

ARTICLE

“Discipline, Programs, and Systems”: The Limits of Heterodoxy in the Thought of José Carlos Mariátegui, 1917–1930

Peter David Morgan

Homerton College and Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Email: morganpeter091@gmail.com

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This article argues that, despite his reputation for intellectual heterodoxy, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) actually set a high value on the political discipline of theoretical activity, and that some of his most creative thought was on that theme. In doing so, the article questions the prevailing assumption about the heterodoxy of Mariátegui’s Marxism. By reading Mariátegui in terms of discipline as much as heterodoxy, the article also unsettles historiographical conventions about Mariátegui’s attitude to various political practices and ideas, including cosmopolitanism and the politics of exile. The article proceeds by first contextualizing Mariátegui’s adoption of Marxism as a means of greater discipline in Peruvian intellectual life. It then traces the main lines of Mariátegui’s critique of politically ill-disciplined intellectualism during the interwar period, before reconstructing his positive models of a balance between intellectual discipline and innovation, understood as a necessary condition of genuine revolutionary thinking.

Despite his reputation for intellectual heterodoxy, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) actually set a high value on the political discipline of theoretical activity. This article revisits Mariátegui as a theorist of intellectual discipline within the Marxist tradition. In doing so, the article complicates prevailing ideas about the heterodoxy of Mariátegui’s Marxism and of his thought in general. Moreover, by reading Mariátegui in terms of discipline as much as heterodoxy, this article unsettles historiographical conventions about Mariátegui’s attitude to various political practices and ideas, including cosmopolitanism and diaspora.

The basic idea of Mariátegui as a heterodox interwar Marxist is well justified. Mariátegui made several innovations in Marxism between the late 1910s and his death in 1930, including the reinterpretation of the indigenous Andean peasantry as a possible agent of socialist world revolution.¹ In trying to globalize European Marxism

¹ An excellent selection of Mariátegui’s writing is José Carlos Mariátegui, *Invitación a la vida heroica: José Carlos Mariátegui. Textos esenciales*, ed. Alberto Flores Galindo and Ricardo Portocarrero Grados (Lima, 2005).

to Latin America and Peru, Mariátegui also created a new, cosmopolitan reading of the Peruvian imagined community.² Moreover, in his editorial and publishing activity, Mariátegui developed new models for socialist communication strategy with journals including *Labor* and *Amauta*.³

The interpretation of Mariátegui as a heterodox Marxist has multiple sources, and it has been done in different historical contexts since 1930. It actually began with the relatively hostile line of the Peruvian Communist Party—which Mariátegui had cofounded in 1928—under Eudocio Ravines during the 1930s, when the party attempted to disassociate from Mariátegui’s “heterodox” and “populist” departures as it drew closer to an increasingly Stalinist Comintern.⁴ But Mariátegui’s heterodox innovations within Marxism have since been rearticulated in more positive terms. The New Left in Latin America revisited Mariátegui as foundational to a Latin American Marxist tradition distinguished from the idea of a Eurocentric Soviet orthodoxy. In this approach, Mariátegui’s heterodox development of Marxism represented a necessary point of departure for adapting that theory to the peculiar conditions of Latin America, including the region’s position in relation to the global accumulation regime of capitalist imperialism, and distinctively Latin American processes and structures of racialization.⁵

More recently, since the 1990s, the influential discourse of decolonial theory—most associated with Walter D’Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano—has valorized Mariátegui’s intellectual heterodoxy, too, albeit in a very different way. The decolonial tradition has claimed Mariátegui as an antecedent and archetype for its political ideal of a “delinking” of indigenous cultures in the global South from the epistemological categories of (a certain idea of) “Western modernity.” This approach to Mariátegui requires the assertion that he made fundamental departures from Marxism, categorized as an instance of the Western episteme.⁶ However, this reading of Mariátegui is profoundly ahistorical.

² A recent “global turn” in Mariátegui scholarship has focused on this aspect. See Martín Bergel, “Tentativas sobre Mariátegui y la literature mundial,” *Nueva sociedad* 266 (2016), 168–179; Bergel, “José Carlos Mariátegui and the Russian Revolution: Global Modernity and Cosmopolitan Socialism in Latin America,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116/4 (2017), 727–44; Paulo Drinot, “Global Mariátegui,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 56/2 (2024), 329–53.

³ Javier García-Liendo, “Networking: José Carlos Mariátegui’s Socialist Communication Strategy,” *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 38/1 (2016), 46–68.

⁴ Drinot, “Global Mariátegui,” 333; David Sobrevilla, *El marxismo de Mariátegui y su aplicación a los 7 ensayos* (Lima, 2005), 46–53.

⁵ José Aricó, *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires, 1980); Michael Löwy, ed., *El Marxismo en América Latina: Antología* (México, 1982); Löwy, “L’indigénisme marxiste de José Carlos Mariátegui,” *Actuel Marx* 56/2 (2015), 12–22; Harry Vanden, *National Marxism in Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui’s Thought and Politics* (Boulder, 1986); Marc Becker, *Mariátegui and Latin American Marxist theory* (Athens, OH, 1993). On the wider tradition of Latin American Marxism see Carlos Aguirre, ed., *Militantes, intelectuales y revolucionarios: Ensayos sobre marxismo e historia en América Latina* (Raleigh, 2013); Fabian Calabuz and Tomás Torres López, *Aproximaciones al marxismo latinoamericano: Teoría, historia y política* (Santiago de Chile, 2021).

⁶ Aníbal Quijano, “Prologue,” in José Carlos Mariátegui, *Textos básicos* (Lima, 1991), vii–xvi; Walter D’Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking* (2000), 2nd edn (Princeton, 2012), 139–44; D’Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham, NC, 2021), 381–419.

The recent global turn in Mariátegui scholarship, pioneered by Martín Bergel, makes clear that the interpretation of Mariátegui's thought as a fundamental critique of the West, and especially Western *modernity*, is historically absurd. It only requires close reading of Mariátegui's work in context during the 1920s to understand that he was a fundamentally cosmopolitan thinker whose conception of the global was built around an explicitly occidentalist ideal of modernity, including where he creatively combined this ideal with certain axioms and claims of Peruvian *indigenismo*.⁷

Moreover, unlike the New Left and more recent global rereadings of Mariátegui, decolonial theory, in its exaggeration and mischaracterization of Mariátegui's heterodoxy, fails to understand the fundamental role of Bolshevik-inflected Marxism in his political thought. In this sense, decolonial theory, which represents the principal Latin American iteration of the wider postcolonial turn of the 1980s and 1990s, has done to Mariátegui what has been done in different ways to other twentieth-century Marxists in the (semi)colonial world: it takes Mariátegui's heterodox departures *within* Marxism, especially departures that responded to the peculiar social conditions of a non-European world region, as license to decontextualize his work from Marxism as such.

Thus, in relation to the decolonial interpretation of Mariátegui, this intervention, by focusing on his thought about intellectual discipline in the context of the world communist movement, reasserts the importance of Marxist orthodoxy for a holistic understanding of Mariátegui's political thought, including his heterodox departures. But reading Mariátegui in terms of intellectual discipline—which he understood principally in terms of (1) the unity of theory and practice and (2) the rigorous application of Marxist method to social analysis and political action⁸—also illuminates features of theoretical activity that have been overlooked by the broader tendency among scholars, extending beyond the recent decolonial current, to privilege heterodoxy in the analysis of Mariátegui as a thinker.⁹

In a (very) loose sense, therefore, this article tilts back towards the analytical posture of Peruvian “Old Left” communists, led by Mariátegui's old friend, Jorge del Prado, to rehabilitate him politically as an orthodox Marxist–Leninist.¹⁰ Of course, this reading has been (gainfully) overwritten since the New Left began to celebrate Mariátegui as an innovator of Marxism; but the point here is to explore and amend the ways in which this revisionist tendency since the 1960s has overextended. Rather than revert from the reading of Mariátegui as heterodox and innovative to an exclusive stress on orthodoxy and discipline, this article instead shows how orthodoxy and heterodoxy, intellectual discipline and autonomy, were combined by Mariátegui. This combination is key to a

⁷Bergel, “Mariátegui and the Russian Revolution”; Drinot, “Global Mariátegui.”

⁸On the unity of theory and practice see especially Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976) (London, 1979).

⁹Further examples of the thematic prevalence of “heterodoxy” in contemporary scholarship about Mariátegui include Curtis Kline, “The Open Marxism of José Carlos Mariátegui,” *Latin American Perspectives* 49/4 (2022), 94–109; Paula Jimena Sosa, “Mariátegui y su tiempo: La propuesta antropológica de un marxista heterodoxo,” *Revista internacional de pensamiento político* 13 (2018), 307–22; David Cardozo Santiago, “Como evangelio y método de movimiento de masas: Las raíces del marxismo ‘heterodoxo’ de Mariátegui,” *Anales del seminario de historia de la filosofía* 41/2 (2024), 345–53.

¹⁰Drinot, “Global Mariátegui,” 333.

historical understanding of his creativity within Marxism, and its (often self-conscious) limits.

As for the key terms used here, including “intellectual discipline,” “orthodoxy,” “heterodoxy,” and “dogma,” a priori definition carries analytical risk. The article is as much about analyzing how these categories were used in Mariátegui’s own writing. That being said, it is quickly apparent that his ideal of intellectual discipline had both a “bottom-up” and a “top-down” dimension. In the former sense, Mariátegui could imagine good, materialist social theory resulting “organically” from the situation of theoretical activity within the organized proletariat, without a need for the top-down setting of “party lines.” In the latter sense, Mariátegui frequently called for theorizing to be done within the framework of a disciplined socialist political organization—a framework which necessarily infringed upon the ideal of the total individual autonomy of intellectual activity through the imposition of political duty. These were the coordinates of Mariátegui’s unity of theory and practice, a concept which he expressed with various formulae of his own, such as the theological description of revolutionary Marxism, developed in a review of Unamuno’s *Agony of Christianity*, as a combination of “spirit and word” as opposed to being a hermeneutical “tyranny of the letter.”¹¹

Mariátegui also recognized the potential for generative intellectual *disciplina* to decay into stagnant *dogma*, typically due to an excess of top-down political direction. This concern becomes evident in his writing during the late 1920s, amid the advance of Stalinism in the world communist movement. Mariátegui used the term *dogma* as a negative antinomy for the term *doctrina*,¹² by which he meant the model form of political theorizing and practice, reasoned and justified by a coherent method responsive to the world-historical moment: that is, in the 1920s, Marxism. Whereas Mariátegui often used the term *disciplina* itself positively, *doctrina* best captured the concept and ideal of intellectual discipline in his lexicon. As for *ortodoxia*, Mariátegui’s meaning was ambivalent: it was not synonymous with *dogma* and it could be given a positive value, depending on whose orthodoxy. In the case of a historically declining class such as the capitalist bourgeoisie, “orthodoxy”—laissez-faire political economy and liberal parliamentarism—was a negative, contrasted to the “heterodox” reformism of post-World War I theorists such as Francesco Nitti and John Maynard Keynes.¹³ Whereas in the case of the historically ascendant proletariat, Mariátegui interpreted its “orthodoxy” of socialist world revolution as a positive value to be defended.¹⁴ This absence of a consistent normative binary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Mariátegui’s rhetoric reflects his effort to transcend such a framing in his political theory and practice, as will now be seen.

