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“Rimanakuy '86 and Other Fictions of National Dialogue in Peru"

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Introduction: Indigenist Multiculturalism and the Rhetoric of Education

State-backed initiatives towards what might now be considered a “multiculturalist” politics have existed in Peru since the first quarter of the twentieth century. While academic understandings of “multiculturalism” vary widely, especially when placed across the political spectrum, I refer generally to the body of academic, educational, and political discourse that acknowledges a variety of human experiences, and advances legal, political, and social mechanisms to defend and legitimize them.1 Though it may seem anachronistic to call early indigenist projects “multiculturalist,” I mean to suggest that incipient formulations of indigenism share with more recent discourses of multiculturalism two fundamental characteristics: First, a desire to recognize, protect, and promote marginalized cultural forms; and second, an inability to modify the uneven distribution of power that keeps colonialist cultural hierarchies in place. In forms past and present, “multiculturalism” has failed to recognize the constructed and relational nature of cultural difference by favoring, instead, superficially inclusive but ultimately static and essentialist notions of cultural diversity (Bhabha).2

Across the Americas, “indigenism” as a multiculturalist discourse overlapped in theory and practice with State-backed endeavors of “indigenous education.”3 Often understood as a homogenizing project to incorporate “Indians,” through schooling, into an all-encompassing mestiza nationhood, indigenist discourse has in fact only partially favored the assimilation of indigenous peoples into dominant society.4 At certain times and in certain places, indigenist politicians and intellectuals instead used the school to support the opposite goal of preserving idealized forms of unadulterated Indianness at all costs. This position is well represented by the early thought of historian, anthropologist, and educator Luis Eduardo Valcárcel,5 whose 1927 manifesto, Tempestad en los Andes, disdained racial and cultural mestizos as degraded Indians (cholos), and likened them to “parasitic worms” living off the “rotting body” of a corrupt and putrid society (39).6 To counter this “degeneration,” Valcárcel’s early work sought to temper the multiple processes of cholificación through diverse mechanisms of social control, the most important of which would be schooling. Pondering this initiative nearly half a century later, he explained: “In
[. . .the] processes of cultural confrontation, the school’s mission was of the utmost importance. The educator was responsible for determining which of the aspects of the modern cultural archive would be worthy of admission into indigenous culture” (Memorias 352).

Though his pessimism regarding the merits of mestizaje abated over the course of a long career, Valcárcel’s early reflections on the task of social engineering point to the role that his indigenist counterparts assigned to themselves as rightful guardians of “Indianness.” For him, as for many in his cohort, the enterprise of forging a desirably “multicultural” society meant molding and enforcing a specific social and cultural order. By working to save Indianness or to undo it, to prevent mestizaje or to encourage it, indigenist intellectuals of various political shades and ideological convictions took on, in Foucault’s bio-political terms, nothing less than the “calculated management of [indigenous] life” (262).

As Minister of Education between 1945 and 1947, Valcárcel sought to “improve” Indians and national society by refining Indianness and re-centering rural life around the institution of the school. One significant development of this period was the institution of rural schools that were initiated in conjunction with the Bolivian Ministry of Education and paid for with the financial support of the United States – the Núcleos Escolares Campesinos (“Rural Scholarly Nuclei,” or NECs).7

In the indigenist imaginary, these schools would form the physical and ideological center of the refashioned rural and indigenous community, allowing for the preservation and improvement of Indianness while at the same time keeping “Indians” in the countryside and far from the corruptive influences of dominant society. By propelling improved Indians into the future alongside but separate from their non-indigenous compatriots, the NECs would help, at least in theory, to foster a “multicultural” society in which parallel national cultures – posited as flat and unchanging – would never have occasion to meet.

While notions of multiculturalism have thus been conceived as a remedy to social ailments and channeled into educational politics for many decades, they have never managed to undo the colonialist configurations of power through which distinct cultural forms are allocated dissimilar amounts of social capital and political influence. As recently as 2004, for example, children in rural and non-Spanish-speaking areas were twice as likely to fail out of or abandon school, and one out of every five rural children left school before completing the first grade (Mujica and Salazar). In light of longstanding geographical notions of “race,” whereby people from the highlands are typically considered “more Indian” than their urban counterparts, regardless of phenotype (De la Cadena, “Las mujeres”), and given the entrenched notion that racial “improvement” can and should occur through education, grim numbers like these close the perceived circle of racialized rural “backwardness” in on itself.

In a 2005 commentary on the precarious state of national education, teacher and philosopher Constantino Carvallo asserted the following:
The State, represented by the school, has been neither generous nor noble. Its abuses have generated discontent that [...] converts public schools into factories of resentment. [...] The classroom] reflects the profound distance, separation, and mistrust among sectors of Peruvian society that are scarred [...] by an extremely serious issue that education does not even address: racism. (Labarthe)

Considering the interdependence of class and ethnic identifications, the continuum of mestizaje, and the waves of migration that have changed the geopolitical landscape of the country since the mid-twentieth century, it is impossible to posit the racism to which Carvallo refers in anything other than relative and situational terms. Still, at least this much is evident: Despite its centrality in a variety of multiculturalist remedies for Peru’s social ills, educational discourse in and outside the school apparatus has oftentimes served to reinforce rather than erase colonialist perceptions of racial differentiation, as well as the social, cultural, and political hierarchies that accompany them.

