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Marxist Insurgencies and Indigenous Rights; The Cases of Guatemala and Peru

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Marxist Insurgencies and Indigenous Rights: The Cases of Guatemala and Peru

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to understand the nature of the relationship between leftist armed guerrillas and indigenous rights in the Latin American region. I argue that the ethnic component and indigenous mobilization have greatly determined the political and social achievements of Marxist insurgencies active in many countries of the sub-continent during the second half of the twentieth century.

In order to test my hypothesis, I devote particular attention to the historical exposition and critical analysis of both the ethnic problem and Marxism, in its European, Russian, Chinese, and Latin American versions.

Subsequently, I focus on the case studies of Guatemala and Peru, as exemplary of different results obtained by radical armed groups. The Guatemalan civil war and its outcome demonstrate the importance of indigenous people's mobilization for the partial success and reintegration into civil life of Marxist guerrilla movements. Conversely, the Peruvian conflict points out the dangers of a dogmatic ideology that led to unprecedented violence and sparked state authoritarianism and populism.

The critical assessment of the two case studies is carried out in a qualitative manner and takes into account two main variables, namely the armed groups' degree of support for indigenous grievances and their level of dogmatism. My hypothesis proves to be valid, at least in the cases of Guatemala and Peru, as I discover that a high level of support for the ethnic question coupled with a low level of dogmatism of the leftist insurgencies is linked to higher indigenous mobilization and relatively better performances of the armed guerrillas.

As a consequence of these findings, I expand my analysis to the whole Latin American region and to other countries beyond this area, also challenged by the threat of political violence linked to both radical ideology and ethnicity. I conclude by highlighting the importance of the nation building process for the prevention of further instability and by recommending a manifold approach that factors the reintegration of armed groups members into society and the creation of a participatory state.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 - Description of the issue

Latin American countries share the burden of a colonial past whose traces are still very much evident today. Since the Spanish conquest, the indigenous population has suffered an exploitation that has gone well beyond economics and has resulted in a separation, both physical and social, between the native people and the descendants of the European colonizers. The reactions of indigenous people to this protracted inequality have oscillated between resignation and rebellion,¹ the latter being used more routinely from the beginning of the 20th century.² It is indeed in this century that the so-called “ethnic question,” namely the presence of ethnic cleavages generated by colonialism and aggravated by authoritarian regimes, has dangerously shown its potential for conflict.

When Communist ideology began to spread in the American sub-continent, fuelled by the success of the Cuban Revolution (1959), it encountered a favorable terrain in the grievances of Indians. Countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia experienced the phenomenon of armed insurgencies starting from the first decades of 1900 as a consequence of the “agrarian, regional, ethnic, and national problem”³ that had not been addressed for centuries. While indigenous participation in armed rebellions varied across nations and across years, it can

¹ Degregori, Carlos Iván. “Com’è difficile essere Dio. Ideologia e Violenza Política di Sendero Luminoso,” in *La Ricerca Folklorica*, Vol. 28 (Oct. 1993): p. 35, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/148013>, (accessed on 6 November 2010) and Tamayo Herrera, José. *Liberalismo, indigenismo y violencia en los países andinos (1850-1995)*. Fondo de Desarrollo Editorial, Universidad de Lima: Lima (1998): p. 20.

² Tamayo Herrera, p. 20.

³ Lora Cam, Jorge. *El EZLN y Sendero Luminoso. Radicalismo de izquierda y confrontación político-militar en América Latina*. Benemérita Univesidad Autónoma de Puebla: Puebla, Mexico (1999): p. 11.

be argued that the ethnic question has been one of the root causes of political violence in Latin America.

Yet scholars' approach to political instability in this region has usually focused on one side of the problem only: how to eradicate the scourge of armed insurgencies in order to achieve a fully democratic rule in the sub-continent. Little understanding of the "past and present situation"⁴ of the countries involved was applied by policy-makers and academics, who seemed more interested in "democratizing" the area according to a "Western" model.⁵ Only recently have political analysts concentrated on the link between a specific attribute that most Latin American nations share, namely the presence of a consistent indigenous population, and the actions and repercussions of leftist insurgencies on native people's rights.⁶ It is my belief that the ethnic element of the Marxist armed groups that emerged in this region has been a critical aspect of their alleged success or lack thereof. This is why further investigation is needed on this subject, in order to shed light on two phenomena, leftist insurgencies and Indians' rights, which in my view are dialectically connected.

This study will aim at filling some of the gaps identified by my research on Latin American insurgencies. Its main purpose will be to evaluate the above-mentioned relationship between Marxist guerrilla warfare and the interests and rights of indigenous people by examining the Guatemalan and the Peruvian civil wars as case studies. First

⁴ O'Donnell, Guillermo. "Illusions about Consolidation", in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, 2 (1996): p. 47, available at http://muse.jhu.edu/ccny-proxy1.libr.ccny.cuny.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v007/7.2odonnell.html (accessed on 4 February 2011).

⁵ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁶ To quote a few of them: Jorge Lora Cam (see footnote 3, p. 1), Harold José Rizo Otero (*Evolución del Conflicto Armado en Colombia e Iberoamérica*. Corporación Universitaria Autónoma de Occidente: Bogotá, 2002), James F. Rochlin (*Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico*. Lynne Rienner Publisher: Boulder London, 2003), and the previously mentioned José Tamayo Herrera.

and foremost, I will analyze the viability of armed revolution within the context of the indigenous condition of isolation and discrimination. Can the Marxist concept of class conflict be successfully applied to the native population, mainly peasants (*campesinos*), with a unique link to their land derived from their tradition and culture? More importantly, have Marxist theories, as outlined in the various armed groups' action programs, represented a satisfying and real solution to the ethnic question? Have they contributed to lifting native people out of poverty and discrimination?

I will subsequently assess Marxist armed groups' performance with regard to the indigenous question against the backdrop of neo-liberalist economic strategies and a neo-colonial structure of the State. I seek to discover whether radical leftist approaches to politics have actually offered a better platform for native people to advocate for the advancement of their social and economic rights. I will therefore identify both positive and negative aspects of armed insurgencies, with a view to obtain an unbiased and comprehensive evaluation of their activities, always analyzed from an ethnic point of view. In this regard, it will be important to consider not only economic theoretical frameworks (neo-liberalism and different Marxist approaches, such as dependency theory),⁷ but also anthropologic considerations with reference to the inherent complexity and the altered perception of the Indian identity throughout the years.

Aside from the regional implications highlighted in the previous paragraphs, my research has a twofold international relevance: on the one hand, left-wing armed

⁷ Dependency theory arose in Latin America in 1960s and sought to explain the protracted underdevelopment of the region through a global northern exploitation of the global South, which occurred in three phases: the era of colonialism, the era of industrialization, and the era of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Dependency theory is believed to be connected to the foundation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 as well as to the United Nations' "voting blocs" of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (Notes from the International Political Economy class of 1 March 2010 and Sterling-Folker, Jennifer. ed., *Making sense of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2006: 199-207.) For more details, see Chapter 3, Section 4.

guerrillas continue to challenge States' authority in Latin America and elsewhere, posing a threat to national and international security and health (these movements are often funded through transnational drug trafficking). Increasingly, extremist insurgencies using terror as a tactic are perceived as a serious menace by the international community and scholars often link their ideological character to an unresolved ethnic question, as in the cases of the Maoist rebels of India and Nepal.⁸ By systematically focusing on ethnicity and not only on the ideology of the specific guerrilla movement, one can grasp the problem of non-State armed group violence with a holistic approach and, thus, a more thorough understanding. This is true for the Latin American region as well as for the rest of the world.

On the other hand, the global indigenous movement that found its *momentum* in the 1980s, in part as an unexpected “positive” consequence of armed insurgencies, has widened the perspective towards human rights and multiculturalism. In reference to the former aspect, native people's rights represented a new addition to the broader regime of human rights and contributed to a shift in domestic politics of many countries, such as Canada, Brazil, or Australia, that were not recognizing these specific rights before. As a result of the acknowledgment of indigenous rights by certain countries, multiculturalism has acquired a growing importance in contemporary states' approaches to state building, due to the fact that the ethnic element of a country's population cannot be ignored or “assimilated” any longer. In this connection, the whole concept of “nation-state” has proved insufficient, as the geographical reality not always matches the cultural one.

⁸ See Murshed, S. Mansoob, and Scott Gates. “Spatial-Horizontal Inequality and the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal,” in *Review of Development Economics*, Vol. 9, 1 (2005): 121-134, available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/ccny-proxy1.lib.cuny.cuny.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9361.2005.00267.x/pdf>, (accessed on 10 December 2010).

Political instability and social well being increasingly depend on how and whether under or non-represented minorities are reflected in a country's legislation. This, in turn, shapes the amount of resources that are allocated to citizens: the higher the inequality, the likelier the rebellion, especially if this inequality has been protracted in time and consistently directed to a part of the population, in what Collier describes as "ethnic dominance."⁹ It is clear that the ethnic problem is therefore a main issue that governments worldwide need to address, in order to gain legitimacy within the different strata of their society.

1.2 - Hypothesis

In my work I will argue that Marxist insurgencies and indigenous mobilization are reciprocally connected and that the latter crucially determines the performance of the former. Radical armed groups could not succeed in achieving genuine change without the active participation of native populations. Vice versa, I expect to find out that Marxist theories' contribution to the indigenous cause is limited, especially due to an ideological rigidity that hinders a full understanding of the specific social and cultural diversity of the *indio*.

In order to test my hypothesis, I will examine two case studies, which I deem representative of radically different outcomes in the interactions of the guerrillas with the Indians and exemplary of the Central American and the Andean region. The case of Guatemala, a country ravaged by more than 30 years of civil war, presents a positive interaction between indigenous interests and ideological fight, exemplified by the 1996 Peace Accords with the Guatemalan government, which advocated for substantial

⁹ Collier, Paul. *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy*. World Bank: Washington DC (April 2006): p. 14.

reforms of the country, including indigenous rights. Conversely, the Shining Path of Peru is an emblematic case of the need for a dismissal of dogmatism in Marxist armed insurgencies. My research shows that the Peruvian internal conflict has sharpened social fragmentation without properly addressing the ethnic question.

1.3 - Methodology

The two case studies will represent the core of my thesis paper. From their analysis I will infer a set of lessons learned that could be applied to other countries in the Latin American region and beyond it, facing the double challenge of radical armed groups and ethnic violence. My research does not feature a separate literature review section, because the analysis of the sources consulted is incorporated into each chapter and serves as a starting point of discussion for the topic presented.

I intend to gather information regarding the Guatemalan and the Peruvian civil wars from comparative studies found in books and journal articles, such as Jeffery M. Paige's *Social Theory and Peasant Revolution in Vietnam and Guatemala*¹⁰ and Jorge Lora Cam's *El EZLN y Sendero Luminoso. Radicalismo de izquierda y confrontación político-militar en América Latina*.¹¹ In addition, my research will greatly benefit from primary sources (interviews) found in Betsy Konefal's work on Mayan political and social mobilization during the Guatemalan civil war¹² as well as from Santiago Roncagliolo's biography of the leader of the Shining Path, Abimael Guzmán.¹³ Both

¹⁰ M. Paige, Jeffery. "Social Theory and Peasant Revolution in Vietnam and Guatemala," in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 12, 6 (Nov. 1983), available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657292>, (accessed on 7 November 2010).

¹¹ See footnote 3, p. 3.

¹² Konefal, Betsy. *For Every Indio Who Falls. A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960-1990*. University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque (2010).

¹³ Roncagliolo, Santiago. *La cuarta espada. La historia de Abimael Guzmán y Sendero Luminoso*. Debate: Buenos Aires (2007).

books offer an insightful analysis of the two civil wars by simultaneously focusing on the political and cultural aspects of the countries examined.

When presenting the economic and social background of Guatemala and Peru, I will gather quantitative data found in books and journal articles. Figures obtained mainly from the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions reports¹⁴ of the two countries and from historical sources¹⁵ will allow me to assess indigenous political mobilization and governments' consequent repression, with a view to determine the extent to which native people's rights have been violated during the internal conflicts and whether this has contributed to their participation in the conflict itself.

These data notwithstanding, my work will remain essentially an evaluative one, relying mainly on a qualitative approach. The focus will lie on the careful analysis of the Guatemalan and Peruvian case studies with a specific attention to their ethnic aspect and a subsequent critical judgment of these internal conflicts' outcome.

1.4 – Chapter outline

To this end, I plan to divide my thesis research into an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography section. So far, the present introduction has outlined the main purposes of my study, presenting a short background of the problem, introducing both the main questions I aim to answer in the following chapters and the hypothesis that

¹⁴ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), report available at <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/toc.html>, (accessed on 12 December 2010) and Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (Peru), report available at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/conclusiones.php>, (accessed on 12 December 2010).

¹⁵ Such as Jim Handy's *Gift of the Devil. A History of Guatemala*. and *The Peru Reader* (Handy, Jim. *Gift of the Devil. A History of Guatemala*. South End Press: United States, 1984; Starn, Orin, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk, ed. *The Peru Reader. History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1995).

will be confirmed or disproved by the two case studies under examination, in addition to dedicating a specific section describing the methodology I opted for.

The second chapter will offer a deep and comprehensive background of the ethnic question in the Latin American region and in Guatemala and Peru, specifically. Basic knowledge of colonialism and state authoritarianism in the sub-continent are essential to determining the root causes of this issue, while the status of native people during the twentieth century will be a key element to the analysis of the proposed case studies. Moreover, I will draw upon anthropologic investigations and cultural literature on *indigenismo*, intended as a broad field encompassing ethnology, anthropology, indigenous culture, and Government's policies towards indigenous populations.¹⁶ I will subsequently move on to discuss the global indigenous rights' movement, which found its universal recognition in 1989 with the adoption of the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 (*Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries*). The significance of such a legally binding document for the substantive development of native populations' rights will be reiterated, in that it acknowledges the right of non-discrimination, the right to self-identification and self-determination, the right to social and political development, and the right of consultation in matters that affect native populations' interests.¹⁷ Moreover, the Convention clearly limits the use of the adjective "indigenous" to those people who "retain some or all of

¹⁶ Barabas, Alicia M. "La Construcción del Indio como Bárbaro: de la Etnografía al Indigenismo," in *Alteridades*, Vol. 10, 19 (2000): 10, available at <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/>, (accessed on 10 December 2010).

¹⁷ International Labor Organization, *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries*. Geneva, 27 June 1989, available at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C169>, (accessed on 6 November 2010) and United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*. New York, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/512/07/PDF/N0651207.pdf?OpenElement>, (accessed on 6 November 2010).

their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”¹⁸ The overall intention of the chapter is to establish a theoretical foundation against which evaluating the actual achievements of Marxist insurgencies, whose ideology and main aspects will be the subject of the third chapter.

At that stage, I will concentrate on the presentation of the main tenets of Marxism, described as a theoretical approach stemming from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that has come to include several strains of thought, from world-system theory to Gramscian analysis. I will build on the conspicuous literature on this subject, including the analysis of primary sources,¹⁹ and rely on Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism* for their interpretation.²⁰ I will then proceed on identifying the main points of the European, Russian, and Chinese strands of Marxism and compare them to the Latin American ones, mainly by introducing dependency theory as the most important local approach to historical-structural views. In this connection, I will give a brief overview of the economic situation of the Latin American regions by presenting the reflections of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which greatly influenced proponents of dependency theory. By the end of this chapter, the link between Marxist insurgencies and indigenous rights will take shape. The analysis of Marxist theories, with their inherently pessimistic view of world politics as a perpetual conflict between the dominant class (bourgeoisie) and the exploited class (proletariat) is fundamental to the partial addressing of some of the questions formulated in the introduction.

¹⁸ ILO Convention 169.