¹¹José Carlos Mariátegui, “La agonía del cristianismo de Don Miguel de Unamuno,” *Variedades* (Lima), 2 Jan. 1926, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 329–332: 331.

¹²Although he occasionally employed “dogma” as a neutral synonym for “doctrine” too.

¹³José Carlos Mariátegui, “El crepúsculo de una civilización,” *Variedades* (Lima), 16 Dec. 1922, published some months later in *El Tiempo* (Lima), in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 177–81.

¹⁴José Carlos Mariátegui, “El exilio de Trotzky,” *Variedades* (Lima), 23 Feb. 1929, in *Archivo José Carlos Mariátegui*, at <https://archivo.mariategui.org/index.php/el-exilio-de-trotzky>.

The pre-1917 context: embracing Marxism as a modern orthodoxy

The Bolshevik Marxism that Mariátegui took up in postwar Europe put a high value on the political discipline of intellectual activity, especially in relation to party political organization.¹⁵ But Mariátegui was already primed to embrace a more regimented mode of political theory by his experience of Peruvian politics during the earlier 1910s. When he left for Europe, Mariátegui was fatigued by what he saw as the superficiality of an intra-elite party politics in Peru during the period now known as the 'Aristocratic Republic' (1899–1919), which had entered a moment of organic crisis by the late 1910s.¹⁶ Moreover, Mariátegui was also critical of the personalism that he identified with Peruvian and Latin American political culture more widely, articulated by the idea of *caudillismo* since independence, by which Mariátegui meant a politics of personal charisma (demagogy) and relations (clientelism), without theoretical rigor, principled motivation, or popular agency.¹⁷ Mariátegui would associate both of these political tendencies with the instrumentalization of political language, and a corresponding dearth of ideological rigor in Peruvian politics.

Mariátegui understood the marginalization of what he termed “doctrine”—understood as an internally coherent method for the analysis of social reality—in Peruvian politics as a lack of *modernity*, itself an ideal that was normatively central to Mariátegui's thought and which he conceptualized as determinately Western.¹⁸ Moreover, Mariátegui's need for a more modern and theoretically coherent politics in Peru was shared across the political spectrum, including outside Mariátegui's vanguardist intellectual milieu. For example, the social Catholic intellectual Víctor Andrés Belaunde (1883–1966) similarly lamented the personalism of Peruvian politics during the 1910s and called for more intellectual content in visions of political order.¹⁹ But whereas Belaunde imagined the advent of modernity in Peru as the creation of a properly bourgeois republic, with effective state institutions and separation of powers, and ruled by an enlightened, nation-building middle class, Mariátegui saw it in Bolshevik socialism: radically different answers to the same (idea of a) peculiarly Peruvian question.

In his earliest writings on the Bolshevik Revolution, Mariátegui imagined this new form of socialism as being able to elevate Latin American politics from the level of personality to the higher level of doctrinal rigor based upon the social analysis of political realities. Thus Mariátegui commended early pro-Bolshevik “Maximalists” in Peru

¹⁵Anderson, *Considerations*; Michael David-Fox, “Communism and Intellectuals,” in Silvio Pons and Stephen Smith, eds., *The Cambridge History of Communism: World Revolution and Socialism in One Country 1917–1941*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2017), 526–50.

¹⁶Carlos Contreras and Marcos Cueto, *Historia del Perú contemporáneo: Desde las luchas por la independencia hasta el presente* (Lima, 2013), 205–39.

¹⁷Pedro Castro, “‘Caudillismo’ in Latin America, Yesterday and Today,” *Política y cultura* 27 (2007), 9–30; Natalia Sobrevilla Perea, “Caudillismo in the Age of Guano: A Study in the Political Culture of Mid-Nineteenth Century Perú, 1840–1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, London, 2005).

¹⁸Nicola Miller, *Reinventing Modernity in Latin America: Intellectuals Imagine the Future, 1900–1930* (Basingstoke, 2008), 143–86.

¹⁹Osmar Gonzales Alvarado, “Víctor Andrés Belaunde y el pensamiento socialcristiano,” *Revista de sociología* 27 (2018), 209–38.

for their unconcern about the traditionally defining questions of Peruvian politics to do with the old party system, as compared to social claims and international issues.²⁰ Mariátegui saw Bolshevik praxis as the means for Peru to escape the superficiality and parochialism of a premodern political regime. Indeed, from the outset, Mariátegui identified socialism with modernity in the wake of 1917. As he asserted in April 1918, “every modern man is a socialist!”²¹

Mariátegui’s embrace of Bolshevism as a means to deepen Peruvian politics was further developed through his critique of the new presidency of Augusto Leguía (1863–1932) that emerged in 1919 (a critique that quickly led to Mariátegui’s exile to Europe). Leguía came to power in July 1919 as an outwardly revolutionary candidate in the context of a wave of worker and student protest amid postwar inflation.²² Briefly, Mariátegui, alongside other left intellectuals in Peru, imagined Leguía as a vehicle for social revolution and the overthrow of the established political elite.²³ However, in response to Leguía’s appointment of *ancien régime* figures to his cabinet, Mariátegui began to denounce the new government from a socialist standpoint as lacking any coherent program, failing to satisfy the popular demand for a social—not merely political—transformation, and thus regressing to the political habit of vacuous clientelism. Mariátegui argued that the heterogeneity of Leguía’s cabinet, combining a minority of social reformers with a majority of status quo politicians, was evidence that the new regime was not “spiritually cohesive and defined,” and that therefore it lacked a “*modern physiognomy*.”²⁴ Incoherence of ideals—of “spirit”—was the sign that Leguía’s revolution did not represent the much-needed modernizing project for Peru and, therefore, did not represent a genuine revolution.

In Mariátegui’s sharpest critique of Leguía for squandering the potential of 1919—censored before publication—Mariátegui began to elaborate the importance of a unity between theory and practice for structuring revolutionary activity even before his detailed engagement with Marxism in Europe. Mariátegui argued that substantively transformative governments are sustained by the “calid and *doctrinaire* conviction of the collective masses,” as distinct from a single, spontaneous origin, whereas Leguía neglected popular opinion.²⁵ Thus Mariátegui connected the positive value of “*doctrinaire*” rigor to embedment in collective, mass politics. Mariátegui then continued that, if Leguía had actually intended to lead a transformative government, he would have formed a “strong and *disciplined* nucleus” of cadres, united by “doctrine” and a unanimous ideal, in contrast to the mixed and primarily traditional cabinet he had

²⁰José Carlos Mariátegui, “El maximalismo cunde,” *El Tiempo* (Lima), 12 Jan. 1919, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 116–18.

²¹José Carlos Mariátegui, “Bolchevikis, aquí,” *El Tiempo* (Lima), 9 April 1918, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 95–7, at 97.

²²On the period of Leguía’s second presidency, the self-described “Patria Nueva”: Paulo Drinot, ed., *La Patria Nueva: economía, sociedad y cultura en el Perú, 1919–1930* (Chapel Hill, 2018).

²³José Carlos Mariátegui, “Después de la Revolución,” *La Razón* (Lima), 7 July 1919, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 129–32.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 130–31; here and below, emphasis is added unless otherwise stated.

²⁵José Carlos Mariátegui, “La Patria Nueva: Un personal senil y claudicante,” *La Razón* (Lima), suppressed by the censor, 3 Aug. 1919, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 136–8, at 136–7.

now appointed.²⁶ Again, the concept of “doctrine” was providing the coherence and “discipline” necessary for a revolutionary project.

In the censored 1919 article, Mariátegui asked the rhetorical question, key for his concept of revolution, “Can a ... *modern* government be made with these men [Leguía’s cabinet]?” He answered in the negative because, even disregarding the reactionary appointments, Leguía himself did not represent a “doctrinaire” current of opinion but only a personalized political force.²⁷ Thus the idea of a modern politics, regimented and empowered by ideologically coherent “doctrine(s),” was already being defined by Mariátegui against the characteristic personalism of premodern, postcolonial Peru and Latin America; the real revolution would be a “*modern* and elevated struggle” and a “great controversy of *ideas and doctrines*.”²⁸

Thus, whereas many other intellectuals in the (semi)colonial world who embraced Marxism–Leninism after 1917 did so, at least at first, for its strident anti-imperialism, Mariátegui, while by no means uninterested in the Bolsheviks’ critique of empire, was most attracted to the new doctrine as a vehicle of modernization in the *postcolonial* context of early twentieth-century Latin America, and specifically “modernization” in the sense of a new, more meaningful politics defined by both political commitment and intellectual discipline.²⁹ Whereas the Bolshevik Revolution gained uptake in Asia and Africa as a resource for contesting continued and direct imperial domination by the capitalist powers, it made headway in South America as a means to overcome the social and political challenges of postcolonial existence during the long nineteenth century.

Mariátegui’s critique of intellectual indiscipline

The problems of intellectualism under modern capitalism

During Mariátegui’s exile in Europe between 1919 and 1923, he developed a clearer understanding of the international communist movement, and a greater political commitment to it. He also gained a more detailed knowledge of Marxism–Leninism and its underlying theoretical principles of historical materialism. This Marxist political education shaped Mariátegui’s critique of politically uncommitted intellectualism after he returned to Peru. Another contributing factor was the evident failure of Mariátegui’s initial, speculative hope before 1919 that socialism might be popularized in Peruvian society on a cross-class basis, aided by a national cultural elite, by the force of its rationality alone—as a process of enlightenment rather than class struggle.³⁰ Yet by 1923 anti-Bolshevism was growing—not diminishing—in Peru and Latin America, including through the intellectual activity of the *buena gente criolla* that Mariátegui had

²⁶Ibid., 136.

