

Alternautas

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter



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Phyrric Victories: The Fall and Rise of the Left Turns - Jon Beasley-Murray

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Alternautas is a peer reviewed academic that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development thinking.

It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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www.alternautas.net

f: /Alternautas

t: @alternautas

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DOSSIER

The End of the Progressive Cycle

GUEST EDITOR: Gerardo Muñoz

GERARDO MUÑOZ¹

INTRODUCTION

Beyond Identity and the State: The Crisis of the Latin American Progressive Cycle²

Immediately after the results of the referendum were counted in most of large urban centers of Bolivia, Vice-President Álvaro García Linera delivered a press conference from Palacio Quemado in which he called the results an “empate técnico”, or a technical draw between those in favor and those against the plebiscite to lengthen Evo Morales’ MAS (Movimiento Al Socialismo) presidential candidacy for a fourth term until 2025. Although the official results posted by TSE (Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Bolivia) are favoring the “NO” by a slight margin of 51% over 48%, it is perhaps too soon to predict the ways in which the MAS will reconstitute its political forces both within and beyond the institutions of the State. Regardless of changes in the wake of these results, what is crucial is that MAS lost two of its most important political bastions (Potosí and El Alto), which symbolically introduces evident fissures into the internal democratic process of the Bolivian State’s political hegemony³. Bolivia is central to the thesis of the ‘exhaustion of the Latin American progressive political cycle’ because it is the last standing State with broad base legitimacy and

¹ GERARDO MUÑOZ is a fourth year PhD student in Latin American literature at Princeton University. His dissertation “Fissures of the State: crisis of sovereignty and principles Latin American twentieth century” explores cases of fractured hegemony and political principles. He is a member of the Infrapolitical Deconstruction academic collective (www.infrapolitica.wordpress.com).

² This article was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/12/introduction-to-dossier-crisis-of-the-latin-american-progressive-cycle> on May 12th, 2016.

³ Pablo Stefanoni. “Un referendum por penales”. *Le Monde diplomatique*, Febrero 2016.

democratic institutionalization.

Perhaps more importantly, under the name of 'Bolivia', a new political grammar was installed in pursuit of a strong democratic horizon beyond the conventional antinomies of social movements and State; charismatic leadership and motley social composition. Álvaro García Linera's writings, in particular those published and available on the 'Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia' website, have systematically contributed to the linking of democracy and movements perhaps unlike any other politico-theoretical reflection in its transformation of the State form at the center of the post-neoliberal epochality⁴. García Linera's persistent theoretical reflection is symptomatic of the region's democratic passion, but also, within the current predicament, of its shortcoming⁵.

As a recent and brief exchange between Álvaro García Linera and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui demonstrated, the specter of identity continues to override the possibility of a *democratic breakthrough*. If, on the one hand, Rivera Cusicanqui blamed García Linera for "not understanding the Indian", García Linera's response, being no less personal, accused Rivera of betraying her "political roots" for social struggle⁶. Whereas Rivera spoke from a semi-epistemic privilege of knowing the Indian; García Linera spoke from the "triumphant" ideologically hegemonic position of doing what seems "right". In both instances, the debate was diluted to the grounds of identity and hegemony, and not on the basis of disagreement or political contestation. This third position -- which I am calling *posthegemonic* -- is the one that this dossier

⁴ To access the publications of the 'Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia', see <http://www.vicepresidencia.gob.bo>

⁵ For a theoretical and historical reconstruction of Álvaro García Linera's intellectual itinerary, see Peter Baker's "The Phantom, The Plebeian and the State: Grupo Comuna and the Intellectual Career of Álvaro García Linera". Viewpoint Mag. <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/02/25/the-phantom-the-plebeian-and-the-state-grupo-comuna-and-the-intellectual-career-of-alvaro-garcia-linera/>. Also, on the relations Linera and Zavaleta, see Anne Freeland's "Notes on René Zavaleta: 'abigarramiento' as condition of constitutive power". Alternautas 11, December 2014. <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2014/8/31/k1jjjvwi5c2eqc5h13ckgm3i4fdyp>

⁶ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. "El oscuro y tenebroso Qhananchiri". <http://colectivachixi.blogspot.com>

seeks to put forward, against the coming winds of political voluntarism and reaffirmations of counterhegemonic or new identitarian formulations. I agree with Alberto Moreiras' affirmation that "any kind of hegemony premised on identity, albeit subaltern identity, runs the infinite risk of turning democratic recognition into compulsion, no matter how counter-intentionally. Indeed the last thing democratic politics would want is the kind of organization of the social whereby people must assume enforced identities or reflect unwelcomed ones... The positing of identity as the horizon of subaltern politics is far from moving towards the end of subalternity — it only co-opts its notion at the service of a given ideology of power"⁷.

This basic but fundamental premise allows us to think the valence of a radical democratic horizon in the region at a moment where communitarian, decolonial de-linking, and State hegemonic articulation seem to exhaust the conditions of political reflection. This is not to say that Álvaro García Linera's essays, such as *Identidad Boliviana* (2014) or *Socialismo comunitario: un horizonte de época* (2015), are the cause of the recent political defeats or shortcomings of the Bolivian process. Moving against identitarianism, opens the potentiality of a post-hegemonic politics for a coming democratic horizon. This democratic horizon remains far from the *criollo* liberal ideology (intensified through neoliberal dismantling of the State since the 1990s), which has also traditionally fomented diverse techniques of governmentality that have haunted cultural locations and their subjects⁸. In a fundamental way, raising the question about the 'end of the Latin American Progressive governments' should not be understood as a condemnation or celebration of the political processes in the region within the last fifteen years or so. What is at stake here is precisely the offering of a democratic post-hegemonic possibility, in order to move beyond that which already undermines the deepening of what some of the contributors here — as well

⁷ Alberto Moreiras. "Democracy in Latin America: Álvaro García Linera, an introduction". *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, Vol.56, No.3, 2015. P.274-75

⁸ See Gareth Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*. Duke University Press, 2002.

as many other thinkers, observers, and scholars — take as the ‘best’ of the transformation of the *Marea Rosada*. In the end, the Bolivian process matters, but it does not exhaust what should be of interest here, that is, the question of democracy understood as *republicanist institutionalization* and radical freedom in the face of a post-neoliberal pushback prompted in different cities of the region⁹.

The rise of the *nuevas derechas* is in fact a direct consequence of the hegemonic closure of populism that turned political dissent into consensus and permanent machination (post-political ethos). What is more, the so called ‘post-subalternist option’, offered by John Beverley, seems at the current moment to be equally limited or ironically on the side of the ‘Right’, if we understand the new developments between subaltern subjects and the State as mediated by consumption¹⁰. In fact, we are at the moment witnessing a *fissure* between consensual politics (whether from the Right or from the leftist communitarianism) and hegemonic State grammars that solely guarantee democratic passion vis-à-vis a reduction of politics to the political as enmity¹¹. These two positions do not merely make enmity the dominant factor of the political. They make the political the dominant structuration of existence and common life. A collective and long lasting engagement can only produce a new *posthegemonic reflection* as a consistent option for Latinamericanist thought. It is in this light that this dossier proposes a preparatory and modest effort in this direction.

⁹ What has been lacking since the independences in the early nineteenth century in Latin America has been democratic republicanism. At the historiographical level this argument has been made by Rafael Rojas in *Las Repùblicas de aire* (Taurus, 2012), and *Los derechos del alma* (Taurus, 2014). For a recent defense of republicanism as a radical form of democracy, see José Luis Villacañas essay *Populismo* (La Huerta Grande, 2015).

¹⁰ John Beverley develops the ‘post-subalternist’ option in his *Latinamericanism* after 9/11. Duke University Press, 2011.

¹¹ The understanding of the political as the division of enmity is of course that of Carl Schmitt. For a contemporary reading of Schmitt’s architectonics of the political and its exhaustion, see Carlo Galli’s *Janus’ Gaze: Essays on Carl Schmitt*. Duke University Press, 2015. The crisis of the principal politics alluded here is also in reference of the ongoing work of the Infrapolitical Deconstruction Collective (www.infrapolitica.wordpress.com).

The contributions collected in this dossier are varied in style and argumentation, as well as in the case studies discussed. Yet, they are not meant to be read as comprehensive reflections on the region throughout these years. Instead, each of the contributions essentially takes up a paradigm that allows us to rethink a problem or a series of problems that traverse different key sites¹². These are also conjectural texts, but to the extent that they seek to think through central issues of Latin America politics, they also exceed the established temporal parameters fixed by the ‘untimely present’ or the ‘actual movement’ of contemporaneity. Another important observation should be made about the very phrase ‘end of the progressive cycle’. I should also admit that there have been other conceptions of it that have circulated in the contributions of important political observers and scholars such as Maristella Svampa, Pablo Stefanoni, Salvador Schavelzon, or Raul Zibechi, some of them contributors in this issue. My own inflection on the “end” or “crisis” of Latin American progressive governments seeks to complement the historical determination with that of the analytical, so as to open up other categorial possibilities beyond hegemonic structuration and grand-historical narratives. There is a tension throughout across the articles that point to different ways of understanding the ‘crisis’ (which is fundamentally the crisis or *krenein* of thought, that is, of judgment)¹³.

Salvador Schavelzon’s “The end of the progressive narrative in Latin America” offers a broad map that points to the generic conditions of the debate on the ‘end of the progressive narrative’ in the region. Looking at recent developments in Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, Schavelzon argues that the progressive movement towards democratization has come to a halt through a centripetal redirection generated by a populist logic. According to Schavelzon, “...instead of an anti- or post-extractive outlook as an alternative to a new political cycle, what we are witnessing today is the emergence of a new Right with a revamped, ‘post-ideological’ and ‘for the people’ discourse”. Schavelzon points to the increasing influence of conservative religious

¹² According to Giorgio Agamben, a paradigm is a relation between a singular and a singular, thus no generalizable master theory or arche is derived from this notion. See his essay “What is a paradigm?” (9-32) in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, Zone Books 2009.

¹³ On different valances of “crisis”, see Willy Thayer’s *Tecnologías de la crítica. Entre Walter Benjamin y Gilles Deleuze*. Santiago de Chile: Metales Pesados, 2010.

values in the political arena, and takes note of the substitution of an old imperialism (U.S. Washington Consensus) with another (Chinese investments). The decay of the progressive political parties in both Brazil and Argentina is just a feature that Schavelzon thematizes in order to move beyond the impasse of right-wing cooptation and post-political fascination.

Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott's "The Chilean Case and the Latin American Pink Tide: Between Democracy and Developmentalism" focuses on the Chilean case not because Chile has to be included in the *Marea Rosada*, but rather because this case is the excess or specter that haunts the matrix of accumulation and developmentalism as a principal form of the *Marea Rosada* State form. Instead of producing a unilateral reading of economic forces (State location and forms of accumulation) Villalobos looks at the way in which "the State form indicates an opening for struggles of social transformation demonstrates the extent to which those initiatives of social transformation taken upon by the governments of the Pink Tide have viability or remain palliative to what John Kraniauskas has called "the cunning of capital" (2014). Through the notion of 'State form', Villalobos introduces a double register of the political force in the region, and leaves the question open regarding the kind of 'people', beyond the double calculative configuration of constituent and constituted power, that could reappear against the parameters of political and State representation. In the end, Villalobos' infrapolitics of thought is no longer bounded by the preset calculations between history and imagination as a struggle for recognition.

Diego Valeriano's "Liberation through consumption: six hypotheses on the passage from exclusive neoliberalism to the new *runfla* capitalism" is a brief, although important piece. Through a series of programmatic notes that invite further elaboration and investigation, Valeriano forcefully argues against the category of 'exclusionary neoliberalism' in favor of the category of 'runfla capitalism'. As a persistent political observer in Buenos Aires, Valeriano has contributed systematically (in a series of articles, of which this is just one condensation) to understanding what he sees as a process of liberation through a new democratizing force of consumption in the years of Kirchnerismo. In linking the principle of liberation and consumerism,

Valeriano challenges many central beliefs that govern traditional narratives of the “*década ganada*”. Mainly, the passage from neoliberalism to a post-neoliberal redistributive State, liberation as a technique of market force, and a post-ideological (post-hegemonic) understanding of social action through inoperative figures such as ‘*runflas*’ (*runfla* which could be translated as lumpen or marginal lives). Valeriano’s hypotheses challenge the claim for the subaltern subject position, while affirming a *form of life* beyond domination and resistance.

Bruno Cava’s “Can the Latin American Progressive governments outlive their success?” challenges the monumental narrative of the Latin American Pink Tide, and offers instead a viewpoint from the social movements that allowed for the emergence of the institutionalization of the progressive governments in the first place. Cava recasts the question of the ‘end’ of the progressive cycle by admitting its success and by doing so, pushes for a further deepening of the constituent process that opened well before the cycle itself. This task, according to Cava, is also one of reflection, as he argues: “The task is to liberate the analysis from black and white, epic, or dialectical narratives, as to reopen political imagination to a new social and economic composition in the region, in a similar vein as *Zapatismo* did in the 90s. We can leave the process of mourning to a global left still haunted by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism.” Bruno Cava, far from soliciting a new communist horizon that mourns and restitutes a revolutionary will, posits a problem of imagination in politics that still depends on fissuring constituted power from below against contemporary forms of accumulation, corporate interests, and uneven patterns of exploitation.

“For a Democratic Horizon of Emancipation: Maristella Svampa on the exhaustion of the Latin American Progressive Political Cycle”, consists of a set of questions on the central core of the dossier in light of her own work on the Latin American progressive actors and its ties with extractivism and contemporary designs of post-neoliberalism. Svampa, author of books such as *Maldesarrollo* (2014) and *Debates Latinoamericanos* (2016), does not limit her thought on the region within the parameters of self-affection (defeat or triumphalism, unconditional support or militant criticism). Rather, her thought hinges in multiple registers that map out the

complexity of actors and dilemmas facing most, if not all, of the progressive governments. At the core of her intervention, Svampa's commitment is in line with the deepening of democracy, without losing sight of the dynamic of neoliberalism as a force that could reinstate itself further in light of the Macri / PRO victory in the Argentine National Election. Svampa endorses a political reason that exceeds locality as well as the paradigm of sovereignty in favor of a democratic horizon that could bear witness to the "opening of a wound at the very heart of Latin-American thought".

Michela Russo's review of Ticio Escobar's recent collection of essays *Imagen e intemperie: las tribulaciones del arte en los tiempos del mercado total* (Capital Intelectual, 2015) raises pertinent questions in thinking the aesthetic register parallel with the return of the 'popular' embedded the Latin American progressive cycle imaginaries. Russo's commentary on Escobar's art criticism is deployed not only in light of the complex ways in which modern and indigenous art has been theorized in the Paraguayan art institutions (most notably, under the mission of Centro de Artes Visuales/ Musso del Barro), but also makes an effort to deploy aesthetic political dimension that dislocate the logic of hegemony. As Russo argues: "...Escobar works at the edge of that liminal zone where the political and the aesthetic enter a threshold of indecidability. I am convinced that his reflections on the question of art and image are absolutely crucial in order to think what I believe is one of the central features of the "progressive cycle" in Latin America, a newborn, although already tremendously ailing, geopolitical conjuncture, that is to say, the "return of the popular" and, thus, the question of representation". Escobar's recent writings on Latin American popular art, always in permanent dialogue with critical aesthetic theory (Walter Benjamin), becomes a threshold that allow for a particular mode of reassessing limits that separate aesthetics and politics, the national popular horizon and the temporality of archives and its heterogeneous traditions

My own essay "The exhaustion of the progressive political cycle in Latin America and posthegemonic reflection", weighs the crisis of the Marea Rosada by analyzing the specificity of the Argentine Kirchnerista State and its demise leading to the electoral victory of Mauricio Macri, and the rise of other political forces to the national scene

such as Sergio Massa. The essay considers the limitations of populist culturalism and its adverse translation during periods of transitions. However, my analysis is not solely centered around Peronism during Kirchnerismo; since it also moves on to contest the 'communitarian' or 'turn to the commons' political contestation as deficient within the generic democratic horizon of the Latinamericanist reflection. The essay leaves an open space — a space that I call *posthegemonic reflection* within the temporal inhabitation of the interregnum — that necessarily abandons the cathexis of the master concept that continuously solicits identity and location. This has fundamental political consequences for the very notion of the political in terms of its categorial organization (civil society, movement, subject, or State) and principial formation of legitimacy (such as constitution or rights). In a certain way, these essays seek to produce a reassessment of the political in the region. There is still a need to further develop an principial political democracy of the singular. If we refrain from recoiling back to subject mediations, a space opens that invites disagreement about thinking not only the ruins of the Latin American Pink Tide, but also the ruin and inefficiency of the political categories and concepts that organize the reflexive practice of contemporary Latinamericanism.