¹⁹ I intend to analyze Marx’ *The Communist Manifesto* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

²⁰ Kolakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism. The Founders. The Golden Age. The Breakdown*. W. W. Norton & Company: New York, London (2005).

Coupled with the considerations made in the previous chapter, this part of my work will shed more light on the actual viability of leftist armed revolution in the specific context of Latin America, a region whose indigenous populations' identity represents both a distinctive trait and a decisive variable in the effectiveness of governments and non-state armed groups alike. I believe that the accurate review of the programs of action and main ideological beliefs of the guerrilla movements present in Guatemala and Peru will constitute a solid frame to my hypothesis, which I will start testing in the following chapters.

The Guatemalan civil conflict will be the subject of the fourth chapter. I will begin by presenting an exhaustive historical background, including the frequent change of governments and the shift of alliances between the elites, the bourgeoisie, and the peasants. One could trace back the root causes of the conflict in the authoritarian nature of the State, as well as in the changes in the organization of production that triggered a violent class conflict between the landowners (supported by the military) and a migratory population of *campesinos* and wage workers. In fact, the shift from the traditional *hacienda* (plantation or estate) and a substantive change in Guatemalan exports (cotton, sugar, cardamom in addition to the typical coffee exports) in the early sixties have contributed to the rise of a rural proletariat, comprising of a majority of indigenous people, as opposed to the traditional *ladino* (white Spanish-speaking population) middle class.²¹ The different armed insurgencies that emerged during this period were mainly a natural continuation of the popular unrests against the elected government that occurred at the end of the fifties and did not immediately appeal to native people. Nevertheless, the

²¹ Paige, pp. 728-729.

rural base of these guerrilla movements would grow as the civil war progressed and as indigenous populations identified their interests with the Marxist rebels' program. In order to properly understand the intensification of indigenous political mobilization, one has to view it as a parallel phenomenon to the increasing community activism of the highlands during the 1970s and the ideological debates occurring in several universities throughout the country.²²

My research seems to partially disprove Wickham-Crowley's statement, according to which "peasants join guerrilla movements to pursue peasant interests, not due to ideological conversion."²³ It appears that, at least in the case of Guatemala, Indian peasants and migrant workers have usually joined the insurgency further to class-consciousness, a concept that is supported by Konefal's work, the unification of the four main guerrilla movements in 1982 under the general umbrella of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Army (URNG), and the 1996 Peace Accords with the Guatemalan Government.²⁴ I will argue that such a long-term perspective is contrary to the stereotypical view of peasants interested only in their land and their temporary well being.

Finally, the Peace Accords represented a fundamental step towards the advancement of the indigenous cause and are the lenses through which judging the effectiveness of Indians' mobilization in Guatemala.

The fifth chapter will examine another insurgency, the Shining Path of Peru, a Maoist guerrilla active from 1980 to the first half of the nineties (although it is believed

²² Konefal, Ch. 3.

²³ Wickham-Crowley, Timothy P. "The Rise (And Sometimes Fall) of Guerrilla Governments in Latin America," in *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 2, 3 (Summer 1987): p. 494, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684670>, (accessed on 7 November 2010).

²⁴ Rizo Otero, pp. 122-127.

to still exist nowadays). After a short background on the political history of Peru, I will focus on the armed insurgency, perhaps the most violent terrorist group in Latin America, considering the relatively short time span in which it operated, having caused the death or the forced disappearance of 69,280 persons.²⁵ The Shining Path was led by a strong and charismatic personality, Carlos Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, also known as President Gonzalo, who creatively mixed Maoist thought with the outstanding indigenous question of Peru, addressed previously by José Carlos Mariátegui, the founder of the Peruvian Communist Party. Considerable space will be allocated to the analysis of the Peruvian intellectual milieu of the twentieth century and on its great impact on Guzmán's personality and personal beliefs,²⁶ which ultimately shaped the actions of the terrorist group and largely determined its failure.

As in Guatemala, Peru was a country that relied heavily on agrarian resources. The Shining Path tried to capitalize on the widespread discontent among the Indian population, usually peasants from the Andes or from rural areas deprived of their lands. However, the brutality of the movement, coupled with the extremely dogmatic ideology of its leader, prevented the Shining Path from gaining peasants' support in the long run. This lack of representation among the peasantry, along with ideological rigidity, generated a myopic conception of the Peruvian society with little or no attention to the specificity of the indigenous populations. Ultimately, the Shining Path failed to understand that its uncompromising guerrilla warfare turned into pure terrorism proved to be deleterious not only to the Indians, but also to civil society as a whole. Peasants would

²⁵ Roncagliolo, p. 16.

²⁶ Aside from Roncagliolo's biography, I will use interviews and speeches by Guzmán.

indeed rebel against the rebels in several occasions²⁷ and organize *rondas campesinas* (peasant patrols) to defend their villages from forced recruitment into the movement. Although both the Guatemalan and Peruvian governments reacted brutally to armed revolution, often targeting indigenous populations as a punishment for their political activism, the will to negotiate displayed by the Guatemalan URNG was totally absent in the Shining Path. This further proves the extreme rigidity of the group and transforms the Peruvian internal conflict into a “zero sum game” where the winner is an absolute one and the ethnic element of the population is discarded in favor of ideology.

The following chapter will be dedicated to a structured analysis and comparison between the two case studies: what worked and what failed to achieve results in both Guatemala and Peru’s armed groups and why. This part will critically assess the validity of my hypothesis against the performances of the URNG and the Shining Path, thus verifying the strength of my initial claim. Two variables will be measured, namely Marxist insurgencies’ degree of support for indigenous grievances and their degree of dogmatism. The ensuing conclusions will highlight that, on the one hand, the Guatemalan case showed a certain degree of reciprocity in the relationship between non-state armed groups and *indios*. Leftist insurgencies’ legitimacy was possible because their statement partially reflected the ethnic cleavages of the country. In turn, indigenous rights were inserted in the Government’s agenda for the first time as a result of the negotiations between the State and the armed groups. On the other hand, the case of Peru demonstrated that, in order to be successful, ideological insurgencies have to be mindful of the inherent characteristics of the targeted population and that class conflicts are not

²⁷ Starn, Orin. “Maoism in the Andes: The Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path and the Refusal of History,” in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 27, 2 (May 1995): p. 415, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/158120>, (accessed on 7 November 2010).

sufficient to gain the support of indigenous people. Thus, I will argue that Marxist theories' application in the Latin American region is limited, because it vitally depends on a flexibility that these frameworks do not possess *per se*. Without a clear link to ethnicity, armed insurgencies in this part of the world are not only bound to fail, but also to further broaden the divisions among the community.

Taking into consideration the experiences of these two countries, my research will conclude in the seventh and last chapter by inferring a set of lessons learned and policy recommendations that could be applied to other countries equally challenged by armed groups whose claims are intertwined to the indigenous cause. Government officials and political analysts could use the past experiences of Guatemala and Peru to facilitate the reinsertion into society of former elements of Marxist insurgencies and to adequately factor indigenous rights in their countries' legislations, so that multiculturalism can become a reality. Finally, I will identify three main areas of reform intended to promote a pluri-cultural concept of the state: education, land reform, and judiciary. Political stability and fair distribution of resources are direct consequences of such more balanced, yet complex, approach to state building.

The concluding remarks of my research are aimed at showing that the lessons learned from the Guatemalan and Peruvian case could be valid beyond the Latin American region and do apply to all countries with a significant ethnic component and a high potential for conflict.

Chapter 2 – The Ethnic Question

2.1 – Initial Remarks

The condition of oppression and discrimination that Latin American indigenous people have endured since colonialism is also defined as the “ethnic question.” Throughout the years, white elites have exploited American Indians economically, while dismissing their culture as backward and degenerate. This prolonged segregation did not end with independence from Spain, as native populations found themselves still at the bottom of the social ladder, with little or no involvement in the nation-building process that was taking place in the nineteenth century.

Within the Latin American territory, the implications of the ethnic question have been different and contingent upon the specific demographic of the Indian communities as a result of the Spanish conquest. However, a commonly shared feature of the Indian problem arose after independence. Governments of the sub-continent continued to ignore the indigenous element inherent in their national societies, as if the end of colonialism had suddenly stopped the century-long inequalities to which *indios* had been subjected. Such a tacit agreement among elites was even more ludicrous in Central American and central Andean countries, home to 85 percent of the entire Latin American indigenous population, estimated to reach 40 million.²⁸ Here, national identity was forged to the detriment of ethnic differences that were at times downplayed and at times blamed for the countries’ failure to attain economic development. Thus, it was here that indigenous minorities have played (and will continue to) a major role in advancing ethnicity as a key component of any Latin American nation.

²⁸ Sieder, Rachel, ed. *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity, and Democracy*. Palgrave MacMillan: London (2002): p. 1.

2.2 – Ethnicity, “Mestizaje,” and “Indigenismo”

Race and ethnicity are sometimes used interchangeably. However, scholars like Yinger and Chambers caution against such an indiscriminate use of the two terms and define race as a mostly biological category and ethnicity as a social and cultural one.²⁹ More specifically, Yinger describes race as one of the “defining elements”³⁰ of ethnicity, along with language or religion, and offers the following definition of an ethnic group: “a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture.”³¹ Although in the Latin American case the ethnic question could refer to several minority groups, such as Afro-American and Asian people, that have also been victimized and discriminated against, this research paper will only deal with indigenous people. This is why I will occasionally refer to the ethnic question as the “Indian question.”

With regard to the word *indio*, it is important to point out that its essence has changed throughout time, in a historically and socially constructed process. While during the colonial era this term was used mainly with a racial connotation, it then came to encompass ethnic notions of belonging to the same nation with a particular type of “indigenismo.” Lately, depending on the country, the term could be used in a positive

²⁹ Yinger, J. Milton. “Ethnicity,” in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 11 (1985): pp. 158-159, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083290> (accessed on 26 March 2011) and Chambers, Sarah C., “Little Middle Ground. The Instability of a Mestizo Identity in the Andes, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Appelbaum, Nancy P., Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosenblatt, ed. *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, The University of North Carolina Press (2003): p. 33.

³⁰ Yinger, p. 159.

³¹ Ibid.

way to reinforce cultural identity or with a negative association that links it to the colonial past.³²

Spanish conquistadores, and Columbus *in primis*, judged the *indio* through the Western categories they were comfortable with and immediately rejected him as different (*otro*). The well-known history of ruthless domination of the indigenous population during colonialism is not only a consequence of economic calculations, but stems also from racist ideologies, abetted by religious beliefs. Indians were considered inferior by means of their physical traits and because of their “idolatrous” habits.³³ Conversion to the Catholic faith would not redeem them from the sin of not being white. Thus, colonial society was essentially divided into white elites and Indians and such a rigid social structure would not fundamentally change with the growth of a *mestizo* (mixed) population. Generally, given that indigenous people were subject to a tax to the Spanish crown as a compensation for the right to cultivate communal land, *mestizos* were incorporated in the indigenous ethnic category by the colonial administration.

Latin America’s fight for independence in the early nineteenth century did not terminate the oppression of indigenous peoples. To the contrary, the end of colonialism only worsened the condition of native populations, who at least under the Spanish government benefited from legal protection and local autonomy.³⁴ The liberation movement that wavered around the sub-continent meant the creation of national states and the conquest of political power for Creole elites, but only brought more misery and subordination to the Indian masses that were excluded from this nation-making process.

³² Ideas of semantic differences in the term *indio* across Latin America are taken from the Seminar of Carlos Camacho that I attended on 13 October 2010 at the United Nations Headquarters.

³³ Barabas, p. 11.

³⁴ Chambers, in Appelbaum et al., p. 34.

Despite embracing liberal ideas of equality, supporters of independence continued to be victims of racial stereotypes that confined *indios* to the bases of the social pyramid, in light of their biological inferiority and lack of education. Simón Bolívar, the independence leader, considered the “difference between the races”³⁵ of Latin America an impediment to democracy and real autonomy, while liberal Domingo F. Sarmiento boosted European immigration to Argentina, so as to balance the indigenous component.³⁶ As governments consolidated their power, racial discrimination and economic exploitation of indigenous minorities increased, for the sake of national interest. The size of communal lands shrank inexorably as the state was confiscating more and more productive land to indigenous communities. In many countries, especially in Mesoamerica, native people were subject to peonage in order to fuel an economy dependent on exports. The rise of scientific racism during the nineteenth century contributed to the already existing dichotomy between whites and the “others” and further legitimized the hierarchical structure created by the upper strata of white and Creole population.³⁷ This is the phase of political and ethnic assimilation, described by Rodríguez Guaján as a process “by which the dominant culture of a given society deprives of influence and eliminates, by direct and brutal means, the culture(s) of the other people(s) in the name of a single state.”³⁸ In other words, because the indigenous element was seen as an obstacle to the young nation’s overall progress towards modernity, the assimilationist approach tried to eliminate it through “cultural

³⁵ Miller, Marilyn Grace. *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race. The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*. University of Texas Press: Austin (2004): p. 9.

³⁶ Appelbaum et al., p. 5.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁸ Rodríguez Guaján, Demetrio. “Maya Culture and the Politics of Development,” in Fischer, Edward F., and R. McKenna Brown ed. *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*. University of Texas Press: Austin (1996): p. 78.

homogenization.”³⁹ Where native populations were scarce, namely in Argentina or Chile, physical elimination constituted a more feasible approach for white elites in order to facilitate national unity and economic development.

According to the analysis of Appelbaum, Macpherson and Rosenblatt, the early twentieth century witnessed a changing attitude in Latin American upper classes, due to the mounting of a popular mobilization mainly represented by the Mexican Revolution of the 1910-20s and by the increasing peasant and worker unionism across the region.⁴⁰ Despite the lingering of racial concepts, the nation-making process became more inclusive for indigenous minorities, primarily because of the appearance of “mestizaje,” intended as the celebration of one Latin American identity as opposed to several sub-identities revealed by race.⁴¹ In the vision of the most fervent proponent of “mestizaje,” Mexican José Vasconcelos, the mixture of all the races within the Latin American continent would give birth to a “cosmic race” capable of transcending biological notions in favor of the “spiritual fusion of people.”⁴² Though closer to a philosophical approach towards the ethnic problem rather than to a political one, “mestizaje” was used by Latin American intellectuals as an anti-imperialist tool to reassert their racial equality or superiority vis-à-vis the European and United States-sponsored racial purity.⁴³

In Appelbaum et al., the origins of “mestizaje” coincide with the emergence of “indigenismo,” another “social and cultural movement”⁴⁴ that was particularly active in

³⁹ Appelbaum et al., p. 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Miller, p. 27.

⁴² Ibid., p 30.

⁴³ Appelbaum et al., p. 7.

⁴⁴ De la Cadena, Marisol. “From Race to Class: Insurgent Intellectuals *de provincia* in Peru, 1910-1970,” in Stern, Steve J., ed. *Shining and Other Paths. War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*. Duke University Press: Durham and London (1998): p. 32.

