

Peru: The Ideology Of Apocalypse Shining Path To What?

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Introduction

In one episode of his novel, *Yawar Fiesta — Feast of Blood* -, the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas describes in painful detail the combat of a condor tied to the neck and shoulders of a bull. Seldom does either animal win. The bird pecks madly, trying to get away from the enraged bull. Often the bull, blinded and exhausted, collapses and crushes the condor to death. This ritual has been performed at religious festivities for about three hundred years, since the Spaniards introduced European cattle into the Peruvian Andes. Arguedas uses this as an allegory of the violent, never-resolved conflict resulting from the invasion of the American continent by the Europeans. The rapacious policies of Spain, the super-exploitation of the indigenous population and the violent methods used to obtain total submission reflect one of the most cruel episodes of history. Perhaps up to 10 million Peruvians were murdered or died of European infectious diseases, and that in only the first 25 years of the invasion. Thousands of temples, administrative posts, roads and aqueducts were wantonly destroyed. Cities like Cuzco, Caxamarca were disfigured or almost demolished. The expropriation of the communal lands of the natives by the Europeans was a religious desecration of the beliefs of the Peruvians who revered the Earth, the Pachamama, as an all life-giving deity. Precious objects of art were melted for their gold or moved into European museums, or private collections. A practice that still continues today.

In Peru, class conflict has always been exacerbated by racial hatred. The lower classes are always Cholos, when not zambos or cutatos for people of African descent. There is the term *chinitos* for any oriental, like President Alberto Fujimori. The rich and powerful are always considered white, regardless the color of their skin.

Furthermore, different ethnic groups are antagonistic towards each other. Peruvians from the coast seldom recognize their brothers and sisters from other regions as their legitimate countrymen. Racial epithets fly around at the least expected occasions, be they soccer or politics.

In Peru, a sense of nation, of having a common background and common symbols to unify the country, has never existed. It is common for Peruvians to call themselves members of the “independent republic of Cuzco,” or ‘Arequipa’, etc. The middle classes of Lima identify with New York, Paris or even Moscow but reject Peruvians from the highlands or the jungle.

Geography is one of the most brutal challenges to the Peruvian people. The Andes cross the country from north to south, creating three regions: the arid, desolated coastal deserts; the highland sierras; and the Amazonic jungle. Each of these regions is a separate entity economically and culturally, always in conflict with the other regions. There has never been a cohesive policy of building roads or creating efficient systems of communications. Most railways are from the 19th century, built by British or Americans. 20th century travelers in Peru have observed that, if you travel from West to East, you will move from the present to the late 19th century and when you arrive in the jungle, you will be in the Stone Age. Yet United Nations functionaries still manage to say that Peruvians, decedents of the Incas, live royally compared to the abject poverty and misery of Bangladesh or Northern India.

20th century technology has blanketed Peru with the message of rock and roll and blue jeans. Radio and TV has transformed the descendants of the Incas into consumers of Capitalism’s junk. The most popular soft drink is called Inca Cola. But these stand in sharp contrast to another reality. The peasants of the Andes and the dwellers of the slums of Lima and other urban centers live in terrible conditions, victims of exploitation, unemployment and diseases long-ago controlled

in most of the world. Cholera, tuberculosis, venereal disease are rampant in these improvised villages. No wonder an uncontrollable rage has exploded.

Paradoxes, contradictions and exaggerations are the biggest obstacles for those of us who deal with Peru's history. An Italian geographer created a phrase that is a national obsession to all Peruvians. Antonio Raymondi said, "Peru is a beggar seated on a bench of gold."

The Failure Of Ideology

In 1980 when *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) started its military operations, Peru was in the middle of the most profound crisis ever in its 150 years of Republican existence. Both economic illusions and long-revered ideological sacred cows had failed.

First, due to ecological reasons and overfishing, the fish industry had collapsed. Since 1950, almost a million highland peasants had abandoned their lands to work along the coast in a profitable new industry. Peru became the world's largest exporter of anchovies and fish meal. A gigantic fleet of 'Bolicheras', high sea fishing vessels, annually caught over \$75 million worth of fish. When the industry collapsed in the late '60s, millions of Peruvians were affected. By 1970 the desperate, unemployed invaded the streets of Lima in a wave of crime and violence. Nevertheless, the government did not realize its political implications.