Finally, the last two pieces in the dossier bring to the present, albeit in dissimilar ways, past temporalities latent in the political map of the region. Andres Ajens' poem "Allende, Evo, Over", translated by Michelle Gil Montero, juxtaposes the proper name of two leaders of national-popular experiences in a constellation of references that signal the possible returns of other temporalities through a modality of writing that is no longer governed by the logos of transparency or communication. In the last verse we read: "*kunumi letteredly illiterate a graphophagus, pure at times, already mottled*". The poem, already a translation, where more than one language are disjointed, transfers an aporetic and impossible attempt at crossing a destination, since as a philosopher has recently reminded us, poetic language always arrives at an illiterate encounter¹⁴. This is, indeed, the subalternist limit that carries forth Ajens' poematological experiments beyond the grammar of sense. Jon Beasley-Murray's

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben. "¿A quien se dirige la poesía?" (Trans. Gerardo Muñoz & Pablo Dominguez Galbraith). <http://horizontal.mx/a-quien-se-dirige-la-poesia/>

"Pyrrhic Victories: The Fall and Rise of the Left Turns" is a generous critical response to the different texts of the dossier, while simultaneously recoiling back to the memory of the Caracazo uprising as an 'ur-origin' of a political cycle, in which the multitude guides the potential for insurrectional vitality and social mobilization. Rehearsing some of his important theoretical premises developed in *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (University of Minnesota, 2010), Beasley-Murray invites us to take a distance from both disenchantment and enthusiasm by abandoning hegemony as the principle of political closure: "the more that these regimes sought hegemony, the more frustrated they were bound to become. But the fact that they ultimately (or even initially) failed to become hegemonic is not in itself the marker or symptom, let alone the cause, of their downfall. Rather, defeat was already inscribed in the moment of their triumph: in the ways in which they were more or less forced, upon assuming state power, to turn against the movements that established them in that power, and to find that (reciprocally) those movements then sooner or later abandoned them and escaped the scene". Whereas Ajens' poetic resonances rendered inoperative the apparatus of identity and the ideal of transculturation *in language*, Beasley-Murray's cautionary response about the epochal ruin of the progressive cycle emphasizes the always-fissured nature of hegemony, thus opening a debate on how to come to terms with the notion of the 'end' in the 'end of the political cycle'. Far from being endorsing political optimism as a compensatory strategy for the current categorial and grammar of crisis, Beasley-Murray's response to the dossier pushes the limits of critical reflection, recasting the original stimmung of the 'pyrrhic victories', whose echoes and rhythms perhaps are perhaps still very much at work in the least expected zones of our present.

This dossier would not have been possible with the generous interlocution and efforts of a series of friends, to whom I would like to extend my gratitude: Alberto Moréiras, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, Pablo Dominguez-Galbraith, and Lindsey Reuben. My gratitude and many thanks to Anne Freeland and Ana Carballo for the superb work at *Alternautas*.

GERARDO MUÑOZ¹

The Exhaustion of the Progressive Political Cycle in Latin America and Posthegemonic Reflection²

Marea Rosada and Latinamericanist reflection

More than a decade since the eruption of the “progressive cycle” of Latin American governments— which could be said to commence with the electoral victory of Hugo Chavez in 1999, the political crisis of 2001 that led to the crumbling of several governments in Argentina, or Lula’s PT victory in 2002, depending on how one periodizes this epoch — a question has become inevitable after the recent presidential elections in Argentina: what is left of the Latin American Left? Is it still possible to isolate divergent tendencies in the Latin American progressive wave at the current moment of generalized international financial domination? Does the question of the ‘exhaustion’ of the progressive cycle not open a gap that invites us to think beyond the popular distinction of the “two Lefts”, proposed by Jorge Castañeda (2006), that strategically separated a “good democratic left” committed to liberalism and the market from an “authoritarian” one, heir to populist and caudillo legacies of the Latin American political tradition?

This set of questions is not only relevant for thinking the current geopolitical map of the region, but more importantly, the limits of the politics of Latinamericanist

¹ GERARDO MUÑOZ is a fourth year PhD student in Latin American literature at Princeton University. His dissertation “Fissures of the State: crisis of sovereignty and principles Latin American twentieth century” explores cases of fractured hegemony and political principles. He is a member of the Intrapolitical Deconstruction academic collective (www.intrapolitica.wordpress.com).

² This article was originally published in: <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/12/yldqikwbvfrkj6lfbsoj14fdual> on May 12th, 2016.

reflection, both within and beyond the United States university circuit. If we are witnessing uncontested symptoms of the end of the *Marea Rosada*, we must ask to what extent John Beverley's tripartite typology of "neo-arielist", "ultra-leftists", and "post-subalternists" that organize his *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (Duke Press, 2011) is still useful in understanding a heterogeneous Latin American map, whose opacity exceeds clear-cut political units³ To think the exhaustion of the progressive cycle would necessarily entail taking a distance from a post-subalternist position, which remains relevant only insofar as it marks the alliance between the subaltern and the state in a hegemonic social pact. But if by exhaustion of the progressive cycle we understand the withering of the *state form* through the permanent processes of neoliberal decontainment, then hegemony is no longer on the side of the subaltern, but rather becomes the governmental machine that reproduces, polices, and domesticates the potential for a "politics of the people". Hegemony then becomes the "barring of other political possibilities" (Williams 2015).

On the same token, if clear, distinctive political units are subsumed by a new form of political opacity, what type of intellectual commitment and political horizon open up for Latinamericanist reflection? What is stated above does not entail that Latin American criollo positions have disappeared or decreased their influence in the reordering of Latinamericanist knowledge. Rather, what must be thought through is the ways in which an assumed post-political contemporary position — understood as the simplification and erasure of conflict from the idea of politics — of the progressive governments obliges one to account for an uncertainty of the conditions that make intellectual reflection possible. The displacements of the Leftist governments towards a center-right position reenact the argument about the spectral continuation of the neoliberalism of the 90s today that haunts the present ..., albeit with major differences. The emergence of the "New Right" (*nuevas derechas*) across the different governments of the region have learned to modify its political styles and symbols in a transversal safety-valve relation with the state that allows for an even

³ John Beverley. *Latinamericanism after 9/11*. Duke University Press, 2011.

more complex architectonics that interweave neoliberal administration with state form.

It has become difficult, if not impossible, to affirm who is at the “vanguard” of the Latin American progressive governments today. This question is more perplexing, since most if not all of these governments have entered into conflicts with the very social movements that were central for their electoral ascension leading to constituent reforms. Having to recur to heterogeneous forms of coercion or low-intensity disciplining, what begins to wither away is the very ground of legitimacy as the key for establishing long-lasting democratic institutionalization distinct from the liberal criollo political organization of the past (García Linera 2011). If this opportunity is lost due to the overdetermination of factors, populism emerging from a crisis and grounded in the logic of hegemony will always work on the side of subalternization on the one hand and charismatic presidentialism on the other (Zaffaroni 2008).

The crisis also exceeds political institutionalization, spilling over in the active neo-extractive model that upholds a new logic of neo-dependence, balanced with redistributive social policies, although always conditioned by the international prices of commodities (Svampa 2013). In the last years alone, the mass mobilizations in Brazil, the “Vulture funds” in Argentina, and the economic crisis of Venezuela have made explicit the extent to which the contemporary state form of the *Marea Rosada* is structurally dependent on international financing and its juridical-legal grounds.

The fracture of Kirchnerist political culture

The Argentinean case bears witness to some of the outlined contradictions disclosed by contemporary Leftist governments. I am not interested in arguing that Kirchnerismo is hyperbolic or symptomatic of *all* of the *Marea Rosada*, but rather that it does illustrate the limits of hegemony (in the case of the Peronist tradition) within latinamericanist reflection. In this precise sense it is a strong case that deserves attention. Besides the presidentialism that labors on the side of juridical-economical exceptionalism, as argued by Eugenio Zaffaroni, the crisis of Kirchnerismo is also perceived at the level of candidate building for political continuity. The fact that the Kirchnerist candidate Daniel Scioli was able to aggregate almost 50% of the vote

under his name speaks not of the power of Kirchnerismo, but of his appeal *in spite* of Cristina Kirchner and most of the Frente para la Victoria's strand of peronist ideologues. Like traditional Peronism (1945–55), political culture was central to the Kirchnerist imagination, and in the last year alone it was easily perceived even by the outside observer how cultural apparatuses—such as the intellectual collective “Carta Abierta”, the juvenile grassroots organization “Campora”, or the ultra-militant TV show “678”—stood in irreconcilable positions that only allowed real discussion in terms of consensus or for clear-cut electoral ends.⁴

The severe depreciation of conflict and antagonism within Kirchnerismo led to futile disputes that only mattered when thinking the “continuation” of the political process as solely based on a proper name (Kirchner) at best, and at worst of an initial (the culture “K”). Similarly, since the primaries (also known as PASO), the three national political forces—Mauricio Macri's Cambiemos, Sergio Massa's Frente Renovador, and Kirchner's Frente para la Victoria (FpV)—only distinguished themselves through external political factors, since each of the political positions was validated through a consensual logic through appropriation of the legacy of the 2001 destituent moment, promising different degrees of security, anti-corruption measures, and political stability as to avoid a second “2001”.

Sergio Massa, ex-mayor of Tigre and founder of Frente Renovador, Macri's anti-party “Cambiemos” (he prefers the technical name of “equipo” or “team” to refer to his post-political block designed by Ecuadorian advisor Jaime Durán Barba), and Scioli's particular strand of FpV shared a common language of consensus and political hybridity that did not dismiss the Peronist apparatus. As Durán Barba repeated in his books and interviews, it was not that Peronism did not matter, but that people no longer identified themselves with such a traditional political identity (Durán

⁴ The internal crisis of the Frente para la Victoria (FpV) generated, according to Beatriz Sarlo, a “dilemma of succession”. We could say that right after the sudden death of Nestor Kirchner and the victory of Cristina in the first round, an impasse signaled the precarious conditions of a long-term political continuation of kirchnerismo that rendered impossible the building of a solid political candidate for the presidency. See, “La toma del poder”: (<http://www.perfil.com/columnistas/La-toma-del-poder-20160619-0057.html>).

Barba 2011). Besides the fact that all three of them share similar political trajectories dating back to Menemism, the three candidates installed a corporate interpellation of government as efficiency in the political scene. In the specific case of Massa, he resorted to a securitarian rhetoric that took the Mexican State's war on drugs as an exemplary model to implement the emergency powers in light of the perennial presence of drug trafficking and organized crime in Argentina.⁵ What is clear, leaving nuances aside, is that whatever Cambiemos turns out to be in the following months or years, what came to a radical halt was the expansion of the radical democratic horizon that opened up with both the insurrection of 2001 and the initial moment of Nestor Kirchner's presidency.

At this threshold, Kirchnerismo should be read as a paradox between the production of a strong cultural popular imaginary and the fragility of political institutionalization (which had borrowed and re-structured from the Peronist *justicialista* apparatus). According to the most in-depth analyses of Kirchnerist political culture, such as Horacio Gonzalez' *Kirchnerismo, una controversia cultural* (Ediciones Colihue, 2011) and Beatriz Sarlo's *La audacia y el cálculo* (Sudamericana, 2011), FpV produced a renovation in social languages and cultural symbols transversal to civil society and across multiple institutions. Tecnópolis, a science and technology mega exhibition in Villa Martelli inaugurated during the Bicentennial celebrations; Secretaría de Coordinación Estratégica para el Pensamiento Nacional, appendix of the Ministry of Culture and directed by philosopher Ricardo Forster; Centro Cultural Néstor Kirchner that opened in 2015; and 6,7,8, a political commentary TV broadcast which ran from 2009 until the end of 2015, orchestrated a contemporary cultural rhythm that hinged on habits and rituals long established in the Peronist sentimental fabric (Plotkin 2003). What changed from classical Peronism (1945–55) to the Kirchnerist reenactment was the impossibility of translation from culture to politics, at both the level of state policy and that of the base constituencies.

⁵ On the discourse of security during the last years of kirchnerismo, see the radio Clinámen "Scioli llegó hace rato" (<http://ciudadclinamen.blogspot.com/2014/09/scioli-llego-hace-rato.html>). For in depth sociological analysis of security forms in Argentina, see *Terror y control: la gestión de la inseguridad como forma de gobierno* (Futuro Anterior Ediciones, 2014) by Esteban Rodríguez Alzueta.

Whether the cultural realm is no longer the main driving form of populist politics is something to be disputed and further analyzed; but what seems to have become clear is that a “New Right” like Cambiemos has also been keen in exploiting popular cultures of identification and subjective desires that are no longer the monopoly of the populist affective machine (Bellotti 2015). The kirchnerist political defeat at the national polls confirmed that the processes of translatability between political culture and political identities are swayed by an irreducible gap to this antinomy. Without a doubt the most explicit symptom of this conflict was the public witticism voiced by the Kirchnerist Minister of Interior, Florencio Randazzo, who in his appearances in one of the “Carta Abierta” meetings at the National Library said of Scioli: “El Proyecto se ha quedado manco” or “the project has become amputated”. The punchline being, of course, that Daniel Scioli lost an arm in a water-racing event in 1989.

Randazzo’s pun touched a sensitive nerve in the Kirchnerist Project, and its relation to the historical Peronist tradition. If Peronism is also the history of the bodies of its leaders— the missing and recovered body of Eva or the dismembered hands of Peron, as *objet petit a* of hegemony — Scioli’s missing arm can no longer account for the secret object of Peronist popular desire. In fact, the “missing piece” of the sovereign affect seems insufficient in times of the total sovereignty of financial markets and the arousal of visual culture. What is at stake here is what I am willing to call the “debasement” of the katechontic myth of the return of the state (“State Eva-Peronism”, as coined by John Kraniauska), traversed by a new affective capitalism (“capitalismo runfla”) or low-intensity consumer form of neoliberal subsumption at the everyday experience.⁶

⁶ On the capacities for “imagination” in kirchnerismo, see Pablo Hupert’s *El estado posnacional: más allá del kirchnerismo y el antikirchnerismo* (2011). On Valeriano’s notion of ‘capitalismo runfla’, see “El consumo libera: seis hipótesis sobre el pasaje del viejo neoliberalismo excluyente al nuevo capitalismo runfla (que lo incluye y supera)” (Lobo Suelto).

The crisis of “Kirchnerist culturalism” does not only bear witness to the impossibility of grounding legitimacy in traditional symbols and myths, but also reveals the ways in which the triumph of a national-popular fervor is always-already inseminated by influxes of consumer market’s affective sovereignty and effective processes of subjectivation. As noted by political theorist Joseph Vogl, the national space of containment can no longer compete on the same playing field with heterogeneous sovereign effects of market production and accumulation.⁷ The myth of globalization and international agreements based on economic interests rests on the strong case that national states are still autonomous in terms of decision-making and political legitimacy, when exactly the opposite is the case.

Along with trumpeting the “end of the progressive cycle” in the region by analysts such as Salvador Schavelzon, Bruno Cava, or Raúl Zibechi, on the reverse side one must also study the rise of the “New Right” through electoral democratic means within the *Marea Rosada*.⁸ What is ‘new’ in these ‘New Rights’ is the extent to which they have gone through a long process of learning from their mistakes after the plundering 1990s dominated by the “Washington consensus” and the dictatorial neoliberal economic model. Their relevance hinges on how they occupy certain flexible zones of the state apparatus, supplemented with a rhetoric of “security” (modeled after the designs of the “War on Terror” in the United States and elsewhere), and the foreclosure of politics to consensus and appeasement, rather than disagreement and democratic expansion. It is not a coincidence that the neutralization of political conflict, as observed at the beginning of the twentieth century by Carl Schmitt, goes hand in hand with a nomic distribution of economic investments, which in the particular case of the region takes the form of the extractive

⁷ Joseph Vogl. “The sovereignty effect: markets and power in the economic”. *Qui Parle*, Vol. 23, Fall/Winter 2014.

⁸ Some of the best analyses on the crisis of the progressive cycle are, in no particular order: “Anatomía política de la coyuntura sudamericana. Imágenes del desarrollo, ciclo político y nuevo conflicto social (Lobo Suelto, 2 de Noviembre 2015), by Diego Sztulwark; “El ciclo progresista en América Latina ha terminado” (*L’Ombelico del Mondo*, 4 de Noviembre 2014) by Salvador Schavelzon; “El fin del relato progresista en América Latina” (*La Razón*, 21 de Junio 2015) by Raúl Zibechi; “Socióloga argentina dice que esta llegando el fin de ciclo de los gobiernos populistas” (*erbol digital*, 2 de Octubre 2015) by Maristella Svampa.

model that guarantee the compulsive modernization constitutive of the philosophy of history (Villalobos-Ruminott 2016).

In the Argentine political landscape the figure that best represents the emergence of this new right is the ex-mayor of Tigre Sergio Massa, whose political discourse in the last year productively articulated institutional Peronism in a national-popular register with a technocratic post-political security rhetoric. As studied by Diego Genoud in his political biography *Massa* (Sudamericana, 2015), Massa's political paideia combines multiple registers that circulate in contemporary Argentina that helped raise the Frente Renovador as a major national party. I would argue, in fact, that the locus of the late Argentine political culture finds the best expression in *massismo*, understood as a set of articulations that suture political dissensus into one of consensus, albeit full-fledged police presence in the territories. In contrast to the political inefficacy of Scioli's arm, *massismo* could well be understood as kirchnerismo's neoliberal stain as part of the recomposition of state political culture. In a way, Massa is the most visible figure of the neoliberal continuation from above that has redrawn the limits between state and neoliberal economy, Peronist political culture and flexible forms of consumer democratization.

The turn to the commons

Confronted with this new reality that signals the end of the progressive cycle, it seems that the age-old Leninist question "what is to be done?" returns once again to the agenda, requiring us to rethink the traditional antimonies — state and market, the new right and left wing populisms, social movements and political verticalization — that have dominated Latin Americanist reflection during the last decade. An emerging positing in recent years has been that of the "communitarian" or "communal" option that argues, against the grain of state politization, for the work of "social movements" as the transcendental mole capable laying the groundwork for an autonomous politics of the "people".⁹

⁹ Emir Sader. *El nuevo topo: los caminos de la izquierda latinoamericana*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006.

