



Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring 2006, 1-16

[www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente)

## **Alien to Modernity: The Rationalization of Discrimination<sup>1</sup>**

**Jean Franco**

Columbia University

In the introduction to the report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, published in 2003, its president, Salomón Lerner, had some harsh words to say about the history of discrimination in his country. He charged the army and the police, on the one hand, and the insurgency on the other, with atrocities and deaths during the Civil War of the eighties and early nineties in which an estimated 69,000 people were killed or disappeared and thousands were forced to leave the south-central sierra region. Of every four victims three, he pointed out, were peasants whose maternal language was Quechua. Though denying that the war was

---

<sup>1</sup>. An earlier version of this article was delivered as the 2006 "Stanley and Joan Pierson Lecture," Department of History, University of Oregon, February 17, 2006.

an ethnic conflict, he wrote that “these two decades of destruction and death would not have been possible without the profound contempt towards the dispossessed people of the country, expressed equally by members of the insurgent *Sendero Luminoso* and the Army, a contempt that is woven into every moment of Peruvian everyday life.” On the part of Sendero, extermination of entire communities was rationalized as a strategic means to an end. Like the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, it sought to destroy the infrastructure of the existing society under a leadership of intellectuals and construct it anew, breaking down community loyalties in the process. What I want to examine in this essay is the language and discourse of discrimination not only in its obvious form of degrading insult but also as “common sense” and political philosophy.

Referring to an archive of sixteen thousand testimonies of abuse in the Peruvian civil war, Salomón Lerner drew attention to the fact that “over and over again, it is the racial insult, the verbal injury towards humble people like an abominable refrain that precedes the beating, the rape, the kidnapping of a son or daughter, the point blank shot delivered by some agent of the armed forces or the police.”<sup>2</sup> Insult is a performative speech act, one in which speech accomplishes an action, in this case, the expulsion from humanity and all that this entails. As the Guatemalan Commission on Historical Clarification that documented the slaughter of thousands of Maya Indians put it, “Racism allowed the army to equate Indians with the insurgents and generated the belief that they were distinct, inferior, a little less than human and removed from the moral universe of the perpetrators, making their elimination less problematic.”<sup>3</sup> What is remarkable about the Peruvian Truth

---

<sup>2</sup>. The report of the Commission is available on the web at <http://www.cverdad.org.pe>.

<sup>3</sup>. Greg Grandin, “The Instruction of Great Catastrophe: Truth

Commission, that was appointed by provisional President Valentín Paniagua in the wake of Fujimori's flight from Peru, is that it underscored a little investigated but centuries-old scandal by drawing attention to the sense of exclusion and indifference experienced by people and communities victimized in the armed conflicts, and to the fact that "for the centers of political and economic power what occurred in the pueblos, houses and families happened in another country, a Peru *alien to modernity*," thus signaling not only overt discrimination but a pervasive and stealthy common sense whose effect is not perceived by the speaker, only by the addressee.

That the indigenous have been outsiders to the nation state is a long-standing scandal. From Sarmiento's description of Buenos Aires as an embattled urban enclave surrounded by wilderness and savages to Porfirio Díaz's attempts to resettle the troublesome Yaqui, the indigenous have been cast as primitive outsiders, the pariahs of modernization and non-citizens in the Republican state. The "spiritual conquest" of the New World by Catholic Spain followed the logic of cleansing and persecution against Jews and the Moslems that discriminated on religious grounds. The post-Independence secular state viewed the Church as the fortress of reaction and anti-modernization and shifted the ground of discrimination from heretical religious beliefs to backwardness and resistance to modernization. The pattern by which religious heresy was commuted into heresy against the state, thus justifying ethnocide is, of course, not unique to Latin America. In their monumental work on the extermination camp at Auschwitz, Van Pelt and Dwork argued that the extermination of the Jews articulated centuries' old prejudices against the enemies of Christianity with the imperial project for reclaiming the lost Eastern territories and resettling Germans in the

