Conscription and Violence in Peru

by
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In early April 1993, as a political organizer in my native Peru, I visited the city of Yauri, in the southern department of Cusco, to attend the inaugural congress of a grassroots organization formed by young peasants from four different provinces of the department.[1] In spite of their diverse social backgrounds and political orientations, the participants in the event easily identified an issue that would become a paramount aspect of their demands: the reform of the Servicio Militar Obligatorio (Compulsory Military Service—SMO). They demanded that the state not draft young people in peasant communities and, instead, recognize their right to organize in self-defense units accountable to the local population, *rondas campesinas*.[2]

The notion of local institutions authorized to use violence to defend their communities—trapped in the crossfire of the dirty war between the army and the Shining Path insurgency—was heralded at the time by some left-wing parties as an embryonic form of alternative counter-state power. As a result, I was enthusiastic about the platform of the organization. However, there were also emotional reasons for my interest in SMO reform beyond my own political choices, reasons linked to my own short experience with the service some years earlier.

At the age of 16, Peruvian young men and women have to obtain a *boleta militar* (provisional military ID) from the Municipal Registry of their district of residence. Except for their birth certificates, this is the first legal identification document that they will receive from the state. A year later, the boleta is traded for the definitive military ID, after an official physical examination has determined the eligibility of the person to serve in the ranks. The military card, in turn, is needed to obtain—at the age of 18—the voting card, possession of which marks the legal recognition of adulthood and citizenship. The voting card is the single most important document in the daily life of a

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LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 112, Vol. 27 No. 3, May 2000 88-102

Peruvian citizen: its presentation is necessary to vote, to conduct various economic transactions, and—in a society haunted by violence and insecurity—to be allowed entry to public and private buildings.

When the time for claiming my boleta finally came, I considered it an opportunity to assert my ability to do things on my own, an initial step toward citizenship and legal adulthood. Thus, I felt very annoyed that my mother would insist on accompanying me to the Registry. There, I found out that the procedure was quite bureaucratic and boring: after hours of waiting in line, a civilian employee filled out a form asking me general questions such as my name and address. When he arrived at the item "skin color," I was ready—not without certain uneasiness—to answer *trigueño*,[3] but to my surprise and my mother's satisfaction he did not ask the question but wrote "white" without even looking at me.

During the summer of 1995, I attended another inaugural congress. This time, a nationwide organization was being founded: Acción Ciudadana contra la Pobreza y por el Desarrollo (Citizens' Action Against Poverty and for Development), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) network organized to promote social policies alternative to neoliberalism. One of the speakers was the celebrated theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who—instead of talking about economics and political strategy—chose as his topic for discussion the death of a 14-year-old boy in the border conflict with Ecuador a couple of days before. The child, Yenuri Chihuala, was being celebrated by the media as a *niño héroe* (a boy hero) who had run away from home to join the army, only to meet gallant death by enemy fire weeks later. In his speech Gutiérrez made the point that the media were victimizing a child who should never have been in combat. In fact, he asked, who could doubt that this was one of the innumerable cases of institutionalized abuse against young people from the shantytowns that surround Lima? It was obvious that Yenuri had been a victim of the forcible recruitment known as the *leva*.

The leva is an illegal military operation by which young men who are unable to produce their military cards are plucked from the streets and taken to the barracks, where they are forced to serve in the army for a variable period of time during which they are held incommunicado. Common in rural areas and working-class neighborhoods such as Comas, the district where Yenuri Chihuala lived, the leva is resorted to by the military when—because of high rates of absenteeism and draft evasion—recruitment goals cannot be achieved.

All these situations of daily inequality and abuse revolve around the institution of compulsory military service, which—in its original liberal formulation—is ideally an experience of republican equality. Conscription in Peru is not the legendary institution that allegedly saved revolutionary France

against monarchic reaction in the late eighteenth century. Far from a duty performed by all citizens, it is the obligation of the poor and those without contacts. In addition to the lawful draft, every year young men are forcibly drafted, in an act that shows the inherent violence of social classifications and the hidden meanings of the notion that the state has a legitimate monopoly on the means of violence. Conscription is a rich vein for research because it is one of the few arenas in Peru in which discriminatory labels are publicly and legally used, with important consequences for the character of future quotidian interactions between the individual and state agencies.