The “communal (communitarian) option” situates the primacy of the social movement on a horizontal plane, and like populism, it seeks to render political representation irrelevant through direct democratic participation and personal involvement in the decision making process. In a recent interview, Raquel Gutierrez Aguilar, who is also the author of one of the most significant books on social movements, *Los ritmos de Pachakuti: Movilización y levantamiento indígena-popular en Bolivia* (Textos Rebeldes, 2008), argued that before the inevitable leaning to the right of the region, a necessary battle for the “commons” is waged on behalf of the “communal” as an essential task of political action and thought. For Gutierrez Aguilar, the commons is understood as breaking away from the civil society / state divide, drifting towards the autonomy of heterogeneous social movements or multitudes that constantly contest the common sense and the sensible experiences that order the social space and feed the traditional arrangement of the status quo.¹⁰ More importantly, the “commons” for Gutierrez Aguilar is intimately tied to the logic of re-appropriation as the most significant determination of praxis. In a more recently articulated version of her notion of ‘commons’ she argues:

during the years of struggle a possibility emerged for the reconfiguration of such a body into something that, by contrast and for the sake of distinction, we can call the recommon—*res communis*. The main features of this recommon, created, yearned for, and suggested by every successive assault against the state order of capital, consist in establishing what must be collectively reappropriated and, at the same time, in inhibiting the order of the centralizing rule that allows for *the monopoly of decisions* and the institution of nondeliberated procedures.¹¹

The conceptual tension within the “communal (or communitarian)” horizon resides in its instantiation with what is “proper”. Although Gutierrez Aguilar is critical of the forms of decision making in progressive governments of the region, citing Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, in terms of their capacity to “veto” the common expansion,

¹⁰ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar discusses the rise of the “new right” in the region and El Primer Congreso de Comunalidad en Mexico, in a recent radio interview: <https://archive.org/details/151026RAQUELGUTIERREZCOMUNALIDAD>.

¹¹ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar. "Beyond the "Capacity to Veto": Reflections from Latin America on the production and reproduction of the common". SAQ 113:2, Spring 2014.

her own position remains grafted to an understanding of the commons through an amphibological logic of appropriation, re-appropriation of what is proper and must remain property. Thus, if by the “commons” we understand a mere re-appropriation of that which has been initially expropriated, then the common is yet another version of a *primitive reason of social centralized organization (state)*, which, instrumentalized from below (in a micropolitical register), maintains the Hegelian schematics of principial unfolding of what is “proper” to “us” rendered governable by historical movement of a unified direction.

More problematic still is the fact that, for Gutierrez Aguilar, the appropriation of the commons must be accomplished by reaching consensus, which coincides all the more with the post-political position of occluding conflict as constitutive of the political (Gutierrez-Aguilar 2014). The logic of consensus, moreover, will be consistent with the nexus between appropriation and governability as the space of identity formation and policing. Similar to Gutierrez-Aguilar, Raul Zibechi in *Dispersar el poder* (Tinta Limón, 2006) has articulated the decision power of the commons as “authoritarianism based on consensus” that expiates political domination with a vague economical burden of “duty”.¹² At this point it is not clear how the turn to the “commons” could distance itself from the overlaying principle of ‘order’ that also structures neoliberal administration. However, this is not the only way to deal with or think through the problem of the commons. Against the formulation of the commons as instated by the proper, another notion of the commons could be understood as the dispersal of forms of life in retreat of hegemonic politics, turned towards “use” and “singularity” (finitude) rather than appropriation, by which

¹² A critique of the “horizontal” model of direct participation on the basis of consensus has been advanced by political theorist Maddalena Cerrato in her paper “¿Consenso activo y directo? Consideraciones sobre consenso y democracia” (unpublished). Read at the Seminario Crítico Transnacional, Universidad Complutense, July 2015. In her *Rhythms of the Pachakuti* (Duke University Press, 2015), Gutierrez Aguilar also situates the deliberate process of direct democracy in terms of consensus. She writes: “I firmly believe that this list of demands expresses an interesting, varied, and complex proposal for political transformation in Bolivia... The list of demands essentially seeks to take what is hidden, contained, and below – community methods for planning, reaching a consensus, and self-regulating coexistence – and place it “above and out in the open” on top of the traditional political order” (Gutierrez Aguilar 2015).

another space offers a post-identitarian model of commonality beyond distributive ontologies and effective consensus on what unveils as “proper to us”.¹³

Another possible form of the commons is not only imaginable, but also historically rooted. In her brief gloss on the Paris Commune, Arendt notes how, at odds with the revolutionary hypothesis of Marx and Lenin, the communal form does not thrive at seizing power or consensus, but rather at the *survival of radical freedom* (Arendt 1990). This communal form is irreducible to the way in which Latin American commons have been articulated around another identitarian ground of consensus and property and propriety. Hence, one of the tasks at the end of the progressive cycle is to render thinkable the question of the commons in a democratic horizon that would not be reducible to the creole traditions of liberalism, nor to the charismatic anti-institutionalism of populism.

Between the crisis of the articulation of the national popular projects and the contradictory conditions of the commons, a much-needed possibility for affirming a *post-hegemonic form of latinamericanist reflection* is in order. *Post-hegemonic reflection* is complementary to Jon Beasley-Murray’s well known formulation in *Posthegemony: political theory and Latin America* (Minnesota Press, 2010), although not entirely reducible to habits, multitude, and affect. The conditions for post-hegemonic reflection are two-fold: a principial affirmation of politics in the times of interregnum; and second, a politics grounded in democratic disagreement instead

¹³ What remains to be discussed is to what extent an identitarian affirmation of the commons reaffirms, albeit in other terms, the Hegelian philosophy of history vis-à-vis a distributive ontology as the foundational ground for Latin American sovereigntist validation. An identitarian matrix of understanding indigenous communalism recently revived could also be said to be informed by the writings of Oaxaca’s indigenous leader Floriberto Díaz’s in *Escrito: comunalidad, energía viva del pensamiento mixe* (UNAM, 2007). In their recent *To our friends* (Semiotexte, 2015), the collective The Invisible Committee makes a distinction between a concept of the commons based on the improper and use, and another grounded in a chain of equivalence that legislates an operation of expropriation on the basis of consensual property and propriety. Obviously what interests us here is the second option of communalism against the anthropological reductionism of communitarianism and politics of the subject. An important critique of community and its opening to singularity could also be found in Walter Brogan, “The Community of those who are going to die”, in Heidegger and Practical Philosophy (State University of New York Press, 2002).

of consensus. More incisive than posing the question of an effective political praxis, post-hegemonic reflection dwells on the fissure of hegemony opened within the epochal fracture of the principal form of politics and the architectonics of thought.¹⁴

Far from being an “ultra-leftist position” or an “apolitical position”, post-hegemonic wants to account for the limits of reflection on state form, the forces of financial capital, and the impossibility of establishing an *epoché* outside the regulatory frame of globalized machination. Instead of affirming yet another geopolitical nomic configuration (BRICS) in line with decoloniality, or a new culturalism based on “properness” and identity, *post-hegemonic reflection* amounts to the abandonment of principal politics of location and identity in line with democracy to come. It is an inescapable double-bind that desires no principle of legitimacy: on the one hand, it is a modest proposal for the non-interference of the freedom of thought, and on the other, the challenge of the impossibility of naming precisely that which for the moment lacks a proper name.

Gerardo Munoz is a fourth year PhD student in Latin American literature at Princeton University. His dissertation “Fissures of the State: crisis of sovereignty and principles Latin American twentieth century” explores cases of fractured hegemony and political principles. He is a member of the Infrapolitical Deconstruction academic collective (www.infrapolitica.wordpress.com).

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¹⁴ Political philosopher Reiner Schürmann develops the hypothesis of the epochal closure of principal thought in Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy, (Indiana University Press, 1987).

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BRUNO CAVA¹

Can the Latin American Progressive Governments Outlive Their Success?²

Oliver Stone's *South of the border* (2009) portrays the quintessential narrative of the Latin American progressive cycle.³ The documentary tells the story of the coming to power of Chavez in Venezuela, the first in a new harvest of pink leaders that distanced themselves from the monochromatic post-communist neoliberal order. Surrounded by an overwhelming support from the popular classes and the nationalist left, Chavez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador, the Kirchners in Argentina, and Lula in Brazil confronted openly the elites, the press monopolies, the right-wing destituent force, and in doing so, detached themselves from the governmentality that intensified inequality and poverty in the neoliberal 1990s.

In a sense this film is constructed as an inverse road movie: that is, instead of filming the popular protests throughout its different territories, Stone strolls through presidential palaces adhering to the epic discourse of the chiefs of State. *South of the border* even goes as far as citing the fall of the Berlin Wall, stating that the new Latin American political cycle erupted against the triumphalist post-historical ideology of the Washington consensus. In this narrative made for exportation, the progressive

¹ BRUNO CAVA is an associate fellow at the Universidade Nômade. He is the author of *A multidão foi ao deserto: as manifestações no Brasil em 2013* (AnnaBlume Editora, 2013) and co-author of *Podemos e Syriza: experimentações políticas e democracia no século 21* (AnnaBlume Editora, 2015).

² This article was translated by Gerardo Muñoz. It was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/12/can-the-latin-american-progressive-governments-outlive-their-success> on May 12th, 2016.

³ *South of the border*. Dir. Oliver Stone. Good Apple Productions 2006.

cycle coincides with the Left's nostalgia for the Cold War, anxious in finding an "exteriority" to the global hegemony of capital.

The year 2015 was the *annus horribilis* of the Latin American progressive cycle. This was the year in which governments were defeated on their own terms, that is, through massive electoral participation that included the poor popular sectors. For instance, kirchnerismo could only offer as presidential nominee a candidate whose political career was shaped during Menemismo.⁴ In Venezuela, the opposition allocated 16% of the votes in the National Assembly elections⁵ Evo Morales' young contender Soledad Chapetón became the mayor of El Alto, the second major city in Bolivia and the well-known plebeian heart and soul of the Gas Wars of 2003.⁶ Right after the multifaceted uprisings last June that led to the intensification of the political crisis, Rafael Correa admitted that he will not be running for the upcoming presidential elections of 2017.⁷ Finally, Dilma Rousseff, Lula's successor, faced massive protests in 2011 of almost a million discontented citizens. Cross-electoral polls have rated her popularity below the 10% support line.⁸ Although Dilma won the presidential election in October of 2014, it was by a very thin margin (3%) in which two things were proved, although the second was later proven false: 1. That Brazil was at the border of a deep systemic crisis, and 2. That she would not adopt neoliberal policies of fiscal adjustment, which were integrally inscribed in the 2015 political agenda.⁹

⁴ Salvador Schavelzon. "El agotamiento kirchnerista", http://www.la-razon.com/.../agotamiento-kirchnerista_o_238956...

⁵ Pablo Stefanoni. "Venezuela: el ocaso de los ídolos", <http://lalineadefuego.info/.../venezuela-el-ocaso-de-los-ido.../>

⁶ Pablo Stefanoni. "La nueva derecha andina", <http://www.revistaanfibia.com/cron.../la-nueva-derecha-andina/>

⁷ Bruno N. Dias. "Junho no Equador e o correísmo", <http://uninomade.net/tenda/junho-no-equador-e-o-correismo/>

⁸ On the 2015 protest in Brazil, see Giuseppe Cocco's interview at IHU: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/.../54110-as-manifestacoes-de-mar...>

⁹ Bruno Cava. "The coup in Brazil has already happened", <https://www.opendemocracy.net/.../coup-in-brazil-has-already-...>

It is in this context that the discourse on the exhaustion of the progressive cycle begins to take shape.¹⁰ At the same time, understanding it as a narrative of “closure” is insufficient and full of traps, since it seems to point to a defeat of what previously was a golden age of progressive usurpation of power. According to this faulty narrative, the downfall of these governments was instigated by financial markets deregulation, right wing *golpismo*, and elite alliance with U.S imperialism. In all the cases the explanation is externalized and mystified to an “other” that determines the defeat that we have the duty to mourn.

This self-critique is best expressed by the view that the majority of those who benefitted from the social beliefs did so to then turn in favor of the ideology of consumerism, voting the political opposition (in terms of a populism logic, this is translated as the people are always right except when they do not vote us), and lamenting for not being “socialist enough”. But in reality before the omen of the end of the progressive cycle became a bitter reality in the Argentine case and is beginning to be bitter without end in the Brazilian scene, it is necessary to take distance from any epic narrative structured around the opposition between imperialism and anti-imperialism, progressives and neoliberalists, left and right; all categories that only had some theoretical validity in the 1970s, or perhaps with more analytical justifications in the 1990s. There should not be more mystification by adopting the grand narratives of the state. Instead we should confront the problems as they open a path towards action and thought. As I argued with Alexandre Mendes, the progressive governments *have won*.¹¹ This entails that they have secured legitimacy by systematically repressing emergent constituent possibilities against new political

¹⁰ For instance, see Raúl Zibechi: <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a220180.html>; Gerardo Muñoz: <https://infrapolitica.wordpress.com/.../notas-sobre-el-agota.../>; Salvador Schavelzon: <https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/.../27148-fin-del-relato-pr...>

¹¹ Bruno Cava & Alexandre F. Mendes. “A esquerda venceu”, *Revista Lugar Comum* n.º 45, <http://uninemade.net/lugarcomum/45/>

imaginings that did not fit the prefigured ideological governmental mode of development and social organization of urban centers

In the last ten to fifteen years, the politico-economic project of the region was grounded in a theoretical matrix of production in the context of underdevelopment that dates back to the age-old CEPAL model (Prebisch, Furtado), in spite of new syncretic adjustments.¹² In broad terms, this means an application of Keynesianism in *longue durée*: on the one hand, accepting that investment determines effective demands (one does not produce to distribute, but the other way around); and on the other, that in peripheral conditions it is imperative to govern over industrial and technological developments. From these premises one fundamental consequence is derived: accumulation leads to a general process of industrialization.

The logic of investments in the industrial sector will expand productive capacities, altering the specific composition of imports, and thus leading to a diversification of the economy. However, since the relation between center and periphery is structural, the only viable option for Latin American governments is to use their fiscal surplus of its initial position. It is here that the well-known “Commodities Consensus” springs up (Svampa 2013). In other words, the export index becomes the strategic element of capitalist accumulation as the point of departure for the productive model. In theory, the developmentalist project should enhance the national market relative to the external demand, promoting a deep transformation of the national economy, thus possibly breaking away with the vicious circle of structural dependency. In other words, industrialization and State planning is the path for overcoming levels of poverty.

Before the end of the progressive cycle, in fact, most of the criticisms against these governments stemmed from two main positions. First, those that point out that these governments were not sufficiently developmentalist, making it impossible to break away from neoliberalism, and an external alliance with financial forces hindering any real potential for emancipation. This line of argumentation is followed by the

¹² Antonio Negri & Giuseppe Cocco. “Globo(AL), biopoder e lutas em uma América Latina globalizada”, Record, 2005.

criticism, exemplified in the Venezuelan case, of not diversifying the national economy beyond the nonproductive matrix of petro-industry. In the Brazilian case, the criticism is organized against what is taken to be a “primary form of economy”, even if agro-business is also a large scale industry, intertwined to bio-engineering, financial, brand and commercial sectors. The second type of critique limits itself to the denunciation of extractivist excesses, as if the developmentalist project was grounded in an efficient direction, but only lacking an ethical dimension to impacted communities and more care for environmental policies. Both the industrialist critiques (1st position) and the social-liberal (2nd position) lose sight of a central internal limit to the progressive developmentalist model, to which I will return in the latter part of the essay.¹³

Across the board, the progressive governments emerged from democratic mobilizations from below. Chavez’ Bolivarian Revolution emerged out of the Caracazo (1989); Ecuador’s Citizen Revolution from the urban riots (1997-2001) and the “forajidos” rebellion (2005); Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution was a result of the insurgent cycle of 2000-2005 along with the Water and Gas wars in 2000 and 2003.¹⁴ In the cases of Brazil and Argentina, the 1997 Asian crisis catalyzed the crumbling of neoliberal stability leading to the 2001 crisis in Argentina, whose social protagonists were *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos* before Kirchnerismo – while the ascension of Lula to power came from three different electoral defeats (1989, 1994,

¹³ The liberal critique based on rights is a “weak” first level critique against developmentalism. A second-degree critique is also “weak”, since it substitutes the juridical limit by a qualitative one that meshes the anthropic principle of Malthusian thought with mathematic determinations. Some contemporary thinkers of capitalism, such as geographer David Harvey, regularly argue that capital is limitless and of infinite expansion. According to Marx, however, the limit of capital is class, and class power. The fragments on the machines in the *Grundrisse*, Marx’s most eschatological text, have the merit of placing a limit of the extensive to the intensive *via-a-vis* the machination of the social. This would be a strong third degree critique related to the production of subjectivity. The idea of catastrophe can be disputed as capitalism’s own catastrophe at the moment of its maximum antagonism. From the South, this immanent analysis of developmentalism becomes contaminated with materials from the alter-developmental matrix, as developed by Alberto Acosta and Salvador Schavelzon. In this sense, instead of being determined by the outside by capital’s transcendental will, one could also think of resistance as the transformation of subjectivity in its becoming. In this sense, one could turn the logic of developmentalism by becoming-Indian of developmentalism as I argue in “Devir-indio, devir-pobre”, <http://www.quadradosloucos.com.br/.../devir-pobre-deva-in.../>. Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus* deploy the concept Body-without-organs (BwO) as the figure of the catastrophe.

¹⁴ Alexandre Mendes & Bruno Cava. “O Podemos e os enigmas que vêm do sul”, <http://www.diplomatique.org.br/artigo.php?id=1870>

and 1998). It is important to emphasize, however, that the convergence of these revolts with alter-globalization movements in Seattle and Genova (articulated in the horizon of Chiapas) allowed for a mestizaje of the autonomist generation of the 1990s with the more traditional Latin-American left of the seventies. An example of this encounter was the organization of the Global Social Forums (FSM) that took place in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul governed by Lula's PT.

The democratic mobilizations conveyed a much-needed drift in governmental policies at a moment when the developmentalist model began to directly invest in the social sphere. The reallocation of public budget determined an unseen liberation of manual labor which reinvented the economy from below, promoted a period of economic growth that reduced social and regional inequalities. All of the socio-economic indexes show the success of these social policies that, without the State and market mediations, transferred rent thus increasing the salary ceiling and expanding popular credit (WB Group, 2014). The impact of this transformation was felt at multiple levels, but there is no doubt that it sparked a profound change in most of Latin-American societies. There is a generalized interpretation of the success of the progressive cycle that points to the export indexes in connection to the expansion of the Chinese economy and the international commodities (like oil, which rose to a peak \$100 a barrel) as the central key to the economic contention during the economic crisis of 2008-2009 without giving up the operation of redistribution. What seems to be left out from this analysis is the possibility of considering that the strengthening of the internal market was conditioned to the relative transformation of the social productive forces and the formation of virtuous economic circuits (regardless of the industrial success or limitations), as well as to the overall tendency towards autonomous exports.