Mesoamerica and the Andean region. Many other scholars, such as Tamayo Herrera and Bollinger and Lund, distance themselves from this position and conceive “indigenismo” as the natural Indian response to the ethnic question, an attitude that can be traced back to the colonialist days and the first indigenous rebellions and whose objectives and actors had changed throughout the years.⁴⁵ Generally, indigenistas’ focus was placed on the indigenous component of Latin American societies rather than on celebrating an ideal mixed race. To be sure, “indigenismo” was consistent with a regional response to Western ideas that assumed white people’s intrinsic superiority at both the physical and the cultural level. In this sense, the chronological classification of Appelbaum et al. acquires a greater meaning, also taking into account that “indigenismo” as an intellectual current triumphed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Against the backdrop of the complex and fluid situation of the newly independent Latin American states, “indigenismo” had various strands that could be commonly grouped as “bourgeois indigenismo,” “radical indigenismo” and “Marxist indigenismo.”⁴⁶ The first approach was repeatedly used by states with a consistent indigenous minority in order to incorporate native people into the elites’ nation-making programs. Also called “officialist indigenismo,”⁴⁷ such a movement idealized the Indian past pursuing a two-fold objective: the integration of the *indio* into the new nation-state and the partial address of the ethnic problem, which at that stage could no longer be ignored. Unfortunately, its pragmatic approach that celebrated unity over racial difference

⁴⁵ Bollinger, William, and Daniel, Manny Lund. “Minority Oppression: Toward Analyses that Clarify and Strategies that Liberate,” in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 9, 2 (Spring 1982): p. 15, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633501> (accessed on 26 March 2011) and Tamayo Herrera, pp. 9-12.

⁴⁶ I broadly follow the classification of Bollinger and Lund (“Minority Oppression”) and of Betsy Konefal (*For Every Indio Who Falls*).

⁴⁷ Bollinger and Lund, p. 15.

thwarted the elaboration of government policies genuinely interested at solving indigenous minorities' problems. This type of "indigenismo" was more directed at assuaging Indian populations' grievances by strategically praising their cultural aspects, which were reduced to mere "folklore." Integrationist approaches⁴⁸ can for instance be found during the Guatemalan civil conflict, when levels of violence against the Mayan population skyrocketed and yet government's officials continued to pay tributes to the "Indianness" of the country in public ceremonies.⁴⁹

"Radical indigenismo" also bore an element of opportunism. Advanced by intellectuals that were either isolated in the provincial milieu or were disappointed at the mainstream intellectual discourse, it found refuge in the cultures of pre-Hispanic indigenous civilizations, whose main elements had by then disappeared. These intellectuals were quick in exploiting Inca or Mayan traditions to advance their political agendas: Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, founder of the Peruvian party American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA),⁵⁰ and Abimael Guzmán, leader of the Shining Path, are fitting example of this strand.

The apogee of the "Marxist indigenismo," also called "socialist indigenismo" in Peru,⁵¹ was during the First Latin American Communist Conference in 1929, where the Peruvian delegation drew upon the work of the intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui to reflect on the Indian question in the sub-continent.⁵² Mariátegui plainly rejected conceiving of the Indian problem in an ethnic way, as he saw in such an approach

⁴⁸ Rodríguez Guaján, in Fischer, pp. 80-82.

⁴⁹ Konefal, pp. 24-28.

⁵⁰ Bollinger and Lund, p. 21.

⁵¹ De la Cadena, in Stern, p. 39.

⁵² Bollinger, pp. 10-11.

remnants of “imperialist ideas.”⁵³ Instead, he located the roots of the outstanding issue in the “land tenure system,”⁵⁴ thus prioritizing the economic and social aspect over the cultural and racial one. In line with these reflections, subsequent strands of “Marxist indigenismo” in Guatemala, also known as “*clasistas*,” would interpret the ethnic question as a fight of social classes and would refuse classic “indigenista” approaches more interested in defending the specific traits of the Mayan culture.⁵⁵

A general critique of “mestizaje” and “indigenismo” argues that both movements were usually distant from indigenous masses, as they were the product of intellectuals who lacked representation among the Indians mainly because they belonged to the white or *mestizo* classes. In addition, as contended by de la Cadena, these intellectual debates were not alien to a certain level of racism, due to the fact that the subjects of their discussion, *mestizos* and *indios*, respectively, were still conceptualized in racial terms, despite the movement’s attempted rebellion against Western racial models. The sobering conclusion is that, whether expressed in a cultural trend or through a government policy, the ethnic question failed to be addressed for centuries.

2.3 – The Indigenous Rights Front

It is only in the last two decades of the twentieth century that native populations began a systematic mobilization that transcended the national borders and acquired the form of an indigenous global movement. Stavenhagen offers a multiple explanation to the sudden change in the ethnic question debate from a mainly theoretical one to a more realistic and inclusive one. Firstly, he ascribed to the end of the Cold War a strategic

⁵³ Mariátegui, José Carlos. *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*. University of Texas Press: Austin and London (1971): p. 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Konefal, p. 8.

importance for the shift of the discussion towards indigenous people: as we will see in the Guatemalan and Peruvian cases, Marxist frameworks that tried to recruit Indians lost their appeal with the worldwide defeat of Communism. Moreover, the growing influence of the global economy over previously isolated indigenous communities triggered a clash between the latter and state economic policies, which in turn fostered indigenous unity. Finally, the so-called “third wave of democratization”⁵⁶ that appeared in Latin America in the early 1980s granted indigenous people the political participation they had always been deprived of under the authoritarian and military governments that thrived since the independence from Spain.⁵⁷

Arguably, the main success of this global indigenous movement was in the legal sphere. On the one hand, the emergence of a dialogue between the Indian and the state is recognized nationally and represented by the blossoming of constitutional reforms adopted by countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁸ While the Bolivian Constitution of 1994 defines the country as “multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual,”⁵⁹ the Brazilian Constitution deals with indigenous people in a whole separate chapter.⁶⁰ Article 66 of the Guatemalan 1985 Constitution recognizes the existence of ethnic groups and declares that the state “respects, and promotes their

⁵⁶ From Samuel Huntington’s book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.

⁵⁷ Stavenhagen, Rodolfo. “Indigenous Peoples and the State in Latin America: an Ongoing Debate,” in Sieder, p. 31. In 2001, Stavenhagen was also appointed as the first Special Rapporteur on indigenous people’s rights and fundamental freedoms by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (see United Nations website at <http://www.un.org/rights/indigenous/backgroundunder1.htm>, accessed on 27 March 2011).

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

lifeways, customs, traditions, forms of social organization, the use of indigenous clothing of men and women, and languages and dialects.”⁶¹

On the other hand, the improvement of the legal condition of the *indio* has been formalized at the international level with the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (1989), signed and ratified by 14 out of the 20 Latin American countries, including Guatemala and Peru.⁶² Convention 169, as it is most commonly known, represented a milestone in the path towards the full recognition of native people’s rights, especially because it encouraged states with considerable indigenous minorities to abandon their “assimilationist” approach and to embrace diversity as a catalyst for development.⁶³ With regard to the Indian question, the ILO Convention is equally important, as it encompasses the broad range of elements that constituted the problem, from the ethnic to the social, cultural, economic, and political aspect. It does, in fact, propose a definition of indigenous people as groups “in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country...at the time of conquest or colonisation ...and who ...retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”⁶⁴ Presenting self-identification as the main basis of identification for indigenous people,⁶⁵ the Convention breaks with the racial and ethnic paradigms of the past and inaugurates an era of true pluralism. It further calls on governments to safeguard the full spectrum of rights of native people (Article 2) and to

⁶¹ Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio. “The Politics of Maya Revindication,” in Fischer, p. 25.

⁶² Information available in the ILO website, at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/ratifce.pl?C169> (accessed on 27 March 2011).

⁶³ Convention 169, available at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C169> (accessed on 27 March 2011), Prologue.

⁶⁴ Convention 169, Article 1, para. 1 (b).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 1, para. 2.

end discrimination towards them (Article 3). At the political level, the Convention advocates for the inclusion of indigenous people in all “administrative and legislative measures which may affect them directly”⁶⁶ and extends this consultation process to national and regional decisions that may have an impact on their communities (Article 7). Finally, at the economic level, this binding document dedicates an entire part to the access to land, seen as a spiritual bondage and as a right to subsistence, in line with Marxist and “indigenistas” views. In Article 14, the Convention notes the importance of “the rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the land which they traditionally occupy”⁶⁷ and subsequently mandates the protection of indigenous populations’ rights to the “natural resources pertaining to their lands.”⁶⁸

The indigenous rights regime was further expanded with the increasing activity of the international community in the following years. The United Nations created the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as a body directly reporting to the Economic and Social Council in 2000,⁶⁹ while it had previously declared the “International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People” in 1995, followed by the second one in 2005.⁷⁰ Four years ago, the General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which significantly reiterates all the rights enshrined in the ILO Convention, but makes a fundamental original contribution, namely the right to self-

⁶⁶ Ibid., Article 6, para. 1 (a).

⁶⁷ Ibid., Article 14, para. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Article 15, para. 1.

⁶⁹ E/RES/2000/22, adopted on 28 July 2000, available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/4551c1ca87941c3ec12569b400396335?Opendocument> (accessed on 27 March 2011).

⁷⁰ A/RES/48/163 of 21 December 1993, available at <http://www.un-documents.net/a48r163.htm> (accessed on 27 March 2011) and A/RES/59/174 of 20 December 2004, available at <http://www.un-documents.net/a59r174.htm> (accessed on 27 March 2011).

determination.⁷¹ Such a right, absent in previous international law documents, had been a missing element in the context of an indigenous rights regime. Many indigenous rights proponents were, in fact, convinced of the utmost importance of regional and local autonomy for native communities to adequately participate in the nation-making process.⁷² However, the non-binding nature of the Declaration diminishes the value of such a revolutionary step. Likewise, one must acknowledge that there is a gap between the internationally recognized provisions on indigenous rights and national legislation. Even in the case of the legally binding ILO Convention, Latin American states have been found generally lacking the political will and the economic and institutional resources to implement these rights. Their constitutional amendments discussed above are also widely neglected.

The growth of international attention to the claims of indigenous minorities has spawned a revival of native people's rights also at the regional level. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has created a Working Group to foster a consensus for the issuance of an American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.⁷³ This and other measures, notwithstanding their "soft power," are indeed the symbol of a process for raising awareness that will unlikely stop. By advancing a multicultural and "pluralist approach,"⁷⁴ the growing regime on indigenous rights is acting as a norm-changing agent and has once more demonstrated the resilience of native populations, particularly in the Latin American region.

⁷¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/295 of 13 September 2007, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>, (accessed on 27 March 2011), Article 3.

⁷² Stavenhagen, in Sieder, p. 36.

⁷³ See the Organization of American State website at <http://www.oas.org/consejo/sp/CAJP/Indigenassintesis.asp#2011> (accessed on 27 March 2011).

⁷⁴ Rodríguez Guaján, in Fischer, p. 83.

Chapter 3 – Marxist Thought and Marxism in Latin America

3.1 – Marxism and Marxist frameworks

When Antonio Gramsci said “Marx signifies the entry of intelligence into the history of humanity,”⁷⁵ he summarized in those few words the enormous impact of Marxist ideas in all subsequent economic, political, and philosophical thought. After settling in most of the Western capitalist world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Karl Marx’ theories have spread beyond Europe, influencing not only scholars and politicians, but also disenfranchised sectors of the world population. With its emphasis on the importance of class-consciousness, Marxist thought has acted as a tool of awareness for millions of people in the so-called Third World. In the post-colonialist era, ideals of socialist revolution and classless society were particularly powerful in the Latin American region, where Cuba stood as an example of a successful communist State.

Yet, classical Marxism and Marxist approaches are two separate things. While the former derives from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the latter is an interpretation of these two scholars’ ideas and comprises of numerous strains of thought, from Leninism and Stalinism in Russia to Maoism in China and “Cheguevarism” in Latin America. Although the common underpinning of these approaches is a belief in communism as a necessary phase to overcome capitalism, they are all different re-elaborations of main tenets of classic Marxism and, as such, cannot be plainly identified with it. Rather, one can argue that, after Marx, Marxist frameworks could be regarded as a “method of investigation” as opposed to an “all-embracing theory of history.”⁷⁶ This

⁷⁵ Gramsci, Antonio. *Il grido del Popolo*. 4 May 1918, in Forgacs, David. ed. *The Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935*. New York University Press: New York (2000): p. 36.

⁷⁶ Kolakowski, p. 303.

approach best explains the distinct features that Marxism has assumed in different countries at different times in history and helps us understand why Marxist guerrilla movements have had unequal outcomes even within the same continent.

3.2 – Classical Marxism

Before analyzing the specifics of Marxist ideology in Latin America, it is useful to examine some of the main assumptions introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as they constitute the theoretical foundation of following proponents of communism.

Socialism in the first half of the nineteenth century was a well-known concept that could be traced back to Plato or Thomas Moore and that was advanced by intellectuals such as Babeuf or Saint-Simon.⁷⁷ However, Marxist socialism differs from these thinkers in its fundamental premise. Instead of assuming a normative approach by considering poverty, brought by the Industrial Revolution and the increasing accumulation of capital, as the leading cause of change for the worker class, the starting point of Marxist analysis is dehumanization.⁷⁸ In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx identified the alienation of human labor, in turn caused by extreme technological development, as the chief problematic brought about by advanced capitalism. When mental and physical work are disconnected and man's own labor starts to be commercialized as a "thing," the dehumanization process is complete and can only be fought through man's awareness of such situation. Because it was the most oppressed and dehumanized social class, Marx believed that the proletariat was going to be entrusted with setting humanity free through social upheaval and the establishment of communism. This is the phase of history that, due to the abolition of private property and the division

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 150-158.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 181-182.

of labor, will finally put an end to human alienation and will usher in the harmonious stage of socialism, with its classless society.⁷⁹

In subsequent works, Marx refined his theory of communism by focusing on several issues. One cardinal concept in his thought is the “mode of production” which “determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.”⁸⁰ Capitalism is the mode of production of the modern world, having gradually displaced feudalism, and one of its main advantages, according to Marx, is the fact of having contributed to the material well being of Western European nations. A unanimously recognized merit of Marxist analysis is its lucid view of capitalism and its flaws: this mode of production is, in fact, presented as containing paradoxes that will eventually lead to its destruction. The central contradiction, or “falling rate of profit,” posits that advancing technology and industrialization, aiming at maximizing production and thus substituting workers with machines, will eventually hinder capitalists’ profits, due to unemployment and decreasing wages of producers/consumers.⁸¹

Within the capitalist system, three elements coexist: market exchanges, the dominance of the bourgeoisie as the main owner of capital, and the subordination of the working class, who is the producer of capital.⁸² That is why Marx and Engels conceptualize the modern capitalist system in a perpetual conflict between dominant class (bourgeoisie) and exploited class (proletariat), while they maintain, in one of their most often quoted phrases, that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 130-149.

⁸⁰ Marx, Karl. *A contribution to the critique of Political Economy*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, (1904): p. 11.

⁸¹ Kolakowski, pp. 244-245.

⁸² Sterling-Folker, p. 200.

class struggle.”⁸³ Linked to this position is their materialist approach to history, also known as “historical materialism,” that privileges economic aspects and changes in the modes of production as the main causes of historical events and that derives from Marx’ conception of the world as made of a “substructure” and a “superstructure.” The first is described as the sum of the “relations of production” in which men enter during their “social production,”⁸⁴ whereas the second comprehends all other aspects of human life, from political institutions to religious and cultural beliefs.⁸⁵

It is especially around the interpretation of historical materialism that subsequent Marxist frameworks diverge. According to certain scholars, like Kolakowski, Marx himself did not believe that all historical phenomena could be explained by referring to economic and class factors alone, as this would make his whole theory “unsustainable.”⁸⁶ Kolakowski, in fact, is not in favor of a literal and dogmatic reading of Marx’ work, as he cautions against the “radical and unacceptable formulas”⁸⁷ that the intellectual frequently used in his work in order to advance his revolutionary hypotheses. Interpreted more strictly, though, Marxism can lead to a reductionist and determinist view of history, one that relies only on class fight and economic interests and is blind to any other element of man’s existence.

⁸³ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. The Electric Book Co.: London (1998): p. 8.

