

**A MESTIZO'S  
IDENTITY:  
CONCERNING  
A 1929 ANARCHIST  
MANIFESTO**



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SILVIA RIVERA CUSICANQUI

This essay was originally published in the Bolivian magazine *Contacto* (Año 2 No. 31/32) in 1988, under the title “La identidad de un mestizo: en torno a un man esto anarquista de 1929.” An additional note identifies Cusicanqui as a member of the *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* and adds: “This work was originally presented in the Fifth Conference on Bolivian Studies, Altiplano Region, June 1988.” This translation was originally published in *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 9:1 (2005)

More recently, she has republished the piece as “La identidad *ch’ixi* de un mestizo: En torno a *La Voz del Campesino*, manifiesto anarquista de 1929” in *Ecuador Debate* 84 (December 2011). There she notes the 1988 text was “preliminary” and that she has added some thoughts on “the insurgent potential of *mestizaje* (*lo ch’ixi*) which was not entirely clear to [her] when she first wrote.”

## Introduction

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui is a contemporary Bolivian subaltern theorist, who, unlike many of her colleagues, is influenced by anarchism and indigenous Quechua and Aymara cosmologies more than by Marxism. She was a long-time member of the *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* [Workshop on Andean Oral History], which published pamphlets by indigenous intellectuals as well as longer oral histories.<sup>1</sup> Cusicanqui has also written historical studies of Bolivia<sup>2</sup> in which she emphasizes conceptions of time deriving from indigenous cosmologies and the radical political perspective known as *katarismo*.<sup>3</sup>

Together, these historical studies and oral histories document the struggles of urban and rural peoples: *mestizo*<sup>4</sup> and indigenous peasants struggling to return to and regain communal lands and the collectivist economic form of the *ayllu*<sup>5</sup>; *mestizos*, *cholos*, and *criollo* citizens working as handicrafts people and struggling in anarchist unions. In the article translated here, Cusicanqui documents an attempt by one anarchist to propose the unity of the two struggles. She shows that the urban cholo's indigenous background produces an identification with peasant struggles that was lacking in many of his companions, and which makes it possible for him to propose this otherwise unlikely alliance.

In another important text, "Violencias Encubiertas" [Hidden Violences] Cusicanqui proposes an analysis based on a striking combination of anarchist politics and indigenous conceptions of time to critique the acculturating mission of the

Bolivian state and the mainstream Left's complicity with it. In the U.S., certain forms of *mestizaje* have been held up as subversive new forms of subjectivity. But Cusicanqui demonstrates that in Bolivia, and by extension many other "post-colonial" states, the process of *mestizaje*, or more generally the hybridization of subjectivities, is controlled by the state, programmed by its institutions as part of the long-term destruction of indigenous knowledges and cosmologies. Nevertheless, there is a role for mestizos and others of mixed cultural backgrounds to play in political struggles: this article and the manifesto included with it are a significant gesture in that direction.

I hope that this translation contributes to rethinking some common anarchist ideas concerning cultural differences and political commitment, and presents new working concepts of historical time and revolution, as well as offering a richly historical and concrete case of the idea of a "multiple self" whose multiplicity is not a block to action but its very motivation.

- Alejandro de Acosta

1986; Zulema Lehm, "La lucha comunaria en torno a la contribución territorial y a la prestación de servicios gratuitos durante el período republicano (1920-1925)," unpublished manuscript.

17. *El Hombre*, Montevideo, Apr. 10, 1924.

18. "Breve diálogo sobre la relación entre el movimiento anarquista y el movimiento indio," in *Historia Oral* 1, La Paz, November 1986.

19. Archivo de La Paz - UMSA. Fondo Corte Superior de Distrito. 1920.

20. Certainly, there were also anarchists of this type, in Bolivia and elsewhere. But there was also an Ezequiel Urviola in Puno, and an itinerant Paulino Aguilar, leader of the Federación Indígena Obrera Regional Peruana until his deportation by the Leguía government in 1928. They were also key points of reference for Cusicanqui. In his private archive there are interesting samples of the correspondence between Cusicanqui and Aguilar.

