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# **The Indigenous in Peruvian National Identity**

*Danielle Bartels*

Indigenous peoples populate countries across the globe. In every country, issues of the national identity of the indigenous are important. With the aid of case studies, we can better comprehend the depth of these problems. Focusing on the intellectual history in a case study of Peru, I aim to understand the antagonistic behaviors against indigenous cultures and how the nation state chose to handle their indigenous population over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There are very few people who take advantage of their youth and travel to another part of the world. Of course this is a personal choice. It is a choice that can provide valuable cultural experiences. I made the choice to study for a semester in Lima, Peru in 2013, while in Lima, I grew an even greater interest for the history and the culture of Peru. Through a personal conversation with a friend, I learned that the indigenous culture of Peru was still present, and in fact according to recent population statistics, the indigenous in Peru comprise an estimated 45% of the entire nation. Nevertheless, they are not always seen in a positive light. For example, my friend had begun to date a boy and was scared to introduce him to her family. When I asked her why she was hesitant, she replied, “He is an Indian, of the mountain people,” and her parents would never approve of his heritage. Aside from that example, I was told multiple stories, by limeños, of the “mountain people” and their aversion to modernity. Hearing of these discrepancies between people who live in the country of Peru propelled my desire to unearth some explanations for this cultural disparity of national identity<sup>1</sup>.

The indigenous of any nation state are seen as a threat to the nation state’s national identity. The core of a nation state is the concept of “nation” and at the heart of that idea is the concept of identity. Members of nations find a sense of security and comfort in their national identity and when this is threatened by others, it becomes a problem. The indigenous, the others, who live within national boundaries but are not included in the nation’s definition of national identity, therefore come to represent a threat to the non-indigenous. This becomes a problem for those in power particularly when, as in the case of Peru, the indigenous form a substantial part of the national population. Part of the problem is the size of the population but the real reason for the concern about the indigenous is the definition of national identity.

A nation state constitutes two parts: a nation and a state. The nation is seen as the cultural and ethnic component, bringing feelings of purpose and value to the people of the nation. The state is the political portion, the boundaries, structure and administrative apparatus, which serves to govern the people of the nation<sup>2</sup>.

A common challenge faced by most, if not all, nation states is the “indigenous problem.” Indigenous is a word that is often connected with people from far away lands speaking unknown languages and performing rituals. Is this really what the word indigenous means? The word indigenous is defined as, “to originate or occur naturally in a particular place.”<sup>3</sup> With that

definition in mind, it can be assumed that the people in these far away lands may not all be considered indigenous, their languages may not be entirely unknown, and they may perform rituals. Indigenous people consider themselves to be the first to settle and develop the land on which they live. There are indigenous people all over the world. They are more concentrated in some areas of the world than others, but the indigenous and their identity are globally present.<sup>4</sup>

To gain a better understanding of the indigenous people it will be most beneficial to concentrate on a case study, opposed to the indigenous as a whole. By choosing a specific group of indigenous people in the world, it provides a in depth review of how indigenous relate with national identity. I have chosen to do a case study on the indigenous people of Peru. Because I have personal ties to Peru and have experienced the national demography and history firsthand indicates that Peru serves as an effective case study. During my time in Peru I began to question how and what classified the differences between the indigenous and non-indigenous of Peru. The people of Peru are very in tune with the Earth and relate to one another naturally because of the ties to the Earth. With anything that happens naturally, a sense of identity forms. In the case of the indigenous in Peru, a telluric quality of identity evolved with them, which was reshaped throughout the years. This telluric quality is a spiritual connection the indigenous have with their land, or the “patria” in the Spanish expression.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to European influence, indigenous cultures throughout Peru were self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Many of the Incan beliefs were centered on spiritual beings and their family unit, the ayllu. The ayllu ensured a security of conservation of the indigenous traditions while also effectively using them as a workforce. One of the strongest relationships many indigenous had was with their land. The land provided them with food which kept them alive. There were many different cultures that made up the Incan Empire, which leads to cultural diversity. Despite their differences, the similarity regarding telluric beliefs and lifestyles bonded them to one another. With the arrival of the Spaniards, this relationship with the land would be seen as foreign and unfathomable, which meant it was unacceptable.<sup>6</sup>