⁸⁴ Marx, *A contribution to the critique of Political Economy*, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Kolakowski, p. 277.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303. In Aditya Nigam, one of the reasons for the reductionist interpretations of Marx is his “canonization,” that has destroyed the “critical spirit” of the philosopher in favor of a more plain and easier understanding of his works. Underlining Marx’ self-criticism and cyclical re-thinking of his previous writings, Nigam concludes that any interpretations of the philosopher’s theory has to be mindful of this in order to be comprehensive and realistic. (Nigam, Aditya. “Marxism and the Postcolonial World: Footnotes to a Long March,” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 34, 1/2, Jan. 1999: 33-43, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407547>, accessed on 9 April 2011).

3.3 – Marxism after Marx: Russia and China

Following Marx and Engels' deaths (1883 and 1895, respectively),⁸⁸ their socialist ideas were deeply rooted in the political consciousness of the European *intelligentsia*. At the end of the nineteenth century, the debate on European Marxism was focused on two main concepts: the organization of the socialist party and its path to achieving revolution. In the context of Russia's backwardness and semi-feudal society, Lenin emerged as a prominent figure in the country's young and still illegal socialist movement. His greatest contribution to Marxist thought lay in his "practical" implementation of it, as opposed to the mere theorization found in Marx and Engels.⁸⁹ He argued for centralism as the only way to victory for Russian socialism, because of Russia's inherently different structural conditions as compared to Europe. Taking into account the extremely weak proletariat class, and the tsarist regime, Lenin maintained that only through a trained and limited group of "professional revolutionaries" could the Russian Social Democracy find the optimal organization to defeat oppression and bring revolution on a large scale.⁹⁰ This rigid centralization of the Russian communist party would be a lasting feature, even after the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and it would distinguish the tenure of Lenin's successor, Stalin (1924-1953). With him, Russia abandoned the Trotskyan concept of "global revolution" to adopt the dictator's idea of

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 212-214.

⁸⁹ Kolakowski, pp. 341-343 and Harris, Richard L. "Marxism and the Transition to Socialism in Latin America," in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol 15, 1 (Winter 1988): p. 8.

⁹⁰ Lenin, Vladimir Illyich. *What is to be Done?* (1902), available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1902lenin.html> (accessed on 9 April 2011).

“Socialism in One Country,” by which the Soviet regime decided to continue on the socialist path despite the defeat of leftist parties in Europe.⁹¹

Marxism in China, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, relied heavily on the power of the masses, mainly peasants. Mao’s original re-elaboration of Marxism-Leninism consisted, in fact, in the belief that “social strata were revolutionary in proportion to their poverty”⁹² and in taking advantage of this potential for revolution by focusing on the countryside instead of the urban centers. After his victory against the Kuomintang in 1949, Mao instituted a communist regime following the footsteps of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, but then departed from his Russian counterparts, mainly on how to achieve economic development. While Russian communism emphasized the importance of scientific knowledge in attaining industrialization, Maoism seemed to stress more the power of the masses elicited through ideological pressure and distrusted intellectual knowledge, which could cause “moral degeneration.”⁹³

Maoist thought greatly differed from classic Marxism and Leninism in that it did not conceive of communism as a peaceful and harmonious phase, but as a conflictive status. This theory of “permanent revolution” stemmed from Mao’s assumption that a classless society and social harmony were both impossible to achieve because, whenever a phase of equilibrium was reached, one class would always try to prevail over the others.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Von Laue, Theodore H. *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? Why Gorbachev? The Rise and Fall of the Soviet System*. Harper Collins College Publishers: New York (1993): p. 144.

⁹² Kolakowski, p. 1187.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1197.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1196.

Russian and Chinese versions of Marxism expanded their hegemony to Third World countries during the second half of the twentieth century, even when communist ideas started to “relax” or were abandoned as a consequence of the end of the Cold War.

3.4 – Marxism in Latin America

Within Latin America, one can distinguish two co-existing and mutually influencing strands of Marxist thought: a “revolutionary” and an “economic” one. With regard to the “revolutionary” strand, Marxism-Leninism exercised the greatest influence on the sub-continent, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, the acme of the Soviet Union totalitarian regime. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and dependency theory constitute the theoretical underpinning of the second line of thought, which is more focused on development rather than on socialist revolution.

The revolutionary potential of poor rural and urban masses foreseen by Leninism and, subsequently, Maoism had an inevitable appeal throughout Latin America, where the agrarian question originated with colonialism continued to represent an obstacle to social justice. With the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Marxist Leninist model consolidated in the area but was soon modified in light of the region’s specific conditions. Molded into the Soviet centralized and extremely bureaucratized party, the Cuban regime and other Latin American communist parties, such as the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran, would later opt for an official party led by intellectuals (the Leninist “vanguard”) linked to mass organizations and armed guerrillas. This combination of unions, popular activism, and

armed wings would form the party's natural bond to the society, which was virtually absent in the rigid Soviet system.⁹⁵

As the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict deepens in the 1960s, communist parties in Latin America align themselves with either approach and revolutionary groups underwent fervent discussions on ideological orthodoxy, which brought about several defections. Peru was perhaps one of the most interesting examples of such ideological debates that eventually led to the establishment of a myriad of sub-groups within the main communist party. After siding with the Chinese interpretation of Marxism, the Shining Path became the most notorious of these communist factions. Mao's focus on the peasantry and his theory of revolution coming from the countryside attracted Peruvian intellectuals, given the country's agrarian question and the vast number of impoverished peasants that could potentially overthrow the bourgeois and semi-capitalist regime.

Elsewhere, notably in Guatemala, Marxist frameworks were more sensitive to ethnicity and native populations. Here, Marxism was used as a political tool to involve native masses into the revolutionary struggle against capitalism, but with a view to preserving their cultural and ethnic characteristics.⁹⁶ Still led by intellectuals, this fight against the bourgeois class was seen as a more complex one than its European equivalent. The dichotomy between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie identified by Marx and Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* was in the Latin American case a tension between several classes, comprising of peasants, urbanized workers, landowners, and a few members of the industrial bourgeoisie. The specific stage of Latin American capitalism, not yet fully

⁹⁵ Harris, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Díaz-Polanco, Héctor, and Steven M. Gorman. "Indigenismo, Populism, and Marxism," in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 9, 2 (Spring 1982): pp. 42-61, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633503> (accessed on 10 April 2011).

developed, as well as the presence of a conspicuous number of native populations, had to be taken into account for a successful path to social revolution.

Economic theories based on Marxist frameworks were concerned about the late development of Latin America in the context of a globalized capitalist market. Jorge Larrain identifies three stages of capitalism and connects them to the emergence of different theories of development.⁹⁷ The first phase, the “age of competitive capitalism” (1700-1860)⁹⁸ is what Marx considered the establishment of the bourgeoisie as the main social class, after the demise of feudalism. Colonialism played a key role, in that it provided new markets for the bourgeoisie’s capital expansion.⁹⁹ In the “age of imperialism” (1860-1945), the world economy witnessed the concentration of capital into monopolistic systems and the introduction of the theory of imperialism, thanks to intellectuals like Lenin, Hobson, Luxemburg, and Bukharin. Imperialism was seen as the most evolved expression of capitalism, a phase where the merging of industrial and financial capital triggered the will of expansion of capitalist countries to non-capitalist economies. While the colonization of new markets was regarded as a positive consequence for “backward” countries because it offered them the structural conditions to develop, it was nonetheless perceived as a cumbersome responsibility for central economies, which risked collapsing.¹⁰⁰ With the end of the Second World War, Larrain distinguishes a new phase of “late capitalism,” during which this mode of production underwent a period of expansion (until 1966) and of subsequent decadence (from 1966

⁹⁷ Larrain, Jorge. *Theories of Development*. Polity Press: Cambridge, UK (1989).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Larrain, pp. 45-72.

until 1980s).¹⁰¹ The first two decades saw the proliferation of theories of modernization, according to which pre-capitalist and non-democratic countries had to experience the same stages of development of Western countries in order to reach economic and political maturity. Widely criticized for their teleological approach only focused on Western models, these frameworks are gradually substituted for more domestic and homegrown approaches. In Latin America, the ideas developed within the United Nations-sponsored ECLAC represented a chief contribution to this debate. The fruit of a complex economic reasoning that viewed Third World countries as a periphery in opposition to core (Western) countries, ECLAC's analysis of the Latin America situation was built within the context of capitalism as the sole means of development and in this it strongly differed from Marxist perspectives. It proposed a process of industrialization that was brought about in an autarchic way, so as to obviate the economic exploitation of the global market. Abetted by a strong state intervention and protectionist tariffs, this "import-substituting industrialization" (ISI) would eliminate the reliance on foreign imports and, consequently, economic dependency.¹⁰²

When, in the second half of 1900, capitalism reached stagnation and it seemed clear that the ISI model advocated by ECLAC had failed to stimulate economic development and was no longer sustainable, Latin American scholars elaborated a new set of concepts, broadly encompassed by the so-called "development theory." Their main purpose was to study capitalism in peripheral countries and they have been credited with advocating an analysis of the development of capitalist structures in the Latin American region that took into account the sub-continent's "peculiar historical and geographical

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 10-17.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 102-107.

circumstances.”¹⁰³ Specifically, in Faletto and Cardoso’s version, dependency theory explained the failed or delayed industrialization of the region not only through its unfavorable position in the global market and vis-à-vis central economies, but also and mainly by considering Latin America’s internal political processes. In a traditional Marxist approach, patterns of class struggles were considered the catalyst of all historical processes and dependency was not seen as an inevitable outcome for Latin America, because it could be overcome with the help of internal economic strategies.¹⁰⁴ Other proponents of dependency theory (Furtado, Sunkel, and Pinto)¹⁰⁵ were more pessimistic and did not foresee the possibility of real development in the periphery of the world-system. Instead, they blamed industrialization for the “development of underdevelopment”¹⁰⁶ in Third World countries.

Overall, it is clear how different strands of Marxism have greatly influenced Latin American politics in the twentieth century. Although their success has consistently diminished after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, these frameworks do continue to carry a certain weight on local policies, against the backdrop of persisting financial and economic dominance of countries such as the United States. However, I argue that Marxist theories will survive, here and elsewhere, so long as they are capable of cogently analyzing the realities of the region and to appreciate and pragmatically use national characteristics, both in the political and in the economic sphere. In the case of Latin America, ethnicity is a decisive factor in the success of these frameworks, as will be shown in the following chapters.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 159-174.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 147-153.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

Chapter 4 – The Case of Guatemala

4.1 – General Considerations

Guatemala is a land of contradictions, a country that typifies the Central American region in several ways. Deep-rooted racism, a consequence of this country's colonial past, is continuing to affect social and political relationships within the strata of the Guatemalan population. Furthermore, the State has perpetuated inequality by systematically failing to mediate among the opposing interests of its citizens and by always taking the side of the elites and most powerful constituencies. It is fair to say that, since the 1821 Independence from Spain, the State has been the worst oppressor of the majority of Guatemalans, those excluded from economic progress and estranged from political participation. Among such groups of people left behind by a government completely indifferent to social reforms were indigenous people and poor *ladinos*, usually peasants, urbanized, or migrant workers. Finally, the militarization of politics from the early 1960s to the regime of General Lucas García, has sparked an unimaginable level of violence and repression whose intensity, in my opinion, is yet to be clarified.

Guatemalan society is still coping with the consequences of one of the longest civil wars ever known and the fact that indigenous populations were arguably the most targeted by the counterrevolutionary army greatly deepened the distance between them and the *others*.

4.2 – Historical Background

Right after independence, Guatemala was led by a series of Liberal governments. They focused on economic development and imposed a heavy system of taxation that, by targeting land and crops, ended up impoverishing Indian and *ladino* peasants,¹⁰⁷

Despite Rafael Carrera's revolt in 1838, Liberals were able to secure power once again after his death in 1865.¹⁰⁸ In particular, modernization of the army and the bureaucracy, as well as the cultivation of coffee, received a huge boost during Justo Rufino Barrios' tenure (1873-1885).¹⁰⁹ The introduction of this new crop completely changed both Guatemala's economy and land structure: while the former became completely dependent on coffee, reaching the astonishing figure of 85 percent of the country's total exports by 1900,¹¹⁰ land distribution turned into the major cause of inequality within Guatemalan society. For the sake of economic progress, communal land in Indian villages was confiscated and sold. These expropriations forced peasants to live off of an ever-shrinking size of land, the so-called *minifundio*, and to seasonally migrate to coffee plantations in order to survive.¹¹¹

In the context of this semi-colonial economy, Guatemala reacted to the decline of the coffee empire with the launch of a new crop with a better market. The twentieth century ushered in the banana economy, with capital pouring in from the United States¹¹² and multinational corporations that would greatly influence the Central American

¹⁰⁷ Handy, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-60.

¹⁰⁹ Booth, John A., Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker. *Understanding Central America. Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*. Westview Press: Boulder, CO (2006): p. 115.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

¹¹¹ Porras Castejón, Gustavo. *Las huellas de Guatemala*. F&G Editores: Guatemala (2009): pp. 42-43, and Handy, pp. 64-69.

¹¹² Handy, pp. 73-78.

country's politics until the counterrevolution of 1954. The banana empire, just like the coffee one, considerably exacerbated the unequal land distribution of Guatemala while increasing the number of semi-wagers obliged to migrate to the unhealthy plantations on a regular basis.

The 1929 Great Depression tragically showed to the poor masses and the wealthy landowners alike the flaws of an economy fully dedicated to the export of commodities. General Jorge Ubico Casteñada's efforts to diversify the crops by intensifying rice and corn cultivation¹¹³ only partially addressed the country's foreign debt. Meanwhile, peasants' conditions continued to worsen as the State was expanding its control to the highlands to desperately exploit all possible resources.

It is against this backdrop that students, together with small businessmen and some army officers, initiated a period also known as the "Ten Years of Spring (1944-1954)."¹¹⁴ When Juan José Arévalo Bermejo was elected as the new President, he tried to modernize Guatemala and to transform its semi-colonial economy into a capitalist one. To this end, he promoted public health and education¹¹⁵ and, through the 1945 Constitution, abolished the system of forced labor and peonage¹¹⁶ that had so far characterized relations between peasants and landowners. His successor, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, brought reforms even farther, by approving and implementing the 1952 Agrarian Reform Law, in an effort to address the primary cause of poverty and economic backwardness. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the Arbenz government was not so concerned about inequality and discrimination against indigenous populations and

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

¹¹⁵ Booth et al., p. 116.

¹¹⁶ Porras Castejón, p. 119.

peasants in general. The agrarian reform was conceived more as a tool of modernization, a system that would make land cultivation more efficient and productive, hence benefiting the economy as a whole.¹¹⁷ The conservative aspects of the reform notwithstanding, one has to acknowledge that its pace was certainly unusually fast and its implementation a far-reaching one. In fact, figures show that peasants who directly profited from the land redistribution were 100,000¹¹⁸ (3.3 percent of a total population of about three million at the time), while the total acres of expropriated land by June 1954 were 917,659.¹¹⁹

According to Gustavo Porras, several elements interacted to suddenly halt the democratic reforms of the spring decade: the opposition of the Church, the radicalism of society, the United States multinational corporations' interests, coupled with an international scenario that feared Communism as the worst of evils.¹²⁰ On the one hand, internal factors, such as a conservative clergy and a constant inability to duly take into account the structural constraints to a social revolution frustrated the Ten Years of Spring path to democracy. On the other hand, the end of the spring decade came in the form of an armed intervention orchestrated by the United States, arguably to protect its economic profits in Guatemala, threatened by the Arbenz' land reform. At a closer analysis, though, the US-led coup seems more dictated by a broader political strategy rather than by economic concerns. The Communist Party of Guatemala (PCG) had formed in 1950 and was subsequently reorganized under the Guatemalan Workers' Party (PGT) two years

¹¹⁷ Handy, p. 127.