21. To consider the other as "not people" had been, according to Jan Szeminski, a constitutive trait of the confrontation between Spaniards and Indians during the rebellion of Tupac Amaru in 1780-1781. This confirms the continuity of the colonial event in the republican stage. See *La utopía tupamarista*, Lima: PUC, 1984, p. 194.

22. "1886 – May 1st – 1938. Manifiesto of the Federacion Obrera Local. To the working class in general." Archives of the THOA.

23. A messianism embodied by many mestizos of the south of Peru, as Flores Galindo has shown, by founding their struggle on the return of the Inca. See, for example, "Los sueños de Gabriel Aguilar," in Alberto Flores Galindo, *Buscando un Inca: identidad y utopía en los Andes*, La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1986.

24. This document was found among the private papers of Luis Cusicanqui, published in the form of a manifesto, with his handwritten signature at the end. Through references obtained in other documents, we know that it was distributed in May 1929, and brought about his imprisonment and the persecution of other anarchist organizers such as Modesto Escobar, who was also closely involved with propaganda activities in the countryside.

Becerra, president from 1937 to 1939. [Tr.]

8. An even more eloquent proof is the appended document. As is known, Cusicanqui was the son of an indigenous peasant and a mestizo descended from caciques of the *ayllu Q'alaq'utu* of Pacajes. Aymara was his first language and he spoke it fluently.

9. According to a well-known text by Luis H. Antezana, Revolutionary Nationalism was the *ideologeme* or central ideological paradigm of the state in 1952. Its irradiation capacity was based in the flexible ideological field opened up between its two poles: Nationalism vs. Revolution. See "Sistemas y procesos ideológicos en Bolivia," in Zavaleta (ed.) *Bolivia hoy*. Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1983.

10. Emphasis ours. The reference to "indigenous communists" is clearly to an anarchist communism. This text is a report sent by Cusicanqui to the editorial board of the Urugayan anarchist newspaper *El Hombre* (Montevideo, October 1, 1929) under the pseudonym "Aymara Indian." He relates the repressive actions of the government, including his own deportation. It was in fact the diffusion of *The Peasant's Voice* that brought about his imprisonment.

11. In the grammatical structure of Aymara, there are two types of first person plural: the inclusive we (*jiwasa*), and the exclusive we (*nanaka*). The first refers to situations in which the subject includes the interlocutor, while the second refers to a "we" that excludes the interlocutor.

12. Though this does not imply a conception of Andean communities as "societies against the State," as with the Amazonian societies studied by Clastres, but rather, specifically, societies without states, societies that the colonial invasion rid of their own political state structure. See Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l'Etat*, Paris: Minuit, 1974.

13. A *pongo* is an indigenous person subject to *pongeaje*, a system of forced labor prominent in Bolivia as well as Chile, Ecuador, and Peru. [Tr.]

14. The racial qualification "Mulatto" in reference to the oligarchy of the Rotary Club is puzzling. Linguistic revenge? An allusion to someone in particular?

15. The term *cacique* is a general term used throughout Latin America for an indigenous leader. The movement of *caciques-apoderados* dates from 1914, when the Bolivian authorities refused to recognize the authority of hereditary indigenous leaders. Working from La Paz, they demanded the return of stolen communal lands and the abolition of the draft, as well as rural schools (as competence in Spanish was a crucial tool in dealing with the government). [Tr.]