---

Commissions, National History, and State Formation in Argentina, Chile and Guatemala," *American Historical Review*, 110, 1, February 2005.

expanded Empire by displacing and exterminating Jews.<sup>4</sup> In Latin America, the alibi for the subjugation of the indigenous was constantly reformulated according to the needs of the state. It was waged in hundreds of different scenarios from the caste wars of Yucatan, the desert campaign in Argentina, the seizure of Mapuche territories in Chile, as well as in the projects of peaceful assimilation promoted by *indigenistas*. Indigenous separation from the mainstream had been decreed soon after the conquest when separate indigenous townships were founded, constituting, in the words of Díaz Polanco, “the most important institutions of Spanish domination.”<sup>5</sup> Economically and culturally modern nationalism was built on this colonial regime of indigenous difference that brought into being an ethnicized underclass so that indigenous populations came to be seen, in the words of Carlos Iván Degregori “only as victims, or as inward looking, with their energies concentrated on reproducing almost immutable ways of life.”<sup>6</sup> They were then stigmatized, scapegoated for the failed or incomplete modernization of the nation, one frequently proposed remedy being assimilation and the renunciation of language, beliefs and traditions, as the price to be paid for their access to modernity.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase “alien to modernity” is clearly the result of decades and even centuries of sedimentation of a discourse of discrimination converted into a truism. Although we should not conflate the effects of ethnic and gender identity, Judith Butler’s assertion referring to gender that the “epistemological mode of appropriation,

---

4. Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 1996).

5. Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 56.

6. Carlos Iván Degregori, “Movimientos étnicos, democracia y nación en Perú y Bolivia,” in Claudia Dery, ed. *La construcción de la nación y representación en México, Guatemala, Perú, Ecuador y Bolivia* (Guatemala: Flacso, 1998).

7. Enrique Mayer, “Peru in Deep Trouble. Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Inquest in the Andes* Reexamined,” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol 6, No 4, 1992.

instrumentality and distancing... belong to a strategy of domination that pits the 'I' against the 'Other' which is in turn sedimented through a process of repetition" can be applied to ethnic difference.<sup>8</sup> Discourse is a social text that is learned, passed on and constantly reiterated as common sense. In an article posted on the web, "The Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape," Slavoj Žižek, commenting on the rumors of looting in the wake of the New Orleans disaster, writes that "even if the reports of looting and violence proved to be true, the stories would still be pathological and racist since what motivates these stories is the racist prejudice, the satisfaction felt by those who would be able to say, 'You see, Blacks really are like that.'" <sup>9</sup> In the writing I examine, the conclusion is that "Indians are like that, alien to modernity," and as we shall see, supposedly programmed for violence.

The devastating consequences of such discourses of common sense came to the fore in a well-known incident of the civil war that was carefully scrutinized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It occurred in January 1983 when a group of eight Peruvian journalists were attacked and killed in the village of Uchuraccay. Countless pages have been written on this event but what demands attention is the way prejudice and discrimination were passed off as irrefutable truth. The journalists, on their way to Huaychao to investigate the reported killing of members of the Sendero Luminoso by indigenous villagers, were bludgeoned to death as they tried to pass through the nearby village of Uchuraccay in a region of the Sierra partly controlled by Sendero. The deaths even at a time of civil war gave rise to a national outcry.

Although Uchuraccay was one incident in this civil war between Sendero Luminoso on one side and the military and the

---

<sup>8</sup>. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 144.