²⁷Ibid., 138.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹On early communism and anti-imperialism in the colonial world see Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, “Communism and the Crisis of the Colonial System,” in Pons and Smith, *The Cambridge History of Communism*, 1: 212–31; Manu Goswami, “A Communism of Intelligence: Early Communism in Late Imperial India,” *Diacritics* 48/2 (2020), 90–109.

³⁰José Carlos Mariátegui, “Bolchevikis, aqui,” *El Tiempo* (Lima), 9 April 1918, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 95–7.

expected to convert to socialism as a result of rational persuasion after 1917. Thus the force of ideas alone no longer appeared sufficient to globalize Marxism, and to explain this fact Mariátegui turned to problems with the (bourgeois) intellectual condition itself.

During the 1920s, Mariátegui elaborated a comprehensive critique of the figure of the intellectual in isolation from the labor movement. In the first instance, Mariátegui criticized the tendency of intellectuals to refuse the disciplinary and organizational imperatives of political commitment, even when they were formally progressive in their discourse and aesthetic. Thus Mariátegui identified the intellectual condition per se with an unrevolutionary antipolitics. In a 1924 article, he argued that “intellectuals are generally averse to discipline, programs, and systems. Their psychology is individualistic and their thought is heterodox. Above all, their sense of individuality is excessive and overwhelming. The intellectual’s individuality is almost always felt as being above the common rules. Lastly, a disdain for politics is frequent among intellectuals.”³¹ Mariátegui was criticizing the intellectual tendency to “heterodoxy” as such for creating an incapacity for the political commitment necessary to revolutionary action. And Mariátegui explained this tendency in terms of the individualist psychological condition of the intellectual, itself materially conditioned by the isolation of the intellectual from mass politics—from a unity between theory and practice. In the same text, where Mariátegui was praising Henri Barbusse (1873–1935) and his *Clarté* circle in France as a model of revolutionary intellectual activity for the post-1917 world, Mariátegui contrasted the individualist, heterodox intellectual with the qualitatively distinct figure of a revolutionary one, in terms of the latter’s self-subordination to a mass movement: “The revolution is a political work. It is a concrete realization. Removed from the masses that make it, no one can serve it efficaciously and validly. Revolutionary labor cannot be isolated, individual, disparate. The intellectuals of true revolutionary affiliation have no other remedy than to accept a position in a collective action.”³²

Insofar as Mariátegui was willing to concede that, historically at least, the intellectualist critique of politics as reducible to passive bureaucracy and individual self-interest was valid, he insisted that in revolutionary historical conjunctures, such as the present one opened by the Russian Revolution, such a cynical attitude towards politics ceased to apply. Mariátegui argued that in such conjunctures the political “transcends the vulgar and it invades and dominates all the arenas of human life ... no liberated spirit, no sensitive mind, can be indifferent to such a conflict.”³³ Thus, under revolutionary conditions, the antipolitics inherent to intellectualism becomes factually inaccurate and normatively sterile, even reactionary.

Indeed, on the topic of Italian Futurism and its alignment with fascist anticommunism during the 1920s, Mariátegui argued that the incapacity of intellectuals qua intellectuals to subordinate the sphere of intellectual activity to political organization was a pathway to fascism via the aestheticization of politics. In a 1930 essay contrasting

³¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “*Clarté* y la internacional del pensamiento,” *Variedades* (Lima), 5 April 1924, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 236–40, at 238.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 238–9.

the Futurists' reactionary turn with the enduring revolutionary vocation of French surrealism, Mariátegui argued that the Futurists had unleashed upon politics the anarchic, absolute subjectivity proper only to art, thereby exposing that milieu to co-optation by fascism. Instead, aesthetic experimentation ought to be separate from and subordinate to revolutionary organization rooted in Marxist political theory, judgment and action; as a basis for politics, the aesthetic tended to the spectacular, experimental, and theoretically disordered form represented by fascist reaction.³⁴

Mariátegui also developed an argument that the intellectual condition contained a direct tendency to political conservatism via antipolitics: "Behind an apparent aesthetic repugnance for politics, dissimulated and hidden, sometimes there is a vulgarly conservative sentiment. The writer and artist do not like to confess openly and explicitly to being reactionaries. But there has always been a certain intellectual modesty to show solidarity with the old and obsolete."³⁵ In this view, the antipolitics of the intellectual was merely performative, intended to conceal a substantively conservative political consciousness that was uncouth yet practically widespread in the context of avant-garde artistic milieux.

Mariátegui attributed this underlying "conservative sentiment" of intellectuals to two causes. First, the typically petit bourgeois material position of the intellectual in Europe and the Americas, as a member of the middle classes:

The intellectual, like any idiot, is subject to the influence of his environment, education, and interests. His intelligence does not function freely. He has a natural inclination to accommodate himself to the most convenient ideas, not the most just. The reaction of an intellectual, in a word, is born from the same motives and roots as the reaction of a shopkeeper. The language is different, but the mechanism of the attitude is identical.³⁶

Through the lens of historical materialism, Mariátegui deconstructed the (related) idealist presuppositions that theoretical activity can transcend its material conditions and that the culturally recognized "intellectual" has a qualitatively different, socially unmediated relation to thinking compared to the "nonintellectual." In doing so, Mariátegui could argue that the petit bourgeois social position of most intellectuals engendered political reaction in the same way as it did for the wider social base of contemporary right-wing authoritarianism and fascism. Thus, like Antonio Gramsci in the same conjuncture, Mariátegui problematized the conventional distinction between the intellectual and the nonintellectual.

The second cause of intellectual reaction for Mariátegui was the fact that, outside a unity between theory and practice within the organized labor movement, the isolated intellectual became exposed to the patronizing and clientelist power of capital. Mariátegui argued in 1925 that "today's artist is a courtesan of the bourgeoisie, but

³⁴José Carlos Mariátegui, "El balance del suprarrealismo," *Varietades* (Lima), 19 Feb. 1930, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 558–61; Martín Bergel, "José Carlos Mariátegui and Fascism," *Revista Maracanan* 32 (2023), 274–94.

³⁵Mariátegui, "Clarté y la internacional del pensamiento," 239.

³⁶*Ibid.*

yesterday's artist was a courtesan of the aristocracy ... one servitude is as valid as the other."³⁷ The modern artist did tend to resent the commodification of his "genius" under capitalism: "The painter, the sculptor, the writer are not the most active or apparent of the capitalist order's discontents. But they are intrinsically the harshest and most inflamed."³⁸ However, when situated outside the proletarian movement and its future-oriented project of overcoming capitalism by a modernizing, socialist revolution, the artistic resentment of capitalist commodification tended to manifest as a reactionary romanticism, especially in the aesthetic form of neo-feudal nostalgia, in which the medieval is understood as a higher, aesthetic epoch counterposed to bourgeois materialism.³⁹ And for Mariátegui this neo-medievalist romanticism also contained fascistic potential in the postwar conjuncture, distinct from the futurist discourse of Italian fascism yet also proceeding through the aestheticization of politics.⁴⁰

Thus, after 1917, Mariátegui was a consistent critic of the intellectual condition under capitalism; he identified it as a source of political reaction, especially due to its heterodox tendency. Moreover, Mariátegui's critique of intellectualism was not *sui generis* but endemic to interwar Marxism. A critique of the intellectual condition was a central theme of Gramsci's work in the context of early Italian communism—the same context which had been so formative for Mariátegui's own Marxism (Mariátegui spent most of his European exile in central and northern Italy, where he networked with the early communist milieu in the country).⁴¹ And Henri Barbusse, whom Mariátegui met while in Paris and continued to engage with thenceforth, also elaborated a Marxist critique of the postwar French intelligentsia during the 1920s; a critique that had a direct influence on Mariátegui's own thinking about the unity of theory and practice.⁴²

Marxist critiques of intellectualism were being elaborated by others in the context of early Latin American communism, too. The Cuban Julio Antonio Mella (1903–29) was important here. Both Mella and Mariátegui were involved in the same transnational networks during the 1920s, including the Comintern and its ancillaries.⁴³ Mella was trying to build a communist movement in Cuba in the same transnational

³⁷José Carlos Mariátegui, "El artista y la época," *Mundial*, 14 Oct. 1925, in Mariátegui, *Textos básicos*, 385–8, at 388.

³⁸Mariátegui, "Clarté," 239.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Mariátegui's example of this current was the French monarchist party, Action française, under Charles Maurras. Mariátegui's Marxist contemporary, Walter Benjamin, also explored this theme of the artist under capitalism: Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

⁴¹Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London, 1988), 300–22. Gramsci's critique of intellectuals was, like Mariátegui's, in the sense of professionalised, "traditional" intellectuals, isolated from and averse to mass politics, and therefore having a conservative tendency. His positive counterconcept of "organic intellectuals," embedded in class politics and based on the premise that "all men are intellectuals"—that theoretical activity is not an exclusive specialization—resembles Mariátegui's positive model for political and social theory, as will be seen.

⁴²Mariátegui, "Clarté."

⁴³Julio César Guanche, "¿Por qué leer a Julio Antonio Mella? (A manera de introducción)," in Julio Antonio Mella, *Textos escogidos*, vol. 1, ed. Julio César Guanche (Havana, 2017), 13–32.

context of student radicalism where Mariátegui was doing the same thing, at the same time, in Peru. This transnational student activism had been motivated by the university reform movement which had become Latin America-wide since it emerged in Argentina in 1918 and, as a shared context for promoting Bolshevik-aligned Marxism in the region, it engendered certain conceptual similarities in Mella and Mariátegui's thought.⁴⁴ In particular, their similar critique of intellectualism was in part a response to emergent forms of left anticommunism within the transnational student milieu in Latin America, especially once it became articulated by the Latin America-wide (yet Peru-centric) APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) under the bourgeois student leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre (1895–1979) from the mid-1920s; both Mella and Mariátegui polemicized with Haya, including on the theme of intellectualism.⁴⁵ Mariátegui and Mella's Marxist critiques of the intellectual make sense together, in the regional context of interwar student radicalism, as an effort to move away from the figure of the university student intellectual, and the age-based category of 'youth' more widely, as the imagined agent of revolutionary change in modern Latin America, and towards that of the global proletariat.⁴⁶

Aprismo as intellectual indiscipline in Latin America

Mariátegui developed a critique of specifically *Latin American* intellectualism during the 1920s in the context of his debate with Haya, after the open split between Peruvian communists and Haya's faction of *apristas* in 1928. Having collaborated as a united front since 1923, the two currents diverged over Haya's effort to transform APRA into a homogeneous political party and his increasingly critical stance towards Bolshevik Marxism in Latin America as a "European" ideology. Mariátegui's consequent polemic against *aprimo*—through which he intended to delegitimize Haya and maintain the loyalty of as much of the Peruvian left as possible—distilled his critique of intellectual indiscipline as a cause of disorganization and, thus, debilitation for social revolution in interwar Latin America. Specifically, Mariátegui critiqued Haya's new departure as a retrogression from political modernity to premodern *caudillismo*.

