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THE MEANING OF ALAN GARCÍA: SOVEREIGNTY AND GOVERNMENTALITY IN NEOLIBERAL PERU

This paper draws on Foucault’s distinction between sovereign power and governmentality, and on subsequent theoretical developments of that distinction by, among others, Agamben, Butler, Wendy Brown and Aiwha Ong, to explore a key aspect of the neoliberal ‘revolution’ of current Peruvian president Alan García. I argue that García’s instrumental conflation of political and biopolitical enemies in his denunciations of those who oppose his revolution reveals both how his project of rule is inherently racialized (and racist), premised as it is on the overcoming of indigeneity, and why, for this very reason, despite its apparently novel neoliberal veneer, it is best understood as the latest iteration of the myriad elite projects of rule enacted against the population that have characterized Peruvian history.

Since returning to power in July 2006, following a disastrous first administration (1985–1990) and a decade or so lived in exile (to escape prosecution for corruption), Peruvian president Alan García has pursued an economic and social policy that is anathema to the policies historically associated with the party that he leads, Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). One of Latin America’s oldest ‘mass’ parties, APRA’s founding principles included the nationalization of all agricultural property and industries, the ‘internationalization’ of the Panama Canal, and the struggle against ‘yanqui’ imperialism. Many observers concur that García mark II, and the party that he leads, have little in common with the party founded by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre. But in one respect, García is true to his origins. In public speeches and in a series of newspaper articles that play on Aesop’s fable of the dog in the manger (‘el perro del hortelano’), García has invoked the spectre of communism to attack those who critique his policies. In an article published in late 2007, García traced the genealogy of current environmental critics of his policies to a communist past: ‘the old anticapitalist communist of the nineteenth century disguised himself as a protectionist in the twentieth century and changes his shirt again in the twenty-first century to become an environmentalist. But always anticapitalist, opposed to investment, and incapable of explaining how, with a poor agriculture, it is possible to make a leap towards greater levels of development’.

Some months later, during a speech delivered in Cuzco, which followed a series of protests prompted by the fear that the government would privatize tourist sites such as Machu Picchu, García declared: ‘This is why I raise my voice to reject the demagogic lies, the communist lies of old that manipulate information, that take advantage of ignorance, and that so easily claims that we want to privatize Machu Picchu, that we
want to sell the churches, that we want to give Sacsayhuamán to private capital’. García’s interpellation of communism is clearly instrumental: communists, terrorists, protectionists, environmentalists, all merge into a single anti-capitalist Other intent on destroying García’s ‘capitalist revolution’ and plunging Peru into chaos. But the specific interpellation of communism in a country where ‘the’ Communist Party is a political irrelevance (and wields far less influence than either a vaguely ‘chavista’ populist-nationalist movement, formally ‘Maoist’ unions such as SUTEP, the teachers union, or even the miniscule Castroite left) is worthy of note. It points, at least in part, to a historical hardwiring in García’s and, more generally, APRA’s political mindset that refers back to a historical process of political self-constitution in which communism and, specifically, anti-communism played determining roles.

Regardless of the undeniable local (national) and historically specific inflection of his rhetoric, García articulates a universal hypothesis through the dog in the manger discourse: a capitalist hypothesis or, which is the same thing, an anti-communist hypothesis. In this essay I propose to examine, following Alain Badiou, the meaning of García (or what García is the name of) (Badiou 2007, 2009). I want to suggest that García, like Sarkozy, is a symptom of a particular politics, a politics that Badiou sees as operating through fear, a primitive and essential fear. For Badiou, the 2007 French elections revealed that France was in the grips of two types of fear, primitive fear and a fear of fear, or a derivative fear. The primitive fear, which Badiou associates with a political tradition that permeates French history, but that is best captured by the appellation pétainisme, fuels a politics that Sarkozy in some ways merely gives expression to, although he appears to do it with remarkable dedication. Very recent examples of this politics include new policies banning the use of the burqa in public places and moves to forcibly remove Roma communities. But Badiou sees Sarkozy as expressive of deeper currents in French society and history, currents of which these policies are mere surfacing bubbles. Badiou’s reading of Sarkozy as a symptom of broader processes in French society and history that operate through fear appears to me to be eminently transposable to Alan García and Peru. In this paper I suggest that the fear invoked by García’s dog in the manger rhetoric both reflects and serves to reproduce a particular configuration of sovereign rule and governmentality in Peru.

Albeit from a very different theoretical perspective and in a different analytical register, Badiou invokes what Judith Butler has referred to, in her analysis of post 9/11 US policies, as the re-emergence of sovereignty in the context of governmentality ‘with the vengeance of an anachronism that refuses to die’ (2004: 54). Let us retrace the steps the lead up to this interpretative reading of present configurations of sovereignty and governmentality. As is well known, in the late 1970s Michel Foucault devoted his College de France lectures to developing a ‘genealogy of the state’. Although still largely unknown (because the lectures have only been published in full relatively recently), the lectures have proved immensely influential in several fields, including anthropology, history, international relations, sociology and geography. The basic insight that Foucault develops in these lectures is what has come to be called ‘the conduct of conduct’, or governmentality, which he defines as ‘the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (2007: 108). Foucault
suggests that governmentality emerged in the eighteenth century as a form of power distinct from sovereign power which he sees as having territory as its target and discipline or what he calls police as its chief apparatus (dispositif). Governmentality operates in an analogous way to what Foucault refers to as pastoral power (with roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition), which in some ways he sees as a prelude to governmentality, in the sense that governmental power operates through the management of the population and no longer through its police: governmentality is an overcoming of police in that the management of the population seeks not to maximize the power of the sovereign but rather that of the population by extending, and guaranteeing, freedom in the spheres of the economy and civil society.

