

Universalizing the *ayllu*

José Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, trans. David Broder, Haymarket, Chicago, 2015. lii + 152 pp., £20.00 pb., 978 16 08 46411 1; Álvaro García Linera, *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, selection and introduction by Pablo Stefanoni, trans. Shana Yael Shubs et al., Haymarket, Chicago, 2015. 346 pp., £20.00 pb., 978 16 08 46409 8.

In 1858 the *New American Cyclopaedia* published a little-known article by Karl Marx on Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), the ‘hero’ of Spanish-American independence. In Marx’s version, however, he is no hero. Marx represents him rather as an opportunist buffoon: Bolívar was a creole landowner who, having been seduced by the rituals of European courtly life (he was present at Napoleon’s coronation as Emperor), when not attempting to assume ‘dictatorial powers’ spends most of the long anticolonial military campaign either in retreat or, indeed, fleeing the Spanish imperial enemy. If it were not for European assistance (advisors, mercenaries), Marx implies, independence would not have happened: ‘like most of his countrymen, he was averse to prolonged exertion’, ‘the foreign troops, consisting mainly of Englishmen, decided the fate of New Granada’, ‘this campaign ... was nominally led by Bolívar and General Sucre, but the few successes of the corps were entirely owed to British officers’, Marx writes of Bolívar and the campaign. Rather than possessing the courage and virtue of a ‘nation-maker’, in other words, an image celebrated over the years by much of the anti-imperialist intelligentsia of Latin America and beyond, including the late Hugo Chávez (who famously had Bolívar’s body ceremoniously disinterred and reburied so as to discover whether he had been poisoned – he hadn’t – whilst simultaneously marking his own populist and ‘Bolívarist’ refoundation of Venezuela), in Marx’s portrait the ‘General’ – as García Márquez called Bolívar – emerges as incompetent in almost every way.

Marx’s article on Bolívar provides the occasion for José Aricó’s (1931–1991) important book *Marx and Latin America*, originally published in Spanish in 1980, and it is included in the volume as one of its appendices. From Aricó’s perspective, one might conclude that Marx’s article itself is what is in fact incompetent (it is); but, more importantly, in his view it constitutes a symptom of intellectual malaise – specifically, of a historical unease of Marxism with Latin American societies as such. For Marxism, according to Aricó,

the region was an ‘evaded reality’ to which it arrives only belatedly and, then, mistakenly.

Marx’s account of Bolívar is surprisingly conventional, remaining for the most part biographical in approach. It contains very little of the social and political content that might explain the process of independence Bolívar was involved in – especially, for example, the contending, decentralizing, forces seeking, via an assortment of local *caudillos*, to impose their own interests in the struggle against the Spanish Crown. This dispersal threatened to undermine the formation of an independent nation-state, or even (and this is a utopian image that still moves many on the Latin American Left today), a Latin American federated state, which Marx interpreted as merely a ruse of Bolívar’s to extend his ‘dictatorial powers’. According to Aricó, however, Marx’s interpretation suggests he knew very little about such anticolonial struggles, the ‘national questions’ associated with them (what we might now call the constitution of ‘a people’), as well as the complex social relations of production and the mix of labour regimes from which they emerged. And this in addition to the evident signs of historicist developmentalism in Marx’s text, from whose perspective the local population was clearly just not adequate to its historical task, for lack of cultural formation or political *Bildung*.

A common accusation levelled against Marx in this context – one made, for example, by Carlos Franco, who introduces the book – is that of *Eurocentrism*, which here indeed seems to ring true. Aricó, however, will insist on resisting such an interpretation, including in the long epilogue to the Mexican second edition of 1982 (of which this is the belated English-language translation) in which he responds to further criticisms of this type. According to Aricó, Marx’s article on Bolívar is a symptomatic exception; and the accusation of Eurocentrism both depoliticizes and dehistoricizes his article, as well as his work more generally, as it was developing at the time. It consists, he insists, in attributing to Marx’s work a kind of geographical ‘destiny’ that cannot account

for the shifts and developments in his critical endeavours. If Marx's anomalous article thus provides Aricó with the occasion for writing, it is the conceptual labour Marx was involved with at the time that is the real historical object of his essay. In Aricó's account, moreover, such critical labour is what also distances Marx from Marxism as it was codified by the Second and Third Internationals and theoretically contained by the 'stagnation' of orthodoxy (historicism) – as pointed out by Rosa Luxemburg in 'Stagnation and Progress of Marxism' (1927), a second occasion for his book, perhaps. In this sense, Aricó's essay paradoxically makes Marx's critical anomaly – his account of Bolívar – the exceptional symptom of historical Marxism's codified and institutionalized norm. Indeed, Aricó begins his essay saying that it constitutes the (necessary) beginning of a critical analysis of orthodox Marxism and the history of its relations to Latin America. It is crucial for a democratic socialist future in the region. What, then, is his account of Marx's text, which at one and the same time appears both theoretically exceptional (for Marx) and, though hardly read, historically normative (for Marxism), so far as its ignorance of the specificities of Latin American social relations is concerned?