In a December 1928 letter to Eudocio Ravines (1897–1979), then a Peruvian comrade studying in Paris, Mariátegui justified the creation of a distinct communist party in Peru—the Peruvian Socialist Party (PSP)—as a response to the schism with APRA.⁴⁷ In doing so, Mariátegui attributed Haya's abandonment of "the theory and practice of socialism" to the persistent "demon of caudillismo and personalism" in Peruvian political culture.⁴⁸ Mariátegui likened Haya's new anticommunist *aprimo* to

⁴⁴Pablo Buchbinder, "La Reforma y su impacto en América Latina: Aportes para la actualización y revision del problema," *Revista de la Red Intercatedras de historia de América Latina contemporánea* 9 (2018), 1–18.

⁴⁵Julio Antonio Mella, *¿Qué es el ARPA? La lucha revolucionaria contra el imperialismo (El primer documento político sobre el aprismo)* (1928) (Lima, 1975), 9–78.

⁴⁶Mariátegui and Mella were responding to a distinctly *arielist* concept of *juventud* in Latin America with explicitly aristocratic overtones, inspired by the work of José Enrique Rodó at the turn of the century, not the later Cold War-era idea of student youth as an agent of Third World revolution.

⁴⁷José Carlos Mariátegui, "Principios programáticos del Partido Socialista," Oct. 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 464–7.

⁴⁸José Carlos Mariátegui to Eudocio Ravines, 31 Dec. 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 482–5.

the proto-populist formations of Arturo Alessandri in Chile and Hipólito Yrigoyen in Argentina.⁴⁹ And whereas Mariátegui conceded that such *caudillismo* could still, in certain cases, be a useful instrument for revolutionary strategy in Latin America, this was only on the condition that it was subordinated to a “doctrine, to a group”⁵⁰—that is, to the disciplinary effect of Marxist doctrinal rigor elaborated within the social context and fecund limits of the labor movement. Instead of this arrangement, however, Haya was acting independently of the Peruvian working classes—of any working class—from his position in exile activist circles during the late 1920s, therefore his ideological activity had lost any doctrinal order and it had reverted to the purely instrumental, “demagogic” rhetoric that Mariátegui attributed to the premodern morass of postcolonial politics in Latin America. Mariátegui argued that

language does not matter to Haya; to me it does, and not due to literary preoccupations but ideological and moral ones. If we do not distinguish ourselves from the past in political language, at least, I fear that, in the end, due to the same reasons of adaptation and mimicry, we will end up being different only in terms of individuals and personalities.⁵¹

At the same time as his letter to Ravines, Mariátegui had a terser correspondence with the APRA cell in Mexico City, which he judged to have already aligned with Haya in the emerging split. In this text, Mariátegui assimilated the argument that *aprimo* represented a recrudescence of the pre-socialist and (therefore) premodern “Creole demagogy” of Latin American radicalism—“the old politics”—to a critique of *aprimo* as entailing a comparatively modern, fascist politics, precisely due to its intellectual indiscipline. Mariátegui condemned Haya for his pure instrumentalization of rhetoric by arguing that the political communication strategy of the left in Latin America since the early 1920s had been defined by its basis in social truth; that is, sober analysis of material reality as the principle of revolutionary practical and theoretical activity, including political propaganda.⁵² Now, however, Haya had deviated from this method by pursuing propaganda as the ends rather than just the means of political action. In Mariátegui’s analysis, this move opened the way to a Latin American fascism through a process analogical to the subjectification and aestheticization of politics in contemporary Italy.⁵³

To substantiate the claim that Haya’s new iteration of *aprimo* represented an incipient fascism emerging from within the Latin American left, Mariátegui pointed to the fact that a dominant current of Italian fascism had a similar trajectory: “who were the fascists at the beginning? Almost all of them emerged from the revolutionary milieu.”⁵⁴ In Mariátegui’s analysis, the defection of revolutionary socialists to fascism took place through a performative radicalism, whereby individuals restyled themselves as more

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 483.

⁵¹Ibid., 483–4.

⁵²José Carlos Mariátegui to the APRA cell in Mexico, 16 April 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 429–32.

⁵³Ibid., 430.

⁵⁴Ibid., 431.

radical than communism through an attack on “revolutionary bureaucracy” (valued positively by Mariátegui) leading to the destruction of worker organization; that is, the necessary condition of socialist revolution: “The tactics [of ultra-leftism in Italy] demanded that they attack the revolutionary bureaucracy, to break with the Socialist Party, to destroy the workers’ organizations. For this enterprise, the bourgeoisie supplied them with men, vehicles, arms, and money. Socialism and the proletariat, despite all of its bureaucratic ballast, were the revolution. Fascism, in effect, had a reactionary function.”⁵⁵ Thus Mariátegui assembled the different practical and discursive threads of fascist reaction in his forecast of *aprimo* under Haya, and attributed them to indiscipline: he counterposed a wanton and purely discursive ultra-leftism to a positively valued ideal of *bureaucracy*, understood as the practical and disciplined institutions of worker organization which concretized the revolutionary unity of theory and practice; and Mariátegui also indicated that this inversive tendency within the left, as in Italy, was instigated or else exploitable by the forces of capital, reflected by Haya’s enthusiasm for collaboration with a “national bourgeoisie” against US imperialism.⁵⁶ Moreover, in light of Mariátegui’s embrace of “bureaucracy” as a necessary check on ideological innovation, the conventional emphasis upon his heterodoxy—especially vis-à-vis the contemporary institutions of world communism, which Mariátegui identified closely with the categories of “revolutionary bureaucracy” and “worker organization”—ought to be questioned.

Indeed, even in the case of actors towards whom Mariátegui was far more favorable than he was towards Haya or the Italian fascists, he was unforgiving about kneejerk critiques of bureaucracy. Thus, in his final essay on the Romanian socialist Panait Istrati (1884–1935), Mariátegui attributed Istrati’s recent anti-Stalinist turn to having “a psychology of ‘revolt’ ... not of a revolutionary in the ideological and political sense of the term.” And whereas this psychology of “revolt” could be artistically generative for skilled writers, it was “essentially negative when it comes to political work. The true revolutionary is, although it seems paradoxical to some, a man of order,” such as Lenin.⁵⁷ By contrast, Istrati’s “impatient and impassioned temperament” led him to reject “the more prosaic and inferior aspects of the construction of socialism,” including the necessary role of bureaucracy.⁵⁸ Thus Mariátegui explained the anti-Stalinism of an admired socialist intellectual in strikingly similar (and pathologizing) terms as his explanations of Mussolini and, thence, of Haya de la Torre. Without adequate political discipline, including the acceptance of “revolutionary bureaucracy,” the affect and aesthetic of rebellion on the contemporary left carried the risk of what Mariátegui saw as political backsliding, deviation, or outright reaction.

Mariátegui thus interpreted *aprimo* as a nascently fascist form of politics, attributable to the subjective indiscipline of revolutionary actors. This indiscipline was both rooted in and causal to the breakdown of a unity of theory and practice between

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mariátegui to Ravines, 31 Dec. 1928. Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, *El antiimperialismo y el Apra* (1928), coord. Jessica Andrade (Lima, 2010).

⁵⁷ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Tres libros de Panait Istrati sobre la U.R.S.S.,” *Variedades* (Lima), 12 March 1930, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 566–9, at 568.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

radical intellectuals and the working classes. *Aprismo* was also a distinctly “tropical” form of reaction for Mariátegui, insofar as it regressed to specifically Latin American traditions of personalist and demagogic political activity. Moreover, both of these modalities of *aprismo* identified by Mariátegui—as a local iteration of anticommunism within the global reaction against 1917, and as a specifically regional regression within the Latin American left to *caudillismo* and pre-/non-materialist politics—conspired to create a *sui generis* form of (semi)colonial fascism from within the anti-imperialist moment in early twentieth-century Latin America, encased by an empty rhetoric of indigeneity and anti-Europeanism.

Lastly, analyzing Mariátegui’s polemic against *aprismo* as being primarily a critique of intellectual indiscipline also involves upturning the prevalent convention about his association with exile. Whereas Mariátegui has been (justifiably) read as an exilic political thinker, due to his formative experiences of Western Europe from 1919 to 1923, his critique of *aprismo* after 1928 articulated concerns about the effect of (certain) diasporic conditions upon the development of Latin American revolutionary thought.⁵⁹ In a September 1929 letter to Esteban Pavletich (1906–81), a Peruvian Croatian comrade then living in Paris, Mariátegui argued that the material reality of exile and diaspora had been a condition of the reactionary emergence of *aprismo* from the Latin American left.⁶⁰

Haya had been exiled from Leguía’s Peru since 1923, travelling North America and Europe. He had founded APRA in México, and early *apristas* were concentrated among the Peruvian diaspora in Western Europe.⁶¹ In Mariátegui’s 1929 letter, where he urged Pavletich, as a former secretary of the APRA cell in México City, to push that group away from its new anticommunist line, Mariátegui surveyed Haya’s reactionary turn. He argued that “Haya has situated himself in a terrain of petit bourgeois and opportunist caudillismo.”⁶² Moreover, Mariátegui attributed this reorientation to the exilic conditions of Haya’s development since 1923. He argued that, abroad, Peruvian revolutionaries who do not follow a “severe discipline of studies are decoupled from our working class,” and as a result they become unfamiliar with the actual problems of the Peruvian workers unless they fully incorporate themselves to the proletarian movements of the foreign country where they reside. Thus, under the conditions of exile, it required a higher-level political commitment for intellectuals to maintain their revolutionary quality, whereas in Peru “they would maintain contact with our masses and our problems” more easily.⁶³

We can therefore discern the principal conditions of intellectual discipline for Mariátegui in his polemic against Haya as (1) the erudite and stoic traits of theoretical education in Marxist historical materialism and self-disciplined adherence to its

⁵⁹The Bergel reading especially emphasizes the exilic factor in Mariátegui’s intellectual formation.