Although Foucault’s genealogy of governmentality suggests a teleological or ‘stagist’ process, in fact sovereignty and governmentality are better understood as forms of power that coexist in modern societies. For this reason, although Foucault, and others, see governmentality as exclusive to liberal societies characterized by free subjects and free market economies (in some ways governmentality is a liberal form of power or the form of power that liberalism assumes), in practice, as David Scott (1995) and Mitchell Dean (1999) among others suggest, governmentality is eminently transposable to (as an analytics), and evident in (as a form of power), colonial and authoritarian societies. Foucault acknowledges as much in his discussion of Nazi Germany in his 1976 lectures, where he explores the interplay between the disciplinary and regulatory dimensions of biopower (the management of life or power over life – a concept first introduced in the History of Sexuality vol. 1), i.e. between the apparatuses of sovereignty and governmentality (although he has yet to invent the latter term), and pays particular attention to biopower’s dark side. Particularly important is the central role that Foucault gives to racism as that which inscribes biopower as a key mechanism of state power. As Ann Laura Stoler suggests, although the Nazi regime exemplified for Foucault ‘the sovereign right to kill and the biopolitical management of life’ he recognized that racism was ‘intrinsic to all modern, normalizing states and their biopolitical technologies’ (1995: 86, 88).

In short, sovereignty and governmentality are better thought of as commensurable forms of power rather than as different and successive ‘stages’ in the ‘genealogy of the state’. This basic insight has been key to incredibly fruitful theoretical engagements with Foucault’s original discussion of sovereignty and governmentality. Giorgio Agamben has famously challenged Foucault’s contention that sovereignty is primarily concerned with territory, and more generally his distinction between sovereignty and governmentality/biopolitics in order to suggest that ‘the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power’ (1995: 6). For Agamben, ‘in modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or non-value of life as such’ (1995: 142). In other words, for Agamben the management of the population is not a characteristic of governmental rule but rather the prerogative of the sovereign, who has the power to determine which lives are worth living and which are amenable to be killed with impunity. Drawing on Agamben’s critique of Foucault, meanwhile, Butler has suggested that governmentality enables the emergence of sovereign power in contexts such as Guantanamo: ‘the new war prison constitutes a form of governmentality that considers itself its own justification and seeks to extend that self-justificatory form of sovereignty through animating and deploying the extra-legal dimension of governmentality’ (1995: 95). Although her contention that sovereignty
has returned, or been ‘resurrected’, somewhat undermines her claim that sovereignty and governmentality are commensurable, Butler makes the important point that ‘the resurrected sovereignty [...] is not the sovereignty of a unified power under the conditions of legitimacy, the form of power that guarantees the representative status of political institutions. It is rather a lawless and prerogative power, a rogue power par excellence’ (1995: 56).

It is in relation to neoliberalism that the commensurability of sovereign power and governmentality presents perhaps the most interesting analytic possibilities. Indeed, one of the most fertile areas of scholarship to draw on governmentality is the study of neoliberalism (although, interestingly, it is an area of scholarship that largely fails to engage Foucault’s own extensive discussion of neoliberalism – something that may change as his lectures on the subject become available). Political philosophers such as Wendy Brown and anthropologists such as Aiwha Ong have turned to governmentality in order to theorize the neoliberal turn in ways that overcome what are clearly insufficient interpretations that limit neoliberalism to a set of economic policies associated with the so-called Washington Consensus. Wendy Brown, for example, has argued that neoliberalism is best understood as a political rationality:

Neo-liberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neo-liberalism carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player (2003: n.p.).

Brown’s work focuses on the paradox that whereas neoliberal governmentality operates ostensibly through extending freedom to self-regulating subjects, it simultaneously operates to undermine liberal democracy. Ong, meanwhile, examines the ways in which neoliberal governmentality is deployed selectively, through what she calls graduated sovereignty, in ways that, in effect, reproduce and reassert other forms of exclusion: ‘Graduated sovereignty [...] refers to the differential treatment of populations – through schemes of biopolitical disciplining and pastoral care – that differentially insert them into the processes of global capitalism. These gradations of governing may be in a continuum, but they overlap with pre-formed racial, religious and gender hierarchies, and further fragment citizenship for people who are all, nominally, citizens of the same country’ (2000: 62).