Conscription is a publicly recognized mark of inequality in Peru, for it is commonly accepted that only those who are without means or contacts must serve. The contrast between the universal character of the institution and its biased application provides us with a privileged standpoint for observing the mechanisms of legitimation of differences. These are discursive mechanisms that pose the problem not in terms of enforcing the law but in terms of disciplining certain groups defined as dangerous to the social order.

Conscription is a complex framework of meanings in which official discourses about nation, gender, race, and class are articulated and used to exert classificatory power over life—and death—for concrete individuals. In the practice and discourse of conscription, a sexist construction of masculinity is affirmed, racial labels are publicly used, and class hierarchies are implicitly stated, impregnating daily life with legitimated ideologies of domination. On another level, conscription is also a vantage point for assessing the relations between civilians and the military that could bring a fresh perspective to a field dominated by institutional analyses that emphasize the political exchanges between civilian and military elites (see, e.g., Pedraglio, 1990; Obando, 1991; Robles, 1996; Rospigliosi, 1996). While the traditional analysis is certainly committed to democratic values, its bypassing of military intervention in daily life is a weakness that ultimately erodes its normative objectives.

Given the public nature of conscription and the abuses committed under it, it may be surprising that Peruvian academia has not until very recently produced significant research on it (Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997; Villarán, 1997; González, 1997b). Literature has preceded the social sciences in this field: the first important work by Peru's best-known novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Time of the Hero*, refers to coming of age in a military school,[4] and the unfairness of conscription and military service have appeared time and again, with various degrees of criticism or acceptance, in short stories and novels.[5]

In what follows, I want to analyze the public discourses articulated to justify conscription and review the emergence of criticism in civil society. To do

this, I will show, first, how—in the context of the 1995 border conflict with Ecuador—conscription was publicly presented as a civilizing institution, capable of transforming youngsters from hooligans into heroes (González, 1997a). Next, I will isolate the ideological constructions of class, race, and gender that are organized around conscription and examine their power to reproduce violence, informing the action of their victims, the young conscripts themselves. Finally, I will use the conclusions to link this research with the possibilities and limitations of current legal initiatives to reform the military service in Peru (Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997: 17-20; Defensoría del Pueblo, 1997: 21-22; Gamarra, 1997).

PORTRAIT OF THE YOUNG MAN AS *MAUVAIS SAUVAGE*

During the border conflict of 1995 with Ecuador, a curious phenomenon was observable in the Peruvian press. Youth—a subject that was usually addressed in relation to issues such as juvenile crime, soccer-fan violence (Panfichi, 1995), the composition of subversive organizations, unemployment, and the lack of educational opportunities—appeared in a new, more positive light. The media were saturated with images and testimonies of enthusiastic young soldiers fighting in the disputed Cenepa Valley, a dense forest accessible only by helicopter or after days of marching on dangerous muddy roads mined by the enemy. In fact, it was as if some cynical phantom editor had decided to juxtapose in the same issue of any given newspaper completely opposite notions about youth. Thus, for instance, *La República* (February 13, 1995) appealed on its front page for peace, protesting the prolongation of an undesired international conflict, but at the same in the sports section headlines pointed to "War Against Fan Violence!"—the repression of youngsters accused of vandalism in soccer stadiums.

La República was hardly alone in those days. Reporting a recent clash between fans of rival teams, the press was unanimous in its demand for law and order, punishment for "juvenile vandals," and increased vigilance and repression in the stadiums. The incidents were described with the same language used by war correspondents stationed in the Cenepa: "a human pack of hounds wearing yellow uniforms *took by assault* . . . the Lolo Fernández Stadium and transformed what should have been a simple practice match . . . into a pretext for unleashing its madness" (*El Comercio*, February 12, 1995). Scandal dominated the description of the moment in which the women's restrooms were invaded by the violent fans: "a *trinchudo*[6] fan was being pushed out of the women's restrooms by a *señora* defending her small

daughter. The shameless man jumped around and shouted incoherent harangues while the bystanders laughed." But it was not only the respect due to women that was challenged by the violent young men. Class hierarchies were endangered as different sections of the stadium felt the fury: "the South section, where the radicals were situated, was in ecstasy as the usually privileged West seats were pelted with a storm of stones."[7] Legal authority was impotent to restore the normal state of affairs; a photo in *El Comercio* showed a solitary policeman brandishing his club at a mass of stone-throwing youngsters. The editor, showing that—for this kind of discourse—an image is *not* worth a thousand words, added some text: "The popular sectors and the forces of order, face to face. To control the troublemakers, a broomstick is not enough."