⁶⁰José Carlos Mariátegui to Esteban Pavletich, 25 Sept. 1929, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 529–32.

⁶¹Genevieve Dorais, “Coming of Age in Exile: Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre and the Genesis of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, 1923–1931,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97/4 (2017), 651–79; Michael Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁶²Mariátegui to Pavletich, 25 Sept. 1929, 530.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 531.

analytical principles, and (2) a unity of theory and practice with the working class. The former could sustain Marxist rigor outside a unity between theory and practice only in the case of an exceptionally virtuous and temperate individual (the antithesis of Haya de la Torre, in Mariátegui's view); thus it was not a solid basis for organizing a disciplined movement. Moreover, both of these conditions were more difficult to sustain in exile, especially outside the structures of the Communist International.

Mariátegui's substantive critique of diasporic theoretical activity is remarkable because of how he has become—and was self-consciously—associated with exile himself. During the 1920s, nationalist criticism of Mariátegui's Marxism in Peru connected his exile in Europe with a negatively valued "Europeanism." Moreover, in direct response to this critique, Mariátegui doubled down on his experience of migration and diaspora in Europe, arguing that it had been a precious inflection point in his own political development towards a cosmopolitan Marxism that was the only contemporary framework in which the peculiar social needs of Peru and Latin America were intelligible in relation to their determinate global context of capitalist crisis.

Thus, in a December 1925 essay on "nationalism and vanguardism" in Peruvian literature, where Mariátegui defended the poet and future communist César Vallejo (1892–1938), who was then exiled in Paris, he argued that Vallejo's indigenous themes were another "proof that, by these cosmopolitan and ecumenical journeys for which we are so reproached, we are growing ever closer to ourselves."⁶⁴ The collective "we" here was precisely the revolutionary milieu of Peruvians defined by their "cosmopolitan" formation by (European) exile during the 1920s. In the same way, in a 1929 essay reviewing another Peruvian communist exile and writer, César Falcón (1892–1970), Mariátegui recalled that he had crossed paths with Falcón during his own time in Europe, and argued that, for both of them, "the journey through Europe had been the best, and most tremendous, *discovery of America*."⁶⁵ Specifically, European exile had immunized both of them against the "super-Americanism" since pursued by *aprismo*, which went to excess in its rejection of a putatively "decadent" Europe, and it enabled them to instead make a "strict valuation of our [Latin America's] possibilities," including the denunciation of Latin American social defects and the acquisition of the enduring and new virtues of European civilization; Mariátegui also praised Falcón's self-mastery and self-discipline, specifically, as a Latin American intellectual in the diaspora.⁶⁶

Thus, throughout the 1920s, Mariátegui maintained that exile could nourish rather than derail the intellectual development of Latin American revolutionaries, by deprovincializing their political outlook. Moreover, this is a historically valid thesis. Michael Goebel has shown that, for Latin Americans in Paris during the interwar period, including several members of Mariátegui's network, imperial Europe was a space in which they could pioneer "South–South" connections with anti-imperialist

⁶⁴José Carlos Mariátegui, "Nacionalismo y vanguardismo en la literatura y en el arte," *Mundial*, 4 Dec. 1925, 4, in *Archivo José Carlos Mariátegui*, at <https://archivo.mariategui.org/index.php/nacionalismo-y-vanguardismo-en-la-literatura-y-en-el-arte>.

⁶⁵José Carlos Mariátegui, "El pueblo sin dios por César Falcón," *Mundial* (Lima), 8 Feb. 1929, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 485–8, at 485.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

activists from Africa and Asia as well as with the world communist movement. In the context of these organizational and social practices of exile and migration in Europe, more cosmopolitan and less exclusively hemispheric articulations of colonial liberation were produced.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Mariátegui's late 1920s critique of the *aprista* mode of diaspora did not contradict these other, positive appraisals of exile as a social condition of revolutionary formation. This was because Mariátegui recognized a material distinction between types of (semi)colonial diaspora in the West. Through his polemic with *apristismo*, Mariátegui distinguished a deleterious mode of exile and diaspora that was distinct from and opposed to that which he had experienced himself between 1919 and 1923: a reactionary anti-model of diaspora as against a communist, enlightening model. Moreover, the key difference was—again—the disciplinary force of a unity between theory and practice.

Mariátegui's caveat in the Pavletich letter—that the disorienting effect of exile on Latin American intellectuals could be averted by embedding them in the local labor movement—was a significant one: that is precisely what Mariátegui did in Italy during the Biennio Rosso.⁶⁸ Thus the value of diaspora to Latin American revolutionary praxis was dependent upon its particular social conditions: migration and diaspora were enriching as long as they did not disrupt one's contact with the proletariat, understood as a global presence, by slipping into a socially isolated intellectualism. The backsliding of Haya was due to the fact that his experience and practice of exile were, in Mariátegui's view, concentrated in academic and otherwise overly theoretical settings, therefore, rather than functioning to globalize and modernize the Latin American understanding of imperialism, capitalism, and revolution, the *aprista* anti-model of exile diminished this understanding and functioned as a cause of intellectual disorientation and indiscipline.

By rereading Mariátegui's polemic against *apristismo* as a sustained critique of intellectual indiscipline, we uncover a far more ambiguous relationship between his theory, on the one hand, and the culture and practice of diaspora, on the other, than has been traditionally assumed, and we find new complexities within his theory of revolutionary cosmopolitanism in the interwar world.

Mariátegui's positive models of intellectual discipline

Mariátegui's discussions of intellectual discipline were not purely negative. Based on his critiques of intellectualism and drawing on models available in the context of the global left, Mariátegui also elaborated and enacted positive forms of disciplined Marxist activity during the 1920s. The common thread was an "organic" unity of theory and practice, but Mariátegui's ideal of a revolutionary intellectual was also complex and varied over time. He articulated this ideal in his own practice, but also through the construction of various ideal types, including Henri Barbusse's *Clarté* project and communist surrealism in France, as well as the political culture of the Russian Bolshevik Party, and, as Mariátegui grew concerned about the Comintern's direction of travel at the end of the

⁶⁷ Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis*.

⁶⁸ On the Biennio Rosso see Mark McNally, "Socialism and Democratic Strategy in Italy's *Biennio Rosso*: Gramsci contra Treves," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 22/3 (2017), 314–37.

1920s, he looked to figures outside Communist structures, including the Italian Piero Gobetti, to enquire how historical materialism could be sustained outside the formal organization of the Communist Party.

In practice: Mariátegui as a disciplined intellectual

Mariátegui consciously tried to embody his ideal of revolutionary intellectual discipline in his own activity. Even at the level of his quotidian work routine in Lima, Mariátegui applied the regimentation and orderliness that he idealized in European thinkers as an “austere” subjectivity, contrasted to a peculiarly “Creole” intemperance.⁶⁹ Politically, Mariátegui also elaborated his theoretical work in the midst of organized labor at the Peruvian, Latin American, and global levels. He was active in union politics and organizing in Lima, and it was in this context that he developed important ideas including his critique of left sectarianism and his related emphasis on the flexibility of Marxism as a method of analysis.⁷⁰ Moreover, as mentioned, Mariátegui also cofounded a Peruvian communist party in 1928 amid the schism with Haya, and he served as its first general secretary. Again, Mariátegui articulated significant theoretical interventions in this role, including through party documents and, as seen above, in his efforts to corral and organize comrades in the face of the *aprista* challenge.⁷¹ Mariátegui’s editorial work was also oriented towards the practical questions of party formation and worker organization.⁷²

Moreover, Mariátegui developed his theoretical activity—especially during the later 1920s—in the context of the internally pluralist yet politically disciplined institutions of international communism, which he understood as *the* framework of worker organization at the global level. Mariátegui attempted to connect the Peruvian communist movement to the Comintern as the latter’s infrastructure expanded in South America, and he articulated a number of key interventions regarding the Marxist theorization of indigeneity, racialization, the peasantry, imperialism, and the (semi)colonial bourgeoisie within and for Comintern forums, including the Constituent Congress of the Latin American Trade Union Conference and the first Latin American Communist Conference, both held in 1929. And in June of that year, Mariátegui was himself named to the General Council of the Comintern-aligned League against Imperialism, an organization that he championed in his writing. Mariátegui’s commitment to the Comintern’s organizational ecosystem involved the self-conscious moderation of his public writing, especially on themes to do with Soviet politics: for example, in his reserved response to the exile of Leon Trotsky (1879–1940).⁷³ For Mariátegui, a Peruvian distant even from the Atlantic focus of the Comintern within South America,

⁶⁹ Mariátegui to Ravines, 31 Dec. 1928, 472.

⁷⁰ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Mensaje al Congreso Obrero,” *Amauta* (Lima), Jan. 1927, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 368–73. On Peruvian labour in this period see Paulo Drinot, *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race, and the Making of the Peruvian State* (Durham, NC, 2011).

⁷¹ E.g. Mariátegui, “Principios Programáticos.”

⁷² García-Liendo, “Networking.”

⁷³ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Trotsky y la oposición comunista,” *Variedades* (Lima), 25 Feb. 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 422–6.

this self-moderation was based on the voluntary belief that the Soviet state of the 1920s embodied the locus and vanguard of socialist world revolution. In this view, political commitment to the latter ideal entailed public discipline and restraint when it came to the former state actor.

It is evident from Mariátegui's relationship with the Comintern that, as a space for theoretical activity during the 1920s, the organization represented a generative middle ground between ideological discipline and innovation in South America. In this context, communist skepticism towards heterodoxy was not (yet) reducible to intellectual unfreedom within and around the Third International. Rather, as has been shown by diverse scholars, the early Comintern formed an unprecedented type of context for political thought insofar as it facilitated the comingling of (semi)colonial and Western revolutionaries for the discussion and critique of capitalist imperialism as a global system, and the imagining of a new, world-making project of the oppressed classes and nations of that system in its entirety.⁷⁴ Latin American participation in the League against Imperialism and in the Comintern infrastructure within South America itself during the 1920s was a decisive moment in the conceptual globalization of the approach to anti-imperialism and social revolution in the region, where it had hitherto been primarily hemispheric.⁷⁵ Moreover, whereas this unique climate of politically committed intellectual creativity in communist Latin America would diminish under the pressures of Stalinism during the 1930s, it did (just about) hold together for the duration of Mariátegui's life, justifying and manifesting that balance between discipline and heterodoxy in revolutionary political thought that he had always endorsed.

