On Abimael Guzmán and José Carlos Mariátegui: where the difference lies.

by Andrés Garrido

This essay explores to what extent Peruvian professor and political activist Abimael Guzmán (also known as Presidente Gonzalo), who leaded the Peruvian Communist Party -Shining Path (PCP-SL)\(^1\) in a war against the Peruvian State\(^2\) during the 1980s and early 1990s, was influenced by the ideas of Peruvian journalist and political thinker José Carlos Mariátegui (1895-1930).\(^3\) The intention is to establish if Abimael Guzmán may be considered as a true follower of Mariátegui, as he claimed to be, or if, on the contrary, there is an essential difference between them.

We will start by exploring the bases of Mariátegui’s thought. Through the analysis of the Indian question and the tenure of land in Peru made by Mariátegui and assumed by Guzmán, we will develop the characteristics of Gonzalo Thought [Pensamiento Gonzalo, as known in Spanish]. Since Gonzalo Thought claimed to be more of a revolutionary praxis than a theoretical body, an examination of certain aspects of the Peruvian People’s War will be necessary. At the end, we will summarise our conclusions establishing, as clearly as possible, the differences between José Carlos Mariátegui and Abimael Guzmán.

The bases of Mariátegui’s thought

In the introduction note to his main political work *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality*, José Carlos Mariátegui said:

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1. PCP-SL stands for “Partido Comunista del Perú, por el Sendero Luminoso de José Carlos Mariátegui.”
2. The final report of the Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación (CVR), *Hatun Willakuy* (p.28), reads that the PCP-SL’s objective was to destroy the State: “In no ways [the PCP-SL] was a guerrilla fighting a war of national liberation against a totalitarian regime.”
3. Mariátegui himself stated his year of birth as 1895 in a letter of January 10, 1927, to Enrique Espinoza, although some sources consider he was born in 1894. We will not discuss this issue here.
“My judgments are nourished by my ideals, my sentiments, my passions. I have an avowed and resolute ambition: to assist in the creation of Peruvian Socialism. I am far removed from the academic techniques of the university.”

Mariátegui, known at his time for his humorous and eclectic writing, “was characterised by an agonizing doubt derived from his respect for a reality he perceived as multiple and dynamic.” Mariátegui’s eclectic nature, however, was not an obstacle for his political commitment to Marxism-Leninism. This was perceived by Abimael Guzmán when he was an academic at the San Cristóbal of Huamanga University in Ayacucho. It was after his first trip to China in the mid-1960s, that Guzmán retook Mariátegui’s analysis of Peruvian reality and valued it under a different light. As he admitted, he had not paid much attention to Mariátegui before that time:

“One thing that seems ironic is that the more I understood Mao Tse-tung, the more I began to appreciate and value Mariátegui. Since Mao urged us to apply creatively, I went back and studied Mariátegui again, and saw that we had in him a first rate Marxist-Leninist who had thoroughly analysed our society. It seems ironic, but it’s true.”

So in the mid-1960s, Guzmán retook Mariátegui’s analysis on Peruvian social and political reality and considered it under three bases: proletarian class position and conception of the world; Marxist-Leninist ideology; and dialectical materialism as working method of analysis:

“We must base ourselves on facts, start from the class position of Mariátegui, start from his Marxist-Leninist ideology and one must also start therefore, from his dialectical materialist method.”

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4 Mariátegui, José Carlos, Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1974), p. xxxiv.


7 Guzmán, Abimael: To Understand Mariátegui, p. 2.
Guzmán’s search for ideological ‘purity’ during the 1960s leaded him to the foundation of the PCP-SL in 1969, after splitting from the ‘red flag’ faction of the PCP (also known as PCP-BR).\(^8\) Throughout his political life before his arrest in 1992, Guzmán incessantly wrote and spoke against revisionism and defended that ‘purifying the Party line’ was the first step towards revolution.\(^9\) He considered Mariátegui “a good touching stone to find out who are genuine revolutionaries and who are not.”\(^10\) Abimael Guzmán wrote of Mariátegui as “a source of light” and “an example to follow;” as well as a “guide of the revolution in our country [Peru].”\(^11\)

We will take Mariátegui’s treatment of the Indian question, and also the way in which he applied Marxist-Leninist thought to Peruvian concrete realities, to check to what extent Guzmán’s claims—in the name of the PCP-SL—of being Mariátegui’s legitimate heir are accurate.