In what ways can this analytical framework helps us to make sense of the meaning of García? I what follows I suggest that García’s capitalist revolution operates primarily through sovereign power rather than governmentality. I focus in particular on García’s extensive use of the sovereign prerogative ‘to declare who is an internal enemy’, as exemplified in the dog in the manger discourse, and on what this use tells us about the project of rule reflected in García (2005: 1). I suggest that García’s denunciation of ‘communists’, ‘protectionists’ and ‘environmentalists’ intent on destroying Peru is not incidental to this project of rule; it is not a quirk or a meaningless idiosyncrasy and neither can it be reduced to a product of the emotional imprint on García of
the historical rivalries between APRA and the Peruvian Communist Party. Rather, I suggest that in Peru, as in Sarkozy’s France, the ‘primitive fear’ expressed in García’s interpellation of the spectre of communism reveals, precisely, how projects of rule are enacted against the population. In effect, what García invokes when he refers to communists, protectionists and environmentalists, that is when he refers to a recalcitrant anti-capitalist Other, is Peru’s indigenous population, or, more precisely, that which the indigenous population is seen to represent in the project of rule: ‘backwardness’. What the fear expresses is the belief that indigeneity is a block to national advancement. I argue therefore that García’s capitalist revolution, ultimately, is an attempt to overcome indigeneity, to de-Indianize Peru: like the previous projects of rule of which this is only the latest iteration, it is as much a cultural revolution as it is an economic one. And like previous projects of rule it is, to put it mildly, abrasive, precisely because it operates primarily through sovereign power rather than governmentality.14

On 28 July 2010, García delivered his final speech to the nation before he hands over to his successor following the 2011 general elections. The speech is best described as business-like; and it was the business-like character of the speech that his supporters applauded and that his critics disapproved of. In a sense, much of the debate on García’s government can be reduced to the question of whether a country can, or should, be run according to business criteria, and whether the President should operate as a CEO, or not. To a significant extent, the speech did not depart from what is now a familiar script: García promised that in his final year in office he would guarantee economic stability and social order. But the speech was also marked by a critique of ‘trickle-down’ policies, by an emphasis on the role of the state in the development of infrastructure, and paid significant attention to social policy, particularly to education and public health. And yet, as several commentators noted, García’s government has underperformed in these areas to such an extent that the attention given to them in the final speech only serves to highlight their extreme deficiency.15 Indeed, if something has characterized recent, and indeed not so recent, state policies in Peru it is a sustained human de-capitalization. As physical and financial capital (whether it be new infrastructural investment or international reserves) expands significantly in Peru, the under-investment in human capital is all the more striking. Certain sectors of the Left account for this divergence by arguing that García’s government operates as the executive committee of a series of business interests, both local and global. This is part of the story of course. But the divergence is also expressive of the particular configuration of sovereignty and governmentality in Peru.

To be sure, Peru, in many ways, has indeed undergone a ‘capitalist revolution’ along lines set out in the Washington Consensus reforms implemented by Fujimori in the 1990s and largely reproduced by both Alejandro Toledo (2001–2006) and García (since 2006) in the last decade.16 In many respects, this is a highly successful revolution. Growth rates are among the highest in the world. Certainly, in 2009 the global financial crisis registered in a sharp downturn in GDP but, unlike most economies, Peru continued to grow (in large part thanks to a fiscal stimulus equivalent to ten percent of GDP), albeit at a very low rate.17 In 2010 GDP growth rebounded sharply and was the highest in the world at almost ten percent. Moreover, the ‘quality’ of growth in Peru departs in several respects from previous patterns of export-led growth, or rather of export-led boom and bust cycles, which have characterized the
country’s economic fortunes since the mid-nineteenth century guano boom (Thorp and Bertram 1978). For sure, export commodities continue to play a key role in Peru’s economic fortunes, but the export quantum, though still dominated by minerals, is increasingly diversified and includes both a growing range of non-traditional primary commodities (particularly foodstuffs such as asparagus, paprika, mangos and coffee), and manufactured goods. More important, there are increasing signs of a meaningful diversification in the engines of growth away from primary exports and towards internal consumption, particularly in the sphere of housing (a transformation which reflects a growing access to credit for a broader proportion of the Peruvian population – on which more below). Diversification is also apparent in capital formation in Peru: although foreign investment remains dominant, Peruvian business groups play an increasingly important role in the development of traditional and non-traditional economic sectors. Yet, as many observers stress, this economic bonanza is far from being unproblematic.

One of the most interesting but little examined social consequences of Peru’s recent economic growth has been the consolidation of a new social stratification based primarily on patterns of consumption. If class has any meaning in Peru today it is primarily as an expression of consumption, much of it conspicuous for sure, rather than production (more Thorstein Veblen than Karl Marx). And the key apparatus of class distinction is arguably access to credit. In a sense, Peruvian society is divided into three social classes: those with access to unlimited credit, those with access to some credit at still relatively high rates (although lower than in many other Latin American countries), and those excluded from credit. The visibility of credit is most evident in the extraordinary construction boom that the city has experienced, and which, as I have already noted, now plays a key role as an engine of growth. Prior to the 1990s, self-construction ostensibly was the only option for lower income Peruvians, in Lima as elsewhere. It was a process that depended on gradual capital accumulation, as the proliferation of half-finished homes throughout the country demonstrated. Today, much of the construction boom, led by construction companies large and small, is directed at so-called sectors C and D who are now able to access credit at reasonable rates. But this credit boom is built on exclusions that reveal the shaky foundations of Peru’s current ‘prosperity’. Perhaps the most poignant scene in Josué Mendez’s award-winning film Días de Santiago, released in 2004, revolves around the denial of credit. The hero, Santiago, a soldier who has returned from a tour of duty in the highlands and is having difficulty reintegrating into civilian life, is denied credit in a white-goods store where he is trying to buy an appliance. The scene vividly illustrates the social death that results from the denial of credit, the banishment of the hero to a status of non-being, outside of society. Credit, in short, has become a marker of citizenship.