16. See Taller de Historial Oral Andina, *El indio Santos Marka T'ula, cacique principal de los ayllus de Quallapa y apoderado general de las comunidades originates de la República*. THOA, 1984; Silvia Rivera, "Pedimos la revisión general de límites: Un episodio de incomunicación de castas en el movimiento de caciques apoderados de los Andes bolivianos," presentation for the *Simposio sobre Reproducción y Transformación de las sociedades andinas, Siglos XVI-XX*. Social Science Research Council, Quito, 28-30 July

## A Mestizo's Identity: Concerning a 1929 Anarchist Manifesto

To the memory of Catalina Mendoza  
& Nieves Munguía

The document I will analyze is a significant example of anarchist activity in our country before the Chaco war.<sup>6</sup> Its author, the mechanic Luis Cusicanqui, was among the most creative and persistent anarchist ideologues. He animated the *Grupo de Propaganda Libertaria "La Antorcha"* from the beginning of the 1920s, and later the *Federación Obrera Local de La Paz*. He was the secretary general of the latter union in 1940, when libertarians had already suffered the violence of state repression and the politics of cooptation and neutralization of Toro and Busch.<sup>7</sup>

We should not regard Cusicanqui's trajectory as exceptional. Many working class men and women also interwove manual labor with a wide humanistic self-education as well as the everyday tasks of agitation and propaganda. They composed texts of philosophical and doctrinal reflection, and ventured into essays and theater, neither deserting their jobs nor becoming "professional" politicians or ideologues. That is why his political philosophy is closely woven into his everyday experience. In this experience, comradeship [*convivencia*] and solidarity at work alternate with confrontation and suffering before the oppressor's tyranny.

The document reveals Cusicanqui's character as an agitator. In it we can observe the combination of experience and reflection so characteristic of anarchist writings, and, precisely because of that combination, so distant from contemporary political rhetoric. It is a document addressed to the countryside, written in the first person. However, it was not written from the countryside, but from the city. Could it be a romantic gesture, a paternalistic approximation of the reality of Aymara peasants? Could it be a matter of

demagogic impersonation? Or was the document truly written by an Indian, simply translating Indian thought? A rearguard indigenist might affirm, seeing Cusicanqui's photograph that, yes, one has but to see his face to know that he was Indian.

But things are not so simple. Cusicanqui, as a result of his education, because of two entwined tongues that permanently did battle in his brain,<sup>8</sup> because of his familial trajectory, was a mestizo, or at least an acculturated Indian. In these brief notes, I will attempt to elucidate, however partially, this aspect of anarchist thought and history in Bolivia, as it appears in light of this singular text and its author's personal stamp.

Throughout the entire document, we must attend to the "I" and the "we": usually, the collective "we" refers to the *Indian*, though sometimes Cusicanqui also uses the word *campesino*, peasant ["*campesino*" refers to "*campo*," country side].

Let us begin with the title: *The Peasant's Voice* does not so much indicate the content of the text as it eludes it. The identification is clearer in the lines that follow, though it is stated through opposition: "our challenge to the great *mistes* [white men, or mestizos identified culturally as white] of the State." *Miste*, *misti*, State = *misti*: that is, we, the Indians, against our enemies, the *mistis* and their state.

It is important to clarify that the term *campesino*, in the decade of the 1920s, did not convey the ideological hodgepodge [K'umunta] that ineffable Revolutionary Nationalism put into it.<sup>9</sup> Among the *misti* classes it was simply a term adopted as a euphemistic synonym for Indian (that is, by and large, how it continues to be used today) because, perhaps, of the *misti* classes' shame before others or before themselves due to such a clearly colonial relation. In any case, this shame was likely a hidden motivation for its official use after 1952. That is why it continues to evidence a K'umunta, or linguistic servitude [*pongueaje*].

But Cusicanqui neither speaks nor constructs his sentences as a *misti*. For him, the use of the term "*campesino*" seems to have both a rationalizing and an organizing meaning. It is an attempt at precision that becomes transparent through its context. For example, when he writes, "peasants of the commune or of the *hacienda*;" "Indian" would be the broader generic identification wherein shades and differentiations of locality and activity are no longer necessary. "Peasant," on the other hand, would designate Indians of the countryside, as opposed to those of the city. In this case, it would refer specifically to those that work and live in communes or haciendas. The same is true when he speaks of shepherds [*pastores*], using an exemplary construction: "The poor peasant sets out to be a shepherd, and in a year's time has all his livestock snatched away." (See the appended manifesto, pp. 8-9).