<sup>9</sup>. Slavoj Žižek, "The Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape," *In These Times*, October 20, 2005, available at <http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/236>.

police on the other, it assumed extraordinary importance because the victims were journalists posthumously commemorated as the martyrs of Uchuraccay, because it was investigated by the commission, headed by Vargas Llosa, a famous novelist, public intellectual and eventually presidential candidate, and because of the subsequent polemic over his report. The Vargas Llosa Commission, that included anthropologists, a legal expert, a linguist (the only Quechua speaker) and a psychoanalyst, arrived by helicopter, and spent less than three hours on the inquiry which, as the Truth Commission and critics pointed out, was seriously flawed. Nevertheless, Vargas Llosa issued a skillfully worded report and afterwards gave several interviews and wrote articles and refutations of critics of the report that were later published in a collection of his essays under the attention-getting title, “Sangre y mugre de Uchuraccay” (Blood and Filth of Uchuraccay).<sup>10</sup> But the implications of this writing go far beyond the event and raise questions about the roots of violence, about atrocity, and about discrimination and eventually about the system of justice in a multilingual nation. It also raises questions about the ethical status of literature and the authoritarian nature of the lettered city.

In his report and in interviews, articles and polemics Vargas Llosa, again and again, represents himself as the rational modern man faced with the alien other. In his vividly written “Inquest in the Andes,” an article published in the *New York Times* that encapsulated the work of his Commission, he begins by recreating the thoughts and feelings of the journalists as they set out, with no premonition of danger, on their taxi ride and later their hike over arduous terrain towards Huaychao, a route that would take them

---

<sup>10</sup>. Mario Vargas Llosa, *Contra viento y marea*, vol. 3 (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990) includes ten texts on Uchuraccay under the title, “Sangre y mugre de Uchuraccay” that includes the Spanish version of the *New York Times* essay from which I translated. See also the interview with Alberto Bonilla, “Después del Informe. Conversación sobre Uchuraccay,” *Contra viento y marea*, vol 3, 150-1.

through Uchuraccay. This part of the narrative is told with a novelist's eye for detail. Vargas Llosa reproduces their jokes, the moment when they stopped to take photographs, where they stopped for breakfast, their encounter with their guide, Juan Argumedo, whom they came upon sawing wood. This empathy with the journalists, this concern for every detail of their last journey is in sharp contrast to the author's depiction of the Quechua-speaking *comuneros* to whom he gives the name "*iquichanos*" (of which more later) and who are depicted as clinging to ancient beliefs in the *apus*—the gods of the mountains. The *iquichanos* in his account are monolingual, desperately poor and at times violent, especially when their way of life is threatened. During Independence, they fought on the royalist side and refused to accept the Republic. "The few studies of their way of life," he writes, "depict them as jealous defenders of those uses and customs, that although archaic are the only ones they have."

What is striking about the account is that while the actions of the journalists and the mestizos make sense, those of the indigenous seem absurd. They have so little understanding of the explanations of the workings of the law, he writes, that "while I explained this (that in Peru, it is illegal to kill and that judges and courts are in charge of the law) and seeing their faces, I felt as absurd and unreal as if I were indoctrinating them in the true revolutionary philosophy of comrade Mao betrayed by the counter revolutionary Dog, Den Tsiao Ping." He confidently identifies magico-religious elements in the slaughter—the wounds "appeared to be ritualistic." The journalists were buried face down "as devils or as those who had pacted with the devil." Their ankles were broken so they would not return to avenge themselves. He concludes: "The violence that we observed surprises us because in our daily life it is anomalous. For the *iquichanos* that violence is the atmosphere in which they move from birth to death." One wonders how it is that Vargas Llosa only

sees a “violence that surprises us” in the murders committed by iquichanos when modern life offers daily examples from the shooting of illegal immigrants crossing borders to torture and the bombardment of the innocent.

As the Commission prepares to leave, a “little woman” of the community suddenly begins to dance. Vargas Llosa describes her thus:

She was humming a song that we could not understand. She was an Indian who was small as a child but with a wrinkled face of the old, with the cracked cheeks and the swollen lips of those who live exposed to the cold of the punas. She was barefoot, and wore various colored skirts, a hat with ribbons and while she sang and danced, she hit us slowly on the legs with a bunch of nettles. Was she saying goodbye according to some ancient ritual? Was she cursing us for belonging to the world of strangers—Senderistas, journalists, who had brought new motives for anguish and fear to their lives? Was she exorcising us?