¹¹⁸ Booth et al., p. 117.

¹¹⁹ Handy, p. 128.

¹²⁰ Porras Castejón, pp. 150-169.

later,¹²¹ while unionism and peasants organizations had already resumed under the Arévalo government.¹²² During the latter and Arbenz' democratic administration, the United States had looked at this activism in an unfavorable way. However, the Agrarian Reform triggered the American intervention in virtue of the political and social consequences that it entailed. Arbenz and his clique were perceived as a communist menace not only for the United States, but also for the whole Central American region, where Guatemala held such a strategic and important position for the stability of the sub-continent.

The CIA-backed coup of 1954 overthrew Arbenz and inaugurated a succession of military governments during which the Guatemalan society slipped back into extreme misery, polarization, and inequality. The land distribution carried out under the Agrarian Reform was quickly reverted, so that the old system of mini-latifundia was re-established, to the detriment of poor peasants and small landowners, who soon became landless once again. The semi-proletarianization of the lower strata of society was a logical consequence of the severely unequal distribution of the land. According to figures of the Commission for Historical Clarification, ten years after the coup, 62 percent of Guatemalan land was in the hand of only 2.1 percent of the population, while 87 percent of peasants were cultivating plots of land that were too small to grant them an adequate level of subsistence.¹²³ Furthermore, the military governments of this period were notoriously famous for their corruption, a general absence of fair and free elections, and their absolute and inconsiderate violence towards the opposition. Even during the civilian

¹²¹ Handy, p. 120.

¹²² Booth et al., p. 116.

¹²³ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), data available at <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/cap1/chist.html>, (accessed on 4 February 2011), para. 9.

government of Julio César Méndez Montenegro (1966-1970), the military continued to be the main player and to influence all decisions pertaining to the State administration. Méndez was completely unable to control the widespread violence between the first Marxist guerrilla movements that appeared in the early 1960s and the counterrevolutionary death squads, such as the “Mano Blanca,” that began their murderous operations under his tenure.¹²⁴

Both the elections of 1970 and 1974 reflected an absolute lack of respect for the democratic process, with blatant fraud being routinely carried out and a level of violence that further escalated with the election of General Romeo Lucas García in 1978. During his regime (1978-1982), trade unions were crushed, universities repeatedly attacked, and activists and members of the opposition murdered or “disappeared.”¹²⁵ The Commission for Historical Clarification established that the highest levels of violence perpetrated by the State against Guatemalans reached a peak during the years from 1981 to 1983,¹²⁶ between the government of Lucas García and its successor’s, General Efraín Ríos Montt.

Further to the 1985 elections, the deeply divided military agreed to a civilian transitional government and to a certain degree of democratic changes.¹²⁷ The return to civilian institutions somehow bridged the cleavages of a society that had been torn apart by years of civil conflicts, State violence, and racial discrimination of the indigenous component. It certainly contributed to a historic shift of alliances within the Guatemalan society that led to a progressive legalization of left-wing activism and to its inclusion into the political game. Presidents Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo (1985-1990) and Jorge Serrano

¹²⁴ Handy, p. 162; Booth et al., p. 118; and Porras Castejón, p. 221

¹²⁵ Handy, pp. 174-183.

¹²⁶ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), para. 859.

¹²⁷ Booth et al., p. 124.

Elias (1991-1993) are credited with initiating the long process that would then lead to the Peace Accords of 1996,¹²⁸ arguably a memorable moment in the history of Guatemala.

4.3 – Armed Guerrillas, State Repression, and Peace Accords

As hypothesized by many scholars, such as May¹²⁹ and Handy,¹³⁰ the militarization of the State and the concept of permanent counterrevolution was a chief factor in the appearance of armed insurgencies. The 1954 *golpe* featured an American intervention that was two-fold: while the United States facilitated the coup logistically and financially, it also introduced an anti-Communist Cold War ideology that would be espoused by the Guatemalan military and consistent segments of the populace for decades.

The establishment of a National Security Doctrine (*Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional* or DSN) elaborated within the American government,¹³¹ guaranteed the Guatemalan armed force a margin of action that was virtually unlimited. The cornerstone of the Doctrine was the belief that national power was constituted by four elements, namely an economic, political, social, and military aspect.¹³² However, due to the Communist threat, the resources of the first three components had to be channeled into military power, the greatest defender of national security. Against a background of absolute repression and intolerance for any form of opposition, Guatemalan society was at a crossroad: political choices were limited to either agree with the militarized

¹²⁸ Rizo Otero, p. 125.

¹²⁹ May, Rachel A. “‘Surviving All Changes is Your Destiny:’ Violence and Popular Movements in Guatemala,” in *Latin American Perspectives*, 26, 2 (1999): p. 69, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2634295> (accessed on 4 February 2011).

¹³⁰ Handy, pp. 230-234.

¹³¹ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), para. 120-121.

¹³² *Ibid.*, para. 128.

government or to silently dissent. All other types of activity would have to be carried out in a clandestine way.

The first armed insurgency stemmed from a group of disaffected military officers protesting against United States' intervention into Guatemalan politics and demanding a restoration of the armed force.¹³³ This guerrilla movement, named the November 13th Revolutionary Movement (MR-13), allied itself with the Guatemalan Communist Party after an unsuccessful *golpe* on 13 November 1960, creating the Rebel Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* or FAR).¹³⁴ An overwhelming counterrevolutionary strategy coupled with the fake restoration of civilian power in 1966, led to the defeat of this first wave of revolutionary groups.

An overall assessment of armed guerrillas of the 1960s cannot ignore their exclusive character, which kept them apart from the masses of peasants and poor Guatemalans. This State opposition was made of army officials and young middle-class *ladinos* who generally neglected the ethnic question in favor of a simple return to legality and democracy. Only after being decimated by the counterinsurgency did the guerrilla movements realize the importance of rural support and re-organized under a more complex and heterogeneous framework. This process began in the University of San Carlos of Guatemala in the form of an intellectual discourse over the problems of “poverty, discrimination, and political exclusion”¹³⁵ and continued with a community-based indigenous activism, ranging from Catholic groups and associations to unionism

¹³³ Ibid., para. 137-138. Particularly, these officers viewed the American secret training of Cuban rebels into Guatemalan territory in preparation of the Bay of Pigs invasion as a national security threat.

¹³⁴ Handy, p. 230 and Ray, pp. 71-72.

¹³⁵ Konefal, p. 55.

and popular movements, such as the Committee for Peasants Unity (CUC), born after the earthquake that devastated the country in 1976.¹³⁶

The indigenous activism of the 1970s is often linked to a structural change in the modes of production of indigenous villages, brought about by the economic boom of the 1960s. Crop diversification and modernization of agriculture reached the isolated Maya *municipios*, while the individual plots of land were converted into modern cooperatives functioning as “autonomous local entities.”¹³⁷ The phenomenon of society stratification, until then absent in indigenous communities, diversified relations among peasants and subverted the centenary structure of villages.

It could be argued that such a change greatly favored the introduction of the Marxist concepts of class contrapositions, enhancing the resonance of left-wing armed groups within Mayan communities.¹³⁸ However, in my view, indigenous mobilization cannot be over-simplified and must be explained by a multitude of factors. Certainly, the economic considerations presented by Arias¹³⁹ have played a very important role in a further polarization of society and in the rise of inequality after the 1973 economic crisis and the 1976 earthquake. Indians and poor *ladinos*, relying entirely on a commodity-exporting economy, were the worst hit by the unfavorable international conjuncture of the 1970s and went back to extreme misery, landlessness, and low wages. But a complete and objective analysis has to factor in two other elements: State-sponsored violence and

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

¹³⁷ Arias, Arturo. “Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala’s Violent Transition to Modernity,” in Smith, Carol A., and Marilyn M. Moors. ed. *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988*. University of Texas Press: Austin (1990): p. 233.

¹³⁸ This thesis is espoused by Arias in his essay and generally by former *ladino* combatants.

¹³⁹ Arias, pp. 230-256.

armed guerrillas' partial support for the indigenous cause starting from the second half of the 1970s.

Both Konefal and Porras consider the massacre of about fifty Mayans that took place in the Panzós square (Alta Verapaz department) in 1978 as the breaking point of indigenous tolerance towards State's repression.¹⁴⁰ At that stage, it was clear to Mayan communities that the government had declared a war against their minority. The discrimination and racism that had so far been preached in a subtle and paternalistic way were now showing their real faces of brutality, to which indigenous people responded with armed opposition. Moreover, the guerrilla groups that resurfaced in the 1970s were undoubtedly more attentive to Indians' concerns, such as identity, culture, and exploitation and were able to attract a growing number of peasants by showing empathy and fostering unity across a wide range of combatants.

It is difficult to establish the real intentions behind the rebels' accommodating shift towards the indigenous cause. While many Indians complained of continuing discrimination under the guerrillas' cadres,¹⁴¹ Porras' description of his clandestine militancy conveys a sense of patriotism that, despite being at times too idealistic, does offer a credible picture of indigenous people fighting alongside with *ladinos* in a fraternal way.

The two main armed groups that, together with the FAR and the PGT, fought against the Guatemalan state from the early 1970s until the signing of the Peace Accords, were the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* or EGP) and the

¹⁴⁰ Konefal, p. 83 and Porras, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴¹ See Konefal's interviews in chapters 5 and 6, where she focuses on a "divided pueblo" and she even mentions a Maya movement (*Movimiento Indio Tojil*) that promoted a federalist Guatemalan state with a partially autonomous Mayan nation (pp. 146-150).

Revolutionary Organization of Peoples in Arms (*Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas* or ORPA). The former, who first appeared in 1972, was linked to the CUC¹⁴² and was mainly active in the western highlands. Its ideological framework is coherent with Marxist tenets of class action and economic forces determining political results, but it blends them with the specificity of Guatemalan society. Particularly aware of the need to downplay the secular differences between *ladinos* and *indígenas*, they consider “exploitation and oppression as complementary parts of a social system affecting both Indians and ladinos.”¹⁴³ Their most original elaboration is perhaps the so-called “ethnic-national contradiction,” defined simultaneously as the social, cultural, and political domination of indigenous people by the capitalist elites and the urgency to eradicate the economic and political foundation that makes this exploitation possible.¹⁴⁴ To this end, they propose the creation of a “New Multinational Guatemala”¹⁴⁵ where indigenous people and non-Indians could collaborate and achieve an equitable distribution of resources.

ORPA, also active in the western highlands, was reportedly the “most Indian” of all the armed groups.¹⁴⁶ Its program, by considering racism an integral part of bourgeois exploitation towards indigenous people,¹⁴⁷ had space for both Mayan identity concerns and the Marxist revolution in general.¹⁴⁸ By affirming that “the destiny of [all] the

¹⁴² Konefal, pp. 70-71.

¹⁴³ *Articles from Compañero, the International Magazine of Guatemala's Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP*. Solidarity Publications: San Francisco, California (1982): p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, Carol A. “Conclusion: History and Revolution in Guatemala,” in Smith and Moors, p. 267, and Konefal, p. 126.

¹⁴⁷ Smith and Moors, p. 267.

¹⁴⁸ Konefal, p. 132.

exploited is thus indissolubly linked to the destiny of the [racially] oppressed,”¹⁴⁹ ORPA placed an unprecedented focus on the necessity to involve native people in the revolution.

1982 saw the unification of the EGP, ORPA, FAR, and the PGT into the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* or URNG), whose new program aimed at a “popular, democratic and patriotic society.”¹⁵⁰ This pooling of efforts and coordination of strategy was prompted by the massive campaign of counterinsurgency of those years, when State violence escalated to the point that acts of genocide were committed against parts of the Mayan population.¹⁵¹ Although the counterrevolution considerably diminished indigenous activism while weakening the armed guerrillas, it could not annihilate political opposition. As highlands were more and more controlled by the army, who established “model villages” and “civil guards,”¹⁵² the clandestine insurgency was still able to appeal to peasants and the civil war continued until the unity of the armed forces disintegrated and rumors of the genocide began to spread outside Guatemala.

Porras describes the Guatemalan peace process as a “*fenómeno hijo de su tiempo*,”¹⁵³ in that it could not have happened at a different time. He identifies four main trends that modernized Guatemalan society and contributed to its harmonization: a higher demand for education, a greater mobilization of society, and the increasing activism of two strata of the population, namely women and indigenous people.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Smith and Moors, p. 268.

¹⁵⁰ *Articles from Compañero*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), Ch. 2 (Vol. 3).

¹⁵² Handy, p. 261.

¹⁵³ Meaning “event that is a child of its time,” Porras, p. 351.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 433-434.

The 1996 Peace Accords, with the signing of six agreements featuring, *inter alia*, indigenous rights (“Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People”), generic human rights, agrarian reform, and the modalities of political assimilation of the URNG, reconciled the State with its citizens for the first time after the spring decade. Such a remarkable example of mediation and political compromise did not end Guatemalan political and social shortcomings but it did mark the beginning of a State accountable to its constituencies, a State that had finally accepted its role of social responsibility.

Chapter 5 – The Case of Peru

5.1 – General Considerations

The Spanish conquest has affected the Andes in a very peculiar way. Given its specific geography, with impenetrable chains of mountains and difficult living conditions, this area has preserved indigenous culture, perhaps more than any other Latin American territory. However, over the years Western ideas managed to permeate such secluded region, to a point that the endogenous element (so-called “nativism” or *indigenismo*) could hardly be dissociated from the exogenous or “colonial” one. Yet, this process of assimilation has been arduous: the entire history of the Andes is, in fact, characterized by native rebellion, State authoritarianism, and military repression.

A country like Peru is no exception. The dichotomy between liberal ideas and native traditions¹⁵⁵ that characterized the young republic after its nineteenth century independence is still alive nowadays. More importantly, this inherent contradiction might account for the most violent rebel movement ever encountered in the Andean region: the Shining Path. Initially a mixture of Maoist thought and Incaic mythology, such a terrorist group has ended up falling into the trap of a radicalized ideology that has precipitated Peru into chaos for twenty years. The Shining Path has tried to solve the five-century old opposition between the native and the European element by annihilating the former and embracing a foreign-based theory of development grounded on armed struggle. The resulting civil war and the government’s response to it has halted the path to democracy that Peru was slowly, but steadily following since its free elections of 1980. In this sense,

¹⁵⁵ Tamayo Herrera, p. 9.

the “Fujimori tsunami”¹⁵⁶ and the ensuing scandals linked to his tenure could be seen as both a direct consequence of the bloodshed caused by the terrorist group and as the reaction of a State with poor institutionalization and loose control over its population.

5.2 – Historical Background

Although the antecedents of the Shining Path could be mainly found in the Peruvian political history of the second half of the twentieth century, it is useful to briefly refer to the colonial times and to the periods that followed the country’s independence from Spain in 1824. As everywhere else in Latin America, Spanish *conquistadores* exploited and subdued native populations, whose numbers plummeted from nine million to one million in the short span of seventy years after Francisco Pizarro’s arrival in 1531.¹⁵⁷ The discovery of silver mines briefly after, transformed the region into an “El Dorado” for the Spanish crown, but considerably precipitated the tragic conditions of Inca descendants, who were enslaved¹⁵⁸ and controlled through a hierarchical bureaucracy. The rigidity of the colonial system would be a defining and long-term feature in Peru’s social fabric, typically divided into a white or creole oligarchy and an Indian or *mestizo* (mixture of indigenous and white or creole population) lower class.

Indigenous people’s isolation and disenfranchisement are also linked to the geographic reality of Peru, a country where three different environments coexist. While the white elite has historically been located in the small coastal strip (*costa*) that is also home to the capital, Lima, the Andean highlands (*sierra*) and the jungle (*selva*) account for about 90 percent of the country’s land and almost half of the population, typically of

¹⁵⁶ Rudolph, James D. *Peru. The Evolution of a Crisis*. Praeger Publishers: Westport, CT (1992): p. 143.