**The Indian question and the problem of land**

Mariátegui wrote that “the problem of the Indian is rooted in the land tenure system of our economy.” This means that its causes are not to be found in the country’s “administrative, legal, or ecclesiastic machinery, its racial dualism or pluralism, or its cultural or moral conditions.” \(^12\) The problem of the Indian is the result of the economic and social system that has oppressed him for centuries. So it is a socio-economic and therefore political problem.\(^13\)

As a Marxist-Leninist, Mariátegui thought that “the land tenure system determines the

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10. Guzmán, A., p. 3.

11. Ibid., p. 11.


13. Ibid., pp. 30-32.
political and administrative system of the nation.”\textsuperscript{14} In the case of Peru, he found through historical studies that the Inca economy was based in different forms of collective ownership of farmland, waters, pasture and woodlands, as well as in cooperative labour.\textsuperscript{15} Those forms of Inca agrarian communism were destroyed by the Spanish colonial rule and its feudal organisation of economy. The colonial regime proved incapable of organising a productive feudal economy and consequently introduced elements of a slave economy, bringing black people from Africa to Peru. Indian population decreased from about 10 million at the time Spaniards arrived to one million people after three centuries of Spanish domination. Slavery, however, “was doomed to fail, both as a means of economic exploitation and organisation of the colony and as a reinforcement of a regime based only on conquest and force.” \textsuperscript{16}

The problem was not eased by the Peruvian independence from Spanish rule. “The Laws of the Indies protected indigenous property and recognised its communist organisation,” although “Indian property could not be adequately protected because of colonial practices.” Under the feudal system the community was not protected but tolerated: it survived in servitude. The needs of the peasant population –it means, the indigenous– were not reflected by the program supported by the revolutionaries who fought against Spain. When Peru gained independence, the new country’s policy formally abolished the forms of servitude (mitas, encomiendas, etc.), but didn’t reduce the privileges of the landholding aristocracy, which continued to be the dominant class in the country.\textsuperscript{17} The Indians remained in factual servitude, unprotected, especially in the sierra, where production levels are low as a consequence of landowners’ interest in the income they receive from land rather than in land’s productivity.

In the coastal latifundium, a form of capitalist technique –“although its exploitation still rests on feudal practises and principles”- developed thank to foreign investment –mainly from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 34.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 35.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 35-39.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 45-51.
\end{itemize}
Britain and later the US- and no trace of the indigenous communal forms can be found. “Peruvian agriculture, therefore, obtains credit and transport solely for the products that benefit the great markets. […] Our latifundistas, our landholders, may think they are independent, but they are actually only intermediaries or agents of foreign capital.”  

**From land tenure to armed struggle**

Guzmán agreed with Mariátegui’s analysis of the Indian problem as rooted in land tenure. He believed that the coexistence of three types of production systems (Indian communal, feudal and bourgeois) in the Peruvian 1920s remained untouched till the beginning of Sendero’s Popular War in 1980:

> “The land problem is fundamental, because this problem is really the one that is resolved through democratic revolution [...]. What we carry out is the destruction of semifeudal relations of production, and the distribution of the land to the peasantry, principally the poor peasants, then the middle peasants.”

However, an agrarian reform had been conducted by the government of General Velasco (1968-1975). This reform came after the peasant uprisings and land invasions occurred in the 1960s, under previous governments. Guerrilla movements also appeared during that period and the violent military response together with a suffering national economy did not improve matters. Velasco’s land reform benefited almost half a million peasants and put about three-quarters of all agriculturally usable land under some type of cooperative ownership.