The developmentalist principles adopted by the progressive governments were formulated before the decline of the Keynesian Fordist model of the seventies and the arrival of financial globalization. In this way, industrialization is understood as the path opening toward emancipation, whether it is through proletarianization with class consciousness, or through the "base reforms" (Furtado 1976) in a more diachronic analysis. Also, the developmentalist success of the Brazilian dictatorship

(1964-85), through the 2nd National Plan of Development (PND), drove to a conclusion the “iron cycle” coinciding with the moment of the silicon revolution that began in California. After three decades, the productive sector no longer coincided with the industrial sector, since the developmentalist projects continue being measured through indexes that no longer account for the overdetermination of the “capital of communism” that drives financialized forms.¹⁵ The attempt to isolate the working sector through investment indexes became a mirrored image, leading to a parallel accumulation of capital in the hands of the traditional oligarchic elites that should have been the target of their antagonism in the first place.

In any case, it is important to emphasize the singularity of both Bolivian and Ecuadorian constituent political processes that forced mobilizations at the margins of developmentalist agendas, such as the plurinational construction based on “Buen Vivir”,¹⁶ or Correa’s techno-populism based on the economy of knowledge that copied not so much the Cuban model as it did the South Korean.¹⁷ In spite of these designs, the respective cases of TIPNIS and Yasuni-ITT signaled the resolution of tensions and contradictions within the rich Andean political experiences, impacting the developmentalist project as well as the dynamic between governments and the social movements. The complex biopolitical practices of autonomy and the common became reduced to a social-progressive horizon, as Alberto Acosta and Salvador Schavelzon have argued.¹⁸ No two other statesmen express the primacy of this necessity better than Rafael Correa and Vice-president Álvaro García Linera, who

¹⁵ Andrea Fumagalli & Sandro Mezzadra. “A crise da economia global”, Record, 2011. See also KorpoBraz (2013) by Giuseppe Cocco.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive study of the notion of “Buen Vivir” in Bolivia and Ecuador, see *Plurinacionalidad y Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir: dos conceptos leídos desde Bolivia y Ecuador post-constituyentes* (CLACSO, 2015) by Salvador Schavelzon.

¹⁷ Pablo Stefanoni. “La utopía coreana en los Andes”, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=17279> and Carlos de la Torre’s “El tecnopopulismo de Rafael Correa: ¿Es compatible el carisma con la tecnocracia?”, <https://muse.jhu.edu/login...>

¹⁸ Alberto Acosta. “O Buen Vivir, uma Oportunidade de Imaginar Outro Mundo”, br.boell.org/sit.../default/files/downloads/alberto_acosta.pdf

have repeatedly affirmed the necessity of the developmentalist project as the condition for the State's struggle to eradicate poverty.¹⁹ In the rhetoric of García Linera's, the quintessential intellectual of the progressive cycle, one could read the internal limit of developmentalism from the left.²⁰

There is a lot of discussion on inequality, but not much about exploitation.²¹ Capital is understood not as social relation that organizes the very relations between society and state. Rather, the question of capital appears, inversely, as an organizing principle from both outside and above, a master trope that the state will oppose in a molar tension in the social division of wealth. It is no coincidence that the recent mobilizations are classified as wanting to destabilize the state in the name of restoring neoliberalism. This happened in the uprisings of 2013 in Brazil – in some respects, a far echo of the Argentine *¡Que se vayan todos!*²² – coinciding with the Arab uprisings of 2010-2011,²³ and Venezuela in 2014 and those in Ecuador in 2015.²⁴ All of these uprisings were delegitimized by the progressive governments, and re-coded as “vandalism” in Brazil, as “coup” in Venezuela, or as “terrorism” in Ecuador. The state's discourse, moreover, contributed to institutional atrophy pointing to the radical democratization in a “national-state” matrix,²⁵ undermining its potential for political renovation. This was a common pattern across the region in terms of dealing with social movements in each occurrence of protest.

¹⁹ Álvaro García Linera. “Empate catastrófico y punto de bifurcación”, <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/.../se.../CyE/cye2Sta.pdf>

²⁰ Álvaro García Linera. “O socialismo é a radicalização da democracia”, interview with, [http://www.cartamaior.com.br/... \(2015\)](http://www.cartamaior.com.br/... (2015))

²¹ I follow here the insight developed Giuseppe Cocco in the above-cited interview.

²² Ariel Pennisi. “Imagens e anacronismos; a questão do demos entre o 2001 argentino e o 2013 brasileiro”, *Revista Lugar Comum* n.º 45, <http://uninemade.net/lugarcomum/45/>.

²³ Alexandre Mendes. A good summary could read in “Ocupações estudantis: novas assembleias constituintes diante da crise?”, <http://uninemade.net/.../ocupacoes-estudantis-novas-assemble.../>

²⁴ Pablo Ospinta Peralta. “¿Por qué protestan en Ecuador?” <http://nuso.org/articulo/por-que-protestan-en-ecuador/>

²⁵ Pablo Stefanoni. “Chavismo, Guerra Fría y visiones ‘campistas’”. <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=65376>

We are dealing with a Leftist mixture of Hegelianism and Marxism, where the state appears as the privileged dialectical synthesis that justifies every phenomena through “correlations of forces”. But this is yet another name for the Hegelian equation, “the Real equals the Rational”. This could be transferred to the international scene, where a new dialectic between economy and the world becomes the BRICs synthesis as the international counter-power to North American imperialism. A version of this dichotomy was already in place in Montesquieu’s thought in the account of *checks and balances*.²⁶ The sympathy for the Chinese model is not only nostalgia for the Cold War division, but more importantly a new developmentalist economic matrix. The restoration of the Washington consensus gets rewritten as the Beijing consensus.²⁷ An explicit contradiction hides the all too familiar fluxes through a unifying principle as the one proposed by Deng in 1976: “planning and market forces are two forms that control economic activity”.²⁸ Since dialectics accepts anything, even waving red flags and aligning with the socialist party (as in the Brazilian case), it could govern along with national oligarchies and the corporate class. One cannot govern with Kátia Abreu, the agribusiness queen, and at the same time defend developmentalism as you were Rosa Luxemburg. Only Hegelians can accomplish this impossible task.

The difference between speaking about inequality and thinking exploitation is that, in the case of the latter, what is emphasized is the social constitution embedded in exploitation, and consequently its antagonistic character. To speak of inequality instead of exploitation allows thinking to occur in terms of social stratifications in a sociological frame instead of through the antagonism constitutive of social relations

²⁶ We could cite as example that the fundamental contradictions are central to the model of accumulation and the capitalist continuity. This process of deterritorialization of capitals is at the center of Giovanni Arrighi’s *Il lungo XX secolo; denaro, potere e le origini del nostro tempo* (1996).

²⁷ I am following here Giuseppe Cocco’s analysis of China and the BRICs. The economic matrix designed by Nelson Barbosa follows principles of the post-1976 Chinese model.

²⁸ Deng Xiaoping cited in John Gittings’ *The changing face of China: from Mao to Market*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

in capital. That is, the transformation of the social composition corresponds to the dissolution of the social composition to a molecular form. There is little to lament, however, with the ideal of building a working class that will fit the European modalities of Fordist industrialism. The conditions for proletarianization in Latin America already entail an intrinsic post-Fordist form of proletarianization. As argued by Giuseppe Cocco, in this *sui generis* proletarianization the poor are excluded as poor.²⁹ Combating poverty has an ambiguous dimension in the official rhetoric that leans towards the domestication of the problem, instead of affirming its antagonistic potential. If the progressive cycle ideal of inclusion is the inclusion of the poor in terms of exploitation (and not only in quantitative terms of reducing inequality), then there exists a resistance dimension of the poor, a creative and productive dimension that exceeds the narrative of “State vs. Capital” duopoly.

The critics of the proletarianization of the South, focusing on the moral pattern fixed by consumer democratization,³⁰ or that of an anamorphic and disorganized sub-proletarian tend to exclude the transformations at the level of class.³¹ This has been expressed not only in the new cycle of struggles beyond the progressive horizon, to the extent of even voting slightly to the right-wing political forces. In order to capture this polarization from below internal to the crisis, Giuseppe Cocco and I proposed a *savage Lulism*,³² a potential block of singularities of the new mobilization phase of the poor that was repressed by the Left itself.³³ On the other side of mobilizations and constituent struggles, the conquests of the progressive cycle have systematically

²⁹ This is the axis of the operaismo conceptual analysis used by Cocco to understand the mobilization of the poor in the last fifteen years in Brazil. See his books *MundoBraz* (2009) y *KorpoBraz* (2013).

³⁰ For Emir Sader is the central struggle is the “battle of ideas” against neoliberal ideology. See his “Vencer a batalha das ideias”, <http://cartamaior.com.br/...>

³¹ André Singer, voicing the Leftist sector of the PT, has advanced the concept of the “sub-proletarian”, emerged during the Lula years. See “Os sentidos do lulismo: reforma gradual e pacto conservador” (2012).

³² Giuseppe Cocco & Bruno Cava. “Vogliamo tutto! Le giornate di giugno in Brasile: la costituzione selvaggia della moltitudine del lavoro metropolitano”, <http://www.euronomade.info/?p=173>

³³ Amarildo was the visible face of the 2013 Brazilian uprising, where the expression for organization of the poor, against the grain of biopolitical organization, was affirmed around those of color and indigenous submitted to the dominance of megaprojects of urban development. See “A luta pela paz”, by Giuseppe Cocco, Eduardo Baker and Bruno Cava, <http://www.diplomatique.org.br/artigo.php?id=569>

worked miraculously, since it becomes a paranoid symbolic patrimony that must persist uncontested.

It is not enough to lament or contest the end of the progressive cycle, or even overemphasize the return of the “New Right” in a conjunction like ours that is traversed by multiple fluctuations, new social actors, and intensities.

A critique sustained on how the progressive cycle was not being socialist, developmentalist, or voluntarist *enough*, paving the way from the rise of liberal opponents (Mauricio Macri in Argentina, Henrique Capriles in Venezuela, or Mauricio Rodas in Ecuador) is insufficient. It is important to acknowledge that the progressive governments succeeded and because of this victory, ambiguous results are now emerging. The dynamics of mass mobilizations will reshape the developmentalist projects and explain what national criollo intellectuals cannot longer clarify. The task is to liberate the analysis from black and white epics or dialectical narratives, as to reopen political imagination to a new social and economic composition in the region. We can leave the process of mourning to a global left still haunted by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism. First, one must liberate oneself from an “impotent pseudo-heroism”.³⁴ All walls must fall in order to generate new experiences of action and thought.

**In writing this article, I want to highlight the important interlocutors outside of Brazil, such as Diego Sztulwark, Veronica Gago, Salvador Schavelzon, Santiago Arcos, Pablo Stefanoni, Ariel Pennisi, Bruno Napoli, Mauricio Villacrez, Pablo Hupert, Nicolás F. Muriano, Melisa Gorondy Novak, Bernardo Gutiérrez, Cesar Altamira, Gerardo Muñoz, Alberto Acosta, Oscar Camacho, and Nemo Niente.*

³⁴ Lobo Suelto! Editorial. “El país banal”, <http://anarquiacoronada.blogspot.com.br/.../11/o-pais-banal.h...>

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SERGIO VILLALOBOS-RUMINOTT¹

The Chilean Case and the Latin American Pink Tide: Between Democracy and Developmentalism²

The so called *Marea Rosada* (Pink Tide) specifically refers to the turn that several Latin American governments took by the end of the 90s, in favor of public and social agendas that opposed the neoliberal order that characterized the region in the previous decades. These new agendas also broke away from the age-old ideal of revolutionary partisanship, pursuing a critique of neoliberalism that was not reducible to a radical (impossible) delinking still embedded in the logic of accumulation. The new political agenda brought to the fore by the governments of the *Marea Rosada* without opposing neoliberalism tried to radically modify its logic and produce a more humane economy. In spite of the anti-imperialist and nationalist rhetoric that have flourished in the regional Left, it is also true that for cases such as the Chilean and the Brazilian ones the scene is dominated by a type of government that seeks to correct unjust income distribution while maintaining a disciplined fiscal budget as to facilitate its entry into international markets.

Even so, the nationalizations that have recently taken place in Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia seem to contradict the balanced rhetoric and practice of the *Marea Rosada*. This series of heterogeneous initiatives seem to respond to an age-old agenda

¹ SERGIO VILLALOBOS-RUMINOTT (PhD. University of Pittsburgh, 2003) is Associate Professor of Spanish & Latin American Studies at University of Michigan. He is the author of *Soberanías en suspenso: imaginación y violencia en América Latina* (La Cebra, 2013) and *Heterografías de la violencia: historia, nihilismo, destrucción* (La Cebra, 2016)

² This article was translated by Gerardo Muñoz. It was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/24/the-chilean-case-and-the-latin-american-pink-tide-between-democracy-and-developmentalism> on May 24th, 2016.

inscribed in the logic of the imperial geopolitical order toppled by contemporary globalization. In any case, it comes as no surprise that the Chilean case is still used today as the paradigm to distort the potential for more radical options.

One must recall that Chile underwent its formal transition to democracy in the early nineties immediately after experiencing one of the longest and most brutal military dictatorships in the region. However, what gave the Chilean case its notoriety was not just its constricted democratization, but its position as an ideal model for implementing neoliberal policies in authoritarian conditions. While neoliberal policies were being applied in the rest of Latin America during transitional or democratic periods, Chile already opted for a distinct neoliberal path since the 70s (Harvey 2007), appeasing social unrest through forms of anti-communist security rhetoric. At the same time, the transition to democracy in Chile, formally inaugurated in 1990, was oriented to the administration of macroeconomic policies supplemented with neoliberal engineering born out of the dictatorship. Attenuating its social impact through light redistributive policies, such as fixed bonds and selective assignments, class composition or the overall pattern of wealth or ownership distribution were not altered in a significant way.

To this one should also add that the high price of copper, the main national product, together with the arrival of China to the international market, produced an exceptional financial situation that favors the political strategies of a government uninterested in serious political or economic reforms. In other words, this increase in the price of copper on the international market produced a surplus in the fiscal budget that allowed for multiple redistributive initiatives without really altering the monetary policies, the interest rates on property and profit, or the condition of international exchange. During the years that followed the Pinochet dictatorship, the administrations of *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* devoted themselves to politically managing this model, balancing its own deficiency vis-à-vis a permanent strategy of social deferral and forced social mourning, while incapable of advancing judicial accountability for crimes committed during the dictatorship; many of these criminals were recycled in the state bureaucracy and intelligence apparatus.

The experience of the Brazilian PT, Bolivia's MAS, or the state transformation initiated by Kirchnerismo in Argentina could serve as a contrast to the Chilean case, since in Chile the processes of radical popular organizations that made explicit the crisis of governability of the dictatorships in the 80s were appropriated by the old political elite, constituting itself as the central political actor when the dictatorship ended. From this process of juxtaposition of old partisan cadres and its actors, minimally renewed through social democratic robes, a logic of hegemony under which the central actors continued to be the state, the national army, and the traditional political parties was rearticulated. Thus, in the 90s we see the emergence of a securitarian rhetoric directed not anymore against the communist, but against the delinquent, the drug lord, or even indigenous people and anarchists. This served a single goal: political decisions had to be consensually taken within Parliament and among parties, and not in the streets. There was a clear need to deactivate the social movements that, against all odds, had not ceased to occupy the streets and protest the inherent contradictions of the Chilean democracy.

On the other hand, one of the clearest signs of the institutional or juristocratic (Hirschl 2007) limits of the Chilean model rest, precisely, on the indefinite postponement of demands of the subaltern indigenous population, traditionally punished under times of dictatorship and subjected to the policies of appropriation by banks and by the forestry sector. Chilean democracy, recovered during the early 90s according to the official state discourse, was a zero-sum game for the Mapuche movement. The official acceptance of the multicultural and pluri-ethnic character of the nation, vis-à-vis a fetishistic, ideal, totemic indigeneity, only deviated the gaze from the repressive policies directed at the Mapuche people to the folkloric representation of the indigenous as yet another touristic catalogue of curiosities. The appropriation by dispossession studied by Marxist geographer David Harvey (2007) becomes evident not only during the time of the dictatorship, but also in the need for energetic developmentalist expansion that amounts to the sacking of natural resources such as rivers, lakes, and forests.

The continuation of dictatorship within democracy

The concentration of wealth, the precarization of the lives of the popular sector, the hasty increase of financial profit in pension investments, health, or banking, along with the public debt and criminal interest rates, the sustained drive to privatize natural resources, and the overwhelming presence of corporate elites within the state apparatuses (the same families rotate in public appointments), not only confirm the limited character of the Chilean democracy, but the perpetuity of the dictatorship within the so-called “democracy”. The re-election of Michelle Bachelet, following a series of social protests that bear witness to the incapacity of the center-right administration, was conducted on the basis of a promise for structural constitutional reforms and deep changes in the health and education sectors; changes that have not taken place as of today.

Certainly, these reforms have yet to take place, and have only been accommodated through institutional consent, capturing the social demands of recent years within parliament. Chile, the exemplary model of a center-left government, is in fact a classic example of a governmental administration responsible for the neoliberal model and its macroeconomic policies in the hands of an uncreative political class that superficially reinvented itself by changing its name from *La Concertación* to *La Nueva Mayoría*. The political frame of this false premise remains the same as the one conceived in the 1980 Constitution, which functioned as an effective juridical trap fomenting the operative legacy of the dictatorship.