Vargas Llosa confesses that the incident left him deeply disturbed, for it seemed as if he were discovering a new and terrible history of his own country. Never had he felt as sad as in the twilight of menacing clouds in Uchuraccay, when:

We saw this little woman dancing and hitting us with nettles, who appeared to have come from a different Peru than that in which I live, an ancient and archaic Peru that has survived among these sacred mountains despite centuries of oblivion and adversity. This fragile woman was *doubtless* (my emphasis) one of those who threw stones and waived cudgels because the iquichana women are as belligerent as the men.

But how is this so-called primitive violence different from the punishments afflicted by Sendero or the army except that the villagers struck with sticks and stones and not with guns or dynamite? Is it the participation of women that makes this event uncanny for Vargas Llosa? The woman’s actions are inexplicable, her words unintelligible, but nowhere does he suggest that his own ignorance of Quechua, a language spoken by thousands of his fellow

countryman, may be part of the problem.

Twenty years later, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would tell a very different story, one which incorporated Quechua testimony into the account. They pointed out that Sendero had previously infiltrated the village, causing alarm, and that demands for protection from Sendero attacks had been ignored and continued to be ignored by the authorities. The Truth Commission maintained that the fear that had led them to take the journalists for Senderistas and kill them was not some archaic throwback but a response to a clear and present danger brought about by Sendero's own tactics and the army's response. In fact, ethnographers working in other communities have noted the constitution of strategic communitarian identities in the service of survival of which the peasant militia (*rondas*) formed to protect communities from Sendero and often working with the army and police was one example.<sup>11</sup> Uchuraccay was not a community out of touch with the rest of Peru. There was a school, a church, a cemetery and a *cabildo*. Situated in a strategic position not far from the center of Sendero activities, members of the guerrilla organization co-existed in a state of tension with the villagers that came to a head when they tried to organize a school to indoctrinate women. It was this that aroused the hostility of the community, a hostility that was aggravated when Sendero executed the president of the community, Alejandro Huamán, which, in turn, led the community to resist and kill five Senderistas with stones and wooden bludgeons, months before the events of January 1983. Approving that action, General Noel, regional commander of the armed forces, sent in a helicopter with 15 members of the security forces, known as *sinchis*, who encouraged the villagers to attack any strangers.

---

<sup>11</sup>. Kimberly Theidon, "Entre prójimos. Violencia y Reconciliación en el Perú," *Ideele. Revista del Instituto de Defensa Legal*, 157 (September 2003), 91-6.

When the journalists arrived, the *comuneros* refused to listen to their explanations, assumed that they were Senderistas and bludgeoned them to death, burying their bodies hastily near the central square. The bodies of the guide Juan Argumedo and of Severino Huáscar Morales, a Sendero supporter, were kept hidden so that the *sinchis* would not suspect that Sendero had been present in the community and take reprisals.<sup>12</sup> The community, hitherto divided, decided on a pact of silence around those two deaths and reported the deaths of the journalists as an act against terrorists. The use of terrorism as the justification for violent reprisal was not archaic ritual but a response, albeit misguided, to an intolerable but thoroughly contemporary situation. Furthermore, the deafness of the Vargas Llosa commission and the Belaúnde government to the community's demands for protection from Sendero doomed it to destruction. In the wake of the massacre, one hundred and thirty five members of the community out of a total of 470 inhabitants were killed, mostly by Sendero, and the community itself was scattered and ceased to exist. Those who were not killed left the village and were often forced to hide their identity; some described their life in exile "as living in dreams, stupefied we have lived." Only a few have since returned.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission went to considerable pains to underscore the dangerous consequences of misrepresentation and misinterpretation. For instance, the Vargas Llosa commission described the *comuneros* as "iquichanos" who were supposedly a pre-Hispanic group known for their warlike nature; in fact their reputation for violence was a nineteenth-century invention of the elites and not a historical reality. Yet it forms the basis of the *two Perus* thesis - the archaic Peru, violent and impervious to change, and the modern Peru- advanced by Vargas

---

<sup>12</sup>. This was a legitimate fear as army reprisals took extreme forms.