In a series of brief, condensed chapters Aricó begins by setting out Marx's intellectual path from 1848 onwards: after the failure of the revolutions throughout Europe, Marx moves to London where his attention shifts to the critical analysis of capital in the context of the *world* market. This is not the moment of an epistemological break, in Althusser's 'scientific' sense, but a shift into the critique of political economy: as is well known, Marx will go on to produce a theory of capital accumulation centred on an account of value, commodity form, the valorization process and exploitation. In addition, however, he would also relativize the European experience of capitalism and, to a degree, begin to 'peripheralize' his vision of it, with important political consequences. If he and Engels had previously suggested that the future development of colonies depended on that of their imperial hegemony, now Marx was beginning to reverse the Hegelian motif of 'peoples without history' that at times still characterized his writing, to suggest, for example, that social emancipation in Britain depended on Irish national independence, now socialism's condition. As he deepened his critique of capitalism in the writing of *Capital*, Marx even began to deindustrialize his thought such that the experience of industrial capitalism was no longer – he insists in correspondence

with his Russian readers such as Vera Zasulich – to be conceived as the necessary historical condition for communism; and that, indeed, peasant communal forms of socialization might provide an alternative to it. In sum, according to Aricó, Marx's critical development suggests a path in which his deepening critique of capitalism as an international system entailed the 'provincializing' of the European experience as a developmentalist model. In other words, there was a clear *anti*-Eurocentric tendency – involving attention to specific historical experiences of capital – emerging in Marx's late work. This is the Marx lost to the orthodoxies of Marxism in Aricó's view.

However, what then explains the exceptional character of Marx's article on Bolívar? According to Aricó, it seems to be a question of Marx's (more or less permanent) embattled relation to Hegelianism and its inversion. Here Aricó's account becomes both conjunctural and philosophical. On the one hand, he suggests that Marx is bounced back into a kind of Hegelian developmentalism by Bonapartism, representing Bolívar thus in the cartoonish mirror of Bonaparte's farcical nephew. In this light, his article becomes a work of political parody; but here, in contrast to his complex account of the situation in France, without any analysis of the anticolonial nation-building specifics of Latin America. On the other hand, Marx also redeploys, now in a well-established anti-Hegelian fashion, his anti-statism, in which political subjects emerge, not due to the work of the state, but from the conflicts and contradictions driving civil society. From this perspective the state – and those who inhabit it, such as Bonaparte's nephew and Bolívar – becomes a kind of empty theatre, lacking in any real determining substance of its own. As Aricó points out, however, now putting on his Gramscian hat, in contexts of passive revolution like Latin America, in which the emerging ruling classes are weak (and fear 'the masses'), the apparatuses of the state (both repressive and ideological) become fundamental. Blinded by Bonapartism, however, Marx cannot see the relevance and importance here of political determination.

In sum, Aricó's essay on Marx (in the end he never extended his analysis into the history of orthodox Marxism) carries out two important tasks: first, it presents a Latin Americanist version of the by now more or less established critique of the lack of a theory of the political in Marx; second, it maps out the coordinates of a heterodox tradition of Latin American Marxism in the light of the late Marx's theoretical development. It is the latter that is taken

up by Álvaro García Linera, currently the vice president of Bolivia, in his *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, originally published in 2007.

José Aricó spent the late 1970s and early 1980s in exile in Mexico City, having fled Argentina after the military coup of 1976. There he joined many other exiles, from Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America. Many brought with them the experiences of failed armed struggle as well as a variety of heterodox Marxisms. Many also came to study there. One of these was a young García Linera, a budding mathematician. There is no doubt that he read *Marx and Latin America* whilst in Mexico. Returning to Bolivia, he too became involved in armed struggle and was briefly imprisoned. Whilst there he wrote what remains one of his key works with the somewhat old-fashioned title of *Value Form and Community Form: An Abstract-Theoretical Approach to the Civilizational Conditions Preceding the Universal 'Ayllu'* (1995) (*Forma valor y forma comunidad: aproximación teórica-abstracta a los fundamentos civilizatorios que preceden al Ayllu Universal*).