Second, the leftist military, in a period of State Socialism, managed to impose radical nationalization of mines and industries and the century old dream of social reformers: the Agrarian Reform. But workers could not control artificial industries or compete against international prices. The peasants did not benefit at all from the land given to them in a rather chaotic manner. No technical assistance, mechanical equipment nor seeds were available, and, without social incentives, the long-awaited Agrarian Reform turned into a disheartening tragedy. The peasants continued emigrating to the coast for jobs in factories and the fishing industry, abandoning the land to the despair of romantic social equalitarians and Marxist intellectuals.

Third, the election of Fernando Belaunde Terry in 1980 was the end of any democratic illusions about social change. Belaunde was a most inept man, arrogant and obsessed with expensive pet projects, like building a highway in the Amazonian jungle, ignoring the massive social problems surrounding him. Congress, controlled by the middle-class APRA party that had dominated the political scene for 60 years, followed a policy of sectarian opposition to Belaunde, more on a political basis than due to any programmatic differences. It is no coincidence that Abimael Guzman, the so-called Presidente Gonzalo of *Sendero Luminoso*, decided in 1980 to launch a frontal attack on all the institutions of Peru. In reality there was not much left after the chaos of State Socialism and the restoration of European democracy. Belaunde continued a hysterical purchase of arms because someone had the idea that in 1979, one hundred years after the War of the Pacific with Chile, there should be a revenge for Peru's humiliating defeat. All this was paid for with money borrowed from international banks, monies that could never be repaid because Peru could barely afford to service the massive interest charges on the loans.

Coca: Just Another Industry

In the meantime, Peru had become the main producer of coca.

Recondite valleys in the Andes easily hid coca cultivation, as well as the army of Presidente Gonzalo. The cultivation and use of coca leaves is a cultural leftover of the Inca civilization. Among the peasants of the highland chewing coca was nothing more than a potent snack to combat fatigue and the physical demands of working in the high altitude of the Andes. For over a century, coca was a monopoly of the State. Cultivators sold the leaves to government agencies, which then distributed it to consumers in a rather ordinary way, through regular stores, together with liquor, matches and cigarettes, all monopolies of the State. It was the Coca Cola company that first decided to buy large quantities of the leaves for its famous soda, but it was the elegant elite of Europe and the United States that made cocaine a drug of choice. Even Cole Porter popularized the alkaloid. But, when poor Peruvian peasants began selling coca leaves to different organizations of drug traffickers, the success of the enterprise had unexpected results. Tragic consequences for Peru and the battle for control of the coca crop started. International agencies, mafias and political operatives from many nations fought for the right to buy, and thereby control, the superb leaves of the Peruvian Andes.

Prelude To Insurgency

The insurgency of *Shining Path* was a desperate, almost spontaneous movement of a provincial college professor, students, and unemployed youth. Cadres were easily recruited from the gigantic slums that surrounded Lima, Arequipa and ports like Chimbote, still suffering from the effects of the collapse of the fishing industry.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Peruvian politics had experienced a predictable left/right polarization, the usual array of Marxists and pseudo-Marxists versus the right-wing, including, in the early '30s, black shirt fascists and Franco admirers. But the Peruvian aristocracy had always controlled the most effective political force, the Army. Since the 1950s, the Army had been indoctrinated in the anti-Communist doctrines of Eisenhower and the CIA, or the anti-insurgency '007' tactics of Kennedy. But, in the classical style of tropical contradictions, the Army decided in the '70s to try Socialism! Socialism failed, but things were not back to business as usual. Mass mobilizations had occurred and industrial workers, peasants and students were forming cadres for a Maoist revolution, at the moment the most fashionable theory for armed struggle among Third World revolutionaries.

The original Peruvian Communist Party, affiliated with the Third International and loyal follower of the Leninist ideology of the Soviet Union had become a bureaucratic apparatus, an active collaborator with the so-called "progressive bourgeoisie." But the rift between the CPs of China and Moscow had repercussions on most of the radical left in Peru, as well as in the rest of the Third World. Abimael Guzman, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Huamanga (Ayacucho), fought inside the Moscow-oriented CP of Peru to follow a more radical line. In 1969 he was expelled from the party, and Guzman and his followers found a Maoist faction, reclaiming the name of the Communist Party of Peru for themselves.

Fire In The Andes!