A chaotic image of youth is projected by this account. Young men are described as animals, unable to control their basic aggressive and sexual impulses. Incapable of reasoned argumentation, they express themselves through gestures, screams, and body language. A warlike situation is therefore set up: if reasonable partners for a dialogue do not exist, then only violent means of repression and vigilance remain. Punitive laws, better weapons for the police, and electronic surveillance were proposed by the media as means to curb violence in the soccer stadiums.

At the same time, real war was glorified by the deafening discourse of patriotic journalism: other young men, those actually using their destructive impulses to survive in hellish jungle skirmishes, were called heroes and their deeds described with inspiring words. While the situation was similar—violent assaults, armed clashes—the difference was obvious. On one hand there was an amorphous mass of savages, a "pack of hounds," a despicable mob of *trinchudos* assailing all the established social boundaries. On the other there was a disciplined human machine assaulting legitimate targets in defense of the most basic boundaries, the territorial limits established by the state. However, these opposite sets of predicates, these contradictory discourses, referred to the same subject: youth.

This juxtaposition of soccer fanaticism and war heroism was to demonstrate its impressive power to assign different meanings to the same subject in an infamous case: that of Yenuri Chihuala, the child who had been victim of the leva and had died on the battlefield under mysterious circumstances.[8] During the time when the media were still suggesting a heroic death, hagiographic stories were published in which Yenuri's short life was recounted in terms of patriotic sacrifice. However, in the attempt to demonstrate how a "kid like any other" could turn out to be a hero, an unexpected ironic twist appeared (*La República*, March 1, 1995):

> Yenuri Antonio was an avid soccer player. He was an intrepid, ebullient, and goal-thirsty forward in the local 7 de junio club. He was also a fan of Alianza Lima and saved to go to the stadium when his team was playing. When he could not pay for a ticket, he joined the *segundilla*, the nervous legion of fans that forces its way into the stadium during the last minutes of the match.

It is impossible not to recognize the member of the reviled mass of stadium vandals emerging from beneath the image of the "boy hero," the subject of official patriotic discourse. That section of youth relevant for the media—poor and dark-skinned males—is imagined as dichotomous: hooligans or heroes, brutal vandals or disciplined soldiers. The *divortium aquarum* is redemptive military duty. The same discourse that reifies popular youth as essentially irrational—in an act of discursive violence that serves to make them the object of legal practical violence—depicts a redeemed youth that redirects its violence toward the service of the Fatherland.

As is always the case when stadium violence strikes, the media argued for sophisticated means of mob control such as hidden cameras, aerial surveillance, and intelligence infiltration. However, it is painfully obvious that such high-tech panopticism is impossible in a poor country like Peru. The relevance of the discussion on fantastic means of riot control is its use as a mechanism for avoiding discussion of the real means of repression. These usually include the saturation of the stadium area with armed personnel, the control of lines by sword-brandishing mounted policemen, and the expropriation of radios, water bottles, newspapers, and—in general—any object that could be burned or launched against other fans.

In this discursive context, the conditions are established for arguing in favor of some legitimate form of youth control that could combine punitive and educative violence to repress the instincts of essentially violent subjects and transform them into well-adapted subjects of power.

PORTRAIT OF THE YOUNG MAN AS *NOBLE SAUVAGE*

If words were counted in the stories written by war correspondents during the border conflict, *abnegación* would probably be the one most used to describe the soldiers at the front: self-renunciation, sacrifice—the negation of one's interests, one's identity, and eventually one's life. Thus, for instance, "seeing that the journalist Gladys Bernal is on the verge of passing out . . . Juanito, a sixteen-year-old soldier from San Juan de Lurigancho [a popular district in

East Lima], separated from his family since last month, gives her his last piece of candy" (*El Comercio*, March 9, 1995).

