intriguing and relevant to the point Mariátegui so polemically portrayed: “The cast of our people’s psychology is more Asian than Western... Spiritually and materially, China is closer to us than Europe.”<sup>8</sup> I do believe that precisely this question of an American Indigenism, as old as the European colonization of the Americas, explains that deep cultural link between the peoples of Asia and America that Mariátegui revealed in such an enthusiastic way. The cultural memories of ancient American religious and cosmological conceptions, traditional agricultural, astronomical and medicinal wisdom, and old forms of “communist” land and economic distribution, which were brutally uprooted throughout the colonial process, are closer to Oriental cosmologies and values than to the values of Western capitalism and Christian mythologies.

I want to briefly expand the notion of such an “Oriental dimension” of American cultures and their roots in anti-colonial and socialist movements through a few examples in modern Latin American literature. Mariátegui’s emphasis on “our ancient traditions” comprehends several values concerning human life, health, education and spiritual development, as well as the relationship between man and nature, which also has had a fundamental role in the canonical works of modern Latin American literature. *Grande sertão: veredas*, the indisputable masterwork of Brazilian 20th century literature, can be better understood from the philosophical and cosmological point of view of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, than of any classical Western literary or philosophical tradition. Even contemporary inter-

pretations that do their best to integrate this epic novel written by João Guimarães Rosa into a Western or European cultural framework, and that are informed by classic writers and philosophers, such as Goethe or Kierkegaard, are at the same time compelled to consider non-linear, cyclic conceptions of time, which are much closer to ancient Indian and Chinese cosmologies and philosophies than to traditional Christian and Western worldviews.<sup>9</sup> Among other things, *Grande sertão: veredas* develops a non-dual conception of human existence and of the cosmos which is irreconcilable with Christian and Western philosophical and religious dualism. Moreover, such a non-dualistic concept of being was by no means a personal invention by the Brazilian writer João Guimarães Rosa. He unambiguously took it from the popular language and cultural memories of the Brazilian “sertão,” inherited from the indigenous South American and African cultures.

The most important 20th century Peruvian writer, José María Arguedas, also can be mentioned as another example of such an “orientalism.”<sup>10</sup> One of the most obstinate poetic trends in both his novels and poetry is man’s integration into nature. Not unlike Roa Bastos and other Latin American writers, Arguedas extracts his poetic and “magic” approach to nature from the indigenous and popular traditions and values of the Andean cultures. When confronted with the ultimate metaphysical dimensions of his shamanistic, or “magic,” understanding of an animated and spiritualized literary world of animals and plants, rivers and rocks, that is to say, his poetic perception of the cosmos, one has to borrow philosophical categories belonging to ancient oriental materialism, such as Avicenna, or the theories of Emanation linked to the Kabala. The conception of a supreme harmony or Tao, as it has been defined by the Chinese philosopher Zhang Zai, among many others, is more suitable to Arguedas’ view of nature than any other Western philosophy, with the exception of such thinkers as Schopenhauer in the 19th century and Ernst Bloch in the 20th century, who programmatically incorporated Oriental philosophical traditions into their thinking. Other canonical works of art and literature can and should be analyzed from the point of view of this wider, multilateral approach to world cultures and their intercontinental interaction: from the cyclical cosmic time conception in Juan Rulfo or the mythological novels of Miguel Angel Asturias to Amazonian cosmologies. Such similarities become even more apparent as we approach the most ancient languages, mythologies, art and architecture, and traditions of pre-colonial times, both in South and North America.

## II

I would like to devote the second part of this article to a completely different if not opposite approach to Latin American cultures, literatures and art: the “Western-hemispheric” mapping of Latin American nations, cultures and peoples. The idea

of a hemispheric cultural and political territory or region is unambiguously imperial and colonial. Its anti-hermeneutical principle is a fundamental non-recognition of an actual historical, cultural, ethnic or linguistic unity either of the indigenous peoples of America, who actually shared cosmologies, literary traditions, and religious beliefs, or linguistic families, and much less relations of production all over the Americas. The construction of such a “hemispheric” order is based on completely abstract and arbitrary geodesic lines, boundaries and spaces. It is a literally superimposed economic, political and cultural order from “above.”