The political parties of Peru were not ready for the offensive of *Sendero Luminoso*. Elections in 1980 were more or less normal, except for the minor inconvenience of the Maoist group in Ay-

acucho launching its first military operation. By the 1985 elections, won by APRA, Shining Path had devastated the capital of Peru with constant assaults on the police, bombings and mobilizations of its cadres in the slums, the “pueblos juvenes.” The European-oriented APRA party was, not only totally incapable of resolving the crisis, but actually precipitated in an orgy of corruption, petty revenge and sporadic brutal attacks on the regions where Shining Path operated. The Army routinely massacred thousands of peasants in Ayacucho, Alto Huallaga, Puno and other Andean points of resistance. To no one’s surprise, the armed forces became deeply involved in the ‘protection’ of the coca business organizations, both local and from abroad.

The violence of *Sendero Luminoso*, its irreducible dogmatism, and, especially, its mystical reverence for Presidente Gonzalo’s thought gives the movement a formidable image as an uncompromising political ideology. Peruvians have always managed to, somehow, combine political theories into civilized arrangements that have made Socialists of the Army or fashionable Communists of the children of the rich. Shining Path, however, is different, and perhaps, that is its biggest weakness.

It has been said many times that people with deep religious feelings cannot become capitalists or communists in their many forms. Peruvian middle classes are strongly indoctrinated in Catholicism. By and large, the peasants still keep the old pantheism of the Incas. Shining Path tries to define Peru as a peasant society, separated and segregated from the rest of the world. In the desolated mountains of the Andes, deep in the jungle, even in the small towns around Cuzco, Puno and Ayacucho, that vision of the country seems real, almost a justification for recreating the glory of the Inca Confederation. But neither Maoist ideology nor a nostalgic conception of history is adequate to solve the problems of Peru. With a population of twenty million, heavy external debt and pressure from the IMF, and the tutelage of the United States, the country cannot escape the ups and downs of the current world economy. If capitalism is trying to survive and retain its hold on Third World countries, Peru is a terrible example of future conflicts.

Guerrillas And Romance

When the news of armed struggle in Peru started to appear in the world press, there was, at first, a very sympathetic response. Especially among social agencies, Church workers and liberal intellectuals who decried the poverty of Peruvian peasants. The social horror of Peru’s misery had attracted the attention of the international press, observers and hopeful radicals.

College professors of Latin American studies called for support for the Peruvian revolution. The *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* dedicated long pieces of reporting and analysis to the armed struggle in Peru. The repressive methods of the Peruvian government, whether Belaunde, APRA or Fujimori, had moved organizations like Amnesty International to denounce the country as one of the most flagrant violators of human rights. Shining Path still maintains a rather well-organized network of supporters in Europe and the USA. In the mid ’80s, walls around Berkeley, California were covered with the slogan, “Support the Popular Revolution in Peru.” One very large, impressive wall could be seen from the entrance to the Bay Bridge, covered with hammer and sickle and exhortations for revolution.

Few Americans knew what was happening, but CNN and the magazines started to report on the brutal confrontation that was going on in Peru. Committees of support appeared on the campus of UC Berkeley. Videos, lectures and college agitation soon added the war in Peru as another

cause for the American Left. The presence of American advisers only enhanced the concept that Peru was the next Vietnam.

Typical of the interest shown by young liberal intellectuals was an article published in the 1992 Winter issue of *New Politic*. Written by Professor Phillip Smith, a graduate of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas in Austin, the piece concludes, “it is the responsibility of the U.S. Left to challenge the assumptions of ‘narcoterrorism’ and the international war on drugs as promoted by the Bush administration. It is certainly our place to fight against assistance to the Peruvian military — among the world’s worst human rights violators. The threat of direct intervention is real. With the U.S. government in a chest-thumping mood after cheap and easy victories in Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf, and a public now conditioned for militarism, the temptation for Washington to ‘straighten out the mess’ may well be irresistible.” His prediction of intervention, as many other predictions of the U.S. Left, is a reincarnation of the Vietnam syndrome. The Left forgets the lessons of El Salvador and Nicaragua, the war against the revolutionaries was by proxy and with mercenaries. In Peru the Army is an essential part of the privileged alliance, the backbone of the scared middle classes in Lima and other urban centers. The indiscriminate violence from both the Army and Sendero was a sobering effect that slowly penetrated liberal opinion.