The linking of subaltern forms of being and thinking (some of which identify as “indigenous”), to relatively new channels of social and political power reveals that despite many ongoing challenges, some progress has indeed been achieved in chipping away at the racist and colonialist hierarchies that are perpetuated intentionally or unwittingly by dominant society and the State. As political scientist Martin Tanaka recently asserted regarding the state of national race relations: “[A] minority can go on discriminating, but the vast majority no longer accepts marginalization, and in practice, will question, ignore, and reject such treatment within the realm of possibility” (N. pag). And yet, the alternative “regime of truth” (Foucault) that emanates from new linkages between the realms of culture and power must be considered with caution and historical reflection, for it is neither automatically nor necessarily more democratic than its “classical” indigenist predecessors.

Although the State’s official blessing on heterogeneity through the legal recognition of ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic plurality is generally posited as socially uplifting, the consequences of that recognition are not always so clear. While much hope continues to be deposited in the egalitarian potential of education (and of course, rightly so), the ideas set out to recognize “diversity” are at times no more liberating than those put forth by the dominant indigenist agenda of the early twentieth century. By assigning themselves the task of picking and choosing the elements deemed appropriate and acceptable to a “properly” indigenous culture, advocates of “indigenous education” – like Valcárcel and other indigenists before them – risk undermining the revolutionary possibilities of their own initiatives. A few fundamental questions therefore arise: Who is speaking for whom? With what authority? To what ends?

In what follows, I discuss these issues as they relate to three moments of racialized social conflict in twentieth-century Peruvian history: First, the
indigenous “uprisings” (alzamientos) in Cusco during the 1910s and 20s; second, the 1983 murder of eight journalists and their guide by Quechua-speaking peasants in the highland community of Uchuraccay; and finally, the “rimanakuy” conferences held by President Alan García with indigenous leaders throughout the country, in 1986. Each of these moments reveals a critical convergence of dominant ideas about racialized “culture,” the ostensibly democratic notion of “diversity,” and the hegemonic logic that likens education (especially “indigenous education”), to social redemption and the possibility of national belonging. I aim to show, however, that contrary to that logic, the indigenous voices in the three cases at hand were muted by the very efforts that purported to make them heard (in the interest of diversity), and that in each instance, the rhetoric of education contributed to that silencing. I conclude with reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the Uchuraccay murders, focusing on points of continuity and change with regard to the challenges of fostering national dialogue across distinct sectors of Peruvian society.11 My goal is not to exhaust the historical or theoretical possibilities of the episodes or to discredit the vital and arduous work of educators, but rather, to look at these events as snapshots of particular configurations of cultural capital and political power, and to consider the role that indigenist and educational discourses have played in both.
I: Lima and Cusco (1909-27)

Education! Education! Here it is, on the horizon, already pointing to the dawn of true freedom; here is the weapon to be brandished by those of us longing for vengeance; here is the submachine gun that will wipe out the executioners! –Arturo Peralta.

The early twentieth century gave birth to the Asociación Pro-Indígena – one of Peru’s first indigenist organizations – which was headed by a Chinese-Peruvian philosophy student at the University of San Marcos named Pedro Salvino Zun Leng (“Zulen”). While the Asociación originated in the capital, it expanded quickly into a national organization, involving the participation of 65 delegates from all over the sierra (highlands) and sending Lima-based participants to work throughout the provinces (Arroyo 8). Hailed by historian Wilfredo Kapsoli as “the first attempt at a national popular party in Peru” (41), participants in the Asociación sought to liberate Indians from their servitude while bringing their degraded situation to the attention of dominant Peruvian society. As founding member Dora Mayer explained, “Peruvians cannot fathom how much the Indian suffers, and the Indian cannot fathom that [his] individual suffering is the slow bloodletting and death of the nation. Peru is dying, and no one even feels it” (4).

Zulen, who studied for a Ph.D. in philosophy at Harvard before losing his short life to illness in 1925, posited the work of the Asociación as part of the broader political goal of transforming Peru into a socialist society. A friend of his better-known contemporary, José Carlos Mariátegui, Zulen pointed to Peru’s feudal landholding system as a central impediment to freedom and social justice well before similar arguments were published in Mariátegui’s widely-cited Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana. And yet, despite the tremendous weight of agrarian reform on the revolutionary ideals of the Asociación Pro-Indígena and its leadership, the social, political, and intellectual labors of the group rested on an intense, didactic agenda to foster civic duty through schooling.

With regard to “indigenous education,” Asociación leaders and activists were unquestionably avant-garde, advocating for instruction in Quechua more than half a century before the State would formally institute programs for “bilingual-intercultural education” (EBI) through the Ministry of Education (Godenzzi 1997a; 1997b), and establishing as early as 1910 the revolutionary Escuela Gratuita para Indígenas (“Free School for Indigenes”) in the town of Jauja (Junín province) (Kapsoli 28). Lauded as the first of its kind, the Escuela Gratuita offered indigenous students of all ages instruction in history, geography, civic rights and duties, morality, “love of work,” and “love of the Fatherland” (El Comercio). In light of the powerful, racist ideas and ideals at work during the acme of the organization’s short-lived existence – some of which called openly for the country’s colonization by “strong races,” like “the Yankees, the
English, or the Germans” (Arroyo 13) – the goals of Indian protection and revival were undoubtedly progressive. And yet, Zulen’s own thinking on Indianness would reproduce (and anticipate) the colonialist stereotypes of many of his indigenist contemporaries throughout the region. In 1915, he reasoned:

If the Indian were not of great will, he would not still be searching for the solution to his social ills with tenacious submission to the law, and if he were not of little intelligence, he would not have been systematically [...] deceived by the same law without [...] it having occurred to him to resolve through violence the matters that in 25, 50, or 100 years he has not managed to resolve [otherwise]. (Quiroga 1)

By placing the blame for indigenous abjection on the inferior intellect of “the Indian,” Zulen thus made the indigenist moves typical of his day. That is, he treated “Indianness” as a normative quality and justified his own paternalism vis-à-vis his “less intelligent” compatriots while simultaneously re-inscribing their eternal condition of voicelessness. In and outside the school, “the Indians” were therefore conceived as perpetual pupils of their enlightened tutors.