More generally, much of the critique of the economic ‘model’ pursued by Peruvian governments since the 1990s has focused on what many see as the cost to the national interest of foreign investment. Critics argue that highly favourable tax and royalty regimes have created an attractive set of conditions for foreign mining, hydrocarbon, and infrastructure companies, reflected in substantial capital inflows, but at a high cost: while foreign companies reap astronomical profits from high commodity prices, neither the treasury nor ordinary Peruvians obtain much benefit while the country’s natural resources (minerals or gas) are gradually depleted. Moreover, lax environmental supervision, deficient labour legislation, and rarely enforced corporate responsibility
legislation have produced a series of conflicts pitting largely unaccountable firms against local communities in which the government has typically sided with the former. While Peru’s impressive GDP figures and reputation for sound economic management are applauded in the corridors of multilateral institutions in Washington DC and boardrooms in Wall Street and the City of London, many Peruvians are asking what purpose this growth serves if its main consequence is to improve the balance sheets of foreign firms and line the pockets of a few local capitalists. To be sure, some social benefit has accrued from this growth, not least in the shape of some downward pressure on poverty levels and an expansion in employment in certain economic sectors and certain parts of the country. However, even this limited social benefit serves primarily to highlight the underlying inequalities and exclusions that this model of ‘development’ at once reflects and, in turn, reproduces.

At the same time, critics have commented on the ways in which neoliberal reforms in the economic sphere, begun by Fujimori (1990–2000) but continued by both Toledo (2001–2006) and García since 2006, have not led, as some theorists assume, to the consolidation of an idealized liberal democracy, but rather to a suboptimal politics characterized by clientelism, corruption, limited accountability, and authoritarianism. Perhaps inevitably, Peruvians have little to no confidence in their country’s public institutions and a high percentage view democracy as suspect. Despite leading the only consolidated ‘mass’ party in the country, APRA, García has favoured a hyper-presidential style and done little to address the severe lack of institutionalization of the country. Although the interim government of Valentín Paniagua (2000–2001) and the Toledo administration initiated a number of reforms in various areas, such as the judiciary, for the most part they have not been continued by García. Like Fujimori, García has opted for a sort of politics of (infrastructural) spectacle. Fujimori channelled extensive resources through the Ministry of the Presidency with which he was very closely identified (including through the use of a particular colour of paint – orange) in order to set up physical testaments to his rule in the shape of schools and hospitals. García has taken this strategy to a new level in terms of scale and arguably political ability. If Fujimori associated his rule to new schools and public health dispensaries, García associates his to major road projects, huge port modernizations, massive irrigation schemes, and large-scale exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Far less reliant on fiscal resources and able to draw on large inflows of foreign direct investment, García has developed a spectacular politics on a scale and on a scope expressive of a sovereign ambition not witnessed in Peru since the government of Augusto B. Leguía (1919–1930).

There are two ways to make sense of Peru’s recent economic and political development. One way is to suggest that it corresponds to a deviation from a norm and argue that problems inherent to Peru account for the failure of neoliberal reforms to map seamlessly onto, or, indeed, beget, liberal democracy. Such problems include institutional rigidities (structural obstacles to optimal institutional arrangements – typically recalcitrant unions or, say, a poorly educated workforce) and, as Nobel winner Mario Vargas Llosa suggests, a cultural aversion to modernity. Another is to argue that contrary to what are ultimately tenuous assumptions about the commensurability between liberal democracy and neoliberal economics, neoliberalism is, in fact, perfectly compatible with, and may in fact favour, the advent of less-than-liberal politics (something that, of course, Chileans and Argentines who lived through
the neoliberal experiments of their military juntas know better than most). Kurt Weyland has pointed to the synergies and affinities that characterize neoliberalism and neopopulism; that is to say, Weyland has uncovered the ways in which economic policies associated with neoliberalism cross-fertilize with the political policies associated with neopopulism (1996; 1999). Wendy Brown, meanwhile, has explored the commensurability between neoliberalism and neo-conservatism in the context of post 9/11 United States politics, and suggests that neoliberal rationality has created the conditions for the erosion of liberal values and institutions and for the emergence of illiberal and obscurantist forms of politics (2003; 2006).