In the early sixteenth century, the lives of the indigenous were gradually but significantly altered with the establishment of the Spanish colonial state. One aspect that was immediately noted was the new use of the term “Indian.” This term was not something that the Europeans specified only for the indigenous in the Andean regions, it was universally used to describe any group of conquered people within the Americas, regardless of their origins. As colonization advanced, the Incan systems of labor and the ayllu were interrupted and quickly turned into a system of forced labor.<sup>7</sup>

The indigenous were expected to work and pay tribute to the Spanish. A tribute was a form of tax paid to the government. The Spanish intended to create a utopian, westernized society in Peru that was similar to the European lifestyle they were accustomed to. Since the preference of the indigenous people was to continue their traditional ways and remain marginal to the modern options provided by the European lifestyle, they were seen as archaic and even barbaric, and certainly something “other” than civilized in the Christian and European mold.<sup>8</sup>

The Spanish brought with them many ideas about how society should be constructed and they placed a heavy emphasis on controlling the terms and conditions of rank and privilege in society. These plans included enforcing a caste system, maintaining a pure bloodline and shifting to Christianity. Categorizing people by race (mestizos, white limeños and indios) with the white limeños being at the top, was meant to keep a certain purity of the bloodlines, meaning no procreation with the conquered Indians. This would also keep the caste system in order and functioning correctly. Miscegenation, the “mixing of blood”, was common in the Andean region of Peru between the Spanish colonizers and the indigenous, which forced the caste system to view mestizos, half Spanish and half indigenous, as inferior to the rest of their Spanish elite caste. In becoming a mestizo, one was to deny and separate themselves from their origins in order to cleanse their indigenous identity.<sup>9</sup>

The incessant westernization of the Andean region of Peru by the Spanish was conflicting with the telluric lives led by the indigenous. In many cases the indigenous were being forcefully assimilated into the new European lifestyles, regardless of their contempt toward the new way of life. Assimilation for the indigenous became necessary to an extent; therefore, some indigenous decided to assimilate immediately while others did not. Indigenous who worked for the Spanish as serfs on colonial haciendas under forced labor, when given the opportunity, would move to towns that were completely run by the Spanish to secure, for their families, a job and an income. For indigenous families, this meant much more than living in a Spanish town; it also meant the families would have to learn to speak Spanish as their daily language, change how they dress and change the food they eat.<sup>10</sup>

By 1800 the Enlightenment had taken flight in Europe resulting in political turmoil, the industrial revolution, and global commerce. For Peru, this meant the fall of the Spanish monarchy and its colonial state, and by 1821, the emergence of a new type of state, a republic, and a new challenge of defining something now understood as the “nation.”

With this newly created government came a heightened sense of power and pessimism among the new republican elites. The power was the new direct control of local elites over the freshly minted republican state. The pessimism was derived from distaste for the indigenous people who were considered “uncouth and irredeemable,” and yet clearly were part of the people or “nation” of Peru. It seemed that the only choices given to the government at this point were to use the positive aspects of the indigenous to their advantage or choose to disregard the indigenous as a whole; pretending they did not exist. With what the Spanish understood of the indigenous, they saw no positive outlets to be had by keeping the indigenous; therefore, those in power decided eliminating the indigenous was the best option, so they did not have to pretend they did not exist.<sup>11</sup>

Race was an integral piece to the creation of a national identity in Peru and it continues to be a controversial aspect of Peruvian national discourse. Race was a very controversial topic because those in power chose to repudiate the biological aspects involved in the definition of race and accepted “racial hierarchies the ‘intellectual’ and ‘moral’ differences among groups of individuals.”<sup>12</sup>