## Endnotes

1. *Los artesanos libertarios y la ética del trabajo* ["Libertarian crafts men and the ethic of labor"] is of particular interest to anarchists. [Tr.]
2. One such study is "*Oprimidos pero no vencidos*": *luchas del campesinado aymara y quechua de Bolivia* ["Opressed but not defeated": struggles of the Aymara and Quechua peasantry in Bolivia"]. [Tr.]
3. *Katarismo* was a Bolivian ideological current that began in the late sixties. In La Paz, indigenous Aymara intellectuals who had entered the universities sought to understand the effects of colonialism in history as well as in everyday life. As Aymaras from the countryside, they sought to reaffirm the subversive current of indigenous thought and practice that resisted not only the Western project of domination and acculturation but also the misguided liberal project of the assimilating nation-state. See Javier Sanjinés, *Mestizaje Upside-Down*. [Tr.]
4. A note on the "racial"/cultural nomenclatures used in the text: conventionally, a *mestizo* is the child of an indigenous parent and a parent of European descent. More generally, *mestizaje* is the process of cultural mixture or hybridization concurrent with the cohabitation and mixtures of peoples. In the present context, it typically denotes acculturation to Hispanic norms. *Criollos* are those of European descent. *Cholos* were originally designated as the child of an Indian and a *mestizo*; the term is used more generally for anyone of mixed or primarily indigenous heritage who lives in the city and is assumed to be more acculturated (though this is precisely what Cusicanqui contests in this essay). Due to the inherent instability of racial classifications, and power relations generally, each of these terms has other uses in other parts of Latin America. Finally, as in the United States, the question of the nomenclature of indigenous peoples very much continues to be a controversial one in much of Latin America. Cusicanqui opts for "Indian," but this term should perhaps be interpreted on analogy with "Black" in the context of the U.S. Black Power movement, or, with less need for translation, "Indian" as it continues to be used by some radical native Americans in the United States. [Tr.]
5. The *ayllu* were the basic political, cultural, and economic unit of indigenous life in the Andes, dating from pre-Inca times. They were, in essence, extended kin groups, but were not always limited to ties of consanguinity. Importantly, they were self-governing units based on collective land ownership and agriculture—precisely the sort of "primitive communism" that has always captured the imagination of anarchists. [Tr.]
6. The Chaco war was fought between Bolivia and Paraguay over control of the Chaco Boreal region from 1932 to 1935. Indigenous men in Bolivia were forcibly drafted en masse and more died from diseases such as malaria than fighting. [Tr.]
7. David Toro Ruilova, president of Bolivia from 1936 to 1937; Germán Busch

It could then be that the future society, in its widest and most inclusive sense, translates to this idea: no longer Indians (colonized), but human beings, equal in their rights inasmuch as they are workers, and free to build their own destiny. Was there also recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the society? If we take into account the constant effort of anarchist ideologues to link lived experience with the doctrine gathered from the classics, we can perhaps find an affirmative answer in the proposal of a “federated” society: “Politically, there should be a wide governmental decentralization, under a federated system, respecting the independence and autonomy of every last village and citizen; free expression of thought and of the press; this diversity of thought, tendencies and affinities would make the sciences and arts evolve.”

For Luis Cusicanqui, anarchist and Indian, emancipation was not therefore incarnated in a messianic hope,<sup>23</sup> but rather in the collective historical action of manual laborers (craftsmen and Indian farmers) for whom anarchism comes to be the expression of authentic universality.