The question of the state form

I would like however to restate the fact that this description of the Chilean case is not *symptomatic* of the rest of Latin America, nor is it based upon a political discontent or a moral denunciation on my part. To be precise, I think that the Chilean case allows us to formulate the question about the form and function of the *late Latin American states* in general. This is a central question that needs to be raised at the moment.

First, I would like to clarify what I mean by *late state form*. I argue that it is not simply a question of the historical evolution of the state, but rather, it is related to the process

of institutional re-foundation that the region has been going through. Taking into consideration the constituent processes and new constitutions in Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and to some extent the constitutional reforms in Chile and Central America, this new beginning is regularly associated with the evident failure of the post-colonial republican project that emerged out of the consequences of nineteenth century emancipatory movements and civil wars. I do not mean that this failure is associated with a precise moment of globalization understood as the universalization of the flexible pattern of accumulation constitutive of contemporary capitalism, but rather globalization itself is the *coup de grace* of a republican post-colonial project always already in crisis.

Second, it seems to me that it is important to determine the specific *function and form* of this late Latin American state. In principle, discussing the form is relevant because what is at stake goes beyond the differentiation between an institutional restructuring and the contingent political organization at the level of government. These two levels of analysis are not enough. From the question about state form emerges the problem of the status of law and power as a single machine that allows us to take a certain distance from the monumental notions that tend to delimit politics on variations of one and the same model of domination. In the same way that a contemporary genealogical discourse broke away from the institutional or monumental schematics of power, we need to think the state not as a transcendental entity, but as a field of struggle (*campo de lucha*), as defined in the discussions of the members of the group Comuna in Bolivia and Álvaro García Linera (2010).

In a similar way, instead of thinking sovereignty as an attribute proper to the juridical state order (always already pre-defined as the master key of modern governmentality and condition of the biopolitical closure), it would be pertinent to think of sovereignty as an indeterminate relationship. One could argue the same for law. Far from being a simple ideological supplement to domination (a mythic violence that conserves the social order), it is also a performative practice open to juridical creativity. I think this is what is at stake in recent theoretical debates (as in Derrida's critique to Agamben's notion of *Homo Sacer*, or in Deleuze's re-elaboration of Hume's associationism and jurisprudence); that is, the possibility of thinking the state, the

sovereign relation and the law not as separate markers on social life, but also as indeterminate instances that wage and define the political struggles in the present. In this sense, the question of the late *Latin American state form* is also a question of the instances where that state, far from being a simple ideological apparatus of reproduction and confirmation of class domination, is a field in which this domination is articulated, but also where it could be interrupted.³

Post-neoliberalism?

Finally, the question of the function of the late Latin American state form is related to the possibility of discussing what has been called post-neoliberalism; or alternatively, second-order neoliberalism, which, hinging on the state as the katechon or the containment of the demands of social movements (through diverse forms of repressive and persuasive strategies), guarantees the hegemony of capital and secures the macroeconomic space for flexible patterns of accumulation.⁴ In this sense, if neoliberalism was effectively implemented in Chile, within the frame of an authoritarian government that resulted in policies of fiscal adjustment, reduction of social expenditure, and financial deregulation; neoliberalism of the second order does not seem to need military dictatorships, since it articulates itself with a state that lacks interventionist potential with the ultimate responsibility of securing the productive and extractive processes in line with what Maristella Svampa has termed the commodities consensus and destructive-development (*mal desarrollo*) (2007).⁵

I want to linger on this aporia: if on the one hand the state form indicates an opening for struggles of social transformation, on the other, the determination of its function is what demonstrates the extent to which those initiatives of social transformation taken up by the governments of the *Marea Rosada* have viability or remain palliative

³ Jacques Derrida. *The Beast and the Sovereign I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 408-443. Gilles Deleuze. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. New York: Zone Books, 2005.

⁴ For post-neoliberalism or what I am calling second order neoliberalism, see Verónica Gago's *La razón neoliberal: economías barrocas y pragmática popular* (Tinta Limón, 2015). The flexible pattern of accumulation is the object of exploration in Gareth Williams's *The Other Side of the Popular* (Duke, 2002).

⁵ <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2015/4/22/the-commodities-consensus-and-valuation-languages-in-latin-america-1>

to what John Kraniauskas has called “the cunning of capital” (2014). To what extent have the redistributive policies not only been able to produce substantial welfare structure, but also remain active enough as to keep the constituent political processes expanding the democratic institutions in their struggle against transnational capital?

Perhaps this is, once again, the lesson to be learned from the Chilean case: far from confirming the empowerment of social movements that have disputed neoliberal rationality, the “political class” entrenches itself around the state’s Pinochet-designed Constitution that has consistently expropriated citizen participation, enclosing their demands within the narrow institutional parliamentary frame. To repeat, this should not be taken as a moral critique of the status quo, but as a historical reflection on how this particular “political class” continually perpetuates political distrust of the social movements and the “people”.

The “people” that I am referring to, however, cannot be considered as the historical subject produced within national identity, nor an ethnic-political subject of the liberal criollo project. Nor can it be its “neo-indigenist” symmetrical inversion. “People” refers, on the contrary, to a cathartic figure, unrepresentable by the modern categories of the political as George Didi-Huberman has recently suggested (2014). Instead of being an “exposed people” (*pueblo expuesto*), as in the case of the juridical and historical narratives about The People, narratives that conform and determine, normatively, what this people should be, we are referring to a “figuring people” (*pueblo figurante*) that deactivates the very coordinates of juridical, political, and cultural representation polluting the logic of populism and its fictive ethnicity with multiple forms of participation and social constitutions (Williams 1999).

Therefore, I am not thinking of the “people” of the modern Latin American political (hegemonic) imagination, but rather in the “peoples” where one can account for the possibility of interrupting the savage processes of accumulation in force today. It is in the “peoples” where the *Marea Rosada* should have placed their bet (instead of inscribing them as another emancipatory subject), so as to locate a central actor to wage a battle no longer situated in the infinite reproduction of the total apparatus of development (its governability, security, private property, and the market), but in the

potentiality of other forms of power and social organization. This would be a politics oriented towards a “plebian experience”, as traced by Martin Breugh (2013), where the plebe names the improper site of a community without attributes that allows for dissent as the fundamental condition for a profane republicanism in our times.

The current ‘exhaustion of Marea Rosada governments’, denoted by other scholars, is due both to the inability to fulfill their promises and to the structural exhaustion of the modern Latin American political imagination.⁶ In this sense, the progressive and democratic character of these governments does not transcend that historical imagination, placing them in what we might call a late version of traditional *criollismo*. This *criollismo tardío* (including the decolonial delinking option) is a horizon of thinking still unable to understand politics and history as something other than the battle for recognition, limiting contemporary heterogeneous practices of resistance to neoliberalism to the identitarian agenda of state politics.

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SALVADOR SCHAPELZON¹

The End of the Progressive Narrative in Latin America²

Are we witnessing the end of the progressive governments' cycle in Latin America? This question seems to come up after every electoral defeat or disappear whenever there is a victory. After more than a decade of continuous political successes in Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, as well as other Central America countries, 2015 was the year that signaled adverse results and a drop in electoral support began. Without diminishing the importance of elections, whence the progressive governments derived their legitimacy, it is the time to evaluate the vitality of the political projects away from the narratives that constituted them in their peak moment. Beyond the polls, there looms an undetermined time of change. Due exhaustion of the model and to the internal transformation of the progressive, plurinational or Bolivarian political narrative (electoral defeats), we find a political language that was able to inscribe a new political time in Latin America, which comes to an halt with leaders involved in charges of corruption and as well as accompanied by the lowest indexes of popular support.

Since progressive governments occupy the center of the political spectrum, there has

¹ SALVADOR SCHAPELZON is an anthropologist and researcher at the Federal University of São Paulo and member of the Sampa Citizenship Circle. He is the author of *El nacimiento del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia: etnografía de una asamblea constituyente* (CLACSO, 2013), and *Plurinacionalidad y Vivir Bien/ Buen Vivir: Dos conceptos leídos desde Bolivia y Ecuador post-constituyentes* (CLACSO, 2015).

² A first version of this article was published in Spanish in June 2015 in the Bolivian newspaper *La Razón*. Vice-president, Álvaro García Linera declared in national TV that it was impossible to speak of an end of the progressive cycle in Latin America, was one of the first to react to this piece. A few months after, the electoral results in Bolivia made visible the need to rethink the internal political crisis of the MAS government. This is a revised and updated version of the original article with new statistics and bibliographic references for the publication in this special issue. Open Democracy translated an early English version of the Bolivian original, and Gerardo Muñoz substantially modified the English translation for the purposes of this dossier. In *Alternautas* the article was published in: <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/24/the-end-of-the-progressive-narrative-in-latin-america> on May 24th, 2016.

been a reshuffling of forces and mounting mobilization on both the left and the right. The map of the political situation is not homogeneous and cannot be generalized, but *governistas* (governists) — the term used in Brazil to refer to militant government supporters with strong participation in social networks and characterized for not accepting the slightest criticism, combined with a rhetoric of pragmatic politics — expressed some degree of concern. After taking the first policy measures in the aftermath of its close win in the October 2014 elections, *governismo* in Brazil showed remarkable difficulties in holding on to its own narrative. Brazil was probably the country where the end of the political cycle was visible for the first time. In part, due to the fact that it was the country that did not experience a strong systemic transformation of the political system, obliging the PT to govern with political allies that did not necessarily share their same ideals. The defeat of *kirchnerismo* in Argentina and *chavismo* in Venezuela tragically demonstrated the political fragility of the situation. A few years ago it would have been difficult to imagine losing broad popular support or achieving victory by thin margins³

The political climate is not very different from the one in Bolivia and Ecuador, where the opposition has won important cities, leading up to Rafael Correa's refusal of his candidacy for the next national elections, as well as the recent defeat of Evo Morales' in referendum for presidential reelection. In 2016, too, Dilma Rousseff lost the support of allies, which opened an impeachment process in the parliament.

Although it is true that contemporary electoral campaigns are confined to political marketing and to the languages of commercial advertising, it is imperative to analyze the nature of the progressive political projects at a greater depth; that is, beyond the electoral moments and against rhetorical arguments that sustain the progressive narratives. In this analytical register, we find that the social movements that ignited

³ This is evident in Ernesto Laclau's words a few months before passing away regarding current President Mauricio Macri: "[Macri] tiene tantas posibilidades de ser presidente constitucional en la Argentina como yo de ser emperador de Japón". (La Nación 16/11/2013). <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1680549-la-ultima-entrevista-de-ernesto-laclau-con-la-nacion>

new political agendas that in turn paved the way for the emergence of the progressive governments have lost most of their creative energy and potential for effective transformation. The disappearance of the social movements and urban protests from the political scene reintroduced the discourses and insistent practices favoring governmental administration.⁴ It is from this space whence conservative positions, led by corporate lobbies, could in fact win spaces that are far removed from the political vision that initially supported the governments.

The arrival of a neoliberalism foisted by taking minimal decisions or renouncing other alternatives, has delimited the space of the narrative of social inclusion, the battle against inequality, the sovereignty and privilege of the social space, in short, all the elements to which these governments committed themselves following the election of Hugo Chavez in 1999. After leading an electoral campaign that exalted these principles, Dilma Rousseff appointed conservative ministers and opened the doors for austerity policies and fiscal adjustment that ran counter to her promises during the campaign. This resulted in the end of the grand narrative that functioned to legitimize the government. In this way, according to polls (April and May 2015), Dilma Rousseff's approval rate lies between 7 and 10 percent. And her once extremely popular predecessor Lula da Silva, a likely candidate for 2018, is starting to be affected by current discontent.⁵

In addition to an indignant opposition, government criticism has quickly reached the mass of its own voters. To the most cynical governists, however, neoliberalism is a

⁴ Joao Pedro Stedile, leader of the largest social movement in Latin America, MST (Movimento Sem Terra) explained the Dilma Government to BBC Brasil in these terms: "O governo Dilma paralisou o processo de reforma agrária, sobretudo nos últimos dois anos. As únicas famílias que aparecem como assentadas foram na verdade colocadas em lotes vagos de assentamentos antigos. [...] Estamos completamente insatisfeitos com o governo Dilma. No final do ano, com a troca do ministro da Fazenda, quando parecia que ela poderia recuperar seus compromissos de campanha, nos assustamos ao vê-la retornando à política neoliberal, com a reforma da Previdência. Depois fez acordo com (José) Serra (PSDB-SF) para encaminhar as reservas do pré-sal [oil reserves] a empresas e levou ao Congresso uma lei antiterrorismo que nem na Europa se atreveram a levar. Fez cortes que atingiram fundamentalmente educação, saúde, moradia e reforma agrária. É burrice, é um governo que não se deu conta que, com a agenda neoliberal, perde a base social que o elegeu." http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2016/03/160304_stedile_rs

⁵ In December 2015, the opposition taking advantage of the lack of popular support, translated the crisis into a process of impeachment that began in May 2016 leading to Rousseff deposition of her executive position and the temporal taking command of ex-vice-president Michel Temer.

stage left behind, and the current drop in popularity is due to a crisis in the making for which they hold no responsibility, and to the influence of the mainstream media. There is still talk about the “Revolución Ciudadana” in Ecuador or “proceso de cambio” in Bolivia, when in fact what we are witnessing is the decline of the effectiveness of those enunciations. In fact, Dilma Rousseff’s popularity was already very low during the clashes of June 2013, and later during the FIFA world cup in 2014. On these two occasions, the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores– PT), corporate power, the allied conservative parties, and the opposition became indistinctive political actors.

A perception of a conservative front being joined by progressivism is precisely what triggered the breaking of the progressive narrative. In the opposite direction, the presidential election of 2014 allowed the PT to recover its historic voters thanks to a remarkable polarization of the electorate. It did away with both Marina Silva, perceived as an associate of neoliberalism, and Aécio Neves, outplayed by the focus on social issues during the campaign. It would not be too strange to compare this situation to other national realities. During times of election there is always polarization, in contrast to the time of governing, when there tends to be a unified conservative front.⁶

But the disenchanted majority vote for Dilma was followed by real outrage at the appointments to the cabinet and the first government measures. Together with austerity, in sharp contrast to the campaign promises still ringing in people’s ears, Lula and Rousseff’s PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) accepted the inclusion of the economic advisor from the opposition, and to undertake spending cuts weighing on the working classes and on education. Another shocking appointment (as Minister of Agriculture) was that of Katia Abreu, director of the corporate agricultural association, who some time before had been awarded by the indigenous peoples a symbolic prize for her role defending environmental crimes and promoting the expansion of agribusiness in indigenous lands. These gestures to the markets did

⁶ In opposition to the movement from the streets lived in Brazil in 2013; the polarization that was imposed in 2014 was again the frame of the political situation when the impeachment, presented by the government as a coup d’Etat, was proposed.

nothing to neutralize the demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of citizens calling for Dilma's impeachment. Stressing an anti-corruption platform, they hinted at the possibility of a closing of the cycle in a most conservative way. The voices that were first heard in the streets are now also being expressed in Congress. There, the influence of *la Bala, el Buey y la Biblia* (the Bullet, the Ox and the Bible – also known as BBB) has grown significantly as they control the House of Representatives and exert much more influence in the government than social movements. These political forces on the far right have recently united in favor of the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, in spite of having received allocated key political ministries and support from the PT.

Conservative sectors both in government and within the opposition managed to curb ongoing anti-homophobic educational initiatives (such as the lack of printed material on anti-homophobic education in public schools, called “kit-gay” by the conservative forces) to pass a constitutional amendment reducing age of criminal responsibility (to sixteen years of age), and to allow outsourcing in all sectors of the economy. The end of the cycle is happening in Brazil through the abandonment of the project of change that brought *progresismo* (left) to power and the inability to mobilize the citizenry and stop conservative reforms, with the progressives' direct involvement in these reforms in some cases (i.e. the deterioration of labor rights, an initiative from Rousseff's government after raising the age for retirement). Nevertheless, *progresismo* is still in command, and in Brazil could very well come out on top again by campaigning against the same sectors with which it actually runs the country.

The worship of technocracy

The end of the cycle entails the acceptance of a conservative model considered to be a necessary condition for stability and political continuity. Opinion polls and electoral calculation therefore determine the *gubernista* political project, leaning towards the cult of institutions and technocracy while maintaining a discourse that, by focusing on social issues, caters to its original constituency. In Argentina, Kirchnerism lost the presidential election fielding a candidate, Daniel Scioli, who was first launched into to political sphere by Carlos Menem. He never enjoyed Néstor

Kirchner's and Cristina Fernández's confidence, but was accepted thanks to his strong performance in the polls. Scioli's candidacy attests to two things: that Peronism is still more than Kirchnerism, and that it holds political positions very similar to those of its rivals' in the conservative arena. Another generic trend seems to be that the progressive *governments* want to defend their governmental position vis-a-vis a metamorphosing of right-wing discourses. By abandoning the route that would allow for antagonism between the government and the rural entrepreneurs (Argentina), or taxation of net wealth (in Brazil and other countries), there is a return to explicit policies of security and nationalist discourses that displace the struggle for social rights and a Latin Americanist integrationist effort.

Old politics are also creeping into the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism — MAS) in Bolivia. MAS' hegemonic tendencies have led to co-opt media and recycled opposition figures, as if decisions on candidates and election agreements had no consequences on the grounds of the political project. Any objectives other than occupying institutions are thus being dismissed, and popular mobilization is being replaced by the assumption of the adversary's positions, views, and demands. Any attempts to put forward stronger reforms and to question both the shape and operation of the 'colonial' State — as promised in the wake of Evo Morales's re-election in 2014 — are being abandoned.

On the other hand, the dynamics of the political system have made it impossible for renewal of the movements that led the left and progressive presidents to power. Indeed, political campaigns are financed by the corporate sector, and State revenue depends on some of the worst development and extractivist activities. They are also the basis for spurious alliances with both local chieftains and multinational capital with no other aim than to cash in as fast as possible on investment. Most social policies depend on this source of financing. Both the brand and the popularity of the progressive governments are now closely associated with an economic model that is highly dependent on international prices, which also has catastrophic ecological consequences.