According to the newspapers, among the young soldiers there was no possible self-interest; not even the pleasures of the summer holidays could interest them more than military duty. "There were young men beating down the barracks doors . . . young men who gave up the pleasures of summer, only to face death in the line of fire" (*El Comercio*, February 26, 1995). The middle-class urban journalists imagine *abnegación* in their own terms—renunciation of the pleasures of the summer holidays that are normal for middle- and upper-class youngsters with no need to work. But the nature of abnegación for popular youth is supposed to be something different: they must renounce their essentially unruly, brutal selves. Once military duty is recognized as a self-negating sacrifice, it can be resignified as something even higher. Indeed, it is "also an opportunity to demonstrate that patriotism does exist among young people, in spite of the frivolous images associated with them: drug-addiction, partying, laziness, apathy" (*El Mundo*, February 7, 1995).

Even male aggressiveness, the scandalous attribute of those *trinchudos* who offended female honor, can be an element of redemption in this discourse: "the Cenepa is a true hell. It is necessary to be a real man to enter there, and even more to get out alive" (*La República*, November 18, 1995). The images of mothers and girlfriends crying at the barracks doors were systematically contrasted with the self-assurance of enthusiastic soldiers urging women to share their confidence in victory.

Military duty appeared also as the horizontal exchange between a generous male citizen and his grateful polity, a fair transaction of recognition and courage. The young male puts his manhood at the service of the state, and the state allows him the legitimate enjoyment of male pleasures. As a journalist wrote, explaining the importance of fulfilling one's military duties and getting a voting card, "Obligatory Military Service is a sort of compensation to the state for the status of citizen that it confers upon us. . . . Having a voting card is very useful. For young men, it opens the doors to X-rated cinemas, allows them to check into a motel with a girlfriend, and who knows what else" (*El Mundo*, February 7, 1995).

Even the ethnic condition of *cholo* (half-breed) that was scornfully referred to in the stories about the vandalism of the popular youth reappeared, this time as a symbol of bravery and national pride. The gallant soldiers returning from the front were described as "conscripts of *provinciano* traits," a euphemism for rural indigenous people. To be a cholo became an advantage in the discourse about military courage, because the notion of cholo supposed a connection with an Indianness equivalent to unmediated instinct, natural violence, and mindless courage. As a wounded officer telling war stories to

the journalists put it, "At dawn, we heard a signal. . . . That was the moment to assault Tiwinza. As the troops were being deployed I took a moment to pray and to think of my son Renzo, who lives in Lima. I was afraid, but then we sang some martial hymns and the spirit of the cholo warrior came to our bodies once again" (*El Mundo*, February 21, 1995).

The officer creates a variant of a phrase that is very well-known in Latin American countries with large indigenous populations: *se me subió el indio* (the Indian within me emerged), meaning that one is possessed by a fit of rage or an impulse of spontaneous bravery. Again, the bad savage/noble savage dichotomy is used, though instead of referring to the difference between untamed and tamed youth it refers here to the divided personality of a single man before and after certain Dionysian rituals that efface rationality. The rational self, concerned with soul, family, and safety, coexists with a hidden cholo/Indian—violent, brave, and mindless.

The recognition of differentiated ethnic and racial identifications and identities is always problematic in Peruvian public discourse, because the concept of the nation has been constructed on the assumption of homogenizing *mestizaje* (Franco, 1992). However, the selective nature of military service, an institution that disproportionately targets young mestizos, makes it necessary to address the issue and rethink existing notions of Peruvianness, giving some explicit recognition to its indigenous component. A photograph of Peruvian soldiers celebrating the capture of a position from the Ecuadorians appeared in *La República* (November 18, 1995) with the following note:

> Huamaní? Yupanqui? Quispe? Tincopa? Choque? These are the family names of the people, of the soldiers that went to the battlefield. They were 16-, 19-, 20-year-olds—or even much younger, since many of them do not even have birth certificates. They were simply *levados*, trained and sent to fight. For Peru—their Peru, our Peru.

The use of the expression "family names of the people" in connection with indigenous surnames is an ambiguous way of conflating class and ethnic identifications. It is not said outright that Huamaní and Tincopa are Indian names, for this would challenge the inclusive notion of Peruvianness that is required to glorify military duty. At the same time, recognizing these names as "popular" and implicitly as Indian introduces certain tensions: it implies that other names were not present in combat. The surnames of upper-class, white Peruvians do not appear, because it is self-evident that the young men of the privileged class are simply not draftable. In spite of the journalist's effort to restore the national community by creating an optimistic narrative that attempts to bridge the gap between "their" and "our" Peru, it is painfully

evident that—still—there is a "they" constituted by those abducted, taken to the front, maimed, or killed and an "us" protected by markers of class and ethnicity.