Discrimination that the indigenous faced ultimately revolved around race. The elite who were in power had the right to make decisions for the government, and within their control lied concerns of citizenship, identity and undoubtedly the power to discriminate. The white-limeño population was naturally grouped with the educated elite, while the indigenous intellectuals were slumped into the category of uneducated and inept. Simply because of their geographical differences, the identity of the indigenous intellectuals was deemed inferior. Race, from the elite's point of view, had a place and a purpose in daily life and in occupational situations. The geographical racism is very literal in the sense that the higher the geographical origin of the indigenous person, the lower the class ranking and closer to being identified as Indian. Ultimately, what this reveals to us is that race and class are concepts that must be looked at together because they are so closely connected in the way they are used to discriminate against the indigenous. This reflects a perfect example of the differences in racial stereotyping, some people see color of skin and define race while others, like the non-indigenous of Peru, base racial category on morality, intellectual capacity and cultural purity.<sup>13</sup>

Another area that experienced a plethora of discrimination was education. Previous to the colonization of Peru by the Spanish, there was not a formal education system in place. Since they had survived without an education system in their lives thus far, the indigenous strayed from the modern aspect of education. This belief, from their concerned national aspect of a dwindling culture, was transferred into the state. The mindset of those in power was that if there were uneducated and illiterate people in the nation, they should not be considered state citizens and would not be included in any governmental functions or decisions of the state.<sup>14</sup>

Inevitably, the majority of the indigenous in Peru were uneducated and illiterate and having a large portion of your population be uneducated and illiterate was something the new members of the elite would not excuse; therefore denying citizenship to the indigenous. The indigenous attempted to become involved in their government, but to no avail. The indigenous were rejected multiple times because they were viewed as uneducated barbarians. Because of their desire to live the telluric lifestyle versus a more modern and enlightened lifestyle, they were seen as unruly and incapable of making their own decisions in life. To many, it should come as a shock that the indigenous (the majority population) have only relatively recently gained the right to vote in political elections; however, because of the history involved in Peru, this is understandable and quite frankly a valuable step by the indigenous.<sup>15</sup>

The indigenous posed a problem because they lived within the geopolitical borders of Peru, however, did not share any qualities with the Peruvian people such as customs, language or lifestyle. Could the republic allow the indigenous to continue living their telluric lives and remain the "other" or must they be considered true Peruvians? For the leaders of the new republican nation state, the only answer seemed to be the creation of a process of assimilation that would establish a positive identity for indigenous as Peruvians but keep them under the control of the non-indigenous elite.

From 1910 to 1980, the opinions on the indigenous alternated between a sense of racism and elite superiority within Peru and ended in the uprising of the Shining Path. Improving the

Indian race became an institutionalized concern under the rule of President Augusto Leguía (1919-1930). Throughout the twentieth century, the “Indian problem” would continue to arise and bring forth new solutions about what to do with the indigenous people. There was a group of people who believed that the indigenous culture should be recognized as a part of the Peruvian nation because it correctly depicts the original Peruvian culture, and this group was known as the Indigenistas.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1920s, the idea of “Indigenismo” came to light. Indigenismo was a movement that took the pre-Hispanic traditions of the indigenous and attempted to integrate them into the Peruvian national identity. By initiating this movement, intellectuals aimed to expel the colonial roots that both the indigenous and the non-indigenous collectively detested resulting in a rejuvenated culture for their desired national identity. The ideology of the Indigenista movement focused on the problem faced in the struggle to define the national identity of Peru revolved around understanding the thought process behind seeing racial purity (determined by the elite) as superior to those of mixed blood (“hybrids”). This era of racism in Peru was soon to be transformed from declaration of indigenous rights to military coups that changed the focus from racial purity to an issue of class struggle.<sup>17</sup>

Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre was the leader of Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). In 1923, he was sent into exile by President Augusto B. Leguía for leading a student protest. While in exile, he created the APRA political party which aligned with Soviet Communism and was against United States Imperialism. His vision for Peru was for it to be unified with the other Latin American countries to create and “Indo-America.” Haya de la Torre’s words about APRA exemplify the type of party he intended to lead. He states, “for APRA the primary anti-imperialist policy is the federation of the twenty republics of Indo-America. It is not feasible to resist imperialism without working for a united Indo-America; it is not even worth calling oneself anti-imperialist if one is not a sincere and militant unionist.”<sup>18</sup> In 1931, with his party still in tact, Haya de la Torre ran for President of Peru but was defeated. He was an advocate of fighting for equal rights for the indigenous in all of Latin American under the terms of socialist reform stating, “the new revolution in our America will have a base and feeling that is Indian.”<sup>19</sup>