However, there exists an indisputable historical point of departure for a definition and an analysis of this prevalent geopolitical and militaristic hemispheric perspective of the Americas: the “Monroe Doctrine,” a policy introduced in 1823, which stated that further efforts by European countries to colonize land or interfere with states in the Americas would be viewed by the United States as acts of aggression requiring its military intervention. The Monroe Doctrine reconsidered Latin America as an area under direct economic, administrative and military control by the United States. The annexation of half of the Mexican territory two decades after its declaration and a series of US-backed military coups in Latin America after the Second World War show the extent and rigorousness of such a hemispheric definition of the American cultures and peoples.

It is almost unnecessary to say that such strategic wisdom has also framed the hermeneutical, or rather, anti-hermeneutical mapping of Latin American literatures and cultures. I would like to devote a few thoughts to this topic based on my current experience as a Professor of Spanish and Portuguese literatures in North American universities.

The first and most fundamental departing point in Latin American studies in North American universities, such as I have witnessed, is a programmatic ignorance of the colonial process and its political, social, cultural, and last but not least linguistic consequences. This does not mean that a so-called colonial era and culture are being rejected. There is, on the contrary, a specific academic field called “Colonial Studies.” But what has been systematically ignored and repressed are not the colonial cultures as such, but the colonizing process. The study of colonization as a cultural, genocidal and civilizatory process involving both North and South America at the same time, and involving similar fundamental theological, economic and juridical patterns, and military strategies, is a no-man’s land in standard Latin American studies. Needless to say, if you ignore the beginning you can never understand the consequences and endings. And it is by no means irrelevant concerning this question on the colonization process that it was precisely Alexis de Tocqueville who in his appraisal and celebration of North American Independence and Revolution also drew attention to its shadowy counterparts: the Indian question and the colonial



process of genocidal extermination. His conclusion on this point was anything but ambiguous: "I think that the Indian race is doomed to perish."<sup>11</sup>

The ultimate consequence of such a rejection of the analysis of an unfinished colonial process is not difficult to follow: the impossibility to understand anything from social and ethnic conflicts, to intellectual and artistic expressions in not only Spanish and Portuguese speaking America, but also English America.

I am personally inclined to think that the misinterpretations and misconstructions that follow these historical and intellectual gaps cannot be considered just a byproduct of personal intellectual limitations or shared departmental prejudices, but rather as the ultimate goal of an academic machine which obstinately fragments, segregates and dislocates the whole process of mythological, artistic and literary, as well as the social, ethnic and political configuration of modern Latin American cultures into independent and disconnected microspheres of specialized knowledge. In a recent and quite controversial essay, "Colonized Latin American Poetics," I tried to show how this institutional micro-political and micro-analytical fragmentation and reduction of Latin American studies into segregated concentration fields has been ultimately a political strategy linked to the Cold War with no other goal than to remove and terminate the leading Marxist and socialist intellectual Latin American traditions from Mariátegui in Perú, to Darcy Ribeiro in Brazil, to Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in México.<sup>12</sup> The main methodological constituency of all these analyses is the interconnection and interaction of anthropological, economic, and political factors as a whole. What the departmental micro-political divisions and strategies make impossible is precisely the understanding of those dynamic processes of change resulting from the interaction of the full spectrum of economic, social and cultural aspects. But that is not all: such a micro-political departmentalization makes possible the rhetoric of the end of the intellectual and of the work of art, the reduction of any human expression from ancient myths to contemporary social conflicts, to scripts, texts, and semiotics, and the downgrading of the Humanities into linguistics. Even a critical approach to any literary object, from poems to manifestoes, is condemned under such institutional conditions of segmentation and disconnectedness to lose its momentum and become intellectually empty and socially irrelevant.

The second main consequence of the policies of hemispheric globalization is the termination of historical differences and cultural individualities, and the standardization of Latin American art and cultures under single and global patterns of equivalence and uniformity. In other words, Spanish and Portuguese American nations are equated as equal and equivalent to the United States and Canada despite their radical cultural and political differences, and despite the strong divergences, and even conflicting scenarios of historical evolution.