Llosa and apparently by the anthropologists on the Vargas Llosa Commission, who concluded that “betterment and progress must be difficult for them to conceive,” and doubted whether the community could make “moral, constitutional and juridical distinctions (...) between right and wrong.” They ignored the fact that some of the comuneros were dressed like any urban Peruvian and wore wristwatches, and that 30 percent of them were literate. One of their demands was for schooling in Spanish as well as Quechua, since they were aware of the disadvantages of monolingualism; nor were they ignorant of the law and the Constitution, for they had often appealed to the Guardia Civil. As the Truth Commission pointed out, Vargas Llosa’s interpretation of events conformed to a paradigm that essentialized cultural differences and constructed an image of a totally isolated and primitive community outside citizenship; while on the left, journalists misrepresented it as the work of the *sinchis*, the members of the antiterrorist unit of the Civil Guard. Misunderstanding also plagued the subsequent trials of three comuneros who were accused of perpetrating the massacres. The proceedings were translated from Quechua to Spanish and not vice versa, so that the accused never understood the proceedings. Nor was there any attention to the subtleties of the Quechua language, which requires a suffix to every sentence in order to distinguish what is based on personal witness from hearsay.<sup>13</sup> The accused comuneros were eventually sentenced in 1987 (one died in prison and two were eventually released).

What is noteworthy about this incident is Vargas Llosa’s conviction that he represents the voice of reason and common sense. And despite the fact that he did not speak Quechua and had little knowledge of the highlands, he subsequently went on to elaborate his thesis of the two Perus in his novels, in dozens of articles and

---

<sup>13</sup>. Mayer, “Peru in Deep Trouble,” 466.

interviews, and even in his literary criticism. When he refers to Quechua in his novel *Death in the Andes*, published in 1993, the language sounds to its protagonist, Lituma, “like savage music.” To be sure, the fictional character Lituma is not to be confused with Vargas Llosa, but nowhere in his writing is there any suggestion that in a plurilingual country like Peru, it might be important to learn Quechua and other indigenous languages. In this novel, Lituma, a character that first appeared in the novel *The Green House*, has become an honest and conscientious Civil Guard from the north, dispatched to an area he doesn’t know and can’t relate to. Faced with a series of unexplained disappearances in the middle of a civil war, he finally attributes the killing not to the war but to a cannibalistic ritual. The cannibalism is described as a kind of Dionysian ritual sacrifice led by women. “Only the women went to hunt him down on the last night of the fiesta.”<sup>14</sup> The apparently irrational violence of Sendero is, in his novel, equaled and even exceeded in horror by the gory rituals of the other Peru.

In passing it should be noted that this so-called archaic and violent past exists like a subconscious in many of the novels of the boom. In Carlos Fuentes’ short story, “Chac Mool,” for instance, the Aztec rain god comes alive, and in “La noche boca arriba” (Night upturned), by Julio Cortázar, the alien Aztec past with its cult of sacrifice rises up and engulfs the modern man who becomes a sacrificial victim. But in Vargas Llosa the archaic past assumes not only fictional form but becomes a political philosophy, one that can be described in the words of Víctor Vich as “authoritarian” and without any possibility of dialogue.<sup>15</sup> Like Octavio Paz, who believed the modern Mexican state to be reenacting the primitive violence of

---

<sup>14</sup>. Mario Vargas Llosa, *Death in the Andes*, translated by Edith Grossman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

<sup>15</sup>. Víctor Vich, “Lituma en los libros. El caníbal es el otro,” in *El caníbal es el otro. Violencia y cultura en el Perú contemporáneo* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2002): 56-75.

the Aztecs, Vargas Llosa has one of the characters in *Death in the Andes* ask whether “ what’s going on in Peru isn’t a resurrection of that buried violence. As if it had been hidden somewhere, and suddenly, for some reason, it all surfaced again.” It was a view shared by some of the military. “There has always been violence in the mountains, since the time of the Incas and Spaniards,” army officer Comandante Vasquez was quoted as saying, “How can we have peace with these Indios?”<sup>16</sup>