CLASSIFICATORY WOUNDS, EFFICACIOUS MARKERS

Three years after the Cenepa War, the young artist Miguel García presented the exhibition *Un ruido secreto* (A Secret Noise).[9] The main source of inspiration was a set of photographs of wounded soldiers lying in the beds of the General Military Hospital in Lima. The motifs were scars, mutilated limbs, arms pierced by iron screws, bodies disassembled by war and medical science. These victimized bodies, ordered by the nature of their wounds, were the most palpable effect of the action of powerful discursive structures built along the lines of classificatory markers of gender, race, and class. Youth is constructed by the disciplinary imagination as the intersection of three signifiers: masculinity, Indianness, and poverty, markers that are in the symbolic realm as effective and real as war wounds can be in the physical realm. To be a young, poor cholo is equivalent to being the incarnation of violence, of tension between social danger and heroism; the only possible socially accepted resolution implies the civilizing exercise of state violence.

As we can see in Table 1, the three markers effectively structure two views of youth. The efficacy of these markers lies not only in their ability to make the public recognize institutional violence against youth such as police repression and the leva as civilizing actions but in their internalization by the victims of violence. The recruits themselves were quoted by war correspondents telling the stories of their lives as divided by the transitional moment of military service; they used the before/after dichotomy to emphasize the constructive effects of the military on their lives.

In the "before" category the recruits mentioned aimlessness, family problems, unemployment, and personal disorder. In the "after" category they referred to a sense of personal pride, patriotism, new skills, and personal discipline. A soldier compared conscription to marriage: "It is a whole different world, it is as if you got married: you enter into a stage of your life where they control you" (*El Mundo*, February 7, 1995). The jealous wife controlling the unruly sexuality of the married man was the metaphor for the military controlling the unruly youngster. The recruits proudly pointed to their newly acquired ability to obey: "At home we were careless and untidy, and suddenly we have to say yes sir and obey orders" (*El Mundo*, February 7, 1995).

A veteran called Alex, for instance, said that before his military service he was unemployed and had constant trouble with his family. His service in

TABLE 1
Constructions of Youth

	Dangerous Youth	*Heroic Youth*
Gender identity	Unrestrained sexual aggressiveness, lawless male desire	Legitimate enjoyment of male sexuality
Racial identification	Derogatory views of Indian descent: animal-like *trinchudos*	Positive views of Indian descent: brave *cholo* soldiers
Class position	Popular sectors challenging social order	Popular sectors defending the nation

Ayacucho, the epicenter of the dirty war between the army and the Shining Path insurgents, transformed his life. "I took a course on counterinsurgency tactics. It was tough, but I was proud to serve my country. I spent nine months in the emergency zone" (*El Mundo*, February 7, 1995). This testimony is certainly disturbing, for the systematic abuse of human rights by the counterinsurgency units in the areas of conflict during Peru's internal war is well-known. Was Alex a dirty warrior? Is military discipline such a powerful normalizing mechanism that the formerly restless young man takes pride in his newfound disposition to engage in inhuman actions?

From illegal savages to legal savages: this seems to be the path that the state offers to popular youth. In the context of an international conflict fought by conventional forces in a mainly unpopulated region like the Cenepa jungle, it is difficult to identify the dehumanizing potentials of state discipline. It is through the account of military counterinsurgency action in populated areas of the Andes that the patterns of sexism, racism, and class violence reveal their systematic character, as the rare testimony of "Pancho," a dirty warrior, made clear:

> One time, they gave us a *chola* to waste. We dressed her pretty and prepared her, but our captain, who was a real idiot, did not want us to touch her. Fuck off! The order has been issued and that is how things are! She kept repeating, "I am a virgin, I am a virgin!" Of course she was not. . . . Poor chola! After that, we used her as a sex-toy, and some time later we wasted her.[10]

Dirty warriors viewed the populations under their control as semibarbarous, uncivilized enemies and, as such, as legitimate targets of their own legitimate barbarism. The violence suffered by young men at the hands of the state is, as we have seen, not just physical but symbolic, specifically codified and embedded in social discourses that make it possible to be internalized,

learned in a sort of infernal pedagogy. This is what allows the victims to become victimizers, the savage stadium attackers of señoras to become civilizing soldiers and dirty warriors with license to rape and kill in the name of law and order.