In the years that followed, García Linera produced further important works in Marxist economic and political analysis, which he has continued to do since becoming vice president. Many of these are available

in a fascinating public archive – the archive of the vice presidency – at the heart of the Bolivian state, providing it with a revolutionary, Marxist tone as well as a reflection and partial record of its recent history: democratic revolution turned into reform, contained and instrumentalized (this is crucial, I think) by the state, but which is also magnified and broadcast as if through a loudhailer. This is the sense, then, in which *Plebeian Power* can be described as one of García Linera's 'statesbooks'. It contains essays on the history of the labour movement in Bolivia (particularly, a moving account of the eventual political – and historical – defeat of the miners during the 1980s), as well as on the themes of re-proletarianization and politico-cultural democratization, native Indian politics, the 'community' and 'multitude forms', and an important essay, originally published in 1999, on the contemporary relevance of the *Communist Manifesto*. Rather than presenting these essays individually, I will attempt instead briefly to locate García Linera's work more generally in the Latin American heterodox Marxist tradition suggested by Aricó.

There are three component parts of García Linera's Marxism, all of which are mediated by the work of others in Bolivia such as René Zavaleta Mercado and a group of García Linera's contemporaries associated with the 'Comuna' group. The first is that of



the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, the region's most important Marxist thinker. Resisting Second International (that is, both social-democratic and emerging Stalinist) orthodoxy and developmentalism in the late 1920s, Mariátegui turned towards the communitarianism of the peasant communities (*ayllu*) – and did so before Marx's late investigations into the peasant communes of Russia as alternative non-capitalist foundations of communism became known – seeking to mediate and transform the inherited notion of the subject of social emancipation located in the industrial proletariat. This is, arguably, one of the founding gestures of Latin American Marxism. In doing so, his work became marked by a productive tension between a romantic *indigenismo* and a positivist historical stagism (or developmentalism) that, arguably, still marks the work of García Linera in its concern – evidenced in the subtitle of his *Value Form* book – for the eventual universalization of the community (*ayllu*) form in alliance with other possible subjects of emancipation more generally.

The second important ingredient of García Linera's thought is the work of Bolívar Echeverría, whose seminar on Marx's *Capital* he remembers attending, in the 'Introduction' to the 2009 edition of his above-mentioned 'prison notebook' *Value Form*. Fundamental here is the will to recover and extend not only the philosophical but also the political significance of Marx's concept of 'use-value'. In an important essay originally published in 1984, "Use-Value": Ontology and Semiotics' (translated in *RP* 188), Echeverría insists with regard to Marx's account of the 'valorization of value' (that is, of exploitation and accumulation through commodification) that, theoretically, the objects of everyday practical life conceived as 'use-values' – including labour power – *precede and determine* their contradictory form as commodities – values to be exchanged in the process of accumulation. It is this practical (he refers to it as 'natural') form of use-value and its *social reproduction* that Echeverría seeks to rescue from Marx's 'unilateral' account, so as to provide a political 'counter-balance' to the logics of accumulation at its very heart. This extended version of use-value is crucial both to García Linera's conception of the community and to his post-Negrian account of labour and the class struggle. In the footsteps of Echeverría, it provides for a moment of 'non-capital' within capital that it both needs and consumes, but which it cannot destroy.

The illumination and development of the socio-natural character of use-value as it 'resists' exchange value would concern Echeverría for the rest of his

life, and is the basis, for example, of his account of the *baroque* 'no' that both inhabits and resists the experience of subordination to the commodity form and emerging mercantile capitalism in colonial Latin America, the key to the subcontinent's supposed 'baroque ethos'. In this way, as 'natural form', Echeverría's expanded version of use-value takes on a culturalist dimension. One might thus suggest that in García Linera's writing, Echeverría's account of this broader social and cultural significance of use-value *mediates* Mariátegui's Indianization of the subject of social emancipation in the 'community form' (*ayllu*) – with a view to its future universalization/actualization. In other words, Echeverría's notion constitutes the socio-cultural ground of his overlapping versions of the 'value form' with the 'community form'.