Nevertheless the reform presented problems and was far from successful: it was much centralised and implemented without the peasant’s input into the process, so their expectations were

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18 Ibid., 52-70, (70).
19 El Diario.
not met; there was corruption among administrators and misuse of funds; and, to make matters worse, those left apart grew anger.\textsuperscript{21} Peasant leader and writer Hugo Blanco considers that, when the latifundio system collapsed with the insurgencies of the 1960s, the landowners usurped land from communities in the Amazon region and used their close ties with the judicial power, the political power, the police and the media to repress campesino unions.\textsuperscript{22}

The land reform of Velasco, however, managed to bury the feudal landed-estate system and, although “the official lack of respect towards the indigenous community appalled the campesinos […], the axis of the indigenous problem moved away from being a problem of land. […] With the breakdown of the system of semi-feudal servitude denounced by Mariátegui, the floodgates were opened for the indigenous struggle across all fields.” \textsuperscript{23}

In Ayacucho province, were Guzmán planted Sendero Luminoso’s first seeds, the effects of the reform were limited and only about 11% of the resident’s benefited from it –this compares with 54% on areas where Sendero’s influence was minimal, such as Peru’s north coast.\textsuperscript{24} There were other reasons for the reform not to succeed in Ayacucho. The region has a rocky and agriculturally forbidding terrain, so landholders had lost power to a new sector of merchants, bureaucrats and professionals from Huamanga. “As a result, by the time of General Velasco’s agrarian reform, much of the department’s land was either already in the hands of peasant communities or belonged to small independent farmers.”\textsuperscript{25}

Since, as we mentioned, the terrain was not fit for agriculture, it needed investment, but Ayacucho’s countryside was far from receiving government’s help. Between 1968 (when Velasco gained power) and 1980 (when Sendero Luminoso launched the People’s War), the department of Ayacucho received only 0.3% of the national public investment. In 1972, only 5.5% of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Banco, Hugo, \textit{The Indian problem in Peru: from Mariátegui to today}. (Socialist Voice, Website, 2007).
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Banco, H., pp. 3-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Rochlin, p. 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Poole, Deborah & Gerardo Rénique, \textit{Perú, Time of Fear}. (London, Latin America Bureau, 1992), p. 36.
\end{itemize}
department’s households had electricity and 93.4% had no drinking water. On top of that, over 60% of the population were illiterate.\textsuperscript{26}

With this socio-economic reality surrounding him in Ayacucho, Guzmán’s concluded that Mariátegui’s analysis remained current through the 20th century. He considered that Velasco and the governments that followed him were “engaged in the construction of a corporate state and the development of ‘bureaucratic capitalism’. The Belaúnde government [1963–1968] was seen as ‘the continuation of fascism’ behind a ‘masquerade of apparent democracy’.” \textsuperscript{27} At the same time, the progresses made by peasants struggle in other parts of the country, encouraged Abimael Guzmán to take his analysis a step further. He thought that objective conditions were given in Ayacucho and in the rest of Peru to begin armed struggle in 1980.

\textbf{The Indian and the World’s Revolution}

Mariátegui maintained that Indian society would only be transformed through a socialist revolution. Latin America, lacking urban proletariat and capital accumulation, did not appear to provide the basic objective conditions necessary for a socialist revolution. He considered, however, that the communal distribution of land typical of Indian society carried the seeds of socialism in its midst.\textsuperscript{28} So “indigenous revolutionary consciousness will form slowly, but once the Indians have made the socialist ideal their own, they will serve it with a discipline, tenacity, and strength that few proletarians from other milieus will be able to surpass.” \textsuperscript{29}

From Mariátegui’s view, Indians should unite with other oppressed classes of Peru because “socialism is certainly not an Indo-American theory. It is a worldwide movement.” \textsuperscript{30} In this sense,

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., (p. 456).
\textsuperscript{30} Mariátegui, José Carlos, ‘Aniversario y Balance’, Amauta, Year 3, No 17. Lima, September, 1928.
Mariátegui’s socialism was far from dogmatic, but based, as Lenin wanted, in revolutionary praxis and careful application of Marxism to the concrete reality of different nations. He wrote:

“Tradition is alive and mobile [...]. It is created by those who renovate and enrich it precisely in their resistance to it. [...] Revolutionaries embody society’s will not to petrify itself in a particular moment [...].”

Considering the Peruvian political and social realities from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, Abimael Guzmán found that Mariátegui’s thought matched very well with Mao’s and with his own. We will now analyse to what extent Guzmán followed Mariátegui’s theories by directing our attention to the revolutionary praxis of Sendero Luminoso. We believe it will provide a clearer answer to the question than focusing only on statements made by Guzmán.