Politics And Surrealism

The irrational political confrontation in the elections of 1990 left most observers flabbergasted. There was the old APRA, wasted and running scared, while the Ex-President was being indicted on charges of corruption. Traditional conservatives and Belaunde-followers backed Mario Vargas Llosa, novelist and admirer of British democracy. In a moment of irritation Vargas Llosa dropped out of the campaign, only to return to declare that Peru needed a Parliamentary Monarchy. (This while running for President of a 180- year old Republic.) Finally, there was the obscure candidate of a movement called Cambio 90, Alberto Fujimori. He only had to show his face and declare, “I’m more Peruvian than those other dudes!” While he made vague promises, it was his use of buzz words like ‘blanquiñosos’ (white crackers) that tapped into the profound racial antagonism that pervades Peruvian society. His strongest support came from the growing Protestant Evangelist movement that is challenging the Catholic Church, the official religion for centuries. No one won. The election went to Congress, and the APRA majority gave its support to Fujimori. Vargas Llosa wrote in *Granta* magazine, “After me Peru will fall into barbarism.” He was almost right.

Popular War

Years of popular war has not weakened the State. On the contrary, Fujimori was free to justify his policies by pointing to the difficulties of fighting an internal war and trying to repay the external debt. He reestablished Peru’s international credit in order to pay for the repression, a new bureaucracy and all the symbols of a modern nation. The condition of the poor continued to worsen, but the many calls for national insurrection by Shining Path have not been successful. Peruvians were certainly poor, but the violence of Shining Path was repugnant to the impoverished middle classes and, in a certain way, provoked indifference among the peasants. Certainly

the murder of many cells of the Maoists, some in massacres within prisons, took a heavy tool on the direction of the movement.

In his many interviews, pamphlets and revolutionary literature, Abimael Guzman has never offered a political vision that could be embraced by the industrial workers or the unemployed. The new State, a vague phrase, like “after the revolution” in the '30s, is not a promise of a brighter future, but demands indoctrination, work and obedience. In a tropical nation that still takes its siesta time very seriously, this is a letdown to any potential revolutionary.

Is The End Near?

The capture early this year of Abimael Guzman, the elusive Presidente Gonzalo and most of his staff, moved the strategy of the Maoists into a new, never before accepted phase-political accommodation. Recently President Fujimori has accepted the visit of international groups concerned with human rights. The official press blasted the international delegations, but, still, they made it into Lima. *El Diario*, the semi-official newspaper of Sendero has appeared again in Lima. Perhaps Fujimori needs to play to the new Clinton administration in order to get help for loans and investments. Perhaps some of the revolutionaries realize that the military struggle is not an end in itself. There must be political objectives. The capture of the State apparatus, or at least the destruction of enough of the old ruling class to ensure a degree of popular power, needs the support of a large section of the oppressed. The Russian communist, with Leninist theories of a small, conspiratorial elite of terrorists and intellectuals, produces only a dictatorship, ready to commit the most heinous crimes, just as Bakunin predicted in his debate with Marx at the First International.

Sendero, or any other revolutionary group in Latin America, needs a solid base in the industrial proletariat while still keeping emotional and family ties to the rural population. The impoverished middle classes will respond only to a climate of freedom and productive work, not political patronage or selfish professionalism. The peasant population will never participate in any movement that has European theories as its ideology. Catholicism, Marxism, Maoism spell disaster for the indigenous masses of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Guatemala. Because the question of State, popular power are immaterial to groups that see race and class as an ambiguous concepts, even as distortions of the social order. The masses of peasants need a Federation of independent enclaves, united by collective technology and social services, not a State run by the white elite, Marxist intellectuals or progressive capitalists.

Peru, and many other Third World nations, reflect the cruelest evidence of the erosion of the capitalist system. There cannot be a constant growing economy. This means that millions of human beings are reduced to starvation in order to maintain the system. At the same time, ecological disasters have precipitated economic crises for which even the seven powerful, industrialized nations cannot afford to pay. Just observe the ecological disasters in the former Soviet Union, in the U.S.A., in the North Sea. But even more serious for Peru and other countries, is the aspirations of its people to control their natural resources and the uncontrollable appetite of international corporations backed by the most powerful armies of Europe and the U.S.A.

The invasion of Latin America by Europeans will never have a peaceful solution. When Germany invaded its neighbors it eventually had to withdraw. So it was with the U.S.A. from Japan. But the Europeans have never moved out of Peru. What is needed is a Peace treaty, perhaps

paying reparations to the indigenous populations and restoring a more natural order with the pre-Columbian institutions that still survive in the large Indian communities all over the Andes, from Ecuador, Peru to Bolivia. That region of Latin America has so many elements in common that it is not farfetched to envision a new Andean Confederation, there is already a name for it: Indoamerica. Meanwhile the drama of “Yawar Fiesta” repeats. The condor should be allowed to fly free!

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