In the 1930s, the APRA and Communist Party attempted to take control of Peru in the 1931 elections; however, they were defeated by Luis Miguel Sánchez who was a military leader in Peru. Sánchez was “cholo-looking” and, because he desired to conform the indigenous of Peru, he was widely supported by the aristocracy. Since the concept of a nation was fairly modern at the time, the focus in the 1930s was in creating a nation. As previously noted, the core of a nation is its identity. Therefore, the intellectuals of this time worked to reduce the blatant outward discrimination of the indigenous by changing the term race into culture and ultimately into ethnicity. Although the term race was not verbalized in government at this time, decisions were still based on predetermined racial feelings. While these terms were being reconfigured, it is essential to point out that through the questioning of the Indians’ identity, the definition of

white never faltered. Even through decades of political advancements and setbacks, the Indigenista's outlook on purity vs hybridity was still present.<sup>20</sup>

José Carlos Mariátegui was a Peruvian Marxist born in the outskirts of Lima and was well known for his political involvement in defending the indigenous population of Peru. He is best known for his book, *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (1928), in which he discusses, in depth, how the creation of a “nation” and the confiscation of land has affected the indigenous. The point Mariátegui most emphasized was that the discrimination against the indigenous was not because of their race but their class position; therefore, he believes the indigenous would better argue their equality under the established rules of the state than conforming to the modern aspects desired by the elite. The ideal manner of this fight for equality would be in the form of a socialist revolution; however, his ideology never intended for the history of Peru to be forgotten in an effort to complete the revolution.<sup>21</sup>

The ideas of the socialist José Carlos Mariátegui were explored in a different manner by many political parties. The idea of “redeeming the Indian race” was used in many developing leftist movements. This was to be completed without forgetting the importance of the historical context of Peru, which was important because of the concept of patria. Removing the indigenous from the ancestral land could lead to more distrust in the elites by the indigenous. The term peasant was introduced as an alternative to Indian in the 1960s, which ultimately changed the focus of discrimination from racial to economical. Thanks to the state reform in Peru (1968-1975) headed by Juan Velasco Alvarado, as long as Indians classified themselves as peasants, they would have access to the resources provided by the state, and if they so desired, they could assimilate and gain access to more resources. Alvarado was an important figure for the peasants at this time because in stating, “from this day forward, the Peruvian peasant will no longer be a pariah or disinherited and living in poverty from the cradle to the grave, powerless to make a better future for his children,” he was finally giving the indigenous a sense of identity.<sup>22</sup>

However, after the introduction to the Shining Path in 1980, the rights of the indigenous and all attempts at creating an indigenous identity were discarded by the government, and it was made clear the indigenous identity that was briefly imposed would never be re-constructed. Although there was a great amount of political movement from the 1930s to the 1970s, there was nothing that could compare to the political movement of the Shining Path.<sup>23</sup>

The insurgency of the Shining Path in the late twentieth century drastically affected the national identity of Peruvians today. The Shining Path of Peru was a political organization which stemmed from the Maoist Party of Communism and took flight in the 1980s. The leader of the Shining Path, Abimael Guzmán (better known as President Gonzalo), a college professor, was a member of the Communist Party established in Peru before 1980 when he decided to create his own branch of Communism based on the Maoist theory of violence. The ideology of the Shining Path was that the peasantry in Peru were being disregarded yet taken advantage of and, without violence, this discrimination would remain.