The decade following the 1917 dissolution of the Asociación Pro-Indígena overlapped with the eleven-year rule of Augusto B. Leguía (1919-1930), when indigenist discourse flourished across Peru, dividing
its proponents along geographical lines between sierra and coast. Non-indigenous intellectuals from Lima, Cusco, and Puno, in particular, engaged in vehement public debates over who held the rights and responsibility to represent “Indians” and speak for their “Indianness.” In this regard, the Lima-based magazines Amauta and Mundial provided an important forum for metropolitan intellectuals as well as their critics (Aquézolo Castro). Lamenting what they perceived as the arrogant ignorance of “indigenists” from the capital with no first-hand knowledge of the highlands or Quechua-speaking peasants, Cusqueñan intellectuals, in particular, lashed out at that which many of them identified as “just another ismo from the coast” (Escalante). Repeated outbreaks of violence between the landed elite (gamonales) and the resident laborers who worked (or slaved) on their property between the 1910s and the mid-1920s became a central focus of indigenist interest and apprehension for serranos and costeño alike.

In Cusco, as peasants from the highland provinces of Canas, Chumbivilcas, and Espinar revolted against the abuses of gamonales and the overseers who supported them, rumors spread of an organized Indian movement to reinstate Tahuantinsuyu. While still a student at the Universidad Nacional del Cusco, indigenist intellectual Andrés Alencastre wrote a detailed interpretation of the 1921 uprising in the district of Layo (Canas province), of which he claimed to be an eyewitness (3). Among the Indian participants in the insurrection, he explained:

[...] some [said] they ought to attack the population, set fire to [the town] and kill the white residents; others [said] not to burn it, but to kill their abusive neighbors, the authorities, and the priest; still others [said] the authorities had to be replaced with others chosen by the indigenous masses according to their ruling norms; that is, sub-prefects, governors, and lieutenants. Others – the majority – wanted, to the contrary, to restore Tahuantinsuyo [sic] with the help of the ancestors revived in their spirit. The most impassioned among them want[ed] to hang and quarter the hacendados [and] exterminate the whites and mistes. [sic] (4)

In light of the violence, which led to the deaths of Indians and non-Indians alike (including Andrés Alencastre’s father, Leopoldo), local papers provided an important channel for debate, and the political leaders of affected regions used them to communicate a sense of panic that resulted from the materialization of a movement characterized as both anti-national and anti-white (De la Cadena, Indigenous 102). In keeping with this imagery, Alencastre claimed in his term paper that while caught up in their “delirious rage,” the Indians of Layo promised death even to white chickens and dogs (4).

These “Indian uprisings” were believed by many to have been incited by a successor of the Asociación Pro-Indígena called the Comité
Pro-Derecha Indígena Tawantinsuyu,18 which has been studied in depth by anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (Indigenous 86-130). Comprised of lawyers and intellectuals from Lima and Cusco, as well as self-identified indigenous leaders, the new Lima-based organization was characterized by Valcárcel as a group of “false indigenists” seeking to manipulate Indians in support of their own political agendas (Memorias 235). While there a good deal of scholarly debate regarding the uprisings and the degree to which indigenous peasants were acting out of self-interest by participating in them,19 there is not a transparent record as to what they, themselves, thought about the matter. Drawing on newspapers, government documents, and court proceedings, we come up against that which historian Flores Galindo lamented as the perpetual “silence that shrouded campesino life throughout the Republic” (286).

Before it was barred by President Leguía in 1924, the Tawantinsuyu Committee enjoyed government support and worked to promote both agrarian reform and Indian education. At the First Indigenous Congress, held in Lima to commemorate the centennial of national independence less than a month after the death of Leopoldo Alencastre, the organization made this declaration:

We consider the July 28, 1921 to be the point of departure of a new era, when we should learn […] to protest and rebel against the oppressive hand. […] G]amonales know their regime will end the day the Indian knows how to read and write, and that is why they prevent the functioning of schools. […] If ten years from now each community has its own school, the fate of the Indian will change. […] Respected for his knowledge, the Indian will have strong fists to defend his rights. (El Tawantinsuyu)20

As De la Cadena explains, the Committee founded its revolutionary mission on the society-altering potential of massive indigenous literacy. While this objective has yet to be achieved, the focus on education has permeated state-backed indigenous policies into the twenty-first century despite the long-established argument that even “the most efficient and grandiose teaching system” cannot transform oppressive economic and social realities (Mariátegui 254-265).

For Zulen, then, indigenous violence had been an unsuccessful measure of last resort when educational, intellectual, or legal avenues of social change were unviable (or unavailable), while for the members of the Tawantinsuyu Committee, learning and social change had to go hand-in-hand. Liberated from their passive ignorance, Indian peasants, they imagined, would stand up for themselves, and in doing so, move one step further along the long road to Peruvian citizenship. In keeping with the notion that schooling would be the key ingredient to all recipes for nation-building, a Ministry of Education textbook published in 1934 (shortly after the end of the Leguía period) depicted a well-groomed, white man
in collared shirt and tie, beckoning potential pupils to their classrooms. Through literacy, he proclaimed, rural and indigenous children would become – presumably like him – “useful to the Fatherland and humanity” (Cangahuala Rojas 100).