There is one important historical and political fact that standard Latin Americanism does not want to analyze and cannot confront. For many reasons the struggle for independence of the Latin American and Caribbean nations throughout the whole 19th century, and in many aspects even until today, constitutes that historical reality which does not fit into the framework and blueprints of a homogeneous, hemispheric, all-American cultural map. The ethnically and culturally mixed population of Spanish and Portuguese America, as opposed to the predominantly white and protestant United States of North America and Canada, the absolutist political power of the colonial Catholic church in Central and South America, as opposed to the secular and democratically oriented Anglo-American puritanical and Calvinistic traditions, the lack of an enlightened reform of knowledge, and of a process of secularization in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking world, and last but not least, the scientific, technological, and industrial backwardness inherent in the Iberian and Iberian American cultures as opposed to the liberal and scientific traditions linked to the Industrial Revolution in the politically leading European nations since the 18th century, signals an ignored social, intellectual and political gap between North America and Spanish and Portuguese America. I do not have to remind the reader that this real historical gap has created, and still creates, the paramount and most excellent conditions for an increasing dominance and supremacy of the North over the South, with fatal consequences for both.

Instead of questioning these historical and cultural realities, and the resulting inequalities and conflicts, and instead of questioning the process of colonization as well as postcolonial colonialism in the Americas, mainstream Latin Americanism establishes a series of reductive abstract codes and linguistic differences. It creates an historical and anthropological confusion between the ancient indigenous cultures of the Americas and the hybrid cultures resulting from the colonial process, in order to epistemologically and politically subdue them as cultural or ethnical minorities under the administrative umbrella of a segregated or "apartheid"-multiculturalism. Standard hemispheric Latin Americanism displaces and replaces class and ethnic conflicts with imperial powers through symbiotically manipulated gender conflicts, and systematically reduces the long history of Western military interventions and Western imposed dictatorships in the region to a de-politicized rhetoric of a volatile category of human rights. Hemispheric Latin Americanism indistinctively converts works of art and literature, social struggles and conflicts into electronically and academically surveyed intertextualities. Last but not least, conventional North American Latin Americanism redesigns the social, religious and artistic expressions of these historically and socially different Latin American cultures as local speeches and expressions of self-proclaimed global discourses and cultural patterns.

## III

I would like now to return to the beginning: Mariátegui's vision of the relationship between Latin American ways of life and Asian cultures, and his ground-breaking understanding of Asian political projection in Latin America during an age of anti-colonial struggle and emancipation. Mariátegui wrote: "The cast of our people's psychology is more Asian than Western... Spiritually and materially, China is closer to us than Europe." These sentences express *pars pro toto* the thought process exactly opposed to the standardizing linguistic procedures of mainstream Latin Americanism that amend and adjust Latin American national and regional cultures into readymade hemispheric packages.

Mariátegui's farsighted perception of a bond between popular American and Asian cultures was deeply rooted in his understanding of ancient socialist forms of production and distribution, and their founding function in modern socialist movements. Such a historical standpoint, which constitutes one of the more original accounts of his main work, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, has been confirmed by contemporary anthropological research, such as that of Nathan Wachtel.<sup>13</sup> It is also a common standpoint of the Western reception of Tupí-Guaraní and other pre-colonial cultures of the Americas from the 16th century Italian humanist and traveler Amerigo Vespucci to the 20th century Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro.

We may highlight at least three assumptions and consequences to bring this article on Mariátegui and Latin American Socialism to a conclusion. The first consequence of Mariátegui's approach to the ancient cultures of America and the modern social struggle for emancipation and socialism, and of his thinking about Latin America's links with both East and West was a redefinition of cultural, ethnic and social multiculturalism. The second consequence of Mariátegui's intriguing statement "China is closer to us than Europe" is a redefinition of cultural and political multilateralism. A third corollary can also be introduced concerning contemporary national and global hopes for a new, more just, less violent, and not unilateral world order. As I suggested before, Mariátegui's perspective on a bond between Latin America and 20th century Asia expressed the search for an intellectual and political alternative to the social impoverishment, economic, and technological dependencies, and political decay of 20th century Latin America.

Today's multiculturalism, as opposed to late 18th and early 20th century cultural pluralism defined by philosophers such as William James or George Santayana, and as opposed to Latin American multiculturalism as defined by anthropologists and cultural historians such as Darcy Ribeiro, or, more recently, Antonio Risério, among many others, focuses mainly on ethnic minorities, their local identities, as well as

social, and linguistic boundaries.<sup>14</sup> It also focuses on the assimilation strategies of these ethnic cultural minorities into a market order and a consumer culture, and not on the cultural, ethnic and linguistic nation-building process any longer, as was the case in the 19th century North American “melting pot” theories or the theories of miscegenation developed by Brazilian anthropologists.