**Gonzalo Thought**

In an interview given in 1988, when he was living clandestinely, Abimael Guzmán, then known by his *nom de guerre* Presidente Gonzalo, defined his thought (Pensamiento Gonzalo) as follows:

“It is the application of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to the Peruvian revolution that has produced Gonzalo Thought. Gonzalo Thought has been forged in the class struggle of our people, mainly the proletariat, in the incessant struggles of the peasantry, and in the larger framework of the world revolution, in the midst of these earth-shaking battles, applying as faithfully as possible the universal truths to the concrete conditions of our country. Previously we called it the Guiding Thought. And if today the Party, through its Congress, has sanctioned the term Gonzalo Thought, it’s because a leap has been made in the Guiding Thought through the development of the people’s war. In sum, Gonzalo Thought is none other than the application of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to our concrete reality. This means that it is principal specifically for our Party, for the people’s war.

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31 Becker, (p. 457).

and for the revolution in our country, and I want to emphasize that. But for us, looking at our ideology in universal terms, I emphasize once again, it is Maoism that is principal.”  

From his analysis of Peruvian reality, Guzmán concluded that violence has been always the mean to bring political change. When the violence didn’t bring significant change to the country it was because it lacked the theoretical guidance of a true Communist Party. He justified his assertion quoting from Mariátegui:

“Mariátegui said, ‘Power is seized through violence and is defended with dictatorship’, ‘today revolution is the bloody process through which things are born’, and throughout the years of his glorious life he persistently upheld the role of revolutionary violence and class dictatorship. He also said that no matter how big a majority you might have in parliament, it could only serve to dissolve a cabinet, but never to do away with the bourgeois class.”

Mariategui also wrote: “Revolutionaries from all latitudes have to choose between suffering violence or making use of it.” So Guzmán decided to systematise the violence through a military strategy, which consisted, first, in building up a Communist Party that recognized armed struggle as the principal mean to bring political change; and second, developing People’s War to conquer the State. Guzmán applied his understanding of Mariátegui and Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to these tasks.

After “purifying the Party line”, Guzmán’s PCP-SL started in 1973 the formation of “party-generated organisms”, defined as “natural movements generated by the proletariat in the different organisational fronts.” They worked as a base of support and a pool of young recruits. Guzmán learned from Mariátegui that the need for a guiding Party precedes the consolidation of mass organisations:

33 El Diario.

34 El Diario.

35 Mariátegui, La escena contemporánea, V, “El Mensaje de Oriente”, Marxists Internet Archive. The translation into English is mine. This quote originally reads: “Los revolucionarios de todas las latitudes tienen que elegir entre sufrir la violencia o usarla.”
“He [Mariátegui] knows perfectly well that the proletariat has organic forms such as workers unions, workers’ alliances, and workers’ weaponry. Well, Mariátegui knew that these three things we just mentioned amount to nothing if there is no brain guiding it. So then Mariátegui proposes founding a proletarian party and creates the Party of the proletariat in our country.”

Then, in 1975, the PCP-SL established People’s Schools for political education in different parts of Peru –especially in their strongholds of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac. In 1977, it came the final phase of the Party’s reconstitution: “The National Plan of Construction”, when the Party sent cadres to consolidate its structure in the country and to prepare the conditions for armed struggle.

As a result of concluding that Peruvian agrarian society presented parallelisms with the objective conditions under which Mao developed his revolution, as well as following Mariátegui’s thought on regards to the organisation of masses under a guiding Party, which functioned as the Leninist vanguard of the proletariat; and finally gathering support from the Indian population, Guzmán’s PCP-SL opened by the end of 1979 a Military school to train the First Company of Sendero Luminoso’s army. It was more of an indoctrination school than based on military training.

Guzmán took the opportunity of, through carefully selected readings, transmit basic convictions learnt in China: that “everything could be blown away if you put your mind to it,” and “alone one is worth nothing, the mass is everything.” From Lenin’s thesis on revolutionary conditions and the Communist Party’s role in them he took “how to begin armed struggle from nothing.” Guzmán took from Mariátegui that the “force of revolutionaries lies not in science, but in faith, passion, and will.” This stress on violence as the necessary mean to bring change had an

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36 Guzmán, A., p. 7.
37 Poole, D. & G. Rénique, pp. 40-41.
38 Ibid., p. 33.
39 Gorriti, Gustavo, p. 32.
escalating effect that Guzmán did not try to attenuate.