This brings us back both to the dog in the manger rhetoric and to sovereignty and governmentality. I would argue that García expresses a project of rule characterized by the privileging of sovereignty over governmentality; that is, a politics that privileges the police or discipline of the population over its ‘improvement’ and constitution as self-regulating free subjects in the sense that while governmental power is deployed among a minority of the population, sovereign power is used to discipline a majority. As I have suggested elsewhere, processes of governmentalization, a project of rule based on what Tania Murray Li has called the ‘will to improve’, are very much discernable in Peruvian history. But such projects clearly do not represent the supplanting of sovereignty by governmentality in a neat teleological progression. Instead Peru, today and in the past, is best characterized by the presence of islands of governmentality in a sea of sovereignty. This configuration reflects the ways in which projects of rule in Peru have focused not on the management of the population as a whole but rather on the micro-management of sectors of the population in ways that express racialized understandings of the ontological capacity of different population groups to contribute to, and indeed be subjects of, projects of ‘improvement’ and national ‘progress’ more generally. It is a configuration that accounts for the fact that historically projects of rule in Peru have been enacted not for but against the population. García’s second term is the most recent instantiation of this. That projects of rule in Peru privilege sovereignty over governmentality is perhaps not surprising if we understand state sovereignty to be, as Hansen and Steputtat note, ‘an aspiration that seeks to create itself in the face of internally fragmented, unevenly distributed, and unpredictable configurations of political authority that exercise more or less legitimate violence in a territory’ (2005: 3).

Take, for instance or perhaps a fortiori, the case of the Bagua ‘massacre’ of June 2009, when a protest near the town of Bagua over legislation (in the context of the Free Trade Agreement signed with the United States) that would have effectively eased natural resource extraction from the Amazon resulted in violence, with several, including a large number of police officers, killed, or indeed, any conflict over the control and management of natural resources during García’s administration. Ultimately, i.e. beyond the specific social, environmental and political issues that each conflict reflects, what Bagua and other similar conflicts reveal is the ways in which, much as in the Asian cases studied by Ong, the neoliberal project undergirding Peru’s economic expansion hinges on a differentiation between populations subject to sovereign power and populations subject to governmentality. Put otherwise, these conflicts reveal how for the purposes of resource extraction, the biopolitical management of populations that are perceived to be recalcitrant or outright hostile is performed not through governmental power (through dispositions that make populations behave as they ought) but rather through sovereign power; through police
or discipline. There is, for the most part, no attempt here to rule through extending freedom to these populations; in fact it is their freedom that is perceived to be the problem. But the deployment of sovereign power over these populations reflects more than a strategy to manage their recalcitrance. It expresses the belief that these populations are in fact not amenable to governmentalization by virtue of who they are. In other words, what mediates the differentiation between populations considered amenable to sovereign power and populations considered amenable to governmentality is only partially how they relate politically to neoliberal projects and primarily how their identities as, say, poor indigenous women who happen to have joined a protest over industrial pollution determine their commensurability with those very same neoliberal projects.

Herein then lies the importance of the sovereign prerogative to declare who is the internal enemy because the enemy is not exclusively a political enemy but also, and in fact primarily, a biopolitical one. Indeed, as García’s policies certainly intimate, the main enemies of García’s project are less the ideological enemies (whose ideas are, in any case, costless to dismiss) than the flesh and bones enemies (whose bodies, it transcends, are equally expendable). But as the dog in the manger rhetoric shows, García’s strategy consists in conflating the two, or rather, in assigning a specific political identity – communist – to all opponents of his economic policies. It is, on the one hand, a logical strategy. After all, Peru’s descent into chaos in the 1980s and early 1990s was to a significant extent the product of an insurgency led by a party that called itself Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso (although we should not forget García’s own role in that debacle, or rather and ironically, the role of a García, who, as president from 1985 to 1990 introduced a series of ‘heterodox’ economic policies that bankrupted the country, that today’s García would most likely denounce as a communist!). What better way to demonize those who oppose yet another mining concession or the privatization of communal lands than to associate them with Abimael Guzmán and his followers. The strategy is impeccable of course: Shining Path brought Peru to the edge of national implosion; the anti-mining protesters are doing likewise. Since it is the prerogative of the sovereign to defend the national territory against internal and external enemies, it follows that the sovereign is entitled to discipline the anti-mining protesters much as it did the Shining Path militants. Who could question this prerogative or demand accountability from the sovereign when the polity is in such danger?

In conflating political and biopolitical enemies in this way, García in fact, and here I return to Badiou, taps into an essential or primitive fear in Peru, as a recent example illustrates. By law, Peruvians must fly the national flag on 28 July, national day, when the country celebrates independence from Spain in 1821. In mid 2010 in the Miraflores district of Lima, someone decided to hang a Peruvian flag from their balcony. The flag had its centre a drawing of the face of Tupac Amaru II, or José Gabriel Condorcanqui, who led a mass rebellion in the late eighteenth century against the colonial authorities. This drawing, by the artist Cherman, is part of a series of stylized portraits of ‘superheroes de la Patria [superheroes of the Fatherland].’ Upon finding the flag hanging from the balcony, some neighbours alerted the police after they, perhaps not completely unreasonably, assumed that the flag was the flag of the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, an insurgent group which operated in the 1980s and briefly resurfaced in late 1996 when a small group of militants took hostage guests at a reception at the Japanese ambassador’s residence. The MRTA’s flag, as is well known,
is essentially a Peruvian flag with Tupac Amaru’s face (although it must be stressed that Cherman’s rendition of Tupac Amaru’s face is completely different to the MRTA’s rendition), flanked by a FAL rifle and a chakana (Inca club) in the middle. The police arrived with the press in tow. One news network set about interviewing some of the neighbours who appeared concerned by the presence of the flag; a worrying reminder no doubt of the years of insecurity that Peruvians lived through in the 1980s and early 1990s. But what was most striking about this episode was the comment one of the neighbours made to a news-reporter. Looking up at the flag, this neighbour commented in a matter-of-fact way, ‘parece la cara de una empleada, o de Tupac Amaru, no sé [it looks like the face of female domestic worker, or Tupac Amaru, I don’t know]’. 24