¹⁵⁷ Klarén, Peter. F. “Peru’s Great Divide,” in *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol.14, 3 (Summer 1990): pp. 24-25, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40258258> (accessed on 6 March 2011).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

indigenous origins.¹⁵⁹ The cyclical boom and bursts of Peruvian economy have considerably altered the demographic patterns of the nation, generating a migratory flow from the Andean region to the coast, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These population movements have had nonetheless a small impact on the Peruvian-specific duality between actual *limeños*, namely the traditional oligarchy in whose hands lay the bulk of the country's wealth, and *serranos*, or peasants and Indians coming from the *sierra*. One could indeed represent the entire history of the country, from the Indian upheavals of Manco Inca and Túpac Amaru II (1536¹⁶⁰ and 1780,¹⁶¹ respectively) to the Shining Path's terrorist attacks, with the image of a rich and coast-based entrepreneurship and a poor peasantry confined to the hardships of the Andean mountains or the impenetrable Amazonian jungle.

Politics at the end of the 1800s and at the beginning of the twentieth century was done for and made exclusively by the elites. Economic performance, related to the oscillating prices of commodities such as guano, sugar, cotton, fishmeal, rubber, copper, and oil, strongly influenced the political stability of Peru and encouraged a colonial type of land distribution. Cotton and sugar *haciendas*, run by the white oligarchy or by European landowners, were exploiting indigenous people and *mestizos* through a feudal system of tributes and forced labor (*encomiendas*), while mineral resources were in the hand of foreign companies.¹⁶² The frequent changes of government of the young Peruvian Republic reflected the nation's fluctuating economic fate. In no circumstances,

¹⁵⁹ Rudolph, pp. 3-6.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶¹ Starn, Orin, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk. ed.. *The Peru Reader. History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press: Durham and London (1995): p. 145.

¹⁶² Rudolph, pp. 31-32.

however, did the State attempt to reach out to the indigenous and peasant masses that were paying the price for this export-led economy.

Rudolph traces back the origins of the modern political system to the dictatorship of Augusto Leguía (1919-1930) that sparked popular outrage and opposition and gave birth to the first Peruvian “mass-based political organizations.”¹⁶³ Among them, the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* or APRA) and the Peruvian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Perú* or PCP) are particularly relevant for the ideology that they espoused and the importance they would have in future political alliances and outcomes.

APRA was founded by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre in 1924. Although the party’s ideology would change in the course of the years, leaning more and more towards the right side of the political spectrum, APRA was originally a true revolutionary movement. Strongly criticizing foreign “imperialism,” Haya de la Torre advocated for a Latin American way to social and economic development, as opposed to capitalism, socialism, or fascism.¹⁶⁴ Nationalism and economic autarchy were considered to be the right tools to address Peru’s dependency from countries like the United States. While “aprist” ideas were quickly spreading throughout the country, encountering the favor of working classes and students, a young intellectual, José Carlos Mariátegui, began to distance himself from Haya de la Torre’s views and created the first Peruvian Socialist Party in 1928,¹⁶⁵ shortly after transformed into the PCP. Mariátegui’s original contribution to communist ideology was its “peruvianization.” He believed that only the

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p 38.

peasantry could initiate a revolution in the Andean region and that the existence of such a massive indigenous population, referred to as “human capital,”¹⁶⁶ constituted Peru’s main advantage in this regard. In his analysis, the Spanish conquest was ultimately the root cause of the feudalization and extreme poverty that was plaguing Peruvian society, and the indigenous peasants were the ones hit the most by the backwardness imposed on them by the colonizers. Therefore, he relied on universities as the focal points for peasants’ education towards the ultimate class fight and socialization of lands, for a mythical return to the Golden Ages of the Inca Empire.¹⁶⁷ About forty years later, Mariátegui’s ideology would be defined as a “shining path” leading to the triumph of armed struggle.

Marxist frameworks were the base of the first Peruvian guerrillas of the 1950s and 1960s, whose ill-fated attempts at subverting the *status quo* were met with scarce support of the local population and a fierce response from the military. However, the experiences of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* or MIR) and of the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* or ELN) greatly affected subsequent government policies. The military, which since the 1930s had repeatedly intervened in Peruvian politics, started to focus on the rural population, attaching increasing importance to the ethnic question and the distribution of lands. In its view, the guerrilla warfare of those years was caused by the unequal allotment of arable land, on which the lives of so many indigenous *campesinos* depended. Appeasing the peasants would mean eradicating any future armed rebellions.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Tamayo Herrera, p. 23.

¹⁶⁷ Angotti, Thomas. “The Contributions of José Carlos Mariátegui to Revolutionary Theory,” in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1986): pp. 43-46, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633646> (accessed on 6 March 2011); and Roncagliolo, p. 49.

¹⁶⁸ Rudolph, p. 49.

In this context, the encompassing Agrarian Reform Law of General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1969) is easier to understand. Driven by the quest for national security and by a more pragmatic nationalism, the reform entailed the expropriation of private latifundia and their redistribution to peasant communities in the form of cooperatives or private plots.¹⁶⁹ The agrarian structure of Peru thus shifted from a largely ineffective and abandoned *hacienda* to a smaller and more intensely cultivated property, in an effort to “benefit not the few but society as a whole.”¹⁷⁰ Despite Alvarado’s reformism and his ambitions for financial independence, the economic crisis that characterized the first half of the 1970s led to wide discontent and to the General’s removal. The military government that succeeded in 1975 was far more conservative than its predecessor and actually recanted many reforms implemented under Alvarado’s tenure.¹⁷¹ By 1980 a civilian would be elected as the President of Peru, in the typical alternation that had characterized the nation’s politics for the whole twentieth century. Fernando Belaúnde Terry, who had been previously deposed in the armed forces’ coup of 1968, was initially more preoccupied by the threat of another military *golpe* than by the presence of a small terrorist group that began its attacks by burning the ballots of Chuschi, Ayacucho, during the presidential elections. However, 17 May 1980 marked the beginning of the Shining Path’s declaration of war to the Peruvian State that was to represent the major trouble for the Belaúnde administration.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁷⁰ Speech delivered by Juan Velasco Alvarado on 24 June 1969 and reproduced in Starn et al., p. 266.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 256.

5.3 – The Shining Path and the Civil War

The war unleashed by the Shining Path was “the most intense, extensive and prolonged episode of violence in the entire history of the (Peruvian) Republic.”¹⁷² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission created in 2001 to investigate the events from May 1980 to November 2000 calculated that the estimated number of victims could be as high as 69,280 and that the Shining Path was responsible for around 54 percent of such human losses.¹⁷³ Moreover, the report of the Commission highlights how this unprecedented violence targeted the weakest, poorest, and less educated strata of the population, namely the indigenous communities of *campesinos* living in remote Andean areas.¹⁷⁴ These numbers and findings show the anomaly of the Peruvian civil war. Never before had a Latin American guerrilla group attacked its own population that systematically and brutally. Never before had the ethnic problem represented both the justification and the outcome of a conflict.

To be sure, the Shining Path phenomenon can be explained with the charismatic personality of its leader, Abimael Guzmán Reinoso. However, the movement and its ideological dogmatism is also connected to the fervent political debate that engaged the Peruvian *intelligentsia* in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as to the twelve years of military government that preceded Belaúnde’s election in 1980. The period of Velasco’s radical reforms followed by General Francisco Morales Bermúdez’ counter reforms had seen the increased mobilization of society as a response to the armed forces’

¹⁷² Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Final Report, data available at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/ifinal/conclusiones.php> (accessed on 6 March 2011).

¹⁷³ Ibid, data available at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/pdf/TOMO%20I/Primera%20Parte%20El%20Proceso-Los%20hechos-Las%20v%20EDctimas/Seccion%20Primera-Panorama%20General/1.%20PERIODIZACION.pdf>, Chap. 1, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

repression of political parties.¹⁷⁵ In particular, Velasco's ambitious State reform, encompassing agriculture, education, and governmental bureaucracy, could not solve the institutionalization problems that Peru had been suffering since its independence. The military's suppression of parties triggered the mushrooming of left-wing political groups, whose multiplication was also an unintended consequence of the expansion of the education system under Velasco's regime.¹⁷⁶

Within these Marxist groups, Maoism was the dominant current in the 1960s and mid-1970s. Its view of the Peruvian society as "semifeudal" and of the military government as "fascist"¹⁷⁷ would be one of the hallmarks of the Shining Path's ideology. The group was in fact founded in 1969 by Abimael Guzmán, a university professor who was also the leader of the Communist Committee in one of the poorest regions of Peru, Ayacucho.¹⁷⁸ Prior to creating the Shining Path as a faction of the PCP (its formal name was *Partido Comunista del Perú- Por el Sendero Luminoso de Mariátegui* or PCP-SL), Guzmán was well involved in the intellectual debate about the pure essence of Marxism and immediately sided with the pro-Chinese faction. Its literal interpretation of Mao's thought is what sets Sendero apart from the rest of the Left. While refusing to admit that the Peruvian reality of those years had somehow changed with respect to the backwardness of the beginning of the century,¹⁷⁹ the group considers itself the only real

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

¹⁷⁶ Hinojosa, Iván. "On Poor Relations and the Nouveau Riche: Shining Path and the Radical Peruvian Left," in Stern, Steve J. ed. *Shining and Other Paths. War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995*. Duke University Press: Durham and London (1998): p. 68.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁷⁸ Harding, Colin. "Antonio Díaz Martínez and the Ideology of Sendero Luminoso," in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 7, 1 (1988): p. 67, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3338440> (accessed on 6 March 2011).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

revolutionary party and dismisses other Marxist strands as too compromising.¹⁸⁰ It is in this sense that Stern defines the appearance of the Shining Path “both ‘within’ and ‘against’ history.”¹⁸¹

As already mentioned, the Shining Path’s dogmatism and lack of connection with Peruvian reality stem from the very contradictions of the Andean country. Indeed, Mariátegui’s effort to reconcile the indigenous component of Peruvian culture with the specifics of Marxism is allegedly predicated by *senderistas* and evident in the name of the group itself. However, Guzmán’s elaboration is far less problematic than Mariátegui’s for two reasons: on the one hand, his vision is completely absorbed by ideology to the detriment of indigenism, on the other hand, the view of Sendero’s leader is a mere consequence of the intellectual discourse that dominated the political scenes since the 1920s.¹⁸² De la Cadena advances the argument that the increasing radicalization of intellectuals occurred in the mid-1970s did not eliminate the racist and hierarchical views that always typified Peruvian elites. Whereas the word “race” was now substituted by the term “class,” Marxist theorists could not eliminate the traditional paternalism towards native people and simply imposed the concept of “class consciousness” to explain the reality of their country. In doing so, they continued to avoid the ethnic problem inherent to Peru, just like the bourgeoisie and the white elites had done before them. Guzmán’s intransigence and utter disregard for the indigenous question is, therefore, a by-product of the intellectual *milieu* of those years and not only a result of his mental rigidity.

¹⁸⁰ Roncagliolo narrates how even Che Guevara’s ideas were considered too “bourgeois” for Guzmán (p. 51).

¹⁸¹ Stern, p. 13.

¹⁸² De la Cadena, Marisol. “From Race to Class: Insurgent Intellectuals *de provincia* in Peru, 1910-1970,” in Stern, p. 53.

Guzman's character and personality traits are nevertheless crucial in accounting for Sendero's cruelty and unwillingness to mediate with the State or ally with other leftist organizations. Born in Arequipa in 1934 as an illegitimate son,¹⁸³ Guzmán was appointed as a professor in the San Cristóbal de Huamanga University of Ayacucho in 1962.¹⁸⁴ After witnessing the several splits of the Peruvian Communist Party, he unilaterally embraced Maoism by creating the Shining Path and he began a massive operation of indoctrination and recruitment of *senderistas* within the university. His charisma lured dozens of students into the cause of the Shining Path, while his inflexibility led to a severe purge of the academic faculty.¹⁸⁵ When the group attacked for the first time, Guzmán was already considered as the only and absolute leader and was referred to as "President Gonzalo." The cult of his personality and his unchallenged ideology, also known as "Gonzalo Thought," exemplify the extent to which his influence had come to comprehend every single aspect of the terrorist group's actions. Indeed, the terrorist leader was what Milton Rokeach would describe as an authoritarian and close-minded personality.¹⁸⁶

The overall view of Sendero Luminoso was that Peru could attain real justice only by subverting the existing government with the help of a phased guerrilla movement, whose ultimate goal was to create the actual possibility for a spontaneous revolution.¹⁸⁷ In line with Mao's directions, the group needed to rely on bases from which spreading the

¹⁸³ Roncagliolo, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 50-53.

¹⁸⁶ Rokeach, Milton. *The Open and Closed Mind. Investigations into the Nature of Belief systems and Personality Systems* New York: Basic Books, Inc Publishers (1960).

¹⁸⁷ Manwaring, Max. G. "Peru's Sendero Luminoso: The Shining Path Beckons," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 541 (Sept 1995): p. 158, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048282> (accessed on 6 March 2011).

revolutionary ideas to the populace at large. Peasantry would constitute the backbone of such a fight that was meant to end with the conquest of the cities. In this regard, the Gonzalo Thought identifies violence as an absolute requisite of the popular fight: “(Revolutionary violence) is what allows us to solve the fundamental contradictions with an army and through the popular war.”¹⁸⁸ Guzmán goes further, by demanding his comrades to be ready and willing to give up their lives for the senderista cause, in what is commonly known as the “quota:” “Marx, Lenin, and principally Mao Zedong have armed us. They have taught us about the quota and what it means to annihilate in order to preserve...We began planning for the bloodbath in 1980 because we knew it had to come.”¹⁸⁹

Peru’s response to the proliferation of terrorist attacks was at first inadequate. From his side, Belaúnde largely underestimated the senderista threat, confusing it for a phenomenon of petty criminality and permitting its quick expansion from the Ayacucho and Apurímac departments to vast areas of the Peruvian territory. Only when the conflict reached a national scale in 1982 did the government react by entrusting the Armed Forces with eradicating the terrorist menace.¹⁹⁰ The following years would witness the escalation of the violence perpetrated by both the military and the Shining Path. Particularly, the massacre of about 249 inmates committed by the armed forces while crushing a riot in three different prisons in 1986 (the second year of tenure of President Alan García)¹⁹¹ seem to mark the peak of the civil confrontation. This perception proved

¹⁸⁸ Arce Borja, Luis. “Entrevista en la clandestinidad - Presidente Gonzalo rompe el silencio,” in *El Diario*, 24 July 1988, available at http://www.solrojo.org/pcp_doc/pcp_0688.htm (accessed on 6 March 2011) – translated from Spanish into English by author.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, translation in Starn et al., p. 316.

¹⁹⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, pp. 61-66.

¹⁹¹ Rudolph, pp. 111-112.

to be wrong when President Fujimori's (1990-2000) counter insurgency plan kicked in, with his infamous anti-terrorist death squad, the "Grupo Colina" created in 1991 by the Intelligence Service,¹⁹² and his 1992 *autogolpe*, by which he closed the Congress and called for new elections and a new Parliament. A few months later, Abimael Guzmán would be captured in Lima and kept in custody ever since.