On this respect, Poole and Rénique (1992) think that Guzmán’s understanding of the Maoist and Marxist concept of contradiction was influenced by his studies of Kant. They think that Guzmán departed “from the Marxist-Leninist tradition in assuming that all contradiction is antagonistic. Rejecting the basic Marxist principle of the unity of opposites, Guzmán instead constructs his theory of contradiction on Kant’s concept of real or exclusive oppositions. Kant suggests that these oppositions are resolvable only through the intervention of a suprahuman agency (the divine).” For Marx, instead, oppositions are seen as two aspects of one and the same force which are resolvable through human agency. Guzmán thought that the only resolution to the antagonism or contradiction existing between two irreconcilable poles is through the eradication of one of those poles. This leads to Armed Struggle as a purging mechanism which outcome will be the Society of Great Harmony. History is for Guzmán the material force (instead of Kant’s the divine) which solves contradictions. History is that force, not the human agency. In other words: violence is essential to solve the contradictions and for that violence to be effective, the opposite must be annihilated. This led to the development of the quota [cuota de sangre, in Spanish]- which enabled militants to meet any bloodbath. As Abimael Guzmán said in 1988: “If one is persistent, maintains politics in command, maintains the political strategy, maintains the military strategy, if one has a clear, defined plan, then one advances and one is able to meet any bloodbath.” The massacre of Lucanamarca may be considered as an example of this.

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41 Guzmán wrote a dissertation on the “Kantian theory of space” when he completed his bachelor degree in philosophy in the 1960s.

42 El Diario.

43 The Lucanamarca massacre took place on April 3, 1983. It was a revenge after some ronderos (armed peasants) stabbed, stoned, set fire on and shot a Shining Path commander called Olegario Curitomay, in March 1983. Days later, Shining Path militants entered various villages in the province of Huancasancos and killed 69 people, including children, old people and pregnant women. This is how Abimael Guzmán explained the action years later, in 1988: "In the face of reactionary military actions and the use of mesnadas, we responded with a devastating action: Lucanamarca. Neither they nor we have forgotten it, to be sure, because they got an answer that they didn't imagine possible. More than 80 were annihilated, that is the truth. And we say openly that there were excesses, as was analyzed in 1983. But everything in life has two aspects. Our task was to deal a devastating blow in order to put them in check, to make them understand that it was not going to be so easy. On some occasions, like that one, it was the Central Leadership itself that planned the action and gave instructions. That's how it was. In that case, the principal thing is that we dealt them a devastating blow, and we checked them and they understood that they were dealing with a different kind of people's fighters, that we weren't the same as those they had fought before. This is what they understood. The excesses are the negative aspect. Understanding war, and basing ourselves on what Lenin said, taking Clausewitz into account, in war, the masses engaged in combat can go too far and express all their hatred, the deep feelings of class hatred, repudiation and condemnation that they have -that was the root of it. This
Abimael Guzmán went underground in 1979, after building up a hierarchical military command structure on five “organic needs”: centralism, clandestinity, discipline, vigilance and secrecy. It proved a very efficient structure, capable of putting the State under siege, although Guzman’s capture in 1992 was key to dismantle the whole organisation.

The People’s War

The People’s War was developed through carefully planned stages: 1st/ Initiation Plan (May 1980-December 1980): It was carried out with modest, few modern weapons. 2nd/ Deployment Plan (January 1981-January 1983): Its goal was to establish guerrilla zones by controlling specific territories and communities. There was a campaign to obtain weapons. The main actions were sabotages. 3rd/ Plan to Conquer Bases (May 1983- September 1986): It was characterized by the shift of territorial positions and the surrounding of cities as Lima. 4th/ Plan to Develop Bases (December 1986 –May 1989): Sendero Luminoso gained the control of key areas of the country’s central highlands which supplied Lima with food, electricity and water. 5th/ Great Plan to Develop Bases and to Serve the Conquest of Power (August 1989 –September 1992): Its slogan was: “From strategic defensive to strategic equilibrium. From equilibrium to offensive.” By late 1991 and early 1992, Sendero Luminoso controlled about 40% of the country and was carrying out actions in Lima, such as political assassinations, cut-offs of water and electricity, intensive campaigns against NGOs and local activists etc. This stage was aborted by Guzmán’s capture.44