This particular (unconscious?) conflation of an insurgent leftist group, the national hero Tupac Amaru II, and a domestic servant reveals the ways many middle-class Peruvians view their domestic servants, who are typically indigenous or cholo, as a sort of fifth column, a threatening Other on which they reluctantly depend for menial services, but, more generally, the ways the same Peruvians view other Peruvians, invariably constructed as racialized Others, as a broader threat to the integrity of the nation. 25 It is a conflation that has a specific, and revealing, history. During the years of the internal armed conflict, many white middle-class Peruvians began to suspect, and certainly to fear, that their empleadas were Senderistas. The origin of this fear was a simple conflation, indeed the very conflation that likely led the neighbour to associate an empleada with the MRTA: Shining Path, it was argued, had originated in the Andean highlands, specifically in Ayacucho, one of the poorest and, so it was claimed, backward and forsaken regions of Peru, and was beginning to penetrate the cities, and particularly Lima. The empleadas who worked in Lima’s middle-class homes were also from the Andean highlands, from places that most white middle-class Peruvians had never heard of and had little interest in. It followed that these empleadas could very well be Shining Path militants, members of sleeper cells who, once activated, would wreak havoc. This fear, it must be understood, was a highly racialized fear, a fear born of equal amounts of ignorance of, and contempt towards, the indigenous and the Andean. It was a fear all the more gripping precisely because it conflated a political (Shining Path/MRTA) and a biopolitical (the indigenous) threat. García taps into this fear, or what this fear expresses, with the dog in the manger rhetoric, and with its interpellation of communism, precisely because he understands that many Peruvians agree with him that those who oppose his capitalist revolution, whether ‘communists’ or ‘environmentalists’, are threats to the nation, much like Shining Path was in the 1980s and 1990s and continues to be as a latent force (a bogeyman), because they are obstacles to Peru’s progress.

The dog in the manger rhetoric interpellates a communist threat that evokes still very real fears in the Peruvian population in order to legitimate itself. But its real target is Peru’s indigenous population, or rather, that which many Peruvians associate indigeneity with: backwardness, or, to be more precise, explanations or indeed justifications for national backwardness. As I have suggested elsewhere, the idea that the indigenous represent an obstacle to Peru has deep historical roots and is key to the myriad racialized inequalities and exclusions that characterize Peruvian society. 26 Garcia invokes through the dog in the manger rhetoric an old trope in Peruvian thought: the notion that Peru is a ‘beggar sitting on a golden stool’; that it is rich and
yet poor, that it has countless natural resources but is incapable of exploiting them successfully. Peruvians have explained this failure to take advantage of the country’s presumed vast natural resources by either blaming others (the Spaniards, the British, the Chileans, etc.) or themselves, that is to say, their indigenous population, which, because of its inherent racial and moral backwardness, has been deemed incapable of transforming itself from a beggar into a king. As García states: ‘when I visit the city of Ilo and I see its urban development, which is the most advanced in Peru, I know that it is the product of mining and [commercial] fishing and it pains me to compare it with the village of Ayabaca, which has more mining resources that the Cuajone mine in the south of the country, but which experiences the greatest poverty’. 27 ‘Ayabaca’ here stands for a Peru stuck in what Mario Vargas Llosa once called an ‘archaic utopia’. 28 More generally, García expresses in this statement the belief that Peru will only advance once it has overcome its indigenous character, once it has developed ways to de-Indianize itself. In a sense, García’s dog in the manger rhetoric should be read not only as the articulation of an economic or political project, but also as the expression of a cultural project of national redemption through the evacuation of the Indian, or that which the Indian represents in Peru, from Peru’s history. For this is, after all, the promise of García’s neoliberal revolution and of the mines, the oil and gas concessions, the ports and the roads: a Peru free from the backwardness of its indigenous population, or, more precisely, free from the threat to the neoliberal revolution represented by the backwardness of the indigenous population, which, like the dog in the manger, stops others from doing what it cannot or will not do.

This analysis suggests that the configuration of sovereignty and governmentality in neoliberal Peru resembles most closely the configuration of sovereignty and governmentality in colonial contexts, Latin American and otherwise. As scholars of colonialism in Africa and Asia have suggested, one of the key paradoxes of European colonial regimes is that typically in the course of the nineteenth and, particularly, twentieth centuries, European powers extended freedom to their citizens in the metropolis while actively denying it to populations in their colonial peripheries. Projects of rule in the metropolis were not transposed to the colonies. Rather projects of rule specific to colonial contexts were devised. Forms of colonial sovereignty (or what Achille Mbembe has called commandement) and colonial governmentality therefore emerged. 29 Although European powers ruled their colonies, as they did their metropolis, through a combination of sovereign and governmental power, in the colonies they typically privileged disciplinary over regulatory strategies, so that, as Stephen Legg suggests, colonial governmentality ‘remained wedded to the apparatus of regulation rather than security, to a model of police rather than one of liberalism’ (2007: 25). The role of racism in colonial contexts (or indeed in any context) was to normalize and naturalize hierarchies. But it served also to establish, and justify, distinctions between populations amenable to sovereign power (or, indeed, what Mbembe (2003) calls necropower; the power to subject vast populations to a status of living dead) and populations amenable to governmental power; to improvement. Naturally, there was significant variation between colonial regimes and sites of colonialism, and overlap in sovereign and governmental technologies of rule. But the overall tendency is clear, and serves to contextualize the Peruvian case.