What lies behind this attitude is a political philosophy that Vargas Llosa presents in the guise of literary criticism in his book *La utopía arcaica (The archaic utopia)* on the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas. Arguedas, a haunted writer, bilingual in Quechua and Spanish, who had lived and traveled all over Andean Peru and spent his entire life writing on indigenous cultures, their persistence and their transformation, was cruelly caricatured by Sendero as a chauvinist nationalist who sported a Hitler moustache and ridiculed from the right as a romantic *indigenista*. As a folklorist, Arguedas had collected evidence of a folk cult around Inkarrí, the Inca leader whose decapitated body, it was believed, would some day become whole again and return to earth. Vargas Llosa argues “that the mutilated god who was remade in his subterranean refuge was an emblem of the longing for resurrection of that archaic utopia to which he (Arguedas) was always instinctively faithful even when his reason and intelligence told him that the modernization of the region was inevitable and indispensable.”<sup>17</sup>

Twenty years after Arguedas’s suicide in 1969, after the

---

<sup>16</sup>. Quoted as epigraph by Kimberley Theidon, in the English version of her essay, “How We Learned to Kill Our Brother’: Memory, Morality and Reconciliation in Peru,” available online at: <http://www.celat.ulaval.ca/histoire.memoire/histoire/cape1/theidon.html>

<sup>17</sup>. Mario Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica. José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996): 133. For a different viewpoint see Alberto Flores Galindo, *Europa y el país de los Incas. La utopía andina* (Lima: Instituto de Apoyo Agrario, 1986).

devastation of the civil war and many years after the Uchuraccay incident, Vargas Llosa dedicated a book of over 300 pages to this writer towards whom he had at best ambiguous feelings. Arguedas wrote, he said, only one beautiful novel, *Deep Rivers*; his other works “are partial successes or failures.” Despite this lukewarm introduction, it becomes clear that literary criticism is only a cover story for a more extensive project—that of destroying what he regards as Arguedas’s misguided belief in collectivism, and his opposition to one particular form of modernization, when Arguedas himself posed questions rather than offering recipes. Nor can I help wondering why Vargas Llosa, an author who famously defended literature as a defiance of reality, criticizes Arguedas precisely on the grounds that his work does not correspond to reality? Does the answer lie in his own apprehension as he confronts the strange new Peru that, in 1990, rejected him as presidential candidate in favor of the Japanese-Peruvian Fujimori, a president who tied modernization to the police state? Or is that he needed to depict the collective ideal as backward, the better to throw the autonomous individual of liberal philosophy in a positive light?

Vargas Llosa’s own philosophy, culled from Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and its Enemies*, is presented as rational and utterly opposed to the magico-religious world that he claims to be that of Arguedas. Popper had elaborated his theory as a critique of totalitarianism, whose seeds he found in Plato, and had argued that we are confronted with a choice “between a faith in reason and in human individuals and a faith in the mystical faculties of man by which he is united to the collective; and that this choice is at the same time a choice between an attitude that recognizes the unity of mankind and an attitude that divides men into friends and foes, into masters and slaves.”<sup>18</sup> Following Popper, Vargas Llosa dismisses the

---

17. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2 (New York:

magico-religious as primitive and enslaved to the collective; it was the replacement of the magical by scientific thinking that dissolved the collective human reality of the horde and the tribe into a community of free and sovereign individuals.<sup>19</sup> Oddly, magico-religious beliefs are attributed *only* to the indigenous despite the fact that religiosity is pervasive in contemporary societies, not least in the U.S. where millions are waiting for the apocalypse. In a brilliant essay on the “cholification” of Peru, José Guillermo Nugent terms this “countermodernity” and writes that it goes beyond exclusion. “Aggressively it attributes an archaic identity to social actors and makes certain the continuity and reproduction of this discourse.”<sup>20</sup> Indians are like that, backward and violent.