Chukiawu, April 1998

Here, the term “poor” is appended to peasant, in a sense that is compassionate, perhaps even paternalistic. But it is also evident that, while resignation and everydayness accompany these uses of peasant, “Indian” is the term chosen when it is time to present epic truths—historical truths, I would call them—in his text or narration. For example:

*We have suffered the most wicked slavery possible in the republican moment that offered us independence—it cost us life and Indian blood to free ourselves from the Spanish yoke.*

*Watch out, Indian brothers of the American race: spilt blood will be the harbinger of the revolution over throwing this vile society, cursed a thousand times over...*

Epic moments par excellence: independence and the future revolution (a revolution explicitly announced as Indian) are diametrically opposed. The oppression of “four hundred years” at the hands of Spanish colonizers has superimposed on it another oppression, even more humiliating for being deceptive: that of living in a republic of formal citizenship in which, however, one suffers “the most wicked slavery possible in the republican moment.”

In fact, here we ought to add an historic detail: the time of this manifesto was one of the most critical moments in a long phase of expropriation and communal resistance, which would come to a head in the holocaust of the Chaco war. The means that the landholding oligarchy employed in order to perpetrate these expropriations appear to have been familiar to Cusicanqui, perhaps lived in the flesh by him or his close relatives.

*The pants-wearing criollos, lash in hand abuse us, woman, man, child and elder, just as they enslave us.*

*What will we say of the sage Lawyers and other petty officials? Oh! They are the greatest thieves and bandits! They rob us, Law in hand and if we say anything we are beaten and on top of that we are sent to prison for ten years, and meanwhile, they cast out our wife and children, and finish by burning our little houses and we are targets for the bullets these honorably learned men...*

The chronology of resistance also offers a proof of the identification Cusicanqui makes between the lived experience of the peasants of the high plateau and that of the manual workers of the cities. He mentions, among others, the rebellion of Zárata Willka in 1899 and the massacre of Jesús de Machaca in 1921, side by side with “the latest events of Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre.” Another text signed by Cusicanqui clarifies this last reference.

*This year the situation has become more distressing. Because of the threat of war with Paraguay, many Indian workers demonstrated in resistance to a conflict that they knew to be intentionally provoked by capitalists and politicians. The consequence is the repression in Oroco, Cochabamba, Potosí with some indigenous communists assassinated by the hangmen of Siles, and others imprisoned: Cusicanqui, imprisoned at the foot of the majestic Illimani, in the canton Cohoni, and M. O. Quispe, imprisoned in Yungas.*<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, for Cusicanqui, these events of repression against the workers' movement of the cities must be situated in the same line as the confrontations of Indian society against the state and the landholders. According to his own words, the demonstrators are "Indian workers," and their leaders, "indigenous communists." That is to say, the collective identity attributed in this text to the urban craftsmen, the exclusive "we" of Cusicanqui,<sup>11</sup> as opposed to the inclusive "we" (who would be the Indian) coincides fully with the protagonists of Willca Zárate's rebellion, or that of Jesús de Machada, at least in the context of confrontation with a common enemy.

That is to say, it is as a matter of a shared identity, defined by opposition, that a collective subject is generated. This subject includes Indian peasants and farmers, as well as mestizo craftsmen and manual workers. The first line of solidarity between them would be the struggle against the misti-State; a caste state, which stands for colonial oppression as well as the exclusion of the working majority—and urban craftsmen are not free from this exclusion. We find here a complex elaboration and interlinking of anarchist doctrine and lived identity, experienced in an everyday manner by men such as him, inhabitants of the junction between two worlds. Ideologically, it was possible to build a bridge between the anti-statism of anarchist doctrine and the historical anti-statism of Indian communities in the colonial context.<sup>12</sup> This bridge is clear, for example, in the argument he wields against the identity card. But, existentially, the indignation emerged from the same shared experience: that of discrimination and exclusion.