The well-known anthropologist, novelist, and educator José María Arguedas, who came of age during the Leguía period, offered an alternative perspective on indigenous participation in the violence of the 1910s and 1920s. Just months before committing suicide, in 1969, Arguedas published an open letter to President Velasco Alvarado, in whose nationalist “revolution” he placed some hope for the future of indigenous Peru. He explained:

The most inconceivably cruel spectacle, which I saw for the first time in Lima, was a grand parade of the Peruvian army. In 1929, during the Leguía government, in the Plaza de Armas, and on the 24th of September. While part of the crowd applauded, [...] I (at the time eighteen years old) had to make a supreme effort not to cry or scream out loud. Not one man that we would call “white,” or “whitish” – not only for the color of his skin, but because of so many other details – marched in the company. The entire company, every single soldier, was Indian or black. [...] And I knew, I had seen, that those same people were the ones who shot at the Indians who, at the limits of desperation or rage, participated in “uprisings” against the landowners who considered them inferior to dogs, and shot, as well, at workers on strike and during protest demonstrations. (15-16)

Arguedas’ anguished reminiscence is important for at least two reasons. First, it points to his implicit critical assessment of indigenous education as one essential component of social transformation and nation-building. And second, it points to a major failing of the indigenist organizations of the Leguía period and of “multiculturalist” indigenist discourse in general: that is, the unwillingness or inability to recognize that “the Indian” did not exist in any categorical fashion, and that those identifying as “Indians” might do so in different ways and to different degrees in accordance with their needs, interests, and abilities. In short, traditional indigenists ignored the socially and historically constructed nature of “Indianness.” In stark contrast to the dominant indigenist discourse of his day, Arguedas’ letter was, to return to Bhabha’s terminology, an appeal to cultural “difference” (not diversity) avant la lettre.

By bringing to the fore questions of indigenous agency and self-representation, Arguedas reserved a space for himself (and other intellectuals) in the inter-connected projects of Indian and national transformation. If, as he suggested, the military was going to manipulate Indianness for social evil, others would have to counter that manipulation with an alternative proposal for making Indians “think” and “defend their brothers” (16). The Indian object of pity, thus transformed into a political and social ally, might then be a key actor in the struggle for social justice.
In the aftermath of the 1920s uprisings, Mariátegui had argued that that the “Indian problem” would ultimately have to be resolved by indigenous peoples, themselves. At the same time, he characterized contemporary Indians as “an organic mass [. . .] incapable of deciding its historic path” (49). For the young socialist and for Arguedas, so many years later, the imagined indigenist/Indian alliance of the Leguía period could not be held among equals: Until Indians achieved came into political consciousness, they would have to defer to the (sometimes) benevolent tutorial powers of indigenists and others who claimed the right, obligation, and ability to understand their “diversity” and speak on its behalf.

II: Uchuraccay (1983)

In their little world, it seems improbable that they ever could have realized the conflict was only regional. –Juan Ossío and Fernando Fuenzalida

Over half a century later, another instance of racialized social violence in the highlands brought a different set of cultural intermediaries into the national spotlight. By the early 1980s, guerilla warfare between terrorist groups – primarily the Peruvian Communist Party, Sendero Luminoso (SL-PCP) – and the national armed forces had positioned indigenous peasants at the center of a conflict that made them frequent victims of brutality from both sides. On January 26, 1983, eight journalists on their way to the community of Huaychao in the highlands of Huanta (Department of Ayacucho), were murdered along with their guide in the community of Uchuraccay. The journalists, who were on their way to investigate claims that residents of Huaychao had killed terrorists two days earlier, were attacked when the comuneros purportedly mistook them for senderistas.

President Fernando Belaúnde Terry summoned novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, lawyer Abraham Guzmán Figueroa, and journalist Mario Castro Arenas to research and report on the tragic events. These men, in turn, solicited support from several anthropologists whose contributions to the investigation were annexed to the official Informe sobre Uchuraccay, which was published later that year.

There is an uncanny similarity between the alzamientos of the 1920s and Uchuraccay 1983 with regard to the role that non-indigenous intellectuals played in studying indigenous violence and translating its meaning for a broader national audience in terms of cultural relativism. Also remarkable was the fact that despite the passing of more than half a century, those implicated in the violence in both cases had virtually no say in explaining their own actions. As in a modern-day Fuenteovejuna, Belaúnde’s Investigating Commission arrived at the “absolute conviction” that responsibility was “shared by the entire community [. . .] who, united in assembly, decided to confront the senderistas and kill them” (Vargas Llosa et al. 25). In an ironic commentary on the fact that there were no indigenous voices
included in the report, the Commission concluded that: “the death of eight journalists in Iquichano territory […] is the most convincing evidence [to date] that, after four hundred years of contact between European and Andean culture[s], the possibility of true dialogue has yet to be developed” (77). And so, the communication barrier that purportedly contributed to the fatal “misunderstanding” – despite the fact that at least eight of the Uchuraccainos spoke Spanish and three of the journalists spoke Quechua (del Pino 37; 45) – was reproduced and inscribed into the Commission’s official report.

In their contributions to the investigation, anthropologists Juan Osasio and Fernando Fuenzalida drew on their “knowledge of the Andean mentality” to explain how the actions of the comuneros had been, to some degree, predetermined by their “ferocious and belligerent” nature and predisposition to violence (Vargas Llosa et al. 30). To introduce the report, they explained: “given the shortage of details, we have opted to enrich the material collected by drawing on our lengthy experience with Andean reality, which is increasingly cyclical (recurrente) and therefore predictable” (44). The killings were thus presented in the context of an Iquichana ethnic “tradition” – the tradition of a community characterized by long periods of isolation and “erratic bellicose eruptions,” that had even been exploited by the royalists to help quash the Túpac Amaru uprisings of the 1780s (38). Certain elements of the murders were characterized as “magical-religious” (37), and anthropologist Fernando de Trazegnies Granda surmised that terrorism had stirred the “ancestral foundations of the magical-terror that is […] prominent in the non-occidental mentality” (143).