The consequence of this view that sees progress as a linear development from communities bonded by magical beliefs to a modern society is that it demands the disappearance of the indigenous if progress is to be achieved. The Mexican critic Héctor Díaz Polanco uses the term “ethnophagy” to describe the elimination of indigenous difference, “that relies upon the assimilating effects of the multiple forces put into play by the dominant national culture.”<sup>21</sup> Whether couched in terms of progress, developmentalism, modernity, or even revolution, such solutions derive from a discursive formation which homogenizes and simplifies indigenous identity without regard to the historical sedimentation of discrimination underscored by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Among its recommendations were proposals for reeducating the citizenry and its conclusions sparked “debates over indigenous rights, impunity, reparations and state accountability.”<sup>22</sup>

---

Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1952): 246

<sup>19</sup>. Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica*, 187.

<sup>20</sup>. José Guillermo Nugent, *El laberinto de la choledad* (Lima: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 1992): 73 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup>. Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997): 59.

<sup>22</sup>. Maria Elena Garcia, *Making Indigenous Citizens. Identity,*

Proposing nothing less than a new “pact between the state and Peruvian society and between members of this society,” it used terms rarely heard in political discourse, such as forgiveness, responsibility, and justice. Committed to democratic practices, the Commission held public hearings that gave voice to all kinds of opinions including the voices and languages traditionally excluded. In its determination to construct a new history, it urged bringing together communities divided by the war and to constitute a country that recognized itself positively as multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual. However, as historian Greg Grandin has pointed out, Truth Commissions are contradictory bodies because “They often raise hope of justice symbolized by the Nuremberg Trials yet operate within the impoverished political possibilities that exist throughout much of the post-Cold War world.”<sup>23</sup> While the Peruvian Commission went to extraordinary efforts to publicize its findings and confront Peru with its violent past, the society it scrutinized was already undergoing an intense process of change in which discrimination was the undertow. Indeed, in the final pages of *The archaic utopia*, Vargas Llosa recognizes these changes and celebrates the conversion of the Indian into the urban *cholo*, and underscores that the emergence of a new *informal* Peru eliminates forever Arguedas’s utopian dream. “Thanks to these ex Indians, cholos, blacks, mulattos and Asians,” he writes, “for the first time there has developed a popular capitalism and a free market in Peru.” What all Peruvians can now agree on is that “the Peru that is in process of formation will be nothing like the resuscitated Tahuantinsuyu, nor a collectivist society of an ethnic nature, nor a country at war with the bourgeois values of commerce and the production of wealth nor closed off from the world of exchange in defense of its immutable identity.” The indigenous are

---

*Development and Multicultural Activism in Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 54.

<sup>23</sup>. Grandin, “The Instruction of Great Catastrophe,” 18.

identified with discredited socialist ideals the better to glorify another fantasy figure—the autonomous individual of capitalism.<sup>24</sup> But discrimination does not disappear. The urban Indians raise fears of violence and social disintegration whose indices, according to Guillermo Nugent, can be seen in the characteristic urban Lima landscape of houses fortified behind barbed wire and iron railings behind which live “the autonomous individuals” celebrated by Vargas Llosa.<sup>25</sup>

This skewed end-of-history thesis did not hold up for very long. What has marked recent Peruvian and indeed Andean society has been the emergence of the indigenous as a political force that now intervenes—often effectively—in the culture and politics of the continent, raising, at least for Vargas Llosa, a new specter—the specter of indigenous racism which he identifies with Evo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and the presidential candidate Ollanta Humala in Peru. His warning of a new racism, of Indians against Whites, was given a great deal of coverage in Europe and Latin America. Arguing that discrimination in Latin America is not racial but cultural and economic, he ironically termed Evo Morales not an Indian but a “criollo” who is “crafty as a squirrel, a social climber and a trouble-maker (latero).” Without considering his own record of racial prejudice, he refers to Morales, Chávez and Humala indiscriminately as “barbarian caudillos” who are “bestowing legitimacy on a new form of racism.”<sup>26</sup> What escapes his attention, however, is that the failure of the neoliberalism he advocated has driven the search for alternatives, which are taking many different

---

<sup>24</sup> As Charles Hale warns us, “the core of neoliberalism’s cultural project is not radical individualism, but the creation of subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism.” “Rethinking Indigenous Politics in the Era of the ‘Indio Permitido’,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. 38, number 2 (Sept-Oct, 2004): 17.