An assessment of the Latin American progressive governments should include

important criteria such as: progress in regional coordination; the declaration of unconstitutionality of the laws of impunity for dictatorship related crimes; the universal child allowance ('Asignación Universal Por Hijo') in Argentina; some elements of the constitutional 'plurinational' reforms in Bolivia and Ecuador; sovereign debt negotiations; poverty reduction, social intervention and infrastructure building in poor neighborhoods. The end of the cycle is related to the disruption of these agendas, an increase in poverty in Argentina and unemployment in Brazil, and to the constraint on the rights and the guarantees of urban dwellers and indigenous peoples facing eviction from their territories. The negotiation of bilateral agreements in Ecuador and the imprisonment of opponents in Venezuela have broken some taboos too; in particular, the thought that a political program could be defined against national political status quo still haunted by the colonial and dictatorship wounds. The balance sheet is equally negative in regards to industrialization and the phasing out of the primary economy model, now wholly dependent on the international commodity prices. The fall of the price of the commodities, on the other hand, fuels the political crisis from an economic dimension and adds more weight to the coming of the end of the progressive cycle.

The new ideological framework

When talking about structural changes in the inequality and economic model, progressive governments seem to have been transformed by power and institutions, rather than the other way around. The force by which the progressive governments took place in the early 2000s merely contested the executive (presidentialist) role with their agenda, but that at the same time accepted the structural limits – instead of transforming the tools of the State – in exchange for political stability and clientelist advantages of many of its political leaders. While orthodox recipes are announcing a comeback, the possibility of strengthening processes arising from the principle of *Buen Vivir* (Good Living) and aiming at another type of development, vanishes from

the scene.⁷ At the same time, the new ideological framework of *progresismo* ensures popularity and keeps the governments in power, but abandoning the principles and the anti-capitalist demands that inaugurated the progressive political cycle riding on a wave of popular demonstrations that was able to depose unpopular presidents in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil. This is made quite clear by the progress of three elements: consumerist ideology,⁸ consensus on development, and the political agenda brought in by religious sectors

Governist propaganda presents consumption growth as the access of millions of people to the middle class. In addition to abandoning the peasant, indigenous, and workers' agendas, the revision of economic priorities and the redistribution of wealth, is being shelved. On top of it, access to consumption does not include access to healthcare, education, and quality transportation, all of which remain beyond the reach of the majority. Pope Francis' accession to the Vatican, just a few days after Hugo Chávez's death, has already resulted in some setbacks for progressive legislation. It halted changes in the Argentine Civil Code, and legitimized the collapse of the bond between governments and minority struggles historically embraced by the left, thus stopping incipient progress in some countries.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio's transformation went from being the Archbishop of Buenos Aires that censored art shows (such as a León Ferrari's exhibition) and did not assume a critical position during the Argentine dictatorship, into a progressive world leader cannot be reduced to a marketing or media invention.⁹ It marks the end of progressivism as we know it. Consumption growth and a conservative agenda are now entwined with a statist and hyper-presidential perspective linked to nationalist political identities— with their *Batllista* variant in Uruguay (José Batlle, president of

⁷ On the concept of "Buen Vivir" (Good Living), and different works that tries to think beyond development, connected with the fights against fracking, extractivism and violation of indigenous territories see Schavelzon (2015) Svampa & Viale (2014), Gudynas & Alaiza (2011) Acosta & Martinez (2009), Escobar (2010).

⁸ The idea of the democratic expansion of the consumer sector prospers by including the popular sector into the middle class. This project does not only entail economic inclusion, which has been questioned, but more importantly it seeks to democratize through the Western capitalist way of life, associated with consumerism, debt, and individualism, rather than collective association.

⁹ "La Iglesia advirtió que la muestra de Ferrari "es una blasfemia" (La Nación, 2004). <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/659247-la-iglesia-advirtio-que-la-muestra-de-ferrari-es-una-blasfemia>

Uruguay, 1899–1903 and 1911–1915), *Peronista* in Argentina (Juan Domingo Peron, president of Argentina, 1946–1955 and 1973–1974), *Emenerrista* in Bolivia (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR, founded by President Víctor Paz Estenssoro (1941-1952) and the big coalition that governs Brazil with parties from the right — if not to supporters of the dictatorship themselves, if we are to judge by the development model that is being adopted.

Maybe one should take seriously the proposal to found a new International led by the Pope, which was called for by Italian philosopher and politician Gianni Vattimo and hailed by some of the main *gubernista* players who attended the Forum for Emancipation and Equality (*Foro por la emancipación y la igualdad*) in Buenos Aires, in March 2015.¹⁰ Rafael Correa staged in a sudden and rather overplayed attack against what he called the "abortion agenda" with the aim of preventing legal regulation on this issue, and against "gender ideology" on minority rights — which adds to Correa's already classic diatribes against environmentalists and indigenous peoples.

Thus, a politics in the name of social, racial and decolonized antagonisms is being replaced today by conservative values conveyed through a sense of brotherhood and reconciliation that leaves aside the fight against class and ethnic inequality. Popular sectors are being framed and demobilized through the establishment of State and religious paternalistic welfarism. The new perspective comes with a new consideration of dissidence as radicalism — that is, contrary to the interests of the nation. In geopolitical terms, the increased repression and criminalization of dissenters is conducted with an eye to the East — that is, with a discourse and an economic vision close to that of authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China, devoid of any anti-capitalist emancipatory horizon.

Progressivism and the left in power, substituting working class and social and indigenous movements for 'family' and 'middle class' values, cease to be what they were. They take the path of security and consumption that defines the new

¹⁰ For a full recording of Gianni Vattimo's intervention in the Foro por la Emancipación see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXVixgBeXfA>

developmentalist nationalism. This is quite obvious in Nicaragua, where Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas returned to power in 2007. The reconciliation with the church, which they fought in the 70s, is now a fact: a law has been passed prohibiting abortion under any circumstance. In 2014, moreover, the Nicaraguan Congress, with no debate and no previous information, passed another law giving the green light to the construction of an inter-ocean canal. It grants sovereign rights for fifty years to a Chinese company, and suppresses and criminalizes farmers and populations who will be displaced by the new canal. The political cycle founders also when development policies draw progressive or leftist Bolivarian governments close to the nationalist-liberal efforts currently undertaken in Peru, Colombia and Mexico: they are all manipulating State power to guarantee a model that is anything but progressive.

Instead of an anti- or post-extractive outlook as an alternative for a new political cycle, what we are witnessing today is the emergence of a new Right with a revamped, “post-ideological” and “for the people” discourse. It raises an “ethical” and “anti-corruption” flag that the Left has lost. Lacking citizenship engagement and no policies linking territorial struggles with the struggles in the cities, the new cycle is giving way to a system of political restoration, combining social nationalism, religious discourse, and individualistic republicanism, all conveyed through a fuming anti-State discourse.

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DIEGO VALERIANO¹

Liberation through Consumption: Six Hypotheses on the Passage from Exclusive Neoliberalism to the New Runfla Capitalism²

1. Throughout this last decade and a half, and in parallel to the general crisis of global capitalism, a wide popular urban sector of the periphery (from Argentina but also from elsewhere) sought a favorable cycle that included themselves in consumption. One could think of this new access to wealth as a process of liberation (unlike the orthodox critique that interprets it as *alienation*), with the caveat of amplifying the very notion of “liberation”.

2. With the increase of consumption there are new modes of sensing, desiring, thinking, socializing; but also other ways of being, loving, enjoying, and dying that have been radically altered. New possibilities emerge and the traditional knowledge of governing populations radically breaks down. Far from pointing to a decline in the old forms of social organization, collective action opens a new gap in a time that is unprecedented and incalculable. The feast of consumption and the social conflict are the new promiscuous standards that enable the transfiguration and organization of the everyday. Many actors belong to this new process, more often than not against their will, such as the unions, the NGOs, the grassroots and social movements

¹ DIEGO VALERIANO writes for the argentine digital publication Lobo Suelto (www.anarquiacoronada.blogspot.com)

² This article was translated by Gerardo Muñoz. It was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/6/21/liberation-through-consumption-six-hypotheses-on-the-passage-from-exclusive-neoliberalism-to-the-new-runfla-capitalism> on June 21st, 2016.

(whether in alliance with the State or not) and citizens in pursuit of justice.

3. The old neoliberal regime that produced social exclusion was destroyed, first and foremost, from below; that is, from the daily experience of the great majority that populates the periphery. *Runfla*³ capitalism was built on its corpse. *Runfla* capitalism entails a new superior stage of consumption, of popular stability that is both festive and inclusive. The 'good government', parallel to this stage, was its necessary accomplice by unleashing a populist rhetoric that took great efforts in sustaining and fomenting its participation in this process.

4. If we posit the idea of liberation at the center it is because the engine of *runfla* capitalism is consumption by those from below. This took place, mainly, in the spatial periphery of the world-system, as it was called in the past but that in our times has transformed into the effective BRIC axis. The success of *runfla* capitalism depends, I want to emphasize, on its access to consumption as the authentic political kernel of the current transformations underway in the region. The new government of 'restoration', at least in Argentina, challenges these transformations, even though they are defended on a daily basis in the streets by *runfla* lives.

5. This process of liberation always has to be understood ambiguously and in constant dispute. It is true that this process of consumption can also be interpreted on the basis of creating new dependencies (in the "objective" sense: global markets, financial, and technological systems; but also in the "subjective" sense, such as the pattern of consumption or the constant subordination of time to guarantee the vitality of consumption, etc.). Nevertheless, we insist on the fact that these processes contribute in vitalizing *runfla* lives through consumption. Those from below (the youth, the thieves, the immigrants, the *cholas*) without ever abandoning being so, learned to exploit the social hierarchies for their own benefit. They do so through the technique of permanent transgression in the territories to the point of making the

³ Translator Note: *Runfla*: The term *runfla* is not easy to define or translate, and thus we have chosen to retain the original Spanish term. According to the *Diccionario etimológico del lunfardo* (Penguin, 2011), *runfla* is characteristic of the plebe, "gente de mal vivir", referring to the lumpen and the indecent. In an exchange with Valeriano, he reminds me that it also has the connotation of 'obscure business', 'illegality', and 'low life'. Valeriano wishes that this term were not reduced to its lunfardo etymology. According to Valeriano, *runfla* necessarily lacks conceptual definition and should be understood just by its sound.

territories incomprehensible, irrational, extensive, festive, and ungovernable (at least from the point of view of the old art of governing).

6. This force will not cease, since the '*runfla* vitality' is confronted from multiple registers: statistical indexes, imposed restoration, solidarity and depolitization, and a recycled Franciscan poverty. Isn't the emphasis on Christian 'love' an attempt to capture the liberating force of this process? These struggles for the process of liberation are waged furiously on a daily basis. Today these are more sharply expressed due to the new political scenario. We have reached the exhaustion of 'good' and permissive governments. There is a long lasting confrontation between the *runfla* lives and the repressive state (and privatized) apparatus, and from what can be seen today there is no truce in sight. In any case, *runfla* capitalism is inseparable from a generalized form of urban micro-guerrillas, and the micro-politics of life, where consumption, the feast, and the new conflict open worlds to come. These worlds are far more interesting than the previous ones, but less comprehended by the standardized and conventional forms of analysis.

GERARDO MUÑOZ¹

The Democratic Horizon of Emancipation: Interview with Maristella Svampa on the Crisis of the Progressive Cycle in Latin America²

*Maristella Svampa is a sociologist and researcher at CONICET (National Technical and Scientific Research Council) at the University of La Plata. She is the author of a dozen books that have had a significant impact on the academic and public discussion of regional politics, social movements, and the function of the state in Latin America. Among her most recent books are *Fifteen Myths and Realities of Transnational Mining in Argentina* (Colectivo Ediciones Herramientas, 2011), *Maldevelopment: Extractivism and Plunder in Argentina* (co-written with Enrique Viale, Katz, 2014), and *Latin American Debates: Indianism, Development, Dependency, and Populism* (Edhasa, 2016). Over the course of the decade, Svampa's critical work has constituted a sustained effort to understand the progressive actors of the region, as well as an inquiry into the geopolitical configuration at the intersection of state form and transnational capital. Her well-known thesis of the "commodities consensus" has had a broad influence across Latin Americanist thought of this decade, expanding the analytical frameworks through which we understand the so-called Latin American Pink Tide, that is, the series of progressive governments that came*

¹ GERARDO MUÑOZ is a fourth year PhD student in Latin American literature at Princeton University. His dissertation "Fissures of the State: crisis of sovereignty and principles Latin American twentieth century" explores cases of fractured hegemony and political principles. He is a member of the Infrapolitical Deconstruction academic collective (www.infrapolitica.wordpress.com).

² This interview was originally published in Spanish on the digital magazine Fronterad and can be found in <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=maristella-svampa-y-crisis-ciclo-progresista-en-latinoamerica>. It has been translated by Anne Freeland and was published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/6/21/the-democratic-horizon-of-emancipation-interview-with-maristella-svampa-on-the-crisis-of-the-progressive-cycle-in-latin-america> on June 21st, 2016.

to power following the election of Hugo Chávez in 1999. Her analysis of the new forms of extractivism (mega-mining, fracking, and deforestation, among others) constitutive of the current processes of accumulation has shed light on the internal workings of the redistributive policies of these states and their development models. In this interview, Svampa takes up some of the questions that have been central to her work in light of the so-called “exhaustion of the progressive cycle,” a moment in which we seem to be witnessing the decline of the progressive governments with the electoral defeat of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, the succession of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, and Evo Morales’s defeat in Bolivia, where a referendum to amend the constitution and allow Morales to run for a fourth term was rejected. Within this conjuncture, Svampa’s political reflection is oriented toward a horizon of radical democracy—against all identitarianisms—grounded in a shared experience that she calls “a common good of humanity” and the possibility of thinking politics otherwise.

GM: How do you see the exhaustion of the cycle of progressive governments in light of the resounding electoral victory of Mauricio Macri in the recent election in Argentina? Can we in fact speak of the “end of an era” in the region, and the rise of a new regional right, considering what’s happening at the same time in Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela?

MS: Let’s start with the first part of your question. For some time I’ve been speaking of the end of an era in the region, which doesn’t just include Argentina. Between 2000 and 2015, a lot has happened in Latin America. Over the course of these fifteen years, the different progressive governments went from being considered a new Latin American left, arousing keen expectations of political change, to being understood in terms of a twenty-first century populism. In the passage from one conceptualization to the other, something important was lost, there was a sense of abandonment, the loss of an emancipatory dimension of politics and the evolution towards traditional forms of domination, based on personality cults and the identification of the leader with the state.

As for the rise of the right. I’d like to distance myself from conspiracy theories, and not because I don’t think that the right has done anything to erode the legitimacy of the progressive governments. We know they have. But I think the possibility of the

rise of a new right is due largely to the mistakes and excesses of the progressive governments, which have been emphasizing their least pluralistic, most populist dimension, evident in the concentration of power in the executive and in their clear intolerance of dissent.

On the other hand, the extractivist model has shown its limitations in the context of a sharp decline in international commodity prices (some have called it the end of the commodity supercycle). This seems not only to have limited the “comparative advantages” that fueled economic growth over almost a decade (2003–2013), but also to have thrown these countries into an ever-deepening economic crisis, demonstrating the inability of these governments to transform the productive models, their dependency upon and consolidation of a primary product export model. It has also shown the volatility of the success of this model, with rising poverty and the disaffection of the middle classes.

If we look at the Argentine case, there was no indisputable triumph of the right. Macri won by a small margin, and he was as surprised as anyone at the results of the first round, which led to the *ballotage* (the second electoral round). In fact, Kirchnerism was the architect of its own defeat. We must keep in mind that Kirchnerism had long ceased to be a center-left phenomenon, even if it enjoyed a quasi-monopoly of that space over the past decade, and this surely explains part of the exhaustion of a society in the face of the dramatization and polarization of politics that Kirchnerism exacerbated. Its support for the candidacy of the many-faced Aníbal Fernández (accused of having ties to drug trafficking), dismissing the claims of his complicity with the police and the region’s drug trade as if this were just part of the opposition’s “narrative,” was one of the signs of the moribund state of Peronist progressivism.³ So there were many factors: corruption and enrichment of the governing class, including the presidential family and the vice president, crony

³On the allegations of Aníbal Fernández’s connection to the drug trade, see Jorge Lanata presentó un informe que vincula a Aníbal Fernández con el narcotráfico.

capitalism (known as *capitalism among friends*), sustained inflation since 2007, and a significant deterioration of the economy.⁴

GM: How do you see the emergence of Cambiemos-PRO and Macri on the Argentine political scene? Are we witnessing a rearrangement of certain economic policies of Kirchnerism, or is it simply a neoconservative restoration? Or maybe a combination of the two?

MS: The new Macri government represents a break, but also some continuities with the previous government. I will discuss only some of them. To begin with, we have the ideological break: as of December 10th of 2015, Argentina ceased to be governed by a regime identified with an intense populism, based on the concentration of power, intolerance of dissent, and Cristina's hyper-leadership; the new regime is one of right-wing liberalism, based explicitly on a "business-community" model, that is, pro-business, but one that is prepared to work to build its political base, and understands politics in terms of management and marketing.⁵

But I don't think this ideological break means a simple return to the neoliberalism of the nineties. I have no doubt that this will lead to greater social inequality, but this also depends on the limits that Argentine society imposes on the new government. Public sector layoffs, spiraling inflation both pre- and post-devaluation, pro-business measures, the exorbitant increase in utility prices, and a weak social agenda, testify to a government that tends to focus on a single sphere, and not that of the majority.

On the other hand, we must not forget that we live in a different society than we did two decades ago, and this is clear in the capacity for social protest and the expanded language of rights. All this suggests that there should be little room for such a regression. It's no accident that Macri seems to want to establish himself in a space of variable parameters, oscillating between, on the one hand, a less state-centered developmentalism and a recognition of the importance of the social, and, on the other

⁴ Svampa develops the ideas of the "new contractor nation" and "capitalism among friends" in *Maldevelopment*.