The troubled human rights records of the Peruvian government, especially under the Fujimori administration, are yet not comparable with the atrocious bloodshed initiated by the Shining Path against the rural masses and private citizens alike. Considered the main vessel of the popular revolution, *campesinos* would rarely join the senderista cause, mainly because they did not understand it. While Guzmán's indoctrination was directed to students of the province who were usually from the lower classes, the bulk of indigenous communities resisted the Gonzalo Thought due to the fact that it refused to comprehend their Andean tradition and culture. By pretending to wipe out anything that would jeopardize the Maoist armed struggle, the senderistas were depriving the peasant communities of their own organizations, religion, and justice.¹⁹³ They were forcing Indians to trade their millenary civilization for a violence that was completely inexplicable to them. Although the increasing violations and murders carried out by the armed forces did play in favor of the Shining Path's recruitment in some indigenous communities, the situation would quickly reverse. Not only was the military capable of winning the peasants over with a mix of "intimidation and persuasion,"¹⁹⁴ it also helped Andean communities to organize their own self-defense committees, called "*rondas*

¹⁹² Roncagliolo, p. 156.

¹⁹³ Degregori, "Com'è difficile essere Dio. Ideologia e Violenza Politica di Sendero Luminoso," p. 38.

¹⁹⁴ Starn, Orin. "Villagers at Arms: War and Counterrevolution in the Central-South Andes," in Starn et al., p. 237.

campesinas.” The *rondas* arguably weakened the effectiveness of the Shining Path’s attacks in the mountains¹⁹⁵ and empowered indigenous communities previously isolated to tackle the problem of terrorism by themselves. Ultimately, they represented the unbridgeable gap that existed between native people and rebels.

The capture of President Gonzalo significantly reduced Sendero’s actions, which ended almost completely in 1999 with the seizure of his second highest-ranking commander, Oscar Ramírez Durand, alias Feliciano. Finally, the abandonment of the government by the exiled Fujimori one year later would end the two-decade long Peruvian civil war. Still, the way towards real democracy awaits a clear acknowledgement by all segments of the population of the urgency to first recognize and subsequently tackle the ethnic cleavage that divides Peru. The “other paths” to social reconciliation have to clearly factor this element if they aim at achieving long-term results.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

Chapter 6 – A Critical Assessment

6.1 – Testing the Hypothesis

The different outcomes of armed struggle in Guatemala and Peru prompt a series of reflections. What were the main determinants of insurgents' moderate success or lack thereof in advocating for substantial change? Did the Guatemalan and Peruvian guerrillas use a distinct approach towards the ethnic problem? If so, what did they actually achieve in terms of advancement of native people's rights? The civil wars in these two Latin American countries will provide useful tools to test my initial hypothesis that argues in favor of the chief role played by indigenous people in the performance of Marxist rebel groups. They will also show whether this interaction between *indios* and ideological fight is a mutually beneficial one or if we are in front of a "win-lose" situation.

To verify the accuracy of my hypothesis, I will measure two variables: the degree of Marxist armed groups' support for indigenous grievances and the degree of dogmatism of insurgents. If my research question proves correct, a low level of ideological rigidity combined with a comprehensive program of action should determine a greater participation of native population in the cause of the rebels. This, in turn, should be linked to a positive or partial success of left-wing guerrillas. In this case, the term "success" is not intended in a pure Marxist way. In fact, it does not entail the end of class differences and the abolition of private property, but it indicates the point to which ideological fight achieves or somehow abets social justice. It is important to point out that, in the case studies exposed above, the alleged "success" of Marxist groups is determined by more than two aspects, such as State repression and economic factors. However, for the purposes of this research, only the inclusion of native people's concerns

and dogmatism will be analyzed, because they are conceived as the two most important variables of the research hypothesis.

6.2 – Degree of Support for Indigenous People’s Grievances

Both the URNG and the Shining Path are inspired by ideological frameworks whose roots are not Latin American. Their cause, as mentioned in the previous chapters, was initially dominant among white and *mestizo* intellectuals, who were the ones leading the rebel movements in both Guatemala and Peru. Subsequently, the two guerrilla groups strived to appeal to the masses of peasants and poor *indios* that constituted the bulk of the population. I will now assess if the Marxist rebels’ recruitment among indigenous people was based on a genuine commitment to improve their situation of discrimination and hardship. To this end, I intend to evaluate the status of native populations during the armed conflict by examining indicators such as land distribution, the displacement of Indian communities, and the general human rights violations committed against these communities.

With regard to the first indicator, this research has repeatedly stressed the particular connection of indigenous people to their land and how an unequal land distribution had impacted negatively on peasant communities whose livelihoods were in most cases entirely dependent on agriculture. The case studies presented are examples of the extent to which agrarian reform was considered relevant to the stability of the countries in question. They also show that left-wing sympathizers were advocating for the right to land of indigenous communities. As a matter of fact, land distribution is part of both the URNG and the Shining Path’s original program of action. However, it is precisely *after* their declaration of war to the governments of Guatemala and Peru that the

paths of the two guerrilla movements diverge. Initially triggered by sovereignty issues and led by former military officials, the rebel groups in the Central American country would deepen their connection to the Indian cause in the 1970s, with the appearance of the EGP and ORPA.¹⁹⁶ Although arguing for the conceptual superiority of class conflict with regard to ethnicity,¹⁹⁷ the Guatemalan rebels had strong ties with *campesino* organizations and included many peasants in their cadres. This aspect and the usual pacific coexistence of guerrillas with villagers argue in favor of a certain degree of support of the Guatemalan activists for the land grievances of indigenous people. Conversely, the senderista approach to Indian rights to land starts with a general understanding of the problem and demonstration of solidarity towards peasant communities, and ends with an appalling disregard for the agrarian question. Guzmán's doctrine was greatly influenced by the disadvantaged condition of the peasantry in Ayacucho ("Ayacucho was useful to discover the peasantry")¹⁹⁸ and by *mariateguismo*, which recognizes the utter importance of the land problem in the perpetuation of inequality in Peru.¹⁹⁹ But Shining Path's rebels gradually and inexorably depart from these ideas to prioritize the concept of a protracted war to subvert the bourgeois order. The actions of Sendero to end peasant agricultural production destined to local markets²⁰⁰ demonstrate the movement's distance away from indigenous communities and their land concerns. The closure of peasant markets and the end of villager small-scale economy in

¹⁹⁶ See Ch. 4.

¹⁹⁷ According to the EGP, in fact, "the main danger (for the revolutionary movement) is that the national-ethnic factor will burst forth, in detriment of class factors." (*Articles from Compañero*, p. 25).

¹⁹⁸ Arce Borja, "Entrevista en la Clandestinidad."

¹⁹⁹ According to the Peruvian intellectual, "the indigenous question begins in our economy. It has its roots in the ownership of the land" (Stern, p. 37).

²⁰⁰ Rudolph, p. 88.

favor of subsistence agriculture are strong signals of the Shining Path's disregard for the land question.

Both conflicts in Guatemala and Peru have uprooted an enormous number of indigenous communities by either displacing their members or by unweaving their social fabric. The main difference lies in the responsibilities for these acts: while the State was the main agent of oppression for Mayan villages, Sendero has arguably been held accountable for the majority of indigenous refugees and the destruction of the structure of Andean villages. The CEH (Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification) affirms that displacement of the population was one of the army's main counterinsurgency tactics.²⁰¹ In addition, the Guatemalan army's efforts to dismantle indigenous communities by controlling them are evident in the formation of the notorious "model villages" and "civil guards." These strategies were in fact aimed at "punishing" peasant collaboration with armed rebels, a fact that proves a certain degree of peaceful coexistence of the two sides that seemed absent in the Peruvian case. During the years of Sendero's indoctrination, its recruitment was targeted to the middle class and the rural population; its ideas of social justice and a Maoist peasant revolution were appealing to those Andean villagers that had not benefited from General Velasco's agrarian reform. Nevertheless, peasants distanced themselves from the movement when its violent actions multiplied and were increasingly directed to their communities. When terrorists were infiltrating the villages, in fact, they demanded total abnegation to their Maoist cause and killed village authorities and prominent members in order to establish their own concept of order. Forced recruitment and the destruction of indigenous civil society on the one

²⁰¹ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), Ch. 2, Vol. 1.

hand and state violence on the other hand caused a previously unseen phenomenon of internal migration from the Andes region to Lima and other cities along the coast.²⁰² The number of internally displaced persons during the Peruvian civil war has been estimated to 400,000-600,000.²⁰³

Violations of indigenous people's rights, the third indicator, have been widespread in both countries, reaching even the scale of genocide in the case of Guatemala. With a percentage of 83.3 percent of victims, the Mayan population was the most affected by political violence in the Central American nation.²⁰⁴ Examining the four major human rights violations that occurred during the conflict (arbitrary executions, torture, forced disappearance, and sexual violence), the CEH established that the Guatemalan army was responsible for 93 percent of these acts, while the URNG was found guilty of a mere 3 percent of human rights' abuses and murders of civilians.²⁰⁵ These numbers are self-explanatory. In the case of Peru, investigations of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) show that more than half of the victims and *desaparecidos* (54 percent) were attributable to the Shining Path, while the Peruvian government caused the death and forced disappearance of about one third of the total casualties.²⁰⁶ The TRC further clarified that political violence did match ethnic distribution and rural indigence, with 85 percent of the victims being from the poorest

²⁰² Starn et al., p. 354.

²⁰³ Crandall, Joanna. "Truth Commissions in Guatemala and Peru: Perpetual Impunity and Transitional Justice Compared," in *Peace, Conflict and Development*, 4 (April 2004): p. 15, available at <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk/dl/perpetualimpunity.PDF> (accessed on 14 March 2011).

²⁰⁴ Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala), Ch. 2, Vol. 2.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. The Commission could not assign responsibility for the remaining four percent of human rights' violations.

²⁰⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, data available at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/pdf/TOMO%20I/Primera%20Parte%20E1%20Proceso-Los%20hechos-Las%20v%20EDctimas/Seccion%20Primera-Panorama%20General/3.%20LOS%20ROSTROS%20Y%20PERFILES%20DE%20LA%20VIOLENCIA.pdf>, p. 181 (accessed on 14 March 2011).

departments of Peru (among these, 40 percent were from Ayacucho)²⁰⁷ and that 57 percent of senderista's attacks were directed to peasants.²⁰⁸ The most infamous example of such "selective violence"²⁰⁹ can be found in the Lucanamarca massacre of 1983, when 69 villagers were brutally killed by the Shining Path in retaliation for the murder of two terrorist activists.²¹⁰

The data gathered by the CEH and the TRC depict two very different scenarios. Guatemalan guerrillas showed a pragmatic and, in certain cases, even authentic support for indigenous people's concerns and problems through effective links to native communities and a consistent respect for their right to land and general human rights. The exact opposite attitude can be found in Peru, where Sendero Luminoso quickly deceived peasants and used their hamlets as "support bases"²¹¹ to sustain their warfare as long as possible. Military strategy proved more important than indigenous support right from the start for the Maoist group. The fact that its violence would routinely target members of peasant communities during the rest of the civil conflict is indicative of the huge discrepancy that existed between the terrorist movement's goals and Andean populations' interests. In light of these considerations, I will assign a high to moderate degree of support for indigenous people's grievances to the Guatemalan URNG and a low degree to the Peruvian guerrilla.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 158.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 171.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

²¹⁰ Roncagliolo, p. 112.

²¹¹ Stern, p. 176.

6.3 – Degree of Dogmatism

Measuring dogmatism is a daunting task, due to the fact that it cannot be quantified in a scientific way, but it has to be inferred from other categories. In this research, I will consider a Marxist ideology to be dogmatic if it is characterized by low flexibility in terms of adaptation to the reality of a specific country and if it does not foresee any participation in the electoral game.

Guatemalan guerrillas were arguably capable of adjusting their ideology to the evolving situation on the ground and to the responses of both the population and the government. Most of the cadres of the EGP comprised former members of the 1960s armed groups that had failed at launching the revolution back then. Their past flaws made them strategically wiser and more sensitive to grassroots support, so that their ideology kept the main Marxist tenets but adopted an “indigenista focus.”²¹² A further confirmation of their ability to compromise is the 1982 unification of the four armed groups under the same political entity, the URNG, which required “a greater degree of cooperation.”²¹³ As much as the Marxist revolutionaries needed to unite in order to cope with the ferocious repression of the Guatemalan army, such a decision could not have taken place in the absence of a certain tolerance for different views and opinions. Perhaps the greatest example of the rebels’ ideological flexibility is their very resolution to terminate the armed struggle and initiate a dialogue with the Guatemalan government. Porrás offers a comprehensive historical background for this memorable event. Both the international context (Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* in 1985 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and the regional one (Peace Accords in Nicaragua and El Salvador) steered the

²¹² May, p. 75. See also Porrás, p. 50 (“the orthodox concepts of EGP had to gradually modify in order to adapt to local culture” – translated from Spanish into English by author).

²¹³ *Articles from Compañero*, p. 3.

consensus of the URNG members towards a peaceful negotiation.²¹⁴ As a consequence of the failure of communist ideas in the political realm and of the non-sustainability of socialism in the economic sphere, the Guatemalan Marxist guerrilla chose the realistic approach of a peaceful settlement. URNG resolved the inherent contradiction between a utopian socialist armed struggle and a fundamentally capitalist society by relinquishing the arms in favor of democracy.²¹⁵ The long and difficult path to the Peace Accords demonstrated the URNG's will to be part of the Guatemalan party system, which was formalized on 12 December 1996 with the legalization of the group and its gradual integration into the country's political life.²¹⁶ The abandonment of pure Marxist ideas in the context of a situation that made them unfeasible and the acceptance of a democratic political role that condemned violence allow us to perceive the URNG as a fairly low dogmatic group.

On the contrary, Abimael Guzmán's terrorist group is believed to be the most "totalitarian"²¹⁷ and dogmatic movement of the whole Latin American region, comparable more to "religious faith"²¹⁸ than to a politically armed guerrilla movement. Several elements confirm this analysis. The timeframe of the Shining Path is indicative in this regard. Guzmán's choice to espouse Maoist ideas at a time when the whole Peruvian left was distancing itself from the Chinese position as well as his declaration of war in the midst of the first Peruvian democratic elections in decades are indeed symptoms of a myopic attitude. In addition, absence of ideological flexibility can be derived from the

²¹⁴ Porras, p. 366.

²¹⁵ Porras, p. 350.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 426.

²¹⁷ Del Pino, Ponciano, "Family, Culture, and 'Revolution': Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso," in Stern, p. 184.

²¹⁸ Roncagliolo, p. 125.

structural framework of the Gonzalo Thought. Although announced as a creative and “native” strand of Maoism, the Gonzalo Thought was a mere repetition of it and comprised mainly of constant quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong. Hinojosa describes the senderista ideology as “dogmatic” precisely in virtue of its literal interpretation of Marxism “as a repertory of quotes.”²¹⁹ In fact, even a cursory reading of Guzmán’s works reveals endless references to Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, and this alone shows the lack of an original ideological elaboration that was key in a country like Peru. In Degregori’s view, the inflexibility of Sendero is the main cause of its collapse. The terrorists’ biased analysis of the situation on the ground, their refusal to understand Andean culture, and their “optimistic fatalism”²²⁰ constituted the flaws of the Maoist movement’s strategy and informed their ideological rigidity. The hierarchical structure of Sendero Luminoso, based on the personal cult of its leader, called “President,” is yet another proof of dogmatism. The party was composed of a Permanent Committee that comprised Guzmán, his wife Augusta de la Torre, and Elena Iparraguirre, his future partner. All decisions were taken by this Committee and then communicated in writing to a Central Committee who would distribute the documents to the local bases.²²¹ Subversion or frank opposition to President Gonzalo was not only discouraged, but also brutally punished through public humiliation or murder. The group’s ideological rigidity manifested itself also in the refusal to collaborate with the government or with other leftist movements. During the years of the civil war, Sendero responded to the government’s repression with mass violence and increasing acts of terrorism that were

²¹⁹ Hinojosa, in Stern, p. 63.

²²⁰ Degregori, Carlos Iván. “Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho,” in Stern, p. 149.