I am not suggesting that García rules Peru according to a colonial logic or that Peru is subject to a form of internal colonialism. I merely wish to point to the affinities that
exist between the particular configuration of sovereignty and governmentality in Peru and in colonial contexts in order to further clarify the role of racism, or of a particular racial grammar, in articulating sovereignty and governmentality in the Peruvian context. The point is to underscore how this racial grammar is functional to García’s neoliberal project in the same way that analogous racial grammars were functional to colonial projects in Africa and Asia, and indeed, in sixteenth to nineteenth-century Latin America. The conflation of political and biopolitical enemies in the dog in the manger rhetoric serves to legitimate a broader discourse which presents the indigenous, and that which they represent, as an obstacle to progress both because they oppose, say, the exploitation of natural resources in the highlands or the building of a road in the Amazon, but also because, as Indians, they are anathema to progress (and therefore incapable, qua Indians, of being subjects of progress). In a sense, for García and for many Peruvians, both today and in the past, it is the unwillingness of the indigenous to cease to be indigenous and their unwillingness to renounce what their indigeneity entails (communal control of resources, for example, but also, more generally, an alternative way of being-in-the-world) which is to blame for Peru’s failure to progress. As García states, ‘and against oil, [the anti-capitalist communists] have created the figure of the “uncontacted” jungle native; which is to say, unknown but presumed, as a consequence of which millions of hectares cannot be explored, and Peruvian oil must stay underground, while the world pays US$90 por cada barril. They prefer it that Peru remains an importer [of oil] and impoverished’. Of course, García appears to make a distinction between communists and the indigenous in this statement. But what is important is that both, real or ‘presumed’, are presented as obstacles to ending Peru’s ‘impoverishment’. This is why, in effect, the indigenous are no different to communists and why, as communists, they are amenable to be declared internal enemies by the sovereign.

Ironically, García’s strategy also carries some risks as the tension between two articles published in the Wall Street Journal illustrate. The first article, published on 28 April 2008, was ostensibly a response to a letter sent by APRODEH, a Peruvian human rights organization, to the European parliament in which it argued that a motion to include the MRTA in a list of terrorist organizations served no real purpose since the organization had been inactive for many years. The article, by Mary Anastasia O’Grady, titled ‘Friends of Terror in Peru’, depicted Peru in an entirely negative light: a country where ‘armed struggle’ was a daily reality, where Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian groups were intent on fomenting social chaos, where ‘human rights’ NGOs (the inverted commas are O’Grady’s) such as APRODEH serve as terrorist fronts and have as their primary goal to bring about in Peru what, according to the author, had happened in Bolivia in 2003: the collapse of the government and its replacement by a chavista puppet government. The second article, published on 3 May, was built around an interview with President García conducted by O’Grady. The image of Peru presented in the second article was the polar opposite of the image presented in the first: Peru is a country experiencing expansive economic growth, led by an enlightened President who believes in the ‘private sector as an engine of human progress’, who has undergone a neoliberal epiphany and whose vision of development is shaped by his understanding that we live in a globalized and open world. The primary problems faced by this government are administrative: problems linked to labour regulation, to the size of the informal sector, with the threat of a galloping inflation rate. There is no mention
in the interview of the MRTA, of Bolivarian groups, of philoterrorist NGOs, of armed struggle. The only reference to Hugo Chávez serves to underscore the difference between García and the Venezuelan president, described as an aspiring dictator. 31

O’Grady’s articles perfectly encapsulate the tensions at the heart of García’s anticommunist hypothesis, or, put otherwise, at the heart of the construction of the neoliberal project as a struggle against a recalcitrant anti-capitalist Other. It is easy to imagine Wall Street investors and employees of risk-rating agencies such as Standard & Poor’s, Moodys or Fitch choking on their bagels as they read the 28 April article: if Peru is indeed overrun by terrorists and Bolivarian groups, then what is to happen to the millions of dollars invested in the country? Surely the increasingly positive risk assessments need to be revised? The 3 May article needs to be read therefore primarily as a rectification: if O’Grady thought she was doing García a favour by denouncing APRODEH’s stance vis-à-vis the European parliament’s vote regarding the MRTA, it is apparent that García’s advisors or García himself made sure to impress on the Wall Street Journal journalist that her article was likely to inflict far more harm on Peru than any letter sent by APRODEH to the European parliament or, for that matter, any supposed terrorist resurgence or Bolivarian group operating in Peru. In short, as this reveals, whereas García needs to present his neoliberal crusade as a struggle against the forces of anti-capitalism and against a political and biopolitical threat to the nation and, in the process conflate in the opposition to his crusade any and all, this strategy has the potential to scupper the very neoliberal revolution that he is spearheading by frightening away the foreign investors, multilateral institutions, and credit-rating agencies on which the revolution so clearly depends.