Having explained the events in historical context and according to the tenets of their anthropological expertise, the consultants to the Commission then exculpated the actions of the comuneros with legal and moral justification that resonated powerfully with the indigenist thought of the 1910s and 20s. In his discussion of the legal standing of the parties presumed guilty, Trazegnies Granda referred to articles 44 and 45 of the Peruvian penal code, the first of which stated that judges had to account for the “special condition” of “savage” criminals when considering their punishment. By serving at least two-thirds of the sentence that would have applied to a “civilized man,” the “savage” could be awarded parole on the condition that “his assimilation into civilized life and morality made him apt to behave [properly]” (149). The second article, which referred to crimes committed by indigenous peoples who were “semi-civilized” and/or “degraded by serfdom or alcoholism,” stated that the judges had to consider the “mental development,” “customs,” and “degree of culture” of the accused individuals before making a decision about their case (149).

Trazegnies Granda argued that these laws were inappropriate for a number of reasons, among them, the fact that the Indian was neither “uncivilized” nor “semi-civilized,” but rather, civilized in a different manner (150). Consequently, the eruption of politicized violence that had victimized not only non-indigenous city dwellers, but also the
indigenous comuneros, themselves, was attributed to misunderstandings resulting from an opaque ethnic and cultural diversity. Harking back to the early-twentieth century, indigenous education was again proposed as a solution, and the anthropologist argued: “Iquichano communities must learn that private wars are not permitted in Peru […]. There is an educational project to be carried out that poses a real challenge to the [existing] system” (151-152). Echoing indigenists of the Leguía era, Trazegnies Granda intimated that the comuneros’ incomprehension of the basic tenets of Occidental civilization, as represented by the laws of dominant Peruvian society, had led them to the murder.

Following decades of experience and experiments with educational initiatives intended to bring indigenous peasants “into the nation,” Uchuraccay was an indication to most that the State had failed miserably at this critical goal. While each of the anthropologist consultants ended his individual contribution to the Informe by pointing out the urgency of recognizing the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of Peruvian society, each also made the counter-argument that for the sake of the country’s future, select aspects of Indianness (such as the “pre-modern mentality”) would have to be eliminated (109, 123, 152). Trazegnies Granda concluded: “[logical] reason corresponds to a ‘modern’ mentality that is conscious of the role of the State. It would be desirable – we could almost say, indispensable for national unity – that all Peruvians reason in this manner” (151).

Like their counterparts during the early twentieth century, then, the intellectuals involved in the Uchuraccay report as defenders of “the Indians” interwove Orientalist analysis and Occidentalizing intent into what reads as an attempt to exculpate with ignorance the perpetrators (and victims) of social violence. The catastrophic “breakdown in communication” surrounding the killings and the subsequent investigation thus resulted not only from the barriers posed by language, but more profoundly, from the “diversity” perceived and presented by the Investigating Commission as competing, ultimately incompatible ontologies and epistemologies. Reminiscent of the gamonales’ alarm over the 1920s alzamientos, intellectual anxiety helped frame the report. Luis Millones concluded:

The exasperation of the highland communities has made it evident that the distance from the capital exists not only in kilometers, and that those who have been forgotten build resentments that explode and become uncontrollable – no matter the size of the group serving as “social detonator,” the delirium of its ideology, or the ragged, poorly-equipped condition of its members. (101)

Millones’ words also echoed the indigenist rhetoric and power scheme of the early-twentieth century, for if the Indians were characterized with a “delirious ideology” – an impervious, illogical, fundamentally incomprehensible way of thinking and seeing the world – then the work of the intellectual who studied and interpreted them for others would be of the
The duty of decoding Indianness was critical, therefore, not only for solving the “Indian problem,” but even more broadly, for ensuring the future of the nation. The Informe’s treatment of Quechua-speaking campesinos revealed the intellectual desire for self-preservation and the self-positioning vis-à-vis Otherness that is symptomatic of all dominant indigenist discourse. Given the report’s over-determined explanation of “Indian behavior,” the communicative obstacles to deciphering the tragic events due to the fact that the investigators neither spoke nor understood Quechua amounted to nothing more than a minor detail. Even if it had taken place, dialogue would only have confirmed the pre-given explanations of “diversity” and educational failure.

III: Piura and Huancayo (1986)

And because of that old campesino and comunero wisdom, which is the truth, which is very close to God, I said, with that old campesino and comunero wisdom, we’re going to teach Peru a lesson. [sic] – Alan Gabriel Ludwig García Pérez.

In the context of internal war that continued long after the Uchuraccay massacre, and, contrary to the affirmations of the Investigating Commission, spread throughout the country, the increased migration of highlanders to the relative safety of the coast altered the dominant imaginary of indigeneity forever.\(^{26}\) The intercultural contact that had increased exponentially with the rapid industrialization of the twentieth century intensified further, and the indigenist imaginations of costeños would finally come up against the limits of empirical knowledge and lived experience. Or would they? In September 1986, President Alan García convened “Rimanakuy” – a series of public dialogues with leaders of rural communities in Piura, Huancayo, Cusco, Puno, and Pucallpa. Through open conversations—“president to president,” as García put it—the APRA administration sought to promote understanding and cooperation in the midst of the ongoing conflict, to address the failures of agrarian reform, discourage armed violence, and perhaps most importantly, decelerate the “inexorable exodus of campesinos” from their communities to cities that lacked infrastructure and jobs to accommodate them (Rimanakuy 10). In the long shadow of Uchuraccay, García’s effort to characterize his initiative with Quechua terminology seemed significant. “Rimanakuy” – formed from the verb “rimay,” (to speak), the obligative suffix “na,” and the reflexive suffix “ku,” can indicate either a noun (“dialogue”) or a verb (“to reach an agreement”). Neither of these meanings would seem particularly appropriate, however, to characterize the way in which the exchanges played out.