Henri Barbusse and Clarté

Henri Barbusse was an important influence on Mariátegui's critique of intellectualism. But Barbusse offered Mariátegui a positive model of intellectual activity too. Mariátegui interpreted Barbusse as a model communist intellectual for the post-1917 epoch, insofar as the Frenchman rooted his theoretical work about themes including internationalism and antimilitarism in his practical activity as a communist militant, such as his agitation among the French Army against the 1923 occupation of the Ruhr.⁷⁶ Mariátegui also interpreted Barbusse's publishing project, *Clarté*, as a model of revolutionary journalism, and it directly influenced the cosmopolitan scope and relative (but not open-ended) pluralism of Mariátegui's own publications, especially *Amauta*. Mariátegui idealized *Clarté* in 1924 as the attempted fusion of a left, antimilitarist "International of Thought," which had emerged from diverse progressive critiques of the Great War (including Barbusse's own work), with the Comintern. Mariátegui

⁷⁴Goswami, "A Communism of Intelligence"; Michele Louro, ed., *The League against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden, 2020).

⁷⁵Daniel Kerssfield, "Latinoamericanos en el Congreso Antiimperialista de 1927: Afinidades, disensos y rupturas," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 12/2 (2010), 151–63; Kerssfield, "El congreso de Frankfurt de 1929: La Liga contra el imperialismo frente a la estrategia del Tercer Período," *Izquierdas* 52 (2023), 4673–88; Anne Garland Mahler, "Against Latin American Regionalisms: The 1927 Brussels Congress and the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas," *Latin American Research Review* 59 (2024), 341–60.

⁷⁶Mariátegui, "*Clarté*," 238.

argued that *Clarté* had “led the International of Thought toward the path of the Communist International.”⁷⁷ Thus Mariátegui represented the *Clarté* “movement” as a sort of communist Republic of Letters crafted by Barbusse and his comrades in France from the transnational avant-garde of interwar Europe. He characterized it in glowing terms as “an effort of the intelligentsia to commit itself to the revolution and an effort of the revolution to win over the intelligentsia. Revolutionary ideas must dislodge conservative ideas not only from the institutions but also from the mentality and spirit of humanity.”⁷⁸ For Mariátegui, this fusion of the intelligentsia and the revolution by *Clarté* concretized the unity of theory and practice, creating the conditions for a mode of intellectual activity that could overcome the antipolitical aversion of intellectuals to “discipline, programs, and systems.” He argued that the *Clarté* movement thus demonstrated “how revolutionary action cannot be individual or solitary—it must be collective politics.”⁷⁹ Quoting Barbusse directly, Mariátegui argued that “to do politics is to pass from dreams to reality, from the abstract to the concrete. Politics is the real work of social thought; politics is life.”⁸⁰ Thus *Clarté* modelled a productive synthesis between communist political organization and intellectual activity, and it was only by that synthesis that the reactionary tendencies of modern culture could be restrained.

Moreover, while emphasizing the role of political commitment and discipline in Barbusse’s intellectual work, Mariátegui also commended how this model of communist journalism reconciled a significant openness towards non-Marxist currents of thought. In a later 1928 article, Mariátegui appraised Barbusse’s new journal, *Monde*, for how it included a range of noncommunist thinkers. But this was not an unlimited pluralism. Rather, it was restricted to thinkers of the broad left, such as the non-communist Albert Einstein (1879–1955), contrasted to the forces of “reaction.” The finite pluralism of *Monde* embodied Mariátegui’s own conviction that Marxism could cohabit and draw upon adjacent intellectual currents in philosophy and art, such as vitalism, Freudianism, and *indigenismo*, insofar as the latter could be made consonant with the analytical principles of historical materialism.⁸¹ Non-Marxist thought could enrich Marxism but only on these terms. Thus the disciplinary limits on plurality were as important as plurality itself for Mariátegui—which made left pluralism a delicate practice. Indeed, in 1928, Mariátegui concluded that Barbusse’s original project of a fusion between “the international of thought” and communist internationalism was actually chimerical, because “[t]he doctrinal line is a function of party. Intellectuals, insofar as they are intellectuals, cannot associate to establish it.”⁸² Thus the necessary,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 237–8.

⁷⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, “El grupo *Clarté*” (*La escena contemporánea*, 1925), in *Obras completas de José Carlos Mariátegui*, at www.marxists.org/espanol/mariategui/oc/la_escena_contemporanea/paginas/el%20grupo%20clarte.htm.

⁷⁹ Mariátegui, “*Clarté*,” 238.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸¹ E.g. José Carlos Mariátegui, “Freudismo y marxismo,” *Variedades* (Lima), 29 Dec. 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 478–81; Kline, “The Open Marxism of Mariátegui.”

⁸² José Carlos Mariátegui, “Prensa de doctrina y prensa de información,” *Labor* (Lima), 24 Nov. 1928, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 475–8, at 476.

disciplined work of communist praxis belonged to a distinct category of journalism—the “press of doctrine” as opposed to the “press of information” represented by *Monde*. A press of doctrine, embodied in communist party newspapers, involved a measure of doctrinal rigor and political commitment of which intellectuals qua intellectuals were incapable due to their aforementioned tendency to heterodoxy.⁸³ The value of the more plural “press of information,” as well as preserving a space for freer debate with the wider, more heterogeneous left, was instead to persuade people outside the communist movement to join it, whereas party papers lacked a sufficient readership to do so.⁸⁴ And yet Mariátegui’s new distinction between press of doctrine and press of information signified an acceptance that key areas of revolutionary theory and practice were not possible under conditions of excessive pluralism, even within the wider left.

Mariátegui’s ideal of Barbusse articulated an incomplete effort to reconcile the tensions between communist political commitment and intellectual pluralism, first through synthesis and then through a division of labor. Moreover, for Mariátegui, this ideal had as much to do with recognizing the limits of pluralism as a resource for social revolution as its opportunities. And this theme of Mariátegui’s thought can be—and has been—occluded by the conventional emphasis on his intellectual heterodoxy and autonomy, insofar as those categories have been juxtaposed with the practical imperatives of political commitment under early communism.

Surrealism

A second model of disciplined intellectual activity that Mariátegui drew from the post-war French left was surrealism.⁸⁵ Most associated with the communist André Breton, Mariátegui argued that surrealism was antithetical to Italian Futurism, rejecting the tendency of observers to conflate the two as similarly avant-garde forms of contemporary art. In Mariátegui’s mature account of these two artistic currents in 1930, he distinguished both from the rest of the European avant-garde by their political commitment as opposed to the merely formalist process of “affirming certain aesthetic postulates and experimenting with certain artistic principles.”⁸⁶ Moreover, Futurism was also different from other contemporary forms of right-wing art in its orientation to the future rather than a feudal past.

For Mariátegui, Futurism became subsumed by fascist counterrevolution whereas surrealism was committed to communist revolution for two reasons. First, Futurism was already part of the Italian academic establishment when the Fascists seized control of the state. By contrast, surrealism was a more socially “organic” form of “movement” art, counterposed by Mariátegui to the mere “technique” that obsessed artists qua artists; surrealism represented a form of aesthetic activity rooted in the popular, “organic” social contexts of the French labor movement.⁸⁷ For Mariátegui, surrealism

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Specifically during the late 1920s when the surrealists, especially Breton, had adopted Marxism.

⁸⁶ Mariátegui, “El balance del suprarrealismo,” 558–9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 559–60.

has a sense of political responsibility, of its civil duties, and it has affiliated to a party. And, on this plane, it has behaved in a very different way to futurism. Instead of launching a program of surrealist politics, it accepts and subscribes to that of the present, concrete revolution: the Marxist program of the proletarian revolution. It recognizes the unique validity of the Marxist movement on the social, political, and economic terrain.⁸⁸

Thus, whereas the Futurists were socially isolated within the Italian establishment and therefore exposed to co-optation by the new Fascist state, French surrealism had been made and kept faithful to communist politics because it was embedded in the working class; it was delimited and empowered by a unity between theory and practice.

Mariátegui's second reason for the divergent paths of surrealism and Futurism was, as mentioned above, that Futurism had set loose its aesthetic experimentation and "absurdity" upon the sphere of political action itself, which was a cultural practice constitutive of fascism. By contrast, "The surrealists only exercise their right to absurdity, to absolute subjectivism, in art. They carry themselves prudently in all other realms."⁸⁹ Also in 1930, contrasting surrealism to the "ultra-decadent aestheticism" of nihilist art as well as the political disengagement of literary "populism" in France, Mariátegui praised how surrealism, "accepting the validity of Marxism on the social and political plane, has made the most honorable effort to impose upon itself, against its centrifugal and anarchic impulse, a discipline in the struggle against the capitalist order."⁹⁰ Thus Mariátegui imagined surrealism as the positive model of how to elaborate theoretical and aesthetic activity to its most experimental, subjectivist, and heterodox degree without transgressing a broader, determinate framework of communist political organization and commitment. For Mariátegui, the clear delimitation of a "realm" for plurality in art—as in journalism—was integral to his overall understanding of the value of intellectual innovation per se; the demarcation of spaces for heterodoxy by the frameworks of Marxism and the world communist movement were two mutually constitutive poles of Mariátegui's thought. And the overemphasis of his heterodox departures within Marxism can miss this point: the immanent relationship between intellectual heterodoxy and political discipline in Mariátegui's work.

Moreover, this observation is also instructive for understanding Mariátegui's wider exploration of irrationalism in contemporary politics and art, such as Sorelian political philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. In the former case, Mariátegui was aware of how Sorel's vitalist conceptual world could be extended towards fascism, but he was confident that, if used under the conditions of organized labor and Marxist method, certain Sorelian concepts—especially the idea of a "myth" capable of mobilizing collective action—could be worked to elaborate a new, revolutionary socialism after 1917 by displacing the passive approach of the Second International. Mariátegui thus defended the Leninist potential of Georges Sorel's vitalism even as it began to be invoked by

⁸⁸Ibid., 559.

⁸⁹Ibid., 560.

⁹⁰José Carlos Mariátegui, "Populismo literario y estabilización capitalista," *Amauta*, Jan. 1930, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 554–8, at 556–7.