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The People’s War development, however, probed that Guzmán not always followed Mariátegui’s thought. For instance, it was a fact that the PCP-SL had large and strong support from its indigenous bases in the country side, especially in the departments of Ayacucho and Huananga. Although Guzmán wrote about allowing for the initiative of the people “so they learn instead of being forever ‘under age’”, 45 the hierarchical nature of the Party as well as the inflexibility of its plans discouraged all personal initiatives. As a consequence of this, the PCP-SL overlooked Indian approaches to their reality and pretended to impose their dogmatic perspective combining a patronising attitude towards the peasants with the merciless repression of populations who did not submit to the Party line. This, together with the fact that the PCP-SL did not respect Indian tradition of giving a prominent role to the elders and instead put young militants on charge of populations, contributed to a loss of support from the Indian bases and the development of peasant’s rondas that swept Sendero Luminoso from areas that were under its control at the beginning of its campaign. In this sense, the rural conflict had a generational dimension, since young educated PCP-SL militants from a peasant background tried to violently take over the command of rural communities. 46

The PCP-SL proved to be efficient in gaining support from the impoverished peasants and shanty-town inhabitants –thanks partly to the repressive attitude of the Army and the government, but also to a strategy of penetrating mass organisations as well as small populations. In this sense, they applied Mariátegui’s statement that it is necessary to engage with locals to understand them. However, the development of the war against the State proved that the PCP-SL did not allow the masses to play other role than that of following the Party line, which clearly contradicts Mariátegui’s path.

It is also significant that most of the PCP-SL command were whites and mestizos, while most of the bases of support were mestizo and indigenous. Scholar Marisol de la Cadena considers external analyst as the CVR presents a division in periods so coincidental with the one planned by the PCP-SL means that somehow Guzmán’s Party was successful in plan developing and kept the initiative most of the time.

45 Guzmán, A., p. 5.
46 Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, p. 48
that the PCP-SL elite used ideas of intellectual superiority and Party infallibility to justify “the racial hierarchies in which it silently believed”, which was “silenced in the rigid ‘classist’ lexicon.” She wrote:

“No the 1970s and 1980s, to possess the classist truth made the intellectual elite of the Shining Path perceive itself as utterly pure, and thus above the social hierarchies, including those of class, that governed the society they sought to change.”

Guzmán himself promoted a cult of his personality by the Party militants that bordered in the grotesque, to say the least. Letters from the PCP-SL Central Committee opened with a long formula which started: “Dear Comrades: I give you my greetings and my full and unconditional submission to the greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist on earth, beloved and respected President Gonzalo, chief and guide of the Peruvian revolution and the world proletarian revolution, teacher of Communists and party unifier. I give you my greetings and full and unconditional submission to the scientific ideology of the proletariat: Marxist-Leninist-Maoist and Gonzalo Thought, especially Gonzalo Thought, all-powerful and infallible ideology that illuminates our path and arms our minds.”

This cult of personality together with the pursuit of an inflexible Party line decided by an elite regardless the customs and circumstances of the peasants and workers they pretended to represent, openly contradicted another of Mariátegui’s statements: “The professional intelligentsia will not discover the path of faith; but the multitudes will.”

After his capture by governmental forces on September 1992, Abimael Guzmán gave a speech from his cage in which talked about “keeping on the fulfilment of our tasks.” However, the PCP-SL proved incapable of functioning without its head and, a year later, Guzmán appeared on TV.

47 Cadena, M. de la, (p.53-54).
asking Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori for peace talks. This produced a split on the Party. In 1994, Guzmán offered “advice” in case the Party approved conversations with the government. None of these proposals where taken into consideration by a government which was successful in pushing Sendero’s guerrillas deep into the forest. In 2006, Guzmán proposed a National reconciliation, political solution and general amnesty, unsuccessfully too. He nowadays considers that the People’s War ended in September 1992, right when he was captured.50

Sendero Luminoso guerrillas are still operative by 2012 in hardly accessible parts of the Peruvian forest, somehow involved in forms of narco-trafficking, and do not constitute a serious menace to the government.