Although the conferences were meant to provide a forum through which campesinos and indigenous leaders could discuss concerns over land ownership, credit, legal representation, and education directly with the
highest elected official of their government, President García’s approach to the Rimanakuy was paradoxically anti-communicative. At all but one of the meetings, the president convened the gathering with a long monologue. In Piura he told his audience: “You [are the] institutional and organic representation of deep Peru (el Perú profundo); there is nothing deeper in Peru than the [rural] community; there is nothing more true, more democratic, and more popular than the community; everything else came later, everything else is secondary to the community” (6). Then, appealing to his “love of native land,” García expressed his wish that the campesinos who had left their communities would to return to them:

We are returning and vindicating the power of the [rural] community so that they [the campesinos] know they can go back, because we all want to go back, we all want to be on the land that witnessed our birth, because all of us who don’t deny it, we don’t forget our indigenous antecedent [sic], it’s the part of my skin I love most, that I value most, that Peruvian antecedent, indigenous and comunero. We all want to return to our land, to our furrow, to our work, to our faith, to our history. [sic] (12)

Presumably, the president’s “loved” and “esteemed” indigenous skin and ancestry would be granted to him by dint of the national identity he felt he shared – to greater or lesser degrees – with the members of his audience. Given that he would go into exile for nearly nine years just a few years after these declarations were made, García’s self-inclusion in the community of those “longing to return home” was, indeed, prophetic.

In various iterations of the same long speech, the president made continuous references to the fact that comuneros – to whom he referred interchangeably as campesinos, pobres, serranos, and indígenas – were incapable of communicating with anyone other than themselves, and thus sadly unrepresented in national politics:

[...The] isolated comunero of the Andes has no union, no money, no capacity to make himself heard. [...]Democracy must begin with the poor, and I say that government must speak for the poor, because others know how to speak, to coerce, to demand [...]. But my perpetual preoccupation is and has been: Who speaks for those who are not [present]? Who speaks for the poor of the earth? Who speaks for the rural community? (7)

While the allusion (reiterated throughout the speech) to the comuneros’ collective incapacity to speak is a striking component of the nearly 10,000-word prelude to an encounter focused on the value of communication, more striking still was García’s repeated reference to indigenous struggle—a notion he claimed to have gleaned not from the ideas or experiences of the people he was addressing, but rather, from a canonical indigenist novel. He admitted:
[...I] want to recall the name of [...a...] great fighter, whom perhaps many of you don’t know, [...] Rosendo Maqui, also president of a community, president of Rumi. [...W]e don’t know if they really existed, they are characters of an immortal novel by Ciro Alegría called “El mundo es ancho y ajeno” [sic]. Perhaps Rosendo never lived, but after this novel, which is the most beautiful chronicle and description of comunero life and campesino suffering, Rosendo Maqui represents and is the symbol of all the presidents, all the comuneros. [sic] I believe that in homage to the old mayor [...] we ought to call this Rimanakuy the “Rosendo Maqui” Rimanakuy to make certain that it doesn’t fade in history. [...] In this immortal novel, [...] the greatest novel about agricultural and comunero life in our land, I learned how to respect the [rural] community profoundly. [sic] (6-7)

García went on to tell his audience that he understood their needs and concerns because, through the novel, he had come to know and understand the plight of Rosendo Maqui. Fellow aprista Ciro Alegría’s creative writing was thus presented as a cornerstone of the president’s vision of rural and indigenous Peru, and informed the message he imparted, in Spanish, to his predominately Quechua-speaking audiences throughout the country.

After disclosing the influence of his Alegría’s fiction on his understanding of “el Perú profundo,” President García presented a suggestion: that the comuneros and their families (most of whom did not speak, let alone read Spanish), ought also to understand themselves and their lives as depicted in the novel. In Huancayo, he declared: “I will provide this novel to all of you and to your children, and [it] will be read by all young people in Peru so that they appreciate where they come from, and know that they come from the comunidad campesina” (71). He emphasized: “El mundo es ancho y ajeno” [sic] [...] ought to be the Bible of the comuneros. Because there is your history – with some differences – but there it is” [sic] (74). So, rather than envisioning an encounter in which people could learn about one another by talking or otherwise communicating with one another – a society in which a real rimanakuy might have taken place – García’s response to calls for recognition of the “diversity” of Peruvian society in the aftermath of Uchuraccay was to suggest that campesinos and city dwellers – young and old, indigenous and not – educate themselves about their own lives by reading a work of fiction that had been published over half a century earlier. In front of his voiceless audience, President García thus made a fiction out of national dialogue, and succeeded – however fleetingly – in bringing Rosendo Maqui back to life.


I like it that they can read now, at least, and could not be used by anyone [again]. –Oscar Retto (Father of Willy Retto, one of the journalists killed in Uchuraccay).
What emerges from the comparison of the events considered here is a tendency for non-indigenous interlocutors – sometimes intellectuals, sometimes not – to stifle indigenous voices in their purported efforts to hear them or “make them heard” and the central role that the rhetoric of “diversity” and educational discourses have played in that silencing. This tendency presents an obvious problem for the challenge of building a national society comprising different cultures that are not relegated to pre-determined, “multiculturalist” roles – one in which “difference” can exist and dialogue occur. In their account of the official remembrance of the twentieth anniversary of the Uchuraccay murders, in January 2003, anthropologists Kimberly Theidon and Enver Quinteros Peralta suggested that the passing of two decades had done little to alter the imposed silence on campesino voices in that community. Theidon and Quinteros reported that the event took place in Uchuraccay among family members of the murdered journalists, local authorities, and reporters. As in previous memorial ceremonies (which had taken place annually since they were first instituted in 1998), homage was paid to the deceased reporters, while no mention was made of the several dozen campesinos who had also lost their lives in Uchuraccay to political violence (28). The ceremony was conducted almost entirely in Spanish, thus excluding the community’s monolingual Quechua speakers. Evoking the educational rhetoric and colonialist paternalism of the 1983 Informe sobre Uchuraccay, the father of one of the journalist victims voiced his approval that some of the Uchuraccainos had, at least, become literate, and were therefore less likely to be duped or manipulated by outsiders (29).

