SOCIAL LIBERATION, IDENTITY, AND THE RECOVERY OF EARLY MARXIST THOUGHT: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Ofelia Schutte
3 NOTIONS OF “LIBERATION”

Personal Liberation vs. Social Liberation

- Personal Liberation - emphasis on autonomy, self-development and individual creativity. Not addressed in text with the exception of treatment of women’s social liberation

- Social Liberation - emphasis on liberation of “individuals from structures of social oppression” and includes “cultural, political and economic aspects” of those social structures. (p. 10)
National Liberation vs. Social Liberation

- National Liberation - focuses on the need to displace oppressive (usually Western Imperialistic or Neo-Colonialistic) governments and establish political independence

- Social Liberation - may have overlapping interests but Schutte rejects the idea that “the only path to social liberation is through a revolution assuring national liberation.” (p.11)
3 NOTIONS OF “LIBERATION”

National Liberation vs. Social Liberation

“I regard many specific goals of national liberation movements as not only reasonable but very worthwhile, so long as they are disengaged from an exclusivistic claim to truth or justice” (p.11)
The use of a dualism of good and evil as a basis for liberation theory - whether used by the Right or the Left - will be rejected in this study because of its tendency to result in a dogmatic or authoritarian orientation. The notion of social liberation to be pursued here presupposes “liberation” from such dualistic forms of reasoning.” (pp.11-12)
Cultural Identity...

- “...can be used to distinguish the positive features uniting a number of individuals around something they hold to be a very valuable part of their selves.” (p.12)
- should be as free as possible from “a dogmatic approach to values.” (p.13)
- should be viewed as “the result of a freely engaged in, collective interpretive process, always open to modification or transformation on the part of the members of a cultural community.” (p.14)
Examples of paradigms defending the integrity of Latin American Culture:

- Mariátegui - values of Pre-Columbian heritage
- Ramos - “idea of Mexican identity rid of resentment and feelings of inferiority toward European cultures”
- Zea - “the idea of a continental Latin American identity as an affirmation of the mestizaje” (p.13)
“Endangered Cultures”

Some Factors Affecting Regional Cultural Formations:

- The invasion of U.S. values “through the media and entertainment industries”
- Foreign debt and other economic problems
- “the stunting of regional resources”
- ...the “brain drain” of professionals to the North and to the confinement of the popular sectors to the single task of assuring their basic economic survival.” (p. 14)
World Cup: Rio favelas being 'socially cleansed' in runup to Sporting events

"There is a process of gentrification taking place in the whole city that is connected to the sports events and how the government sees the city: it is no longer a place for residents, but as a business to sell to foreign investors. That's what the World Cup is about," said Renata Neder of Amnesty.
“The “identity” of which I speak here is not derived from a fixed origin, but is the result of multiple configurations always in the process of reorganizing and redefining themselves. In terms of liberation theory, such identities-in-the-making result from a process of selecting endangered or forgotten differences and bringing them to public attention. This involves breaking through the silence imposed on some forms of thought and only subsequently trying to “position” such differences within the general purview of the culture for the enrichment and benefit of all.” (p.15)
HISTORICAL ROOTS OF LIBERATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:

Overview of key historical trends & developments upon which Schutte’s text focuses:

- 1920’s - Mariategui & socialist anthropology
- 1930 - 1950’s - Mexican Based studies in cultural identity focusing on Ramos & Zea
- 1960’s - the impact of the Cuban revolution & the debate between Bondy & Zea regarding underdevelopment & how it affects the existence, productivity and vitality of Latin American Philosophy.
- Late 1960-1970 - Liberation & liberation theology
- Contemporary Decades - Feminism in Latin American Philosophy
“If we think of Marxism as being in a crisis today due in large part to its separation from the will of the people and to its pursuit of a dogmatic rather than pragmatic approach to social reality, then there is much to be learned from a thinker such as Mariátegui.” (p. 19)
José Carlos Mariátegui: A Short Biography