What this reveals, to conclude, is how García’s capitalist revolution, like so many previous projects of rule, is being enacted against the Peruvian population. It shares much with the capitalist revolutions of his immediate predecessors, Fujimori and Toledo, and indeed with other cultural and economic (or culturo-economic) projects of rule of the past. In my view, it marks a departure in terms of the scale, or ‘spectacularity’, of its ambitions and in the extent to which García instrumentally conflates political and biopolitical threats in order to justify his project of rule. Its success depends not on, to draw on Amartya Sen’s formulation, enhancing the capabilities of Peru’s peoples, but rather on constructing them, or, certainly a significant proportion of the population, as obstacles to progress and ‘development’. In this formulation progress becomes contingent on overcoming such obstacles; typically this translates into discursive and embodied assaults on such sectors of the population; assaults legitimated, as I have shown, by discursive strategies that assimilate those perceived as opposed to, say, mining or hydrocarbon concessions or road building to insurgent groups whose object is to destroy the Peruvian nation. Inevitably in a country such as Peru, this is a highly racialized, indeed racist project. As the analytic framework I have employed here suggests, García’s capitalist revolution should be understood as more than a set of neoliberal economic policies: it is a project of rule characterized by the privileging of sovereignty over governmentality. It is, finally, a project of rule that draws on primitive fears much like Sarkozy’s project of rule in France draws on its own form of primitive fear. I have no answer to the question of what those of us who reject such projects of rule can do to oppose them. But I hope that, by offering a particular reading of how such a project operates, I may contribute to the makings of an answer.
Notes

1 I am grateful to two anonymous JLACS reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this article. This is a revised and updated version of my chapter in García Linera et al. (2010).

2 Although some, such as Nelson Manrique, argue that APRA’s current iteration has far deeper roots in the party’s history than many realise. See Manrique (2009).


5 Of course, several parties in Peru claim the name Communist Party, including the Partido Comunista Peruano (a shadow of its former 1970s and 1980s self), the Partido Comunista del Perú-Patria Roja (partially influential by virtue of its influence in SUTEP, the teachers’ union), and the Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso (again, largely moribund, with most of its leadership in jail). A useful overview of the genealogy of the various parties claiming the name is provided in the report of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, www.cverdad.org.pe.

6 I have written on this in Drinot (forthcoming).

7 As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, the anti-burqa discourse in France is marked by an ambiguous reliance on both universalizing claims (the burqa oppresses all women) and particularistic claims (it is anathema to French culture): ‘problems […] begin with Sarkozy’s statement that veils are “not welcome”, because in a secular country like France, they intimidate and alienate non-Muslims … one cannot but note how the allegedly universalist attack on the burqa on behalf of human rights and women’s dignity ends up as a defense of particular French way of life’ (2010: 1).

8 To be sure, ‘fear’ is common trope in Latin American politics.


10 Much of what has been written on governmentality has been based on two of Foucault’s lectures included in Burchell, Gordon and Miller (1991). It is only recently that the lectures have been published in toto in several languages. See Foucault 2007 and 2008. Useful discussions of these lectures include Valverde 2007 and Donzelot 2008. See also the articles by Stuart Elden, Michael Dillon and Bob Jessop in the Rethinking Governmentality forum in the journal Political Geography 26: 1 (2007): 29–56.

11 See, among others, Prakash (1999); Hannah (2000); Joyce (2003); Ong (2006); Legg (2007); Li (2007). Particularly useful for making sense of governmentality as an analytical approach are Rose (1999); Dean (1999); and Miller and Rose (2008).

12 ‘First the state of justice, born in a feudal type of territoriosity and broadly corresponding to a society of customary and written law, with a whole interplay of commitments and litigations; second, the administrative state that corresponds to a society of regulations and disciplines; and finally a state of government that is no longer essentially defined by its territoriosity, by the surface occupied, but by a mass: the mass of the population, with its volume, its density, and, for sure, the territory it covers, but which is, in a way, only one of its components. This state of government, which essentially bears on the population and calls upon and employs economic knowledge as an instrument, would correspond to a society controlled by apparatuses of security’ (Foucault 2007: 110).
13 For a useful discussion of these lectures, see Lemke (2001).
14 My argument in some ways connects but in other ways departs from the work of Hale (2002) and others on multicultural neoliberalism in Latin America. In my view, in Peru there is little of the hegemonizing or governmentizing multicultural neoliberalism that is identified in other countries. See, however, García (2005).
15 See Martin Tanaka’s article in La República, 1 July 2010.
16 On the idea of a capitalist ‘revolution’ see Althaus (2007).
19 See Seligson, Carrión and Zárate (2009).
20 On institutional reform leading up to García’s second presidency, see Crabtree (2006).
21 See Drinot (2011). See also Li (2007).
25 See, however, artist Natalia Iguíñiz’s extraordinary photographic portraits of Peruvian women and their ‘empleadas’, which subtly challenges, and yet at the same time confirms, dominant perceptions of the racialized nature of this ‘working’ relationship. http://www.nataliaiguiniz.nom.pe/.
26 See Drinot (2006).

References


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