But it is not necessary to stretch the argument to the brutality of counterinsurgency to assess the efficacy of symbolic violence in transforming victims into victimizers. It is even easier to remember the simple fact that the leva—an act that implies mastering the art of identification of markers of domination in young men—is executed by young men similar to those who suffer it. They attack young men who look like themselves and use against them the same violence they have suffered: beatings, hazing, solitary confinement. The goal is to teach the new victims how to become victimizers. Discipline triumphs.

CONCLUSION: SPECIFIC MECHANISMS OR ARBITRARY VIOLENCE?

I have tried to show how a legal institution, military service, functions as a disciplinary mechanism directed against popular youth and as a discourse defining that same youth in the intersection of specific constructions of gender, race, and class. Police repression and military service are interchangeable elements in the structure of a social discourse that presents popular youth as inherently violent and dangerous to the stability of the social order. The specific value of conscription is as a pedagogic institution that transforms young vandals into disciplined citizens by skillfully changing the direction of their violence: from anarchic invasion of social hierarchies to legitimate assault on challengers of those very hierarchies.

The precision of this disciplinary mechanism, regrettably enough, is lost in the official discourse of civil and political society trying to curb the abuses linked to conscription. After a series of scandals surrounding the leva, including the unexplained deaths of young men and the corruption of middle-rank officers who accepted bribes to free the levados, a number of civic associations, such as the Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos (National Coordinating Committee for Human Rights—CNDH), and members of parliament, such as Ana Elena Townsend and Ernesto Gamarra, have begun a path-breaking campaign to reform military service and prohibit the leva.

The CNDH criticizes the abuses involved in the leva and denounces the discriminatory practices involved in the selection procedures, but it fails to recognize the nature of those discriminatory practices: “The levados are primarily young students or workers of popular and rural background. This

practice is nonexistent among the middle and upper strata, for whom military service is not obligatory" (Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997). The discrimination at the core of the mechanism is understood as a class problem, while its racial and ethnic dimensions are only suggested by the phrase "rural background." This formulation does not clarify the critical value of conscription as an instrument for advancing racist ideologies in the public arena.

At the same time, the view of the forcible draft as a violent event and not as the beginning of a process of indoctrination, a systematic practice that relies on powerful social discourses, weakens the capacity to dismantle it. Certainly, egregious cases of abuse could be reduced by stopping the leva, but unless this challenged the brutality of military service, the notion of it as a necessary civilizatory mechanism would be left untouched.

Another misunderstanding is to suppose that the leva is an "arbitrary" practice (Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997: 17), that is, an act of violence randomly decided on by the discretionary power of an unnamed agent. Only in terms of individual experience can this phenomenon be considered "arbitrary." As an aggregated social fact it is not a random but a systematic victimization of a given sector of the population that has to be disciplined to reinforce its subordination and to impress on its minds and bodies specific notions of gender, race, and class.

In addition to this, the national Ombudsman's Office has chosen a legalistic approach, presenting the leva as a crime against individual freedom and against the principle of equality before the law. Certain state agents perpetrate arbitrary imprisonment, and certain individuals are being discriminated against, forced to serve in a way that is not demanded of others. This legal formulation of the leva is a useful step toward prosecuting its perpetrators and protecting its victims as individuals (Defensoría del Pueblo, 1997: 21):

> The leva consists of a deprivation of individual freedom, forcing a person to fulfill the SMO. It is a common practice that constitutes arbitrary imprisonment, thus violating article 2.24.f of the Constitution, according to which a person can be imprisoned only with a warrant, or, if by the police, if caught in flagrant crime.

The reason for this crime, in this formulation, is either the arbitrary whim of an unnamed agent or a case of class discrimination whose mechanisms are invisible: "This is a situation in which the principle of equality is being violated for socioeconomic reasons. . . . A disproportionate majority of the young people who fulfill military service comes from lower socioeconomic groups" (Defensoría del Pueblo, 1997: 22). The obvious legal question that is

left open is whether the leva is an offense committed by individual state agents violating individual rights or a widespread and systematic crime against a particular population. Certainly, the formulation, in recognizing the origin of the violations in socioeconomic hierarchization, opens the door for the second option. However, the ombudsman's formulation does not address the ethnic and gender aspects of this act of discrimination.