- Born June 14, 1894, Moquegua, Peru—died April 16, 1930, Lima, Peru. (35 years old)
- His father abandons the family when Jose Carlos is still quite young; to support her children, his mother moves to Lima.
- The Leguía dictatorship in Peru (1919-30) sought to rid itself of one of its most ardent critics by sending the hitherto self-educated Mariátegui to study in Italy in 1919. While there, he established strong ideological ties with some of the leading Socialist thinkers of the time, among them Henri Barbusse, Antonio Gramsci, and Maxim Gorky.
- While in Italy, he closely follows the Turin strike movement and the factory council phenomenon. He also meets and marries his wife, Anna Chiappe; and in 1921 their first child, Sandro Tiziano Romeo, is born.
- He returned to Lima in 1923 and became a strong supporter of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torres’ Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA).
- In 1924 he becomes seriously ill and this results in the amputation of his left leg which was originally weakened from an accident as a child in 1902.
- After a dispute with Luis Alberto Sánchez, a leading Aprista, he left the Alliance to establish the Peruvian Socialist Party in 1928; its name was changed to the Peruvian Communist Party in 1930.
- Though paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, Mariátegui also founded Amauta (1926-30), a Marxist cultural and literary journal that published avant-garde writing. In essays in *La escena contemporánea* (1925; “The Contemporary Scene”), Mariátegui attacked Fascism and defined the responsibilities of the intellectual in countries where social oppression reigns.
- Mariátegui’s masterpiece is the collection of essays *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928; Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality). While emphasizing the economic aspects of Marxism, Mariátegui nonetheless does not repudiate the value of religion and myth in his treatment of the Indians. His views on literature, signaling the importance of indigenous themes and language while adhering to avant-garde artistic tendencies, provided the means to reevaluate Peruvian culture. His *Obras completas* (“Complete Works”) were published in 1959.

(Encyclopædia Britannica & “José Carlos Mariátegui Chronology” by José Carlos Mariátegui III)
PERU IN THE 1920'S

- Foreign investment played a relatively minor role in the nineteenth century, although it included railroads, British interests in banking and oil, and United States participation in sugar production and exports.
- Its role grew rapidly in the twentieth century, concentrated especially in export fields. In 1901, just as Peruvian copper began to gain importance, United States firms entered and began buying up all but the smallest of the country's copper mines.
- The International Petroleum Company (IPC), a Canadian subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, established domination of oil production by 1914 through purchase of the restricted rights needed to work the main oil fields.
- The trend to foreign entry in manufacturing as well as finance and mining was stimulated by promotional legislation under the eleven-year government of Augusto B. Leguía y Salcedo (1908-12, 1919-30), an initially elected president turned dictator who regarded foreign investment as the key to modernization of Peru. That much-publicized partnership between a repressive government and foreign investors was to play an important role for the future of Peru, by feeding convictions that foreign investment was inescapably linked to control of the country by the few at the expense of the public.
- By the end of the 1920s, foreign firms accounted for over 60 percent of Peru's exports. (http://countrystudies.us/peru/53.htm)
Leguía “...even told the U.S. embassy that he wanted to ‘put Peru into the hands of the United States,’ suggesting ‘something in the nature of a protectorate.’ In return, the U.S. ambassador nominated Leguía, ‘the Giant of the Pacific,’ for the Nobel Peace Prize; he claimed the president ‘has the courage of Caesar, the power of Napoleon, and the diplomacy of Richelieu,’ and ‘would go down in history as one of the world’s greatest men.’”

- Paul W. Drake, *The Money Doctor in the Andes: The Kemmerer Missions, 1923-1933*
The capitalist model of development failed Peru because the capitalist model (allied with foreign/US investors) served the landholding minority and perpetuated the feudal oppression and poor living conditions of the Peruvian worker.
Mariátegui’s Response:

- Any effective solution...
  - had to respect the reality of social diversity of Peru
  - must secure the social & economic liberation of the Peruvian worker, the majority of which were “indigenous peasants.”
  - would be found not in democratic-liberal methods but in a form of socialism adapted to Peruvian contexts.
  - would be the result of forming an united front that incorporated “the needs of Peru’s own mestizo and Indian population.” (p.23)
"The socialist definition of the party was not a simple problem of nomenclature. It was linked to (1) a particular conception of [political] alliances; (2) a decision that diverged from the Comintern in terms of the party’s class components, insofar as it wanted to be the political organ of Peruvian workers, peasants, and intellectuals; (3) a rather heterodox vision of its process of constitution, in that its leadership, rather than being the cause, ought to be the result of grassroots activity. This explains why, until the end of his life Mariátegui insisted...on the socialist, popular, and autonomous character of the new organization.” (pp25-26)
Nietzsche:

“Of all that is written I love only what a man has written with his blood. Write with blood, and you will experience that blood is spirit.” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra/p.26)
Mariátegui

- “I shall carry out only those (projects) to which I am summoned by an imperious force [sólo realizaré los que un imperioso mandato vital me ordene]. My thought and my life are one process [Mi pensamiento y mi vida constituyen una sola cosa, un único proceso]. And if I hope to have some merit recognized, it is that - following another of Nietzsche’s precepts - I have written with my blood [Y si algún mérito espero y reclamo que me sea reconocido es el de - también conforme un principio de Nietzsche - meter toda mi sangre en mis ideas].” (p.27)