The existence of the indigenous, by means of national inclusion, was nonexistent; however, they were depended upon by urbanized areas (Lima) for goods and services produced

by the indigenous. The goal of the Shining Path was to recreate society so that the indigenous (peasants) would be acknowledged as participating members of society.<sup>24</sup>

Although Guzmán's ideas could be considered commendable (and were by the indigenous who joined him), his execution of his ideas turned out to be controversial and rather extreme. Guzmán focused on four themes in his ideology: class struggle, anti-imperialism, the vanguard party and violence. The class struggle was not the most pressing concern Guzmán had because he believed that by implemented Communism, the struggle between classes would simply disappear. By taking an anti-imperialist stance, Guzmán aligned himself with socialist José Carlos Mariátegui in his beliefs that imperialism was an idea strategically placed in Peru by outside sources (specifically the United States) in order to maintain a sense of global control (by military mediation). The use of the vanguard party is arguably one of the more self-discriminatory acts fabricated by the Shining Path. Although the majority of those who fought for the cause were indigenous, they were manipulated to be the ones fighting. By visually experiencing the massacre of villagers in 1983, for example, these peasant warriors were tricked into believing that their fight would change society. An important question to consider is, where were the elite of the Shining Path in the process of war, and were they knowingly exploiting the indigenous, therefore repeating the very history which they wished to forget? The level of violence that was involved in the insurgency of the Shining Path was unfathomable. By 1994, fifteen thousand peasants had died because of or for the cause. The Maoist theory of violence instructed the murder of anyone who opposed the cause; and anyone who died for the cause was considered a martyr. To answer my previously proposed question, Guzmán and the majority of his "inner circle" would be considered "white professionals" in the limeño culture. Therefore, the organization was contradicting their premise of eliminating "racial exclusion."

Was the purpose of the Shining Path to recreate a positive society for the indigenous to participate in, or was that ideology a ruse to set in motion a change of government power? A monumental problem that the country of Peru faced in the 1990s was remaining stuck in the thoughts and fears (of the indigenous) from the 1920s, not using any valuable historical evidence to guide them from the disaster created throughout the time of the Shining Path.<sup>25</sup>

By ultimately denying Peruvian history, Guzmán created an organization that compromised the identity of the indigenous who became involved, and did it without their knowledge. Whether or not this agenda was intentional is a debate for a different day. With the information gathered on the Shining Path, I aim to prove that the Shining Path has a direct correlation to the current state of national identity held within Peru.<sup>26</sup>

Mario Vargas Llosa, an infamous Peruvian literary figure, was also very involved in politics of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, Vargas Llosa served as a journalist for the Belaúnde administration of Peru and went out to write reports on the most extreme cases of murder and extermination of villages Peru has ever seen. The Shining Path was in the midst of their rampage at this time, claiming the lives of thousands of Peruvians in a short timespan. Vargas Llosa was commissioned to report on a massacre of state journalists in the village of Uchuraccay, and his conclusion was that the indigenous were "stubbornly primitive" in their actions. As Jean Franco

discusses in *Cruel Modernity*, the way Vargas Llosa handles his experience in the environment of the indigenous was narrow-minded and limited. By ridiculing the indigenous for acting out, he forgets to acknowledge that they (the state) have a force operating against them (the Shining Path) in informing and controlling the indigenous populations. The Shining Path had instructed the indigenous to kill whomever entered their village and was unfamiliar to them because they were against the cause of the Shining Path and, therefore, dangerous. Instead of allowing the indigenous to explain their violent acts, Vargas Llosa chose to speak for the masses, incriminating them as murderous barbarians. The fact that they murdered the journalists is not to be excused, but Vargas Llosa's narrow-minded criticism is important to understand because he continued to have such a colossal impact in the literary world.<sup>27</sup>

Through these examples of political action and involvement, it is clear that historically Peru's elite efforts have lacked sincerity. We have specifically seen this in the efforts of the Shining Path, and in the actions of writer Mario Vargas Llosa, Christa Olsen summarizes this by saying, "the elite efforts to imagine the nation-state are repeatedly interrupted by histories of resistance and discussions of rhetorical failures...white-mestizos invoked the figure of the Indian to serve political ideologies that had little positive impact on the lives of indigenous communities."<sup>28</sup> Those words encapsulate the way the indigenous have been treated throughout history, being manipulated to believe the cause they are fighting for will improve their lives when in actuality the intentions of these causes do not benefit even the indigenous communities, let alone individual indigenous.