Not unlike Brazilian anthropology, Mariátegui’s approach links the simultaneity of cultures, both Eastern and Western, and of ancient and modern ways of life to a general social process of nation building and the development of socialism. His approach to the anti-colonial revolutionary processes in China or India is closely linked to that indigenous/modern idea of socialism.

A no less relevant consequence of Mariátegui’s intriguing statement on China’s nearness to the Asian world is his political redefinition of Latin American multilateralism. We tend to understand multilateralism today as a more or less pluralistic system for international cooperation. It is more than evident that the scale of such problems like proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional and international instability, regulation of the human right to clean air and water and the use of the Earth for survival, or the strategies needed to stop global warming, thwart organized crime, and to respond to massive immigration flows, and climactic and other massive catastrophes, requires a multilateral approach among nations. But multilateralism does not only represent the most efficient, most effective, and most egalitarian instrument to address these global issues. It is also the only thinkable way to achieve a true dialogue between peoples, cultures and nations in an increasingly complex and conflictive world. It also means a more balanced, peaceful coexistence between nations.

However, it is also evident that the United States of North America has grown since World War II into an unconditional and incontestable global superpower. And it goes without saying that during this period of time the United States has systematically refused to compromise hegemonic unilateralism with regards to such important matters as the International Court of Justice, Children’s Rights, and global warming, among many other global issues, including unilaterally performed wars. Unilateralism has been implicitly defined from the point of view of the unconditional superpower as it yields to other national powers in order to hold and improve its absolute prevalence over them. This is to say multilateralism as unilateralism in other words and by other means.

Mariátegui’s statement on Asian and Latin American proximity has a provocative and shocking effect even nowadays. “Western” hemispheric unilateralism, and specifically the repeated designation of Latin American nations as part of the “Western world” are taken for granted, despite the anthropological, archeological and historical evidences of the Asian origins of American native populations, of

African slave transmigration and cultural presence all over the Americas, and other more recent migration flows proceeding from different Asian regions. The arrangement and categorization of Latin America under the label of “Western world” or “Western hemisphere” is taken for granted against the evidence of all the Asian, African, and Indigenous peoples of the continent.

By recognizing these plural roots of the American peoples and cultures, Mariátegui, as well as other outstanding Latin American 20th century intellectuals, such as the above-mentioned Darcy Ribeiro and writers like Augusto Roa Bastos, does not only fracture hemispheric geopolitics as one amongst many other expressions of “Western” unilateralism.<sup>15</sup> He also questions the colonizing processes of the Americas, as well as the feudal structures specifically superimposed by Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, and later maintained and even further developed by English and North American imperialism over the region. Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* leaves no uncertainty about the link between his culturally rooted multilateralism and his search for an alternative to social and political structures left by Western feudalism and imperialism in his native Perú through a programmatic definition of a socialist multilateralism, “Indigenist” socialism, and a socialist multiculturalism.

## Notes

1. “La nueva cruzada pro-indígena,” in *Ediciones Populares de las Obras Completas de José Carlos Mariátegui* [hereafter: *Ediciones Populares*] (Lima: Empresa Editora Amauta, 1959), vol. 13, p. 167.
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3. “La nueva cruzada pro-indígena,” in *Ediciones Populares*, vol. 13, p. 167.
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5. “La escena contemporánea,” in *Ediciones Populares*, vol. 13, p. 168.
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7. “La nueva cruzada pro-indígena,” in *Ediciones Populares*, vol. 13, p. 167.
8. “La revolución china,” in *Ediciones Populares*, vol. 12, p. 133.
9. Stefan Kutzenberger, *Europa in “Grande Sertão: Veredas.” “Grande Sertão: Veredas” in Europa* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 156ff. Fani Schiffer Durães, *Riobaldo und Faust. Untersuchung zum Faust-Mythos bei João Guimarães Rosa* (Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 1996), pp. 82ff; 156ff.
10. José María Arguedas, *Señores e indios. Acerca de la cultura quechua* (Montevideo: Arca Editorial, 1976), pp. 243ff.
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12. Eduardo Subirats, “Colonized Latin American Poetics,” in *Crítica y Emancipación, Revista latinoamericana de ciencias sociales*, 1, 1 (June 2008). Buenos Aires: CLACSO. See also: José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Darcy Ribeiro, *The Americas and Civilization* (New York: Dutton, 1971); Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

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