<sup>24</sup> Nugent, *El laberinto de la choledad*, 89-90.

<sup>26</sup> “Raza, botas y nacionalismo” was published in *El País* on January 15, 2006, and has been widely publicized. There is an English version on <http://www.vcrisis.com>

forms, including ethnonationalism. The fact that the indigenous, far from being alien to modernity, are using modernity, its technologies, its spaces, and its political possibilities (and even winning elections) must be especially infuriating to him, judging by his unconcealed anger and dismay, revealed in remarks such as the following, in which he describes ethnonationalism as a “deeply disturbing element that appeals to the lower instincts, the worse instincts of the individual, like mistrust towards others, towards anyone who is different.”<sup>27</sup>

Such crude generalizations cannot possibly contribute to an understanding of a rapidly changing panorama, nor represent the range of cultural struggles that have come into play. One paradoxical development is that *sierra* peoples who did not think of themselves as “Indians” but as *runasimi* or as *campesinos*, have now been recognized as “Indians” by President Toledo who, on taking office, signed the Declaration of Machu Picchu in support of indigenous rights. The Toledo government also created the *National Commission of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples* (CONAPA) at first under the controversial leadership of the President’s wife, Eliane Karp.<sup>28</sup> Such official multiculturalism makes space for political activism but has its limits.<sup>29</sup> The legacy of discrimination is also revealed in the new identities adopted by sierra peoples, particularly when they emigrate to the cities, identities that include “indio mestizo” and “cholo.” Some sierra peoples have begun to identify themselves as “altoandinos,”<sup>30</sup> thus avoiding the

---

<sup>27</sup>. Quoted on the web, “Stereotype of the Month Contest,” <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/stype3b6.htm>

<sup>28</sup>. García, *Making Indigenous Citizens*, 170-1.

<sup>29</sup>. Hale, “Rethinking Indigenous Politics,” 18-19.

<sup>30</sup>. See data given in Kimberly Theidon, “Disarming the Subject. Remembering War and Imagining Citizenship in Peru,” *Cultural Critique* 54 (Spring 2003), 80. See also Marisol de la Cadena, “Reconstructing Race: Racism, Culture and *Mestizaje* in Latin America,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. xxxiv, No. 6 (May/June, 2001), 16-23. Nugent, *El laberinto de la choledad*, also comments on the terms “indio urbano” and “cholo.”

stigmatized categories of Indian or *chutos*. To my mind, the most revealing responses to the history of discrimination occur in the struggles over language that have been described by María Elena García in her book on bilingual education. At meetings in sierra communities, parents often insist that priority be given to literacy in Spanish because of the “shame” of being monolingual in Quechua, demonstrating how deeply discrimination was embedded in linguistic difference and illiteracy. It is precisely the historical neglect of indigenous education that hindered the development of Quechua and contributed to the isolation of monolingual speakers, especially women.<sup>31</sup> But the ‘shame’ of speaking Quechua is also being overcome in quite a different way by indigenous intellectuals determined to establish Quechua as a written language capable of generating literature and ideas, thus implementing one of José María Arguedas’s cherished ambitions. In common with members of many other indigenous groups—the Mapuches, the Zapotecs, the Aymara – Quechua intellectuals are now using every modern technology to promote writing so that they will no longer be “without eyes.”<sup>32</sup> These efforts tend to fall below the radar of national politics, but they are perhaps the best hope for the pluricultural Peru envisioned by the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

---

<sup>31</sup>. García, *Making Indigenous Citizens*, especially 96-104.

<sup>32</sup>. *Ibid*, 146-8.