That is why Cusicanqui's wide, inclusive identity (his Indian identity) gives rise to the most resounding and heartfelt words of his manifesto. All of the moral indignation, the creative rage of the text is concentrated precisely in those phrases where the enemy is identified as the Indian's enemy, or where he denounces the paradoxes, even more contemptible, of a criollo hypocrisy and double morality lived by a false world of citizens (republican, educated). An example: "Why did the governors not make the servant [pongo<sup>13</sup>] happy with the Remuneration Law? Today he is nothing—the barbarous idiotic Mulattos of the Rotary Club's Zetas have the say here."<sup>14</sup>

The past is therefore dignity and communal life, but also regression, stagnation caused by oppression, by the rupture of the autonomous development of the colonized society. Here the amalgam of anarchist doctrine and the experience of oppression become more evident. The Indian (the victim who is identified frequently, in the text, with the peasant, with the particularist and exclusive identity) is he who, chained to the yoke of oppression, comes to embody a forced, imposed involution that would lead to stultification, mean behavior, and humiliation. Against this moral regression, the future revolution, the *emancipation* (a term dear to the anarchists) would permit access to universality, without the renunciation of one's own history, culture, and collective creativity. But later, we find an allusion to an alliance with "poor mestizos"—the ones who, as opposed to the mistis and their state, could be possible interlocutors of the emancipatory proposition.<sup>20</sup> To whom is this phrase directed? Other comrades, craftsmen, anarchists like him, more Westernized, who considered the Indian as a hindrance to social progress? What is clear is that, because of the threatening tone of the text, the Indian demand prevails over any other consideration of doctrine:

*Watch out, Indian brothers of the American race: spilt blood will be the har-binger of the revolution overthrowing this vile society, cursed a thousand times over. Our caciques bought and assassinated by the "mistis" (...) blood must be spilled as before because we are tired of the present domination, we know all too well the Vampires of the dominant State and its dirty tricks; the poor mestizo does not guide us to liberation, we the Indians will make torrents of copper blood run in América Bolivia.*

It is not possible for us to elucidate this point in greater depth, because the manifesto, and the political proposal it embodies, is ideologically constructed from the point of view of opposition as the source of identity. They tell us little or nothing explicitly about the characteristics of the future society hoped for by Cusicanqui. However, we can catch a glimpse of the basically humanistic character of his postulates: the paradox of oppression in a liberal state consists in that it deceitfully calls for a recognition of the rights of all, as workers and as citizens, but in fact denies even the human condition of the oppressed.<sup>21</sup>

*Now, we ask: where is the right of peoples? Who do the Governors call people? ... We, the Indians enclosed in the Andean steppe of America entirely because of the work of our oppressors: the Bolivian Indian has his hypocritical sympathizers in monks and the clergy, but behind all of it, our complete disappearance is forged in the heart of civilization, which hands us gallow's laws.*



*of the Indians against their cruel masters, the rage of the people against its oppressors.*<sup>17</sup>

The impression left by the assassination of Callisaya must have been intensified by the encounter that Cusicanqui had in 1928 with Santos Marka T'ula. The cacique leader went to the *Federación Obrera Local de La Paz* in search of solidarity and support for the peasant cause, according to the testimony of the comrades Teodoro Peñaloza, Max Mendoza, and Lisandro Rogas.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly, the composition of *The Peasant's Voice* was heavily influenced by this direct contact between anarchist leaders and Indian authorities, linked together in a perception that, for Cusicanqui, was firmly tied to previous experiences and convictions. Not only the style of the composition, wherein the influence of the mother tongue is clearly noticeable, but also the chronological reversal of the manifesto, allow us to conceive of an "invasion" of Indian logic into the thought of the anarchist ideologue.