⁵ The ideologist of "political marketing" in Mauricio Macri's campaign, Jaime Durán Barba, discusses this in his *El arte de ganar: Cómo usar el ataque en campañas electorales exitosas* (Debate, 2011).

hand, a post-nineties neoliberalism, in the style of the former Chilean president Sebastián Piñera. It's still too early to say how this balance or tension between the one and the other will play out, which of the two tendencies will prevail, but the first two months of Macri's government have demonstrated a tendency toward business-centered developmentalist neoliberalism.

On the other hand, there is a continuity with Kirchnerism with respect to extractivism—mega-mining (the government has already announced the elimination of mining taxes), fracking, land-grabbing, and agribusiness. It's true that the appointment of CEOs to various ministries has caused considerable alarm, and especially among communities affected by extractivism, which doesn't mean that these communities have forgotten the recent past. After all, Miguel Galuccio, the CEO of YPF, came from a major multinational company almost on the scale of Shell and the Kirchnerist minister of mining, Jorge Mayoral, is associated with firms that supplied Barrick Gold. Kirchnerism was particularly effective in consolidating a powerful business community, although it availed itself of a language of political mediations and a narrative of heroic progressivism, and could count on the complicit silence of so many intellectuals. In this vein, Macri's program represents a social shift and further extractivism, so we will very likely see new situations of repression and disregard for democracy.⁶

GM: Two recent books—Verónica Gago's *Neoliberal Reason: Baroque Economies and Popular Pragmatics* (Tinta Limón, 2015) and your *Maldevelopment: Extractivism and Plunder in Argentina* (Katz, 2014) (with Enrique Viale), expose the limits of the economic model of redistributive policies coupled with the perpetuation of a flexible model of accumulation and development. I'm also thinking here of Gareth Williams' groundbreaking work, *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2002). This economic model seems to consist of complex registers that function simultaneously at the macro and micro levels, that negotiate inclusion in the sphere of consumption and more global models of extractivism. How

⁶ Maristella Svampa. Estruendos en la mina. Revista Ñ, February 22, 2016.

should we understand the heterogeneous composition of the region's economy at the moment? How do you understand the relationship between consumption and accumulation in the popular processes in the region in the past years of progressivism?

MS: The kind of production that goes hand in hand with today's dominant model of commodification of nature and of social life is associated with certain social paradigms and imaginaries of consumption. That is, they contribute to the consolidation of a way of life, that which is currently hegemonic, grounded in certain ideas of progress that permeate our language, our practices, our everyday life; how we conceive of quality of life, the good life, and social development. Ulrich Brand speaks of an "imperial way of life," referring to the universalization "of a mode of life that is imperial toward nature and in its social relations and that is in no way democratic, in that it does not question any form of domination. The imperial way of life does not simply refer to a lifestyle practiced in different social milieus, but to imperial models of production, distribution, and consumption, cultural imaginaries and subjectivities strongly rooted in the everyday practices of the majority in the north, but also, increasingly, of the emerging upper and middle classes of the south."

In this sense, the progressive regimes have not been very innovative with respect to the models of consumption, because they have stimulated the model of the consumer-citizen or of inclusion through consumption, rather than a model of citizenship based on rights. This is not what happened in the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, when part of the Latin American left, despite being rather indifferent to environmental issues, thought in terms of "basic needs" and questioned the universalization of the model of consumption of the societies of the north, which, in its expansion toward the richest sectors of the societies of the south, not only implied increased concentration of privilege and wealth, but also constituted an unsustainable development model. I want to underscore this because today the progressive governments are far from questioning consumption; they glorify it. I remember in 2015, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner boasted that the Argentines were

the world's top consumers of soft drinks.⁷ We are moving away from the association of Coca-Cola with the United States, a country in which there is a campaign against the consumption of soft drinks as a cause of obesity. Latin America is an emerging market for a lot of products, which become aspirational symbols, something that the various governments encourage while simultaneously availing themselves of an antisystemic rhetoric.

Much of the prominence of the notion of development is due to the fact that the models of consumption associated with the hegemonic model permeate the entire population. That is, today, what is considered to be a "better life" is associated with a demand for the "democratization" of consumption, rather than the necessity of bringing about cultural change with respect to consumption and the environment, based on a different theory of social needs and the relationship with nature. The correspondence between the models of production and consumption, the generalization in the countries of the north, but also of the south, of a "hegemonic way of life," makes the social and geopolitical connection or articulation between the different struggles (social and environmental, urban and rural, for example), and their respective emancipatory languages, notoriously more difficult.

GM: Along with the crisis of the progressive cycle we see an explicit return of the politico-theological. In what way do you think Pope Francis affects the current Latin American map? There are some who think that there could be an alliance with a certain Franciscanism as a new contentious force in the international arena. This is the argument that Gianni Vattimo made at the Forum for Emancipation and Equality in Buenos Aires, where he predicted that the Vatican would become a Fourth Communist International.⁸ What do you think are the limits of such an alliance?

MS: I'm very skeptical about this. Certainly Francis (a Peronist pope) adds a new level of complexity to the current Latin American configuration, but I think the

⁷ Diego Valeriano. Consumamos, lo demás no importa nada.

⁸ Gianni Vattimo's talk at the Forum for Emancipation and Equality, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFBcrronmDE>

importance of his role in Europe is exaggerated. And this exaggeration has less to do with the Latin American reality and much more to do with a certain ideological vacuum in Europe, beyond the promising leftist movements, like that which has emerged in Spain. In Latin America, despite the crisis of the progressive movements, there is no such vacuum, because there's another backdrop, made up of the social organizations and social movements, which have contributed and continue to contribute to the emergence of a new language of valorization (of the land, of nature) and a new political grammar.

On the other hand, Latin American societies are very religious, but Catholicism has lost ground to evangelical churches whose conservative and reactionary character is alarming, and which are beginning to occupy political positions (as a parliamentary bloc in Brazil, or a sector within the Movement Toward Socialism in Bolivia, or in the context of indigenous organizations aligned with the government, as in Ecuador). Francis is a relevant figure and his new encyclical, *Laudato Si*, is critical of the extractivism of the current governments, whether of the right or of the left, and is surely a source of support for social and environmental organizations. But his environmental preaching has found little resonance in the current governments.

GM: Bolivia seems to be one of the countries on the Latin American political map that has escaped the general exhaustion (notwithstanding Morales's defeat in the referendum to authorize another presidential term). But to what point is the hegemonic communitarian horizon—proclaimed by vice president Álvaro García Linera himself over the years in his public speeches, and published on the website of the Vice Presidency of the Plurinational State⁹—sustainable in the context of extractivism or internal domination within the logic of hegemony?

MS: There is no doubt that Morales's government represented a redistribution of social power in a country where the indigenous majority has historically been excluded and subjected to systemic racism. It's also true that the political task has not

⁹ See *Geopolítica de la amazonia* (2012) and *Socialismo comunitario: un horizonte de época* (2015). Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia.

been easy; in its early years it had to contend with regional oligarchies that threatened to secede. But this “catastrophic stalemate” ended toward 2009, the year in which the new constitution of the Plurinational State was approved, and thus a new stage began, with the growing hegemony of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) and the ever greater importance of Evo Morales’s leadership. The government was characterized by its redistributive programs, a new agrarian reform, economic growth and stability, and the strategic nationalization of certain companies, along with the escalation of natural gas extraction and agribusiness.

But conflicts like the one with the TIPNIS (Indigenous Territory of Isidoro Secure National Park) over the construction of a highway without due consultation with the indigenous populations reconfigured the political scene, unmasking the real politics of the government, beyond its eco-communitarian discourse in defense of Pachamama. The indigenist and most autonomist wing of the government thus succumbed to the more statist wing, increasingly oriented towards a traditionally populist form of domination. Vice president Álvaro García Linera—who during the TIPNIS conflict would accuse critics of “colonial environmentalism,” an anathema that conflated the leftist NGOs and dissenting indigenous groups with international organizations—headed the defense of the extractivist model. A “revelatory conjuncture,” as political scientist Luis Tapia (a former colleague of García Linera in the intellectual collective Grupo Comuna) would say, after TIPNIS, nothing was the same again in Bolivia.¹⁰ In the past few years the ruling party has increasingly displaced oppositional indigenous organizations (marginalizing dissenters and creating power structures recognized by the state), silenced critical journalists by cutting off public support, and generated a growing process of self-censorship in the non-official press; and finally, the threat to expel the critical and leftist NGOs, for which the government wrote a new law for disciplinary purposes.

It is in the framework of this attempt to close off channels of expression that the

¹⁰ Luis Tapia. *El Leviatán criollo*. La Paz: Autodeterminación Ediciones, 2014.

government launched its proposal to renew the term of the presidential ticket, which has just been rejected in a referendum (with 51.56% against and 48.44% in favor), in a context in which the political opposition is weak and fragmented (despite controlling several departments and despite the regime's defeat in the referendum).¹¹ Moreover, the concentration of power forecloses the possibility of an emergence of a new political leadership from below. If the government had won the referendum, Evo Morales and García Linera would have been permitted to remain in power for twenty consecutive years. Only ten years ago, these same leaders would have vehemently opposed any other political figure or party that attempted to perpetuate its rule in this way, and yet today, they can unabashedly claim that only the renewal of their own mandate can guarantee the continuation of the process of change within the framework of a popular government and prevent the dreaded return of the right.

The topic of reelection is not a new one in the Latin American conjuncture and has been a source of social polarization. In 2013, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner flirted with the possibility but found that there was too much social opposition. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa also had to renounce the prospect of reelection after a year of conflict with both the right and the left in 2015. To my knowledge, the only ones who succeeded in authorizing indefinite reelection were Hugo Chávez, in 2009, in his second attempt, and the Sandinista Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, whose government is unequivocally authoritarian. These governments, despite their differences, represent a process of concentration of executive power in a hyper-presidential framework and ultimately represent a messianic historical narrative, because they believe that historical change is effected by a leader and not by a change in the correlation of social forces.¹²

In my opinion, we do no service to the Latin American left by leaving these problems to the political right. Neither the defense of freedoms nor the critique of the

¹¹ Official results here: <http://52.86.73.107:55>

¹² Maristella Svampa. *La sociedad excluyente: la Argentina bajo el signo del neoliberalismo*. Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2005.

concentration of power is the ideological property of the right. Moreover, in line with what Roberto Gargarella maintains, it's almost impossible to think that the expansion of popular participation and the concentration of power can go hand in hand.¹³ And reelection is clearly a move towards the concentration of power. Finally, it is precisely the most vulnerable sectors and those on the left who are the victims of the recurrent closures of political spaces and violations of human rights. In sum, returning to Bolivia, perhaps because it's the country that aroused the greatest political hope in the region, it is today an exemplary case that is putting the critical intelligence of the various Latin American lefts to the test.

GM: Critical Latin Americanist discourses (produced within and outside of Latin America) have upheld the notion of the “communitarian” or “the commons.” The “turn to the commons” seeks “direct” access to democracy, and positions itself at once against the institutional verticality of the state and against the charismatic process of populism. But the discourse of the common or the communal is also installed within the rhetoric of some of these states (such as the Venezuelan or the Bolivian).¹⁴ To what extent can the communitarian (identitarian) be a democratic horizon of emancipation?

MS: Concepts in the process of their construction tend to be disputed concepts. So there is a symbolic debate around the new horizon of concepts and a risk of their abuse; they can be twisted or emptied of their potentiality. It's the danger of the “perverse convergence,” as Evelina Dagnino warned in reference to concepts like that of “democratic participation” back in the nineties, with their appropriation by the World Bank and the neoliberal governments. This is occurring today not only with

¹³ Roberto Gargarella. *La sala de máquinas de la Constitución: dos siglos de constitucionalismo en América Latina (1810-2010)*. Buenos Aires: Katz, 2014.

¹⁴ Three major works on the so-called communitarian turn in Latin America: *Dispersar el poder: los movimientos sociales como poderes antiestatales* (Ediciones desde abajo, 2007) by Raúl Zibechi; *Los ritmos del Pachakuti: movilización y levantamiento popular-indígena en Bolivia* (Tinta Limón, 2008) by Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar; and *“Se han adueñado del proceso de lucha”. Horizontes comunitario-populares en tensión y la reconstitución de la dominación en la Bolivia del MAS (SOCEE/Autodeterminación, 2015)* by Huáscar Salazar Lohman.

the concept of “common good” but also with that of *buen vivir*, installed within the governmental rhetoric in countries like Ecuador and Bolivia, and to a lesser extent in Venezuela.¹⁵ Both likewise appear in the pro-establishment rhetoric of certain international organizations.

Beyond the debates, it should be emphasized that the grammar of the common appears as an element of convergence between the countries of the north and those of the south. But the nuances must also be emphasized: while in the countries of the north the grammar of the common is oriented toward the public, that is, against policies of adjustment and privatization (against neoliberalism), against the appropriation of knowledge, the new economy of knowledge (cognitive capitalism and its forms of appropriation), and only more recently against extractivism (particularly against fracking), in our peripheral countries, the common is opposed rather to the various forms of developmentalist neoextractivism, which include land grabs, privatization of seeds, and overexploitation of natural resources as a whole.

From a perspective consonant with the reality of Latin America, the Belgian François Houtart associates common goods with *the common good of humanity*, in the most general sense, which implies the foundations of the collective life of humanity on the planet: the relation to nature, the production of life, collective organization (politics), and the interpretation, valorization, and expression of the real (culture). It's not, however, a question of patrimony, but of a “condition” (wellbeing, living well), a result of all the different aspects of the life of human beings, of men and women, on the earth.¹⁶ The Common Good of Humanity as a democratic horizon of emancipation refers to the defense and reproduction of life, which are threatened today. Its potentiality, within the framework of the current civilizational and environmental crisis, is huge.

GM: Lastly, in *Maldevelopment* you reflect on the role of women in relation to forms of resistance that are not domesticated by state power, but expressed

¹⁵ On the concept of ‘buen vivir,’ see *Plurinacionalidad y Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir: dos conceptos leídos desde Bolivia y Ecuador post-constituyente* (Ediciones Abya-Yale, 2015), by Salvador Schavelzón.

¹⁶ François Houtart. ‘From common goods to the *common good of humanity*’. HAOL, No. 26, Otoño, 87-102.

within a logic of solidarity and of the common. You write: "... it is necessary to underscore the role of popular feminisms in the emergence of a pro-communal ethos, especially those visions tied to feminist economy and eco-feminism, based on an ethic of care and values like reciprocity and complementarity."¹⁷ Do you think that feminisms and these new struggles for the commons reappear now at the center of the agenda in the face of the exhaustion of state progressivism?

MS: I don't know if these new struggles will be at the center of the agenda with the crisis of progressivism. We must not forget that these progressivisms have absorbed part of the creative energy of the various social movements and organizations, which they rewarded with certain policies, but while taking away their autonomy, in the sense of lessening their capacity to determine an agenda, a political agenda independent of the government.

Of course, there are a number of territorial, socio-environmental, indigenous, and feminist struggles that through their persistence, their insistence on the protection and reproduction of life, on the quest for a non-exploitative relation to nature, from a perspective that emphasizes eco-dependence, open up new relational ontologies, that question dualistic and hierarchical views, that appear independently of the market and the state. But the danger is that, in the face of the failure of state progressivism and the loss of power of the social organizations and movements that are organically linked to these states, a disenchantment will spread and the new grammar of life, of the common, based on the principles of complementarity and reciprocity, will be considered unrealistic. We know that it is necessary to recreate the very idea of a pluralistic, democratic, emancipatory project of the left, but this is not the same task today as it was fifteen years ago. The experience of the progressive governments has opened many wounds, not only in the social movements and organizations but also in Latin American critical thought.

¹⁷ Maristella Svampa, *Maldesarrollo*. 398.

A BOOK REVIEW by MICHELA RUSSO¹

On the Imaginaries of Crisis²

Review of Ticio Escobar, *Imagen e intemperie: las tribulaciones del arte en los tiempos del mercado total*. Madrid: Capital Intelectual, 2015.

*Imagen e interperie: las tribulaciones del arte en los tiempos del mercado total*³ is a collection of five essays and an interview, written during the past ten years by Ticio Escobar, one of the most distinguished figures of the contemporary cultural, and political, panorama in Latin America on the question of art and representation.⁴ Perhaps the most influential art critic in Paraguay, as well as a philosopher, lawyer, and former Minister of Culture during Fernando Lugo's presidency (2008-2012), Ticio Escobar has been an attentive reader of different artistic practices at both the

¹ MICHELA RUSSO is a Ph.D. Student and Graduate Assistant Teacher at the Department of Hispanic Studies at Texas A&M University. She studied Political and Theoretical Philosophy at SUM Institute, Naples (Italy). She is currently working in a dissertation on the politico-cultural imaginaries in contemporary Bolivia.

² This book review was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/6/21/book-review-ticio-escobar> on June 21st, 2016.

³ The Spanish title of this book can be translated into English as "Image and Exposure: Tribulations of Art in the Time of Total Market." The Spanish word "intemperie" has many nuances and does not have a direct equivalent in English, but it seems to me that the word "exposure" somehow embraces the spectrum of meanings evoked by the original Spanish. Although at first glance there seems to be little difference between the two, I choose the word "exposure" over "exposition" because the former is enriched by an additional meaning derived by the use made in photography, which refers to the action of exposing a surface to light. Moreover, "exposure," like "exposes" in French, and "expuesto" in Spanish, is a notion central in Georges Didi-Huberman's work – with which Ticio Escobar is in open conversation throughout this book –, especially in his *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants* (2012), where the notion of exposure gets complicated precisely by the reference to light. Didi-Huberman, in turn, moves from Walter Benjamin – another of Escobar's references – especially when, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the German philosopher writes on the cult value and the exhibition value of a given work of art (*Illuminations*, 2007). "Intemperie," thus, in a broad sense, means "outdoors," and the Spanish locution "a la intemperie" refers to the fact of being "exposed out in the open."