Conclusions

We can now summarise our conclusions. Abimael Guzmán declared himself as a follower of José Carlos Mariátegui. Guzmán took Mariátegui’s analysis on Peruvian social and political reality and concluded that Mariátegui was an exemplary Marxist-Leninist who might be used as a “touching stone” to test genuine revolutionaries.

In Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality, Mariátegui said that the main characteristic of the Peru was the coexistence of feudalism, capitalism and indigenous communal organisation, concluding that the problem of the Indian was the problem of land tenure. Guzmán agreed with Mariátegui’s analysis and conclusion, since the social reality he got to know in Ayacucho province -where Guzmán was working as a University professor from 1962 to the mid 1970s- had not been improved by the agrarian reforms carried out by General Velasco between 1968-1975, long after Mariátegui’s death.

It is when Guzmán started to apply his own thought -known as Pensamiento Gonzalo- that differences clearly arose between Guzmán and Mariátegui. Although both emphasized the Leninist

50 As declared by Alfredo Crespo, Abimael Guzmán’s solicitor, in the Peruvian TV program “A primera hora”, in January 2012.
stress on praxis and the need of thinking creatively -as also recommended by Mao Tse-tung-, Gonzalo Thought, as defined by Guzmán, was just the application of Maoism to the concrete conditions of Peru as a consequence of the development of the People’s War. But it was precisely the revolutionary praxis of the PCP-SL what made apparent a pre-existing theoretical and significant difference between Mariátegui and Abimael Guzmán: Guzmán rejected the basic Marxist principle of the unity of opposites. For Marx, as for Mariátegui, the oppositions are seen as two aspects of one and the same force which are resolvable through human agency. But Guzmán constructed his theory of contradiction on Kant’s concept of real or exclusive opposites, where the only resolution to the antagonism or contradiction existing between two irreconcilable poles is through the eradication of one of those poles. Guzmán considered History as the material force which solves contradictions and violence as the force moving History forward. So violence would be essential to solve contradictions by the annihilation of the opposite.

According to this, People’s War would be the adequate and universal response to contradictions in the world as well as in every country. It is for this reason that Pensamiento Gonzalo systematized violence through a military strategy.

The military strategy developed by the PCP-SL used terror as a deliberate tactic to erase any resistance and gain control over the impoverished sectors of society whose interests the Shinning Path claimed to represent. Such a tactic by no means was recommended nor even suggested by any of Mariátegui’s writings. On the contrary, Mariátegui contemplated armed straggle as a necessary mean in the dialectical process of revolution, and for that mean to be effective it was previously necessary that the urban proletariat and the Indian peasants acquired social consciousness. Mariátegui’s conception of revolution was traditionally Marxist and, regarding the tactics to use in the development of revolution, he went no further than Lenin, who although contemplated terrorism in certain moments, was keen to rectify the strategy whenever the circumstances proved it wrong or ineffective. Gonzalo Thought, on the contrary, did not accept a questioning of the Party strategy and when the circumstances worked against its goals, it answered by implementing a policy of violence till literally obliterate the resisting element.
So we can say that it is in the practical application of theoretical thought where the differences between Mariátegui and Abimael Guzmán become evident. And these differences are the reflection of a radically opposed conception of the dialectical dynamics of society and the role given to violence during the revolutionary process. While Mariátegui accepted the unity of opposites, Guzmán solved contradictions by the eradication of the opposition; while Mariátegui believed that a professional intelligentsia would not discover the path of faith, but the multitudes would, Guzmán pursued a rigid line of action decided by the PCP-SL’s elite to violently overpower any reluctance from the masses; while Mariátegui recommended to engage with locals to understand them, Guzmán implemented a policy of penetrating the masses not to understand them but to use them for the Party purposes; while, finally, Mariátegui defended social revolution, what Abimael Guzmán contributed to develop was in fact a war to overcome the State, not a social revolution -this helps to understand why, after he was put in jail, the “objective conditions”, that should back any revolutionary movement, were not enough to secure the success of the revolutionary movement.

If, as he proposed, when he was known as Presidente Gonzalo, we consider José Carlos Mariátegui as a “touching stone” to test genuine revolutionaries, the conclusion must be that Abimael Guzmán has not passed the test.

Ends
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