Encounters like these show that the characterization of fact or fiction with regard to indigenous peoples is – even in the twenty-first century – more a question of relative power as it is of empiricism, or “truth.” Each of the cases examined here points to a simple but crucial question: Who has the means to make their version of the story the dominant one? The answer is, unfortunately, not so simple. But part of the problem is that the erroneous, colonial(ist) categorization of a people “without writing” (Mignolo) has often come to signify not only a people “without voice,” but even more unforgivably, a people without anything to say (worth listening to). This is particularly true in the realm of education, where the struggle to overcome “asymmetric ignorance” still reigns (Chakrabarty). That is, the burden of acquiring new skills, gaining a different perspective, learning an alternate history, or otherwise “catching up” on knowledge has almost always been placed on individuals and groups whose own ideas and actions are deemed either “unintelligible” or unworthy of attention. As a result, the task of education – that is, of learning someone else’s language, customs, technology, world view, and so on – is consistently assigned to those who already know (and indeed, are expected to know) far more about the needs and interests of dominant society than the members of dominant society know (or would ever be expected to learn) about them. In short, the work of “multiculturalism” is typically a one-way
street, without reciprocity or even the perceived expectation of reciprocity. Such “diversity,” rather than making room for dialogue among heterogeneous political subjects who may or may not choose to self-identify in “cultural” terms, represents, as Bhabha put it, “[…] a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity” (34).

When subaltern subjects don’t say or do what politicians, academics, intellectuals, and others in situations of relative authority want to hear and see – that is, what they think subalterns ought to be saying or doing to perform in a properly native, or authentic-enough way – the preference for hyper-reality (Ramos), and the compartmentalization of culture on which it relies (and that it simultaneously perpetuates), creates a schism between that which is desired, on the one hand, and that which is readily available, on the other. Put simply, the “facts” (or lived experiences) on the ground sometimes disappoint. As I have tried to show here, the preference for neat, static, and expedient cultural identifications over complex, messy, and oftentimes contradictory articulations of agency tend to lead those in positions of relative power to project or impose their preferred fictions onto the lived experience of others, thus converting the latter into an always-deficient rendition of the former. The role of educational rhetoric in discourses of multiculturalism has not only been to ameliorate the “deficiencies” of subaltern forms of being and thinking, but also, to render “disappointing” realities a bit closer to the hegemonic ideals of the imaginary.

That the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak) has long been a truism of academic inquiry focusing on marginalized populations, and much of our work seeks to understand, address, and ultimately, to alter the configurations of power that privilege some while silencing others. This goal has been no more salient than in the realm of education. But the events examined here show that to the contrary of their intended or official purpose, discourses of education have often served not to strengthen hushed voices, but to gag them with condescending pathos. A politics of “diversity” rather than “difference” silences subaltern subjects not only because they lack the political, economic, and social power to “make themselves heard,” but also because they sometimes – fortunately – manage to confound the essentialisms on which multiculturalist renditions of culture have been premised.

Notes

1 For a brief survey of the uses and interpretations of multiculturalist discourse over the past fifteen years, see Scott, Chicago Cultural Studies Group, Hingham, West and Brown, Hale, and Hartmann and Gerteis.

2 Bhabha argues that “[c]ultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as knowledgeable, authoritative, [and] adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification”
A related issue – but one which lies outside the scope of this paper – is the way in which the more recent concept of “interculturality” as currently articulated in the Andes and throughout the Americas might negotiate the pitfalls multiculturalism discussed here.

I use “indigenism” as an umbrella term to encompass the contradictory intellectual discourses and social policies designed to incorporate populations identified as indigenous into national societies, on the one hand, and national imaginaries, on the other.

“Indigenous” and “Indian” are, of course, highly problematic terms that inevitably suspend and simplify complex and fluid notions of identity. In Peru, rural peoples from the highlands (“campesinos” or “comuneros”) and the Amazonian region (“nativos”) have both been subsumed by these terms, though the country’s “indigenous problem” has typically referred to the former.

Son of Domingo Vizcarra Valcárcel (a businessman), and Leticia Vizcarra Cornejo (daughter of a prominent State functionary), Valcárcel was born in Moquegua and moved to Cusco as an infant. As a young man, he embraced his reputation as fervent indigenist, yet proudly traced his own ancestry to Spaniards who fought in the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula (Memorias 111-112; 218).

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

These schools were first constructed in Puno by local communities who donated land and labor to the initiative (Garcia and Montenegro 36). Advocates aimed for the NECs to extend to other regions and gradually restructure indigenous communities throughout Peru. See Devine.

Consider, for example, the political work of Chirapaq (Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú) over the past twenty years, or more recently, the repeal by Congress of the “Law of the Jungle” promoted by President Alan García to facilitate the “development” of indigenous lands in the Amazon by mining and energy companies. See: http://www.chirapaq.org.pe and Cordero.

Foucault explained the regime of truth as “… a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (133).