The third component part of García Linera's Marxism contextualizes the other two vis-à-vis the history of capital in Latin America and beyond, giving his work a further original twist in the direction of Marx's critical development, as outlined by Aricó: the deployment of Marx's reflections on the subsumption of labour to capital, which he generalizes socially and culturally – out of Mariátegui and Echeverría – via the notions of use-value and the common (use-value always accompanies exchange-value as non-alienated social labour in its subsumed coexistence with the latter's appropriation and commodification). Marx's reflections are outlined in his famous draft text for Part 7 of Volume I of *Capital*, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', posthumously published as an appendix, where he differentiates between formal and real subsumption based largely on the commodification of the constitutive elements of the labour process such that 'the immediate process of production is always an indissoluble union of *labour process* and *valorization process*, just as the product is a whole comprised of *use-value* and *exchange value*.'

Apart from processes of post-mining re-proletarianization (including the deployment of new technologies) and urbanization – important here in many of García Linera's works from *Value Form* to *Plebeian Power* and beyond – is his analysis of the *effects* of the formal subsumption of Indian communities (*ayllu*) to capital and the mercantilization of their production such that communal labour is broken up and subordinated to forms of family-based production for the market (a local form, perhaps, of the differentiation of the peasantry). And in so far as real subsumption is modelled by Marx on an industrialized wage economy derived mainly from Britain, such conditions, including those of the urbanized working

classes in Bolivia, suggest subordination of other kinds of labour regimes, some of which, nevertheless, remain – in their apparent communality – relatively autonomous qua use values or ‘natural’ forms. In many ways, these logics of capitalist subsumption – ‘permanent primitive accumulation’, writes García Linera more recently in his ‘9 Theses on Capitalism’ – constitute the basis of his mapping of the geography of Bolivia (its particular spatio-temporal fixes, to speak in David Harvey’s terms), as they emerge from its various overlapping ‘trajectories of accumulation’ (Jairus Banaji), across the Andean highlands and the Amazonian lowlands:

In different parts of the world ... agrarian and Indian struggles are emerging that seek to resist the capitalist exploitation of the traditional organization of their ways of life, placing their nations in a situation in which to preserve their community structures they must struggle for an expanded and universalizing communitarianism, transforming them into a productive force of production of the universal community, of socialism and communism. (‘9 Theses’)

The problem for García Linera has been that the actual conditions of such a universalization of the

ayllu, in alliance with other forms of working classes, do not, he suggests, exist. Hence his more recent insistence on the struggle for hegemony and the occupation of the state. In such a context, moreover, perhaps the much commented-upon ethnic (and racialized?) remapping of the political in Bolivia since 2005, when he came to power as part of the government of Evo Morales, might respond in part at least to the revolutionary reformist state’s attempt to defend and *restore* the communal community (*ayllu*) – against the logics of subsumption – through a re-functioning of culture and democracy and the recent juridico-political (constitutional) creation of a new citizen, the ‘originary peasant indigenous’.

And, it is here, perhaps, that Mariátegui’s romantic-positivist tension reappears, via Echeverría, in the work of García Linera, and the state apparatus he now partially occupies: attempting to contain the ‘cunning of capital’ as it imposes its logics through its others (including the community forms he defends throughout *Plebeian Power*), risking the production of a reified social romance of use-value qua hegemonic politico-cultural resource.

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Hypotheses on hope

Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015. 282 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 0 23027 208 8.

One of the pleasures of this book is its total disregard for the disciplinary boundaries that police contemporary academia. The range of learning on display – across philosophy, history, sociology and politics – is exemplary on many levels. Dinerstein navigates with ease through Marx’s critique of political economy, Ernst Bloch’s principle of hope, and the theory and praxis of autonomist Latin American Marxism, accumulating insights and provocations along the way. It is also immediately refreshing in another register. In viewing the contemporary Latin American Left from the bottom up, unapologetically, and, in the main, unromantically, Dinerstein offers an antidote to the state fetishism of so many other accounts. Dinerstein’s analysis begins with popular movements, and takes as foundational points of departure the principles of self-organization and self-emancipation of the oppressed.

The book demands a shift in orientation, then, away from the predominant optic of variations between regime types and party forms – Lula contra Chávez – towards an examination of some of the most crucial Latin American struggles in the last two decades: the experience of neighbourhood assemblies, road blockades, factory seizures and workers’ co-operatives during the Argentine crisis of 2001–02; the vicissitudes of the Zapatista uprising and forms of autonomous self-governance since their explosive emergence from clandestinity in January 1994; the complexities of left-indigenous rearticulation in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005, as well as the contradictions of constituting a (capitalist) plurinational state in the period since Evo Morales assumed office in 2006; and, finally, the massive movement of landless rural labourers in Brazil (MST), before and during the period in which the Workers’ Party (PT)