Moreover, rage is timeless. As in any ethics, the judgment that emanates from this event is projected across time as a moral teaching and evaluation. Even today, reading the verdict on the murder of Prudencio Callisaya,<sup>19</sup> it makes one indignant to realize that, after he was assassinated in the *Guaqui cuartel*, at the hands of Col. Julio Sanjinés (son-in-law of Benedicta Goytia) his relatives discovered the crime and began a long trial, which concluded in enormous frustration. At many times throughout the trial, they attempted to show the delinquent character of the deed; three times they were subjected to the painful legal procedure of autopsy and appealed to the Superior District Court with reliable proofs. All in vain: the complicit and bastard justice that their caste had created when it assumed its republican face never touched Sanjinés and Goytia.

Solidarity with Callisaya is, then, fraternal, almost a kinship tie. It is anger in the name of an assassinated brother. Blood ties are also revealed in other phrases that clarify the inclusive identity assumed by Cusicanqui: "We the eternal martyrs feel the rawness of the scars that you opened on our ancestors. How is it that we can contribute by complying with the sarcastic law called rent tax? Our elders left us common lands and today we find ourselves reduced to common slaves? Was that the work of our civilization?"

And the final condemnation, now from the doctrinal vein of anarchist evolutionism: "Today we find ourselves without warm clothing, without food, without even a match and we are reduced to returning to the primitive era called, by our governors and legislators, a savage era. Why do you, the civilized, make us regress to the savage era?"

Likewise, his indignation is repeatedly directed against the "bastard, criminal laws" that (as is the case of the Exvinculation Law of 1874) were promulgated under guise of apparent equality and citizenship, with the hidden goal of legalizing the violent plunder of communal lands. Although we cannot go into detail here, it should be mentioned that a similar perception of criollo legislation can be found in the internal ideology of the movement of *Caciques-apoderados*<sup>15</sup> led by Santos Marka T'ula.<sup>16</sup>

Here we find a new space of encounters between the experience of Indian communities and anarchist doctrine. The notion of law as a tentacle of the state conjoins doctrinal anarchist interpretation (which posited the existence of a moral law incarnate in free individuals) with the communal action that unmasked the colonial nature of the state and recognized law as a "deception," as we find explicitly indicated in many documents produced by the *Cacique* movement.

Let us return once more to the chronological ordering of resistance, where, as we said, we find in the same sequence episodes of peasant resistance and mobilizations of urban craftsmen. The other event, the "most recent," was the murder of Prudencio Callisaya, which occurred nine years earlier, in 1920, by order of the powerful landowner of Guaqui, Benedicta Goytia:

*...and the latest events of Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre and the martyr Guaqui, in the heart of the district you have torn the limbs, like a blood thirsty beast, our brother Prudencio Callisaya; you bullying soldiers have no right to call yourselves civilized. You are barbarian criminals of the twentieth century, mutilators and destroyers of humanity.*

A series of events, an apparently chronological series, is reversed here by a backward movement. Is this movement a lapse or imprecision? I do not think so. For Cusicanqui, the vital proximity of the Guaqui murder was likely a combination of two phenomena. In 1920, this deed, publicized by the press and denounced in Parliament, must have hurt his sensibility, and outraged his conscience, which was already on the alert for situations of oppression and injustice. This early impression would lead him to write, in 1924:

*Illampu, Illimani... I contemplate the two colossi. I pay them a tribute of admiration and I speak to them as though to two giants, living witnesses of the great tragedies of my race (...) Oh! If you could speak to me of what you have seen! Illampu, Illimani, tell me the story of the conquerors' persecution, exploitation, and annihilation of my race, the race to which I belong. Speak, you mute witnesses, you impassable monsters! Let us know the history of the great rebellions*

## The Voice of the Peasant<sup>24</sup>

### Our Challenge to the Great Mistes of the State

Who are the only true thieves and criminals of the present day

For more than one hundred and thirty years we have suffered the most wicked slavery possible since the republican moment that offered us independence. It cost us life and Indian blood to free ourselves from the Spanish yoke. It made us howl for more than four hundred years, four centuries. The club danced wildly, blows fell on our backs in those years of barbarism, and now, in the very century of freedom, the brutality is redoubled.