European fascists.⁹¹ Similarly, Mariátegui saw Freudian psychoanalysis as a potential ally of Marxism. Both demystified capitalist social reality: Freud by exposing the irrational, libidinal conditions of individual psychology, and Marx by exposing the determination of group ideology by class interests. Following the Trotskyist critic Max Eastman, Mariátegui suggested in 1928 that Marxism could even be understood as psychoanalysis at the level of society. But Mariátegui also pointed out that actually existing Freudians made poor allies for social revolution due to their class position as bourgeois intellectuals disengaged from the labor movement. Thus they tended to pathologize the Marxist “revolutionary attitude” as a form of neurosis, in order to justify the existing capitalist order.⁹² It was the unity of theory and practice that allowed the revolutionary potential of irrationalist traditions of thought to be realized—in its absence, Mariátegui recognized that such thinking could develop instead into conservatism or counterrevolution.

Leon Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party

The end of the 1920s was a moment of heightening contradictions in the relationship between Marxist intellectual autonomy and communist political discipline for Mariátegui. On the one hand, in the context of the 1928 schism with *aprismo*, Mariátegui was increasingly concerned by the danger of indiscipline among revolutionary thinkers. But at the same time, Mariátegui was becoming concerned by a perceptible slippage within the international communist movement from an appropriate degree of political and doctrinal discipline towards an intellectual dogmatism that threatened to undermine the organic unity of communist theory and practice. The latter tendency, which reflected early Stalinism in the USSR, was the context for Mariátegui’s famous (albeit still comradesly) polemics with the Comintern leadership in South America, especially under the Italian-born Argentine Victorio Codovilla (1894–1970).⁹³ Thus, during his last two years, Mariátegui noticed potential flaws with his hitherto consistent presupposition that the organizational infrastructure of world communism since 1917 adequately fulfilled the category of proletarian “practice” in the formulaic unity between theory and practice needed for revolutionary intellectual activity.

It was in this context that between 1927 and 1929 Mariátegui learned of the expulsion of Leon Trotsky from the Russian Communist Party and then his exile from the USSR. Significantly, Trotsky had represented to Mariátegui the ideal of Bolshevik Marxism, embodying the key features of Mariátegui’s own understanding of the project—especially its world-making cosmopolitanism.⁹⁴ Moreover, Trotsky’s 1925 work, *Where Is Britain Going?*, had been a significant theoretical influence on Mariátegui’s understanding of “capitalist stabilization” during the late 1920s.⁹⁵ The public break between the Soviet regime and Trotsky from 1927 was therefore problematic

⁹¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “El hombre y el mito,” *Mundial*, 16 Jan. 1925, in Mariátegui, *Textos básicos*, 9–13.

⁹² Mariátegui, “Freudismo y marxismo.”

⁹³ Alberto Flores Galindo, *La agonía de Mariátegui: La polémica con la Komintern* (Lima, 1980).

⁹⁴ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Trotsky,” *Variedades* (Lima), 19 April 1924, 981–4.

⁹⁵ Leon Trotsky, *Where Is Britain going?* (London, 1926).

for Mariátegui. As he reflected in 1929, “Trotsky, exiled from Soviet Russia; behold an event that the revolutionary opinion of the world cannot easily accommodate itself to.”⁹⁶ In an explicitly pessimistic tone, Mariátegui likened the expulsion of Trotsky to the French Revolution “devouring its own heroes.”⁹⁷

However, in public, Mariátegui never condemned Stalin’s government for its move against Trotsky. Moreover, in not doing this, Mariátegui both practically manifested his own ideal of intellectual discipline vis-à-vis the Comintern and the Soviet Union, and, in his published analyses of the split, actually explained the event in terms of Trotsky’s own indiscipline. In fact, the question of Trotsky’s exile was a key context in which Mariátegui elaborated his mature theory of communist intellectual activity. Mariátegui characterized the expulsion of Trotsky—in a formally value-neutral register—as the necessary consequence of Trotsky’s incapacity to conform to the changing practical needs of communist development inside the USSR, namely consolidation and economic development at the national level. Mariátegui attributed this to Trotsky’s dispositional inability for gradualist, mundane statecraft,

Trotsky, personally disconnected from the Stalinist team, is an excessive figure on the plane of national accomplishment. One imagines him destined to march across Europe in triumph, with Napoleonic energy and majesty, at the head of the red army, the socialist evangel. One does not think of him, with the same ease, fulfilling the modest role of a minister in normal times.⁹⁸

Moreover, as in Mariátegui’s contemporary critique of Haya, he attributed the disjuncture between Trotsky and the national imperatives of Soviet development to exile. Mariátegui argued that Soviet Russia, amid the temporary recession of world revolution in the context of capitalist stabilization at the end of the 1920s, required statesmen sensitive to its peculiarly national needs:

Stalin, a pure Slav, is one of these men. He belongs to a phalanx of revolutionaries who were always rooted in Russian soil: the prison or Siberia were still Russia. Whereas Trotsky and Zinoviev, Radek, and Rakovsky, belong to a phalanx which spent most of their lives in exile. In exile they did their apprenticeship as world revolutionaries, and that apprenticeship has given the Russian Revolution its universalist language, its ecumenical vision. For now, alone with its problems, Russia prefers simpler and more purely Russian men.⁹⁹

There is a discernible similarity between Mariátegui’s effort to (passively) legitimize the expulsion of Trotsky from the USSR—albeit in a context where he was fearful that the schism would be politically exploited by anticommunists if it was not effectively

⁹⁶José Carlos Mariátegui, “El exilio de Trotsky,” *Variiedades* (Lima), 23 Feb. 1929, in *Archivo José Carlos Mariátegui*, at <https://archivo.mariategui.org/index.php/el-exilio-de-trotsky-2>.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹José Carlos Mariátegui, “Trotsky y la oposición comunista,” *Variiedades* (Lima), 25 Feb. 1928, in *Mariátegui, Invitación*, 422–6, at 426.

downplayed¹⁰⁰—and his account of Haya’s reactionary abandonment of socialism: both processes could be traced to the way in which exile loosened the tethers between a revolutionary’s theoretical activity and the concrete social context to which it was oriented.

However, there are key differences between Mariátegui’s analysis of the Trotskyists’ exile and the *apristas*, pertaining to the aforementioned distinction between positive and negative types of revolutionary exile in the Pavletich letter. Unlike Haya, Trotsky’s circle was embedded in the revolutionary labor movement of Central and Western Europe while he was exiled there: “in exile they did their apprenticeship as world revolutionaries.”¹⁰¹ Thus the Russian Bolsheviks’ practice of diaspora in Europe was analogous to the positive model that Mariátegui identified with himself and the other Peruvian communists, not the *aprista* anti-model. And the Trotskyists’ exile during the 1900s and 1910s was historically prior to the Peruvians’ during the 1920s, therefore, in Mariátegui’s account, they did not merely imbibe the world-making cosmopolitanism of Bolshevik Marxism through their diaspora but they created it there: their “apprenticeship” as revolutionaries in exile “has given the Russian Revolution its universalist language, its ecumenical vision.”¹⁰²

Exilic Trotskyism had endowed Marxist thought with its most valuable attribute for Mariátegui. However, in Mariátegui’s account of the Trotsky–Stalin split, it becomes apparent that in his understanding of Bolshevism, whereas the movement tended ultimately to the world revolution, it could, in response to temporary periods of stabilization of the capitalist world system (albeit within the broader arc of terminal capitalist crisis after 1914), require retreat to the national level of social and political development. Indeed, Mariátegui was experiencing similar pressures on communism in Peru at the end of the 1920s, in the context of intensifying efforts to Other the movement as antinational by both APRA and the Leguía regime—efforts that compelled Mariátegui to compromise his own cosmopolitan preferences and reorient his applications of Marxism towards a peculiarly Peruvian frame.¹⁰³

However, this practice of national(ist) compromise for Mariátegui was always only provisional relative to the cosmopolitan *telos* of the socialist world revolution. This was because Mariátegui’s Marxist understanding of historical time remained robustly providential, in part due to the fact that he lived after and outside, and died before, key events and conjunctures—such as World War I inside Europe, the deepening of Stalinism during the 1930s, and the victories of fascism during the 1930s and 1940s—that motivated other (near) contemporary Marxists to admit significant elements of contingency to their vision of socialist triumph.¹⁰⁴ On the basis of Mariátegui’s belief in the inevitable return of Bolshevism to its cosmopolitan essence, therefore, he was able to imagine that Trotskyism could become a legitimate opposition *within* the Soviet and

¹⁰⁰ Mariátegui, “El exilio de Trotsky.”

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928) (Montevideo, 1970).

¹⁰⁴ On the different modes of Marxist temporality in this period see Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York, 2016), 1–53.

international communist movement, fulfilling the key function of sustaining the ideals and practices of Bolshevik cosmopolitanism through intra-communist debate during the current period when the actual policy of the Soviet state needed to be geared to national development for prudential reasons. Mariátegui argued as late as 1929 that “Trotskyist opinion has a useful function in Soviet politics. It represents, to define it in two words, Marxist orthodoxy, in the face of the unruly flow of Russian reality ... The NEP condemns him to return to his belligerent position as a polemicist.”¹⁰⁵ We can see in this speech act how Mariátegui used *ortodoxia* as a positive term, to denote what he understood as the cosmopolitan and internationalist conception of socialist revolution that was essential to Bolshevik Marxism. For Mariátegui, Trotskyist dissent within world communism was necessary to sustain this cosmopolitan essence amid and against the prudential compromises that were required of Soviet policy makers by the “unruly flow of reality” until the (inevitable) failure of capitalist stabilization, when the ideal of socialist world revolution could reassume its determinate role in Soviet politics.¹⁰⁶

Mariátegui argued that the coexistence of Trotskyism and Stalinism was possible by historicizing the current schism. In order to dismiss anticommunist representations of the Trotsky–Stalin split as terminal for the Bolshevik revolutionary project as a whole, Mariátegui argued that it was merely one instance of a longer history of conflictive yet fecund plurality within Russian communism, traceable to Lenin. To make this argument, Mariátegui rejected the hostile description of Bolshevism as necessarily homogeneous and top-down, and he claimed instead that the Bolsheviks—as the protagonists of a world-historical revolution—had always allowed for, and developed through, vigorous internal debate. Mariátegui argued that observers of Russia ought not to expect that “the enterprise of organizing the first great socialist state would be fulfilled by a party of more than a million passionate militants ... without debates nor violent conflicts.”¹⁰⁷

For Mariátegui, it was because the Russian Revolution was a labor of “heroic” activists that “maximal and tremendous tension” had been a normal feature of its politics since the outset. Here Mariátegui invoked “heroism,” a key, positive concept in his voluntaristic conceptualization of Marxism, to normalize and valorize profound ruptures within communism as a sign of the movement’s vitality: precisely because Bolshevik subjectivity was defined by a vital and voluntarist revolutionary heroism, “the Bolshevik party ... is not nor can it be a gentle and unanimous academy.”¹⁰⁸ Even under Lenin’s now hallowed leadership, “The Bolshevik Party never submitted passively to Lenin’s orders, about whose despotism a pamphleteering journalism that could not imagine him except as a red tsar fantasized.”¹⁰⁹ Instead of the anticommunist caricature, the reality had been that Lenin gained and reproduced his authority among the

¹⁰⁵ Mariátegui, “El exilio de Trotsky.”