One example can be found in the politics of “bilingual-intercultural education” (EBI), as they currently play out in rural Peru, where parents are often critical of the fact that children study Quechua in school. For some, the prospect of literacy in an indigenous language is not perceived as part of the process of social liberation or cultural empowerment posited by its advocates, but rather, as a top-down imposition of a circumscribed notion of indigeneity. The rejection of EBI is often perceived by its proponents not as a reconfiguration of “indigenous identity,” but rather, as an internalization of the anti-indigenous racism so prevalent in Peruvian society. My interpretation of this dynamic draws on dozens of conversations with

11 The following year (2004), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its findings on the human costs of twenty years of political violence and reported nearly 70,000 people killed or disappeared. The majority were Quechua-speaking peasants. (See also note 22).

12 Arroyo (1) notes that the Association’s other founding members were Dora Mayer (a journalist of German descent) and Joaquin Capelo (an engineer and professor from Junin province).

13 Zulen wrote in 1915: “A revolution for radical change will have to be an agrarian revolution that breaks up the haciendas so that no Peruvian family will be lacking its own plot of land [. . .]. Down with the land estate! This is the slogan of the future Peruvian revolution!” (N. pag.).

14 Valcárcel observed: “Not only individuals of the white race exploited the Indians. The overseers on the haciendas were usually Indians without the least bit of consideration for the campesinos, and defended the interests of their bosses as their own” (Memorias 236).

15 The Quechua term refers to “the four united regions” of the so-called “Inca Empire,” which some colonial scholars reject as a misnomer since the notion of Empire had “nothing to do” with Andean reality (Rostworowski 16).

16 Ironic in light of Alencastre’s later role as a Quechua-language teacher and poet was his violent death in 1984 at the hands of the peasants on his hacienda, which he lost during the agrarian reform of Velasco Alvarado and later recovered. His father, Leopoldo Alencastre, was killed in the uprisings that Andrés recounts in his term paper.

17 Alencastre included in his analysis a gruesome account of the murder of a businessman and landowner from Cusco named “Manuel Zapata.” According to the account, Zapata was tortured by “inebriated Indians” who cut off his tongue and fingers, gouged out his eyes, and drank his blood before throwing him off a cliff (8). Oddly, the date and details of this murder correspond precisely to that of Alencastre’s own father in the province of Canchis. For more on Leopoldo Alencastre’s death, see: De la Cadena, Indigenous 100.

18 Rejecting the dismissal of indigenous agency, Flores Galindo maintained that the origins of the uprisings were in fact more complex: In light of the confrontation between burgeoning capitalism and a pre-capitalist peasant economies during the post-WWI economic downturn, the highland communities that had been mobilized during the War of the Pacific (1879-1833) rebelled against the imposition of new restrictions on their wool production. These revolts then spread to the colonos (i.e. peons of the landed elite) (261-309).

19 See for example: De la Cadena 106-125; Flores Galindo 261-309; Sarkisyanz 136-151; Valcárcel, Memorias 235-238.
The Latin Americanist, March 2009

20. Qtd. in De la Cadena, Indigenous 90.
21. This quote is from an appendix to the Informe sobre Uchuraccay, “The community of Uchuraccay and the Iquichana region” (75).
22. Along with the pyrrhic victory of the Peruvian state over Sendero Luminoso, the dire situation of peasant farmers and natives during the twenty-year conflict was a major focus of investigation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established in 2000 by interim President Valentín Paniagua and made its final report to President Alejandro Toledo in August 2003. An abbreviated version of the report was published as Hatun Willakuy (“la gran historia”) in 2004. The full report is available online at: http://www.cverdad.org.pe/.

23. The anthropologists referred to the Uchuraccainos as “Iquichanos” because of their supposedly Iquichana “tribal ethnic identity.” Historian Cecilia Méndez explains, however, that references to Iquichanos originate with the Huanta Rebellion of the 1820s, and have no connection with the ways in which contemporary peasants of the region (other than those from the community of Iquicha itself) conceive of, or identify themselves. She argues: “There was never anything stable or permanent about the Iquichana identity in the nineteenth century, nor is there now” (28).

24. This is the name of Lope de Vega’s 1619 play, wherein a town claims collective responsibility for the death of its oppressor, responding “¡Fuenteovejuna lo hizo!” (Fuenteovejuna did it!) when interrogated about the murder.

25. The investigators determined that Peruvian military officers were indirectly responsible for the crimes for inciting Uchuraccainos to violence against outside infiltration into their community. Three comuneros were convicted, though the details of their supposed participation were never brought to light. Two decades later, historian Ponciano del Pino, reconstructed the events of 23 January 1983 from interviews with eye witnesses and other Uchuraccay residents, and claimed that approximately thirty adults and adolescents – not the entire community – had participated in the crime (42-48).

26. This migration should be understood as part of a broader demographic shift that was already well underway. During the second half of the twentieth century, the country’s rural-urban balance was virtually inverted. In 1940, approximately 36% of the national population resided in urban areas and 64% of the population was rural (Censo). In 1993, 30% of the population was rural and 70 percent was urban (McDevitt). While the national population tripled during this period, the population of Lima alone increased almost tenfold, from 662,000 to over six million, or nearly one-third overall (Instituto Nacional de Estatística e Informática).

27. The President did not attend the meeting in Cusco, where the head of the National Planning Institute, Javier Tantaleán Arbulú, spoke on his behalf. García’s failure to appear at the final rimanakuy in Pucallpa sparked protest by those in attendance, many of whom had travelled great distances, and were skeptical of the justification offered for the president’s absence (mechanical problems with his airplane). In light of the commotion, García
made a “special effort” to attend the event despite the difficulties (Beisaga 331).

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