If in those times we worked without pay for the Spanish lord, it is the same today with the criollos, who make us work from sun-up to sun-down without a cent for the hard work. When Spanish justice was blind, deaf, vengeful, we helped the “Mistes” to bring about freedom, only so they could take away our little plots and oppress us: see these injustices of today, peasants of the communes and of the *haciendas*.

The pants-wearing criollos, lash in hand, abuse us, woman, man, child and elder, just as they enslave us. What will we say of the sage Lawyers and other petty officials? Oh! These are the greatest thieves and bandits, who rob us, Law in hand, and if we say anything we are beaten and on top of that we are sent to prison for ten years, and meanwhile, they cast out our wife and children, and finish by burning our little houses and we are targets for the bullets of these honorably learned men...

Now, we ask: where are the peoples’ rights? Who do the Governors call people? ...We, the Indians enclosed in the Andean steppe of America entirely because of the work of our oppressors: the Bolivian Indian has his hypocritical sympathizers in monks and the clergy, but behind all of it, our complete disappearance is forged in the heart of civilization, which hands out gallows laws...

The Identity Card: what good is it for us Indians, seeing as we are beasts of burden, nothing more? How is it that can we contribute by complying with the sarcastic law called rent tax? Our elders left us common lands and today we find ourselves reduced to common slaves. Is that the work of our civilization? Why do we pay twenty cents for a box of matches? Seeing as today we find ourselves without warm clothing, without food, without even a match and we are reduced to returning to the primitive era called, by our governors, legislators, a savage era? Why do you, the civilized, make us regress to the savage era?

Why do you not allow us to acquire the necessary animals for our hard work, with no tax, so that in that way we could tend the earth, for the good of all humanity?

As we are, we cannot have a team of oxen, nor a necessary mule, without previously paying duties, tolls, registration fees on each head of cattle, and moreover the whims of the authorities of our leaders... Why do the father priest and the mista impose forced holidays in our county, threatening horrible penalties? ... Knowing that ultimately we are in utter misery as a result of the daily obstacles of their bastard and criminal laws...

Military service: going to die in the Chaco, with no remuneration. Migrant labor: working ten days for free with our own tools and food. Second-rate servitude [*postillonaje*]: providing all of our cruel masters’ needs at our expense; that is, those very few of those known to the state. We go to the managerial services and as the last straw come from Algeri at the end of the year, to pay four to eight hundred *bolivianos*—look at this shameful amount! The poor peasant sets out to be a shepherd, and in a year’s time has all his livestock snatched away. Servitude [*ponguaje*]: handling his bunch of dried dung, wood broom and, on top of that, food and then to sleep in a doorway, being ready all night for it to open and when it does not, a good beating, and then to be hired out to whoever, our services exchanged for big sums and we do not see the wages even in our dreams.

Why did the governors not make the servant [*pongo*] happy with the Remuneration Law? Today he is nothing—the barbarous idiotic Mulattos of the Rotary Club’s Zetas have the say here.

We the eternal martyrs feel the rawness of the scars that you opened on our ancestors. Here is your work: Mosa, Ayoayo, Jesús de Machaca, Yaya, Lakapampa, Ataguallani, and the latest events of Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre and the martyr of Guaqui, in the heart of the district you have torn the limbs, like a bloodthirsty beast, of our brother Prudencio Callisaya; you bullying soldiers have no right to call yourselves civilized. You are barbarian criminals of the twentieth century, mutilators and destroyers of humanity. Watch out, Indian brothers of the American race, that spilt blood will be the harbinger of the revolution overthrowing this vile society, cursed a thousand times over. Our caciques bought and assassinated by the “mistes”... Blood must be spilled as before because we are tired of the present domination, we know all too well the Vampires of the dominant state and its dirty tricks; if the poor mestizo does not guide us to liberation, we the Indians will make torrents of copper blood run in America Bolivia.

(Signed) Luis Cusicanqui