Today, the heritage of Peru is numbed and frozen by the tourism industry. Alexander Herrera, author of "Heritage Tourism, Identity and Development in Peru," states that "heritage refers to material and immaterial features of humanity's past and traditional culture which are recognized as existing in the present, including landscapes and sites as well as songs and traditional practices."<sup>29</sup> This is important because, in the past, the heritage of the Peruvian culture was dismissed as a part of history that was unconnected to the political movements that were occurring. If we do not change the fact that history has been used as a tool rather than as knowledge, the cyclical acts of discrimination toward the indigenous populations throughout the world will continue to plague national identity. Christa Olson, author of *Constitutive Visions*, discusses the problem of national identity in the Republic of Ecuador, and the themes she discusses closely parallel the themes found in Peru. One of these themes is that the reality of the indigenous is invisible, yet there are representations of the indigenous displayed to represent national pride. In this modern time, the strength of identity is weighed heavily on how individuals (the indigenous) feel in relationship to their sense of belonging to the given national identity.<sup>30</sup>

What is happening with the indigenous culture of Peru, and other Latin American countries, is the attempt to make their culture seem more exotic than it is, for show (and money generated by tourism). Hiring someone to act and dress like a picturesque indigenous person is probably cheaper, and more reliable for making money, than asking an indigenous person to participate. Another way Peru is freezing their indigenous backgrounds is by resurrecting Incan

heroes in the form of monuments throughout the country, never recognizing the indigenous as they are today. The indigenous cultures may still be present but not in the same ways they once were. For example, in Peru the people may still speak their indigenous languages of Quechua and Aymara and dress in “indigenous” clothing; however, they may not consider themselves to be Indian. Because there has been so much energy put into creating a “new hybrid or non-Indian” identity, the cultures have all but disappeared. Sites such as Sipán, Chan Chan, Pachacámac, Kuélap and Machu Picchu have been modernized and venerated in recent decades to provide a sense of a shared national identity to the world outside of Peru. To this day, the religiousness and celestially relevant practices and beliefs of these sites have been discouraged out of fear of the government. Therefore, are these sites truly representative of the acceptance of the indigenous cultures, or are they utilized simply for the monetary gain provided by the tourist industry?<sup>31</sup>

In an article written by Luis Valcárcel (an Indigenista advocate) he says: “In truth, the so-called ‘indigenous problem’ is made up of a complex and diverse series of conflicts that affect population groups located in the lower social strata and subjected to economic struggle aggravated by racial and culture prejudice.”<sup>32</sup> This quote accurately summarizes the entire problem of identity. The havoc created by the Shining Path brought to the forefront that modernity, for the indigenous, has no simple solution. Being forced to assimilate, manipulated into fighting and continually having the status of their identity changed does not encourage them to introduce modern aspects into their lives.

By recognizing the indigenous populations in Peru and attempting to understand their struggles of modernity through incidents like the Shining Path, we can come to acknowledge that there is, indeed, a problem faced by indigenous globally. That problem is one of identity.

The issues that the indigenous people faced have existed for centuries, and the conditions have never truly improved. Even the creation of the nation state in the post-colonial time period could not unite nor resolve the differences between the indigenous and non-indigenous of Peru. Decades of trials and tribulations, especially discrimination, were faced by the indigenous. Attempts by the indigenous to gain control were valiant yet unsuccessful, leading to further discrimination against them. In the 1980s, the indigenous felt as though they were finally going to gain redemption by joining the Shining Path movement. This Maoist Communist-based organization led to a genocidal attempt at gaining control, fought and suffered by the indigenous (peasant) class. By ignoring the historical relevance of Peru, many lives were lost and no true identity was gained. In order to change the outcome of the future, a compromise of history and evolution must be made. History has shown that if it is not recognized it will recur with more force than previously seen.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, the problem of the indigenous is globally present. By concentrating on the case-study of Peru, I have shown that the problem is one of identity. This lack of identity has been a compelling source of discrimination against the indigenous. The problem of indigenous identity was not created by the indigenous but rather by the elite who decided a label needed to be placed upon this population to differentiate them from the white-limeño class. This

discrimination has led to wars and death that, if proper attention was paid to history, could have been avoided.

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