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Mariátegui, “Trotsky y la oposición comunista,” 423.

Bolsheviks through a process of persuasion, by offering the most compelling and lucid analyses of social reality.¹¹⁰

Thus, through Mariátegui's interventions on the issue of Trotsky's expulsion at the end of the 1920s, he elaborated an ideal of the Bolshevik Party itself as a positive model of the balance between intellectual autonomy and discipline, a balance which had been capable of containing different and contradictory applications of Marxism while functioning as an effective organization for the enactment of socialist revolution and state building. Indeed, Mariátegui argued that a "less disciplined and organic party than the Russian Communist Party" would collapse under such a tension between the two imperatives of pluralism and coordinated political commitment—the *necessary*, constitutive tension of modern social revolution—but it was the virtues of (1) political discipline and (2) "organicity" (which, for Mariátegui, meant the rootedness of a movement in the social formation that it was trying to revolutionize) that made the Bolshevik Party capable of living through this tension.

Moreover, the *balance* of discipline and autonomy hitherto embodied by the Bolshevik Party, as distinct from absolute discipline or "despotism," was crucial for Mariátegui because, "without vigilant critique, which is the best proof of the vitality of the Bolshevik Party, the Soviet government would probably run the risk of falling into a formalist and mechanical bureaucratism."¹¹¹ Mariátegui's 1928–9 prediction or hope that Trotskyism could maintain a place within the field of world communism was therefore not optional but essential for preventing the decay of Soviet communism from the organizational ideal of "revolutionary bureaucracy," which fascism and *aprismo* had rebelled against, to the "formalist and mechanical bureaucratism" that Mariátegui knew was a key feature of emergent communist critiques of the Stalin regime, including Trotsky's. Thus, whereas the Bolshevik Party represented Mariátegui's ideal combination of intellectual autonomy, innovation, and discipline, he also recognized the increasing fragility of that combination at the end of the 1920s amid the onset of Stalinism.

Intellectual discipline outside the Comintern

In the context of Mariátegui's incipient doubts about the trajectory of the Comintern under Stalin and its implications for Marxism at the end of the 1920s, he theorized how historical materialism could be sustained by a unity between theory and practice *outside* the institutional structures of the world communist movement. Mariátegui did this through his July 1929 characterization of the Italian radical liberal and antifascist intellectual Piero Gobetti (1901–26). Although formally a profile of Gobetti, Mariátegui's essay was also a semi-oblique critique of the dogmatic—as distinct from doctrinal—excesses of top-down organization within the Comintern as it was developing in South America.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Mariátegui, "El exilio de Trotsky."

¹¹²José Carlos Mariátegui, "La economía y Piero Gobetti," *Mundial* (Lima), 26 July 1929, in Mariátegui, *Invitación*, 492–5.

In the text, Mariátegui emphasized how Gobetti had developed a materialist understanding of social reality without a “hermetic Marxist education” through “an autonomous and very free maturation of his thought.”¹¹³ Gobetti’s intellectual autonomy, in Mariátegui’s analysis, allowed gainful openness to non-Marxist currents, including the distinctively “Italian intellectual tradition” represented by Machiavelli, Vico, and others, and aesthetic enquiry about cultural topics.¹¹⁴ However, crucially, the heterogeneity of Gobetti’s intellectual formation did not prevent him from understanding the economic basis of social and cultural development, and this argument was Mariátegui’s implicit critique of the increasingly dogmatic posture of his interlocutors within the Comintern. Gobetti was able to develop a critical, materialist analysis of society outside Comintern structures and without the need for top-down party lines to define Marxism. In Mariátegui’s analysis, moreover, the reason for Gobetti’s understanding of historical materialism from outside the Comintern was, in addition to his reading of Marxian political economy, the practical experience of an organic unity between theory and practice in the context of the workers’ councils and wider proletarian struggle of the Biennio Rosso in northern Italy after World War I.¹¹⁵ The distinctiveness of Mariátegui’s appraisal of Gobetti here was that the function of the unity of theory and practice as a necessary check on the disorganizing tendencies of intellectualism, including the decay of intellectual plurality into a lack of any doctrinal coherence whatsoever, could subsist outside formal communist political organizations.

Thus, whereas the association of Mariátegui’s intellectual interest in Gobetti with his own openness to heterodox thinkers is valid, it ought not to be confused with an embrace of heterodoxy for its own sake.¹¹⁶ Rather, Gobetti represented for Mariátegui an alternative model of intellectual discipline that conformed to the doctrinal framework of historical materialism by embedding in organized labor yet without the top-down institutional structures of the Comintern, in a historical moment when the necessary balance between intellectual autonomy and discipline which Bolshevism had achieved in 1917 appeared to Mariátegui to be breaking down.

Conclusion

By reading Mariátegui as an advocate and theorist of intellectual discipline, understood in terms of a non-exhaustively open idea of Marxist “doctrine” and the practical condition of a unity between revolutionary theory and practice, this article has questioned well-established conventions about his heterodoxy as a thinker. In doing so, it has also rejected the ahistorical tendency of decolonial theory to divorce the interpretation of Mariátegui’s thought from its Marxist framework. Moreover, the article has also upturned the conventional association between Mariátegui and exile, uncovering his neglected and complex critique of diaspora as a potentially disorganizing force vis-à-vis revolutionary subjectivity.

¹¹³Ibid., 492.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 493.

¹¹⁶Miller, *Reinventing Modernity*, 154.

However, by revisiting Mariátegui as a theorist of intellectual discipline and critic of heterodoxy, this article has not found any cause to question his innovativeness as a Marxist thinker; quite the opposite. The article has argued both that Mariátegui's critique of the intellectual condition and its heterodoxy was itself creative in the context of the interwar Latin American left, and, crucially, that Mariátegui's theorization of discipline and orthodoxy had an immanent relationship to his better-known heterodox departures in Marxism, not an exclusive one. Insofar as Mariátegui recognized the positive value of intellectual heterodoxy, it was defined by the limits of political discipline, and insofar as Mariátegui recognized the value of political discipline, it was only to the extent that the communist institutions enacting it maintained space for debate as a source of vitality through dissent, to prevent regressive forms of bureaucratization and dogmatism. Mariátegui's understanding of Marxist orthodoxy and heterodoxy was thus holistic, connected by a "maximal and tremendous tension" that might have become unbearable in the years after 1930.

Moreover, this lens is useful for the study of Mariátegui's more canonical texts, too, such as *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* and "Programmatic Principles of the Peruvian Socialist Party." This article has focused on his less-well-known writings concerned with the theorization of the intellectual condition, allowing for new, close readings of neglected Mariátegui texts, such as the analysis of Gobetti. However, the approach it uncovers in Mariátegui, avoiding a sharp binary between intellectual discipline and autonomy, was also at work in his more familiar innovations upon European Marxism. Thus Mariátegui's theorization of the indigenous peasantry of Peru as a potential agent of socialist revolution, distinct from the "orthodox" industrial proletariat of Marxian philosophy, nevertheless insisted upon the mediating and pedagogical role of an indigenous cadre trained in the urban proletariat.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, Mariátegui's well-known 1928 statement that "we ... do not wish socialism in America to be an imitation and copy. It must be a heroic creation," is routinely decontextualized.¹¹⁸ Rather than articulate a break with European Marxism, this speech act was actually intended by Mariátegui to undermine *aprista* regionalism in Peru, as he realigned his journal *Amauta* from a left pluralist to an explicitly socialist position. While conceding that "socialism in America" ought to have a distinctive "style," Mariátegui was insisting that it must remain part of the unitary, global project of world revolution based in Russia. He was dismissing the *aprista* demand for an autochthonously Latin American model of social revolution, distinct or autonomous from the socialist world revolution. And Mariátegui attributed this demand to the problem of intellectualism as opposed to socially embedded political theory, the exact critique excavated by this article:

The perfect, absolute, abstract idea, indifferent to facts, to changing and mobile reality, is useless; what is useful is the germinal, concrete, dialectical, and operative idea, rich in potential and capable of movement. *Amauta* is not a diversion or game of pure intellectuals: it professes a historical idea, confesses an active and mass faith, and obeys a contemporary social movement. In the struggle between

¹¹⁷ Mariátegui, "Principios Programáticos."

¹¹⁸ Mariátegui, "Aniversario y balance," 452.

two systems, between two ideas, it does not occur to us to be spectators or to invent a third term. Extreme originality is a literary and anarchic preoccupation. On our banner, we inscribe this single, simple, and grand word: Socialism.¹¹⁹

This article therefore offers a heuristic useful for the analysis of Mariátegui's wider *oeuvre* of political writings. Complex, nonexclusive relationships between political discipline, Marxist orthodoxy, and heterodox innovation also structured his famous vision for "Indo-American socialism" in South America. Moreover, beyond Mariátegui and Latin America, this heuristic can illuminate others in the Marxist tradition romanticized for their intellectual heterodoxy. Gramsci was similarly critical of intellectuals' incapacity for political discipline; Karl Korsch, a pioneer of Western Marxism, was committed to the apparent drudgery of workers' education centered on a relatively orthodox version of historical materialism; and in the colonial world, C. L. R. James recognized the importance of movement discipline, albeit with a more transparent relationship between leadership and the masses than Stalinism imposed.¹²⁰ Similar to decolonial readings of Mariátegui, there has been a tendency in scholarship to take the evident heterodoxy of these Marxists as license to downplay or else elide their theoretical and practical attachments to the Marxist tradition and the world communist movement.¹²¹ But a more historical understanding of how heterodoxy has related to orthodoxy in Marxism allows for a less binary approach, not only to these individual thinkers but to the Marxist tradition as a whole.

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¹¹⁹Ibid., 450.

¹²⁰See e.g. Edward Baring, "Marxism of, by, and for the People: Karl Korsch and the Problem of Worker Education," *Modern intellectual history* 21 (2024), 133–56.

¹²¹For example, Cedric Robinson's readings of James and W. E. B. Du Bois in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) (Chapel Hill, 2020).

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