The result of this absence of a complete diagnosis is a set of necessary but incomplete reforms. Congressman Ernesto Gamarra (1997) has introduced a bill in Parliament that would legalize forcible recruitment only when a judicial order authorizes the army to detain draft evaders. In addition, individuals would be given the opportunity for "conscientious objection" to military service, but it would be subject to review and approval by military authorities, who would decide on the forms of alternative civil service. A complementary idea is that of the ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo, 1997), who recommends reforming the SMO to make it attractive to young people as a professional option. Both are ideas that may prove useful for alleviating the individual fate of youngsters of military age but do not address the causes of the leva or challenge its legitimizing discourses. It is difficult to see any possible connection between these legal reforms and a larger effort to deconstruct the discursive mechanisms that legitimize state violence against youth and that reproduce in the attitudes of soldiers the same patterns of violence that they have suffered.

Soldiers who are abused because of their race or class and who are taught to associate masculinity and violence, Indianness and brutality, poverty and victimization, learn how to abuse others on the same grounds. They will learn to exert sexist violence over women, racist violence against indigenous groups, and class violence against the poor. The brutal human rights violations during the countersubversive war against the Shining Path and the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement—MRTA), the leva of children, and police brutality are only gradations along the same spectrum of violence.

An integrated approach to the problem of conscription would call for the design of social policies directed at empowering the sectors currently victimized by it and reducing the discretionary power of the state agents in charge of repression—that is, addressing the inescapable problem of the subordination of the military to civilian authorities and their accountability to the population. It is not enough to declare that the leva is illegal, because it has always been illegal. It is necessary to create the social conditions that will enable the population to resist this crime: youth associations, even those branded as "vandals," have to be recognized as meaningful interlocutors and mentored.

Legal intervention in the process of military training and civilian oversight of recruitment agencies are necessary to guarantee that the right of citizens not to be illegally drafted is respected. It is useless to declare that the right to individual freedom is being violated if a judge does not dare to issue a habeas corpus against the officer in charge of a barracks. The specific identification of those areas where levas are common is necessary not only to prevent their repetition but also to promote youth employment and education. It is not enough to design conscientious objection as a legal procedure, for if young people of diverse social backgrounds are not equally empowered this new institution could have the unexpected effect of simply legalizing the informal middle- and upper-class privilege of not fulfilling the SMO.

The realization of such a set of policies would have the effect of demilitarizing the relations between the state and the popular sectors. For this to be possible, however, more than elite policymaking, what is needed is the mobilization of civil society organizations and the empowering of popular youth.

NOTES

1. The organization was called Juventud Campesina y Popular de las Provincias Altas del Qosqo (Peasant and Popular Youth of the Upper Provinces of Cusco—JUPAQ).

2. There is a growing literature on the *rondas campesinas* movement in the Peruvian highlands. Degregori et al. (1996) compile research on the movement in the south-central highlands.

3. *Trigueño*, "wheat-colored," is a euphemism for the skin color of a person of mixed descent. In Peru no official statistics about race or ethnicity have been gathered since the reformist military government of 1968-1975, but racial classifications are maintained in military and police records.

4. *The Time of the Hero* was published in 1963 and caused a huge scandal: copies of it were publicly burned at the military high school the author had attended. For references on the novel and the context in which it was inspired, see Vargas Llosa (1994).

5. For an example of the glorification of military service in the context of counterinsurgency, see the collection of short stories by Edal (1993).

6. *Trinchudo* (a person with thick hair) is a derogatory way of referring to a phenotypic trait supposedly associated with indigenous descent.

7. South and North sections, called *tribunas populares*, have the cheapest seats in stadiums, and West seats are the most expensive.

8. Whereas the media initially published unofficial reports suggesting death in combat, the army—under public pressure—recognized that Chihuala had died as the result of being infected with tetanus while performing nonmilitary tasks in the barracks (Ejército Peruano, 1995).

9. The exhibition took place in the Miraflores Municipality in January-February 1998. I thank Miguel García for a long conversation on the subject.

10. I am grateful to Aldo Panfichi for access to this interview in his personal archives, the source of the accounts of Degregori (1990) and Starn, Degregori, and Kirk (1995: 342-347).

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