²²¹ Roncagliolo, p. 119.

aimed at provoking the State in lieu of appeasing it. The peace agreement that Guzmán accepted a year after his capture was not his initiative²²² and sounded more as the testament of a defeated rebel than as a spontaneous acknowledgement of Peruvian reality.

6.4 – Final Implications

We have seen how the approach used by the Central American Marxist groups towards the indigenous cause was essentially opposed to the one applied by the Shining Path of Peru. These different attitudes shaped the ideologies of the guerrilla movements in two divergent directions: more tolerant and mindful of the ethnic problem in the case of Guatemala; fanatic and extraneous to native people's culture and reality in the case of Peru. For my initial hypothesis to be correct, a high level of ideological adaptability coupled with a low level of dogmatism should elicit consistent indigenous participation in the armed struggle, which, in turn, should positively impact the success of the rebellion itself.

The URNG displayed support for indigenous grievances and a low degree of ideological close-mindedness. As a result, their rebel cadres included many Mayans, the majority of which truly shared the rebels' vision because it reflected and embraced the ethnic differences of Guatemala. While Porras describes the guerrillas as mainly composed of Indians,²²³ Handy compares the Mayan participation in the revolution to a "torrent."²²⁴ I argue that the relative good performance of the URNG can be linked, *inter alia*, to the high levels of indigenous mobilization in the conflict. In fact, not only have native population engagement facilitated the movement of the rebels within the country.

²²² Roncagliolo, p. 201.

²²³ Porras, p. 24.

²²⁴ Handy, p. 224.

The massive scale of indigenous rights violations committed by the government during the conflict has also given the guerrillas an international and national leverage that they could not have gained otherwise. One could argue that both sides, indigenous and rebels, have mutually benefited from each other: while the URNG found in indigenous populations their best allies, it also advocated for the advancement of their rights through the Peace Accords, specifically the “Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People.” However, the failed implementation of such agreements shows that the threshold of real engagement in favor of native people is yet to be met.

On the other hand, the Shining Path’s ideology has been assessed as lacking support for the Andean populations’ concerns and as being extremely dogmatic. A consequence of this has been the failure to involve the peasantry in the armed struggle. The ideological framework traced by Guzmán was incomprehensible to them and its concepts of “prolonged war”²²⁵ and mass violence were incompatible with Andean culture. The establishment of *rondas campesinas* indicates that the level of intolerance of indigenous peasants towards the Shining Path had reached its peak. At the same time, such civil guards helped the government in the almost complete military defeat of the terrorists. The Peruvian case thus proves how a substantial absence of indigenous support has been one of the factors that frustrated Sendero’s attempt at Maoist revolution. It also reveals the pitfalls of radical ideology: besides the annihilation of the terrorist group, the civil conflict has left no winners. Peruvian democracy stepped back to authoritarianism under Fujimori, while indigenous peasants suffered from both the war’s hardships and its massive political violence.

²²⁵ Degregori, “Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho,” in Stern, p. 149.

Chapter 7 – Concluding Remarks

7.1 – Political Implications and Lessons Learned

My research has shown that guerrilla movements of Guatemala and Peru have used Marxist frameworks differently, achieving almost opposite results, which were significantly tied to the level of indigenous mobilization and its collaboration with the left-wing rebel groups. In this interaction, ideological radicalism has proved to damage both insurgents at large and native populations in particular, especially because it thwarts a thorough and realistic understanding of Latin American societies with a significant ethnic component. Such conclusions generate lessons learned that could be useful in the analysis of the ongoing nation-building process of these fairly recent countries of the sub-continent and might even be applicable beyond the region.

Firstly, the type of approach used by the government to terminate the civil conflict bears important consequences on the future reintegration of combatants from both sides into civil society. Without the assimilation of disenfranchised segments of the population, especially indigenous ones, countries are bound to be politically unstable and unsafe for their citizens, with all the negative repercussions that the absence of rule of law implicates.

Secondly, if one considers that the main cause of indigenous participation in Marxist armed groups was their secular social and political exclusion, it is clear how the construction of a participatory society at all levels could prevent future conflicts, besides representing a major result for indigenous rights movements across the region. Therefore, the role that ethnicity comes to play in post-conflict Latin American states is paramount for the credibility of state-society relations. Government officials and political analysts

should consider a multicultural solution as opposed to the assimilationist and “top-down” approach used before and during the wars. One of the lessons that indigenous mobilization linked to political violence has pointed out to governments is that the unitary state model is not the only possibility nowadays and could, under certain circumstances as the ones present in most Latin American countries, be deleterious.²²⁶

7.2 – Reintegration of Former Combatants

Comparing the civil wars of the two case studies analyzed in this research, we have observed how the Guatemalan government was able to negotiate peace through a long and difficult process of mediation that showed both parties’ will to collaborate. Conversely, the outcome of the Peruvian conflict was deemed devastating for all protagonists, also due to a lack of compromise and intransigence found in representatives of the rebels and the state. However, these conclusions can be further expanded to the post-conflict period, as government’s attitude towards former members of armed groups does influence their decision to reintegrate into society or to consider joining other rebel movements.

The destabilizing potential of former combatants is an element that needs to be addressed by all governments that experienced acute phases of social upheavals and disorders. It is, in fact, featured in United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding strategies under the “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration” program (DDR), which has become an essential part of the implementation of peace agreements across the world, from Timor Leste to Haiti and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²²⁷

²²⁶ Warren, Kay B. *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics. Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ (1998): p. 5.

²²⁷ For more information on United Nations programs of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) see the UN DDR Resource Centre at <http://www.unddr.org/> (accessed on 16 April 2011).

Particularly, in countries like Guatemala and Peru, where the land issue and lack of economic and political opportunities for large parts of the population is intertwined with the ethnic problem, the reintegration of demobilized rebels and counterinsurgency elements should become a priority for state officials. Efforts at reintegration can range from the inclusion of former guerrilla members into political life, as in the Guatemalan case with part of the Peace Accords,²²⁸ to social and economic policies targeted at the reconstruction of civil society. However, for a reintegration to be effective, governments should design their programs factoring the repatriation of internally displaced persons as a starting point. As mentioned in Chapter 6, state violence in Guatemala and terrorism in Peru have caused high levels of internal migration and have uprooted thousands of *campesinos* and guerrilla members. Thus, expediting their return to the villages could foster community-based programs of reinsertion into civil society and into the job market.

In Guatemala and Peru (and Latin America in general), state officials need to pay particular attention to programs boosting political and economic participation of ethnic minorities, in order to avoid relapsing into conflict. I have already mentioned how the lack of equal distribution of resources and of social justice more broadly, as inheritance of colonialism, have been main factors in the surge of Marxist movements and in their appeal to native populations. Hence, governments' failure to acknowledge their past mistakes and to show will to redress them through inclusive nation-building policies, could only mean further violence, an increasing isolation of indigenous communities, and an escalating level of domestic and transnational criminality, as the latest trends in the

²²⁸ Specifically, the "Accords on the basis for the legal assimilation of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit" (*Acuerdos sobre bases para la incorporación de la Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca a la legalidad*, dated 12 December 1996, in Porras, p. 426).

Central American region are dramatically showing. Post-conflict societies that stigmatize and ostracize demobilized combatants instead of incorporating them generate more and more disillusioned and devalued citizens, who fall in the hands of organized crime or ideological guerrilla movements or both, as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or FARC) exemplify.

Although the Guatemalan Peace Accords represented an encouraging step in the direction of reintegration of armed groups into society, the country has not met international expectations and has for the most part not complied with its commitment of responsibility and inclusion in the social and political sphere. As a result of this flawed approach to reintegration of a wide portion of the constituency, rule of law in Guatemala has consistently worsened. The Peruvian case seems to have elicited a slightly more positive result, despite its initial phases of authoritarianism under Fujimori, perhaps due to the country's better economic performance in comparison with Guatemala.²²⁹ Yet, little efforts have been made, aside from the constitution of the TRC, for a meaningful understanding of the root causes of terrorism and ideological dogmatism in Peru.

Overall, it looks as if Latin American societies were still “in denial” and were refusing to admit that ethnic cleavages continue to exist even after the end of their civil wars, despite the negotiation of peace agreements and a return to democracy. That is why Latin American countries should concentrate more on the implementation of existing policies aimed at reconstructing and reconciling society with the state, rather than at generating a new set of programs with the help of foreign aid, as they have been doing for decades. In this regard, national ownership at all levels of outreach strategies directed to

²²⁹ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Economic Survey of Latin American and the Caribbean, 2009-2010*, Ch. 1, p. 14, available at http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/4/40254/Regional_Overview.pdf (accessed on 16 April 2011).

citizens, particularly the most vulnerable ones such as former combatants, would be an asset for the credibility of post-conflict national programs.²³⁰

7.3 – The Construction of a Multicultural State and the Role of Ethnicity

During colonialism and even more so after independence, Latin American countries have addressed the ethnic question unsatisfactorily, at times ignoring it with a view to assimilate minorities into the mainstream culture, at times exploiting indigenous culture for economic purposes. Boasting tolerance internationally and acting in a paternalist way towards minorities domestically served to disguise state officials' poor appreciation of native populations traditions, considered as a backward legacy of pre-Hispanic times. It has become evident, throughout this research, how such an attitude has backfired against governments, by widening the gap between significant numbers of indigenous groups and the Creole elites. The resulting civil conflicts and the transnational indigenous rights networks that acquired public attention in the 1980s have obliged these societies recovering from political violence to finally face the problem of ethnicity.

The 1990s featured a trend of legislative reforms in the Latin American area whose activity, certainly in the cases of Guatemala and Peru, was stimulated by the end of the respective civil conflicts. While the former country witnessed the signing of important agreements between the state and civil society, especially indigenous representatives, the latter changed its Constitution to acknowledge the pluralist nature of the nation and signed the ILO Convention 169 in 1993,²³¹ a few months after the capture of Abimael Guzmán. It has been previously and repeatedly noticed that these attempts at addressing the ethnic question have been confined to the legal and formal sphere of state

²³⁰ Warren, p. 204.

²³¹ Yrigoyen Fajardo, Raquel. "Peru: Pluralist Constitution, Monist Judiciary – A Post-Reform Assessment," in Sieder, p. 157.

building only and that the implementation stage has never fully taken off. Several causes, as lack of infrastructure or the looming international financial crisis, might have prevented these countries to head in the direction of real plurality and participatory democracy. However, the threat that self-determination of indigenous populations allegedly poses to independent nations has certainly played a chief role in governments' halfhearted legislative and constitutional reforms. In fact, indigenous communities' requests for autonomy have been seen, especially in the Central American country, as a dangerous trend toward secession or further civil wars, as in the cases of the Former Yugoslavia, and have triggered enhanced centralism and authoritarianism.²³² However, such demands are not only in line with international law, but could also abet the streamlining of bureaucracy and boost the efficiency of the state apparatus, if adequately understood and successfully realized in the context of a true multicultural nation.

The construction of a multicultural state begins with the genuine acknowledgement of the importance of plural identities vis-à-vis the single, monolithic identity of the Westphalian state. Such a process does begin in the legislative area, and in this sense Latin American countries, especially Andean ones, are in compliance, but absolutely needs to be accepted at all levels of society, first and foremost by those portions of the population that have been segregated for years and still feel disconnected from the top of the social pyramid. Therefore, the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and the subsequent incorporation of plurality principles in the Constitution are useful tools only when coupled with a community-based method, whose main foundations are decentralization and the recognition of cultural diversity.

²³² Warren, p. 6.

Multiculturalism is a mutual process and, as such, should be interiorized by the whole constituency in a “bottom-up” approach that empowers citizens and spontaneously aligns them with state policies. Besides the legislative field, the main areas of reforms for post-conflict countries with an ethnic component are: education, land and equal distribution of resources, and the judiciary.

As for education, the centrifugal tendency of the new multicultural state should prompt authorities to create new entities promoting indigenous culture and working at designing school programs that fashion bilingualism and are attentive to native traditions. I have pointed out in Chapter 5 how marginalization of rural regions has led to the radicalization of universities and the indoctrination of students by the Shining Path. In light of this, universal access to primary and secondary education should be promoted through a statewide effort to build new schools also in remote areas of the countryside or by reforming existing institutes and staffing them with competent teachers. Citizens of rural centers have to perceive decentralization in a positive way and not as a government’s excuse to further isolate and discriminate them. A huge challenge in this regard is represented by geography, as Andean communities and Central American highland villages are still difficult to reach, despite the technological progress made in transportation.

The educational reform undergone by the Guatemalan state after the Peace Accords highlights the relevance of education in the context of a multicultural nation. The setbacks experienced during the negotiation process, according to Cojtí Cuxil, were not only due to the government’s intransigency, but also and mainly to an uneven leverage displayed by the two parties, whereby the Mayan representatives were unable to

match the technical expertise of state officials.²³³ This experience shows how deeply unequal access to education can influence state-civil society relations by nurturing discrimination.

Social conflicts involving native populations have largely stemmed from land issues and a protracted system of internal colonization. A lesson states should draw from the relative success of non-dogmatic Marxist frameworks among indigenous communities is that neo-liberal policies should follow the same rule, namely refrain from universally suitable and foreign-based economic programs. This research has proved that radical ideology and ethnicity are not compatible, and yet many Latin American countries have embraced economic practices that are completely disconnected from their ethnic component and are contributing to the fragmentation of the social fabric. By giving priority to economic performance and revenues over social stability, some Latin American governments are denying the value of ethnicity and are continuing to blindly accept Western models of development, despite ECLAC and dependency theories' reflections. Although the limits of these frameworks have become clear, neo-liberalism does not offer a solution to the complex multi-ethnic scene of the Latin American region, mainly because it advocates unfettered capitalism to the detriment of indigenous communities. Neo-liberalist approaches end up favoring powerful elites with more economic opportunities and lead to the urbanization of weak segments of the population, usually of indigenous descent, who continue to be left behind in the national effort at economic development.

²³³ Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio. "Educational Reform in Guatemala: Lessons from Negotiations Between Indigenous Civil Society and the State," in Sieder, p. 125.

In order to carry out economic reform that is consistent with the pluralist principles of the Constitution, governments should formulate ad hoc strategies that are both homegrown and mindful of the legacies of colonialism. Contrary to what modernization theories predicated, the Latin American region does not necessarily have to experiment with the same development stages as European countries have done, but needs instead to acknowledge its own diversity. Participatory democracy should start from the equal allotment of resources achieved through original economic policies that benefit the whole society, taking into account the disadvantaged situation of native populations and seeking to redress it.

Finally, multiculturalism has to be guaranteed by an independent judiciary able to counterbalance the power of the executive. The example of constitutional reform in Peru hampered by the legal system should guide future attempts at adapting the country's main charter to the plural character of society.²³⁴ This reasoning holds even more true in light of the authoritarian and militaristic past of the whole Latin American region. An independent judiciary would represent a solution to the problem of representation of civil society in nations where the executive power tends to be the privileged stakeholder in all negotiations and would ensure a truly plural decision-making process.

The lessons learned from the case studies of Guatemala and Peru have demonstrated that ethnicity, once considered a burden for development, can indeed be turned into an advantage for countries that are willing and able to effectively incorporate it into their legislations. A threefold approach encompassing educational, economic, and

²³⁴ Yrigoyen Fajardo, "Peru: Pluralist Constitution, Monist Judiciary – A Post-Reform Assessment," in Sieder, pp. 157-158.

judicial reforms should directly follow the reintegration of former combatants and constitutional reforms.

More broadly, one could argue that the process of state building subsequent to violence spurred by ethnic grievances is essential to the future political and social stability of any country with variables similar to the ones present in Guatemala and Peru. If multiculturalism is really implemented, it could function as a buffer for the spread of radical ideologies and armed groups that thrive on popular discontent and social marginalization.

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