⁴ The first four essays contained in this collection, "El arte fuera de sí," "La irrepertible aparición de la distancia: Una defensa política del aura," "El marco incompleto," and "Nandí verá," appeared translated in English respectively as "Art Beside Itself," "The Unrepeatable Appearance of Distance," "The Incomplete Frame," and "Nandí Verá: The Brilliance of Nothingness" in *La invención de la distancia. The Invention of Distance. Cuatro Ensayos - Four Essays* (Asunción: AICA Press/ Fausto Ediciones, 2013). This bilingual publication was realized after the conferral to Ticio Escobar of the Premio AICA a la Contribución Distinguida a la Crítica de Arte during the 44th AICA (International Association of Art Critics) Congress in 2011 in Asunción, Paraguay.

local and global levels for decades, confronting questions posed by indigenous and popular art, crossed with a form of critique of mercantile-capitalist discourse. Among Escobar's previous publications, we should mention *Una interpretación de las artes visuales en el Paraguay* (1982), where Escobar began delineating, in the light of the Enlightenment definition of art, the question posed by different forms of popular production, whose imageries have been so vividly present within the cultural texture of the region. *El mito del arte y el mito del Pueblo: cuestiones sobre arte popular* (1986), written during Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship (1954–1989), pivots on the analysis of the concept of "popular," and finally, *La belleza de los otros* (1993) engages with the notion of otherness.

The work of Ticio Escobar, however, cannot be said to openly thematize what has been called either the "progressive cycle," the "pink tide" or "Socialism of the 21st century," a phenomenon which transformed the Latin American political landscape in the past twenty years or so (Schavelzon 2016). Nor can Paraguay be said to have been among the countries whose government fully undertook such a "turn to the left." Why, then, include in a dossier dedicated to this specific political and cultural phenomenon, and its inchoate crisis, a review of his latest publication?

First of all, because Escobar's work clearly nests inside the fissures opened by a post-Cold War cultural and political epochality, which incidentally coincided, in Paraguay, with the end of Stroessner's dictatorship. This political landscape is the one that has seen, on a global scale, the rapid diffusion of a new world order characterized by a neoliberal definition of the political, the social, and, why not, the cultural, through the diffusion of open markets, new constitutionalism, and multicultural discourses. This is also the site of the emergence of the Latin American "progressive cycle." The importance of reading both the progressive cycle and, therefore, Escobar's work in a larger geopolitical context appears more evident if we observe, as Patrick Iber does in his *Neither Peace nor Freedom* (2015) on cultural Cold War, that the signification of internal political conflicts and, thus, the meaning of the role played by intellectuals in Latin America at that time, was overdetermined by the inscription onto the superpower competition. In a similar order of ideas, Escobar's work is a writing in an epoch of transition but also a *writing of transition*. It is a writing during

the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Paraguay, but it is at once a writing overdetermined by the inscription into a global context, embracing questions central to the discursive construction of the “progressive cycle” in Latin America. His work, concerned with the intersection of the aesthetic and the political, may help us to think through the “crisis” of this progressive cycle, which necessarily implies a crisis of imagination: the manner in which we imagine is fundamentally a condition for the manner in which we do politics; politics cannot overlook the faculty of imagination, as Didi-Huberman argues, following Hannah Arendt.

In this respect, it is important to mention that Escobar is also the founder and director of the *Centro de Artes Visuales / Museo del Barro*⁵ in the capital city of Asunción. The museum, instituted in the 80s, has played a central role in carrying on such discourses on popular, indigenous, and urban art, and conveying, among others, imaginaries that evoke a pluricultural and multiethnic Ibero-American national frame. Here, the exhibition of indigenous and popular art pieces is not organized following ethnographic, folkloric or historical semantics, but exclusively according to “artistic” criteria (*El Mito del Arte* 8). The reflections on different artistic practices, the status and the role of image and the notion of art, together with the cultural initiatives promoted by the museum, have also been directed towards supporting and strengthening the fragile and tormented democratic process in the country.

The creation, in the year 2000, of a parallel space named *Espacio/Crítica*, is crucial in this respect as a supplement to the expositive capacity of the museum, articulating a variety of intellectual practices. This space promotes workshops and discussions, research and publications, while hosting a series of seminars concerned with themes like *Identidades en Tránsito* [Identities in Transition], *Estudios de Contingencia* [Studies of Contingency], and, most recently, *Imágenes Disruptivas* [Disruptive Images].⁶ Escobar reminds us that, as Walter Benjamin noted, capitalism seems to be taking more time to change the cultural superstructure than the economic base, and it is precisely this discrepancy that allows the identification of revolutionary practices

⁵ For details on the Museo del Barro, see: <http://www.museodelbarro.org>

⁶ See “Espacio Crítica”: <http://espaciocritica.org>

within the same superstructure (*Imagen e Intemperie* 51). Through his work and in his writings, Escobar seems to fully endorse Benjamin's assumption that both cultural and aesthetic practices cannot but play a decisive role within social and political processes of change.

It shall not be taken as an overstatement, then, if we consider the book *Imagen e intemperie* both as a collection assembling different discourses displayed in Escobar's work over the years and, for this same reason, as a contribution which somehow complements, or it is complemented by, the work of the museum. The problematization of the disruptive potential of images bridges both dimensions, especially when confronted with the fetishism of the image produced by the alliance between market, politics, and culture.

The essays featured in the book can be grouped in two parts; first, Escobar enters into dialogue with thinkers "of the crisis," who lived the experience of thinking (at) the edge of the *crisis* of European modernity, both as a limit-experience or experience of the limit, such as Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes.⁷ Second, we see an ongoing conversation with many of those contemporary thinkers who are the heirs of the post-structuralist debates, like Jacques Rancière, Georges Didi-Huberman, or Slavoj Žižek, for whom the *matrices* of the crisis had involuntarily opened the way for recommencement.

⁷ Here, I would like to stress, *en passant*, the proximity between the ideas of crisis, limit, and critique, as theorized by Willy Thayer in *Tecnologías de la Crítica: entre Walter Benjamin y Gilles Deleuze* (2010), which, in turn, takes as its point of departure Derrida's reflections in the context of deconstruction. Both terms, "crisis" and "critique" (including, for our context, *art critique*), share the Greek etymology "krinein," which conveys a constellation of senses that somehow imply a sort of "manual task,": examining, separating, selecting, but also excluding (22-24; 31-35). Both terms would, then, recall each other, while indicating the possibility of engaging with limit-experiences or experiences of the limit of signification(s) or within a given system of signification. To both belongs a sort of "destructive" character in the senses provided by "krinein." The critical moment – understandable both as a moment pertaining to the practice of criticism, and as grave and severe momentum – would be intimately intersecting and intersected by an instance of crisis. Escobar dwells on the question of limit as a form of indecidability between inclusion and exclusion, referring to Derrida's reflection on the concept of *parergon*. This figure enables us to think the frame of any given representation as something which is simultaneously both inside and outside, and neither outside nor inside the work of art, making the work of art the liminal dispositive *par excellence*.

Escobar sets out, then, from the affirmation of the *crisis* of art provoked by the loss of its autonomy, that is to say, the loss of the *aura*, the *specificity* of the work of art. Nevertheless, Escobar argues, we remain within the frame offered by the Enlightenment's concept of art. In this respect he situates himself in a breach already opened by Walter Benjamin, particularly in his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," whose concluding paragraph points, as is well known, to the imbrication of aesthetics and politics, which is, in turn, a sort of subtext of Escobar's book, and of his work in general. In the first part of *Imagen e intemperie*, Escobar engages with a series of reflections on the question of representation, and in the second part on the relationship between art and ethics.

The essays echo each other through a writing which is almost aphoristic, intermittent and fragmentary, and, I would say, necessarily incomplete, whose montage, or textual collage, to quote Marek Bartelik, president of AICA-international (International Association of Art Critics) (Escobar 2013), is visible only at the surface. This writing somehow mirrors what Escobar himself calls the "paradox of the representation," which is also the tragedy of language itself, that is to say, the promise, impossible to fulfill, to re-present what is, in fact, irremediably absent. In other words, this is the tragedy of the impossibility of reducing the *distance* between the sign and the object, where the sign announces the object but shows the image, and, similarly, between the subject — and its *gaze* — and the object. It is a matter, then, of "administrating" this distance, of "administrating" this gaze. This is the theme, precisely, of the first essay of the collection, "El arte fuera de sí." But there is another way of understanding this "distance," which is the one epitomized by the Benjaminian aura, which, says Escobar, indicates nothing but the exclusivist nature of the work of art; its aristocratic origin, which considers the artist as a genius and sacralizes the work of art, drawing it apart from the masses, bourgeois individualism and authority over private property.

The loss of the aura could have had, then, an eminently political potential and the reduction, or even the cancellation, of the distance between the work of art and the "subject" of the gaze could have represented the "democratization" of the aesthetic experience. The sacrifice of the *autonomy* of the work of art, that is to say, *auratic distance* and its cult value, had, thus, a progressive sense and a democratizing effect

(*El mito del arte* 18): the possibility for the work of art (and culture in general) to get closer to the masses. Technology and technical reproducibility, in principle antithetical to and incompatible with the notion of aura, may have represented the ideal way to evacuate such a process. However, and this is also the subject of the second essay, “La irrepresible aparición de la distancia: Una defensa política del aura,” if the loss of the aura may have represented the possibility of substituting the cult value of art with an emancipatory politicization through modern technology, such a loss of autonomy actually meant the subjugation of art itself to objectives external to it.

The expansion of technology altered the aesthetic experience, fracturing the autonomy of aesthetics and declaring the crisis of art, but at the same time it inaugurated a process of *re-auratization* through an exacerbation of what Escobar calls the “aesthetic function” (that is to say, the “form,” the mediating instance which conveys artistic contents) in all the spheres of human life during the epoch of what Guy Debord had called *the society of the spectacle*. Benjamin’s utopia, the attempt to realize a “positive concept of barbarism” based on Marxism, was not fulfilled: “the new aestheticism appeared in a market format; capitalism anticipated the avant-gardes, took on infinite reproducibility, and removed distance and the autonomy of art in search of other objectives”: greater consumption, exacerbation of the object’s exhibition value, and the institution of a new concept of aura, that is to say, the “mythical phantasmagoria of the always-new” (*La invención de la distancia* 240). At stake is, of course, the divide between “high” and “low” culture, the dichotomy between the great art system and the circuit of “minor” arts, and the need to assume, as a political project, Benjamin’s task: taking responsibility, in the context of collective and social projects and the support of state politics, says Escobar, for any democratizing possibilities, awakening the emancipatory potential of any given situation, while looking for modalities of critical and creative appropriation of imaginaries (*Imagen e Intemperie* 62).

However, the question is not, says Escobar, about dismantling the distinction between the erudite [*culto*] and the popular, but to consider it as contingent and provisory (*El Mito del Arte* 16). Escobar assumes Benjamin’s gaze of Janus and his

ambivalence towards the question of the aura, calling, as a practice of dissidence and disagreement, against the consumerism of the image, for a recuperation of the aura and that minimum distance between the image and the object necessary to enable the play of the gaze and the economy of desire while offering and at once subtracting the presence of the object itself. But how does one accomplish such a task without falling into idealist traditions and authoritarian privileges? Escobar goes back to popular and indigenous art, whose ritual forms surround bodies and objects with absence and invest them with the power of imageries, able to perturb and disturb everyday life (*El Mito del arte* 20).

After all, Benjamin had said that the origin of aura resided in “primitive” rituals. Escobar paganizes the aura and depicts a scene constituted now by a proliferation of “other” auras, which are alternative auratic models, represented by certain indigenous forms of art, whose artistic practices had always occurred at the margins of modern Western art. According to the modern gaze, these practices were nothing but craftsmanship and folklore, committed to archaic rites and superstitions, and realized through rudimentary techniques: they did not comply with formal requisites of modern aesthetics, they are not “autonomous,” they are not “useless,” in the Kantian sense of the term (*Imagen e Intemperie* 65–67). Nevertheless, there is something in the scene of the ritual representations that confers to bodies and things the auratic cult value, the unrepeatable manifestation of distance, the luminescent appearance of the aura. Whether it is the *inscription* in another order of signification or the execution of an aesthetic function, at stake is the production of a distance through the distortion of an ordinary setting, “the manipulation of sensibility, and the management of forms” (*La invención de la distancia* 272), in a word, a secularization of the concept of aura. It is in “El marco incompleto,” the third essay of the collection, then, that Escobar wonders about the *critical* possibilities of artistic practice in a global context more and more marked by blends of pluricultural registers.

Reviving the question of the transgressive vocation of art, the role of the *avant-garde* and, implicitly, its relationship with the political, Escobar maintains the need for a de-essentialization of figures like *avant-gardism*, emancipation and utopia, in order to consider them as hazardous historical products, and finally take responsibility for

the challenges posed by any *minoritarian* forms (“becoming-minoritarian” was the strategy proposed by Deleuze and Guattari at the end of the 70s). This refers to what we will see later as the “ethic of the image.” “Nandi Verá” is the last essay of the first part of the book, dedicated to the question of representation. The title of this essay, which in the Guaraní language means “the brilliance of nothingness,” recalls that of an art installation by Osvaldo Salerno at the *Museo de Artes Visuales* in Santiago de Chile in 2005. In this work, the opening sides of a quadrangular window had been draped with tulle where the words *Nandi Verá* had been written with beeswax. Due to the porosity of the tulle, the wax, during the writing process, has passed into the other side. This image points to the *porosity* of the work of art, which, through the play of the gaze, and its constant displacement, opens to the possibility of the event, maintaining the space *as* available space, “making a space for the space” (*Imagen e Intemperie* 136). Here the question of *otherness* also emerges, and the *Unheimlich* inquietude it provokes, a preoccupation that has been at the center of Escobar’s work. This essay is followed by the second part of the book which, with “Prácticas de frontera: Consideraciones sobre la ética de la imagen contemporánea,” finally deals with the relationship between ethics and art. According to Escobar, the ethical dimension of art derives from its concern with the human condition. The “ethics of image,” the dissident gesture of critical art, which presupposes a “politics of the gaze,” consists in being able to disturb the hegemonic imaginary order. Art will not solve historical conflicts, whether political, social, economic, but can offer a variety possible images, imaginaries and scenarios; it can provoke demands, activate desires (*Imagen e intemperie* 160–161). An interview in two parts conducted by Kevin Power, who was a poet, essayist, and art critic working with Spanish and Latin American contemporary art, and who also served as vice-president of Madrid’s Museo Nacional and Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, closes the collection. Here, the two converse on Escobar’s work over the years and the entire conceptuality he mobilized in light of the political situation of Paraguay from the dictatorship to the transition to democracy, the collapse of a geopolitical order shaped by the Cold War and its bipolar imaginary, and the role art played in this context.

As I have already mentioned, Escobar works at the edge of that liminal zone where the political and the aesthetic enter a threshold of indecidability. I am convinced that his reflections on the question of art and image are absolutely crucial in order to think what I believe is one of the central features of the “progressive cycle” in Latin America, a newborn, although already tremendously ailing, geopolitical conjuncture, that is to say, the “return of the popular” and, thus, the question of representation. Escobar’s book ultimately disjoints the notion of “progressive cycle” or “pink tide” from its exclusively national or state-driven discourse in order to see a ‘scattered panorama,’ which nonetheless may open more punctual, interstitial or intermittent, even nomadic spaces disconnected from the ones limited or restricted to a party organization. That is to say, spaces which are possibilities *in spite of all* (Didi-Huberman 2012), against the totality of the machine, its system and networks of significance; in other words, the ground of the hegemonic system that upholds all hegemony.

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A POEM by ANDRÉS AJENS¹

ALLENDE, EVO, OVER²

near the ekeko of alasitas, lord
of wands, beyond, more-
over the indio, false or ver-
ified, in the words of silvia rivera,
nobody voices over you, falsely
or devotedly, devoted, evo,
you'll never have been, above
a miner, pastor, coccalero,
so-called president. But
whenever we evo-
kethe *indio*, fishy or seal-
ed in gold, an Andean metaphysics
flaps its fins; "An-
dean metaphysics": not
a turn of phrase by jesús or silvia
or the vice president or saenz but
by denis arnold weaving
aguayos with juan de dios
yapita (1998), that *Andean*
order of things which denis, lit-

¹ ANDRÉS AJENS is a poet, essayist, and translator. He is the author of collection of essays *La flor del extérmino* (La Cebra, 2011), translated as *Poetry After the Invention of América: Don't Light the Flower* (Palgrave, 2011). His most recent poetry books are *Bolivian Sea* (Flying Islands, 2015), *Æ* (Das Kapital Ediciones, 2015), and *Cúmulo lúcumo* (3600). He is editor of the literary magazine *Mar con soroche*.

² This poem was translated by Michelle Gil-Montero and was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/8/12/allende-evo-over> on August 8th, 2016.

igating and maybe just delit-
 erating jacques the ripper,
 like silvia, reiterates metaphysics
 of the *indio*, auténtic
 or inauténtic, the whole pro-
 gram of first heidegger, “before”
 the clause, before the de-constructed,
 if you will, of what’s been called “Andean
 logo centrism” (arnold 2005)
 alias *chachawarmi*: were we to
 translate that as mother-*patria*?
 but what is *patria*, now of all
 times, in bolivia, *chachawarmi*? mot-
 tled delinquent peeks, me-
 rely dominations? *camba-colla*
 unsurmountable ascent or boundless
 micro-loco-meddled disasters?
 the DEA will never get it (the CIA maybe
 a little in ñancahuazú, with pre-gale-force
 currencies, greening along the gorge) between
 shinahota, okinawa, san ignacio, fortuna,
 gabriela and ernesto fidel, morón,
 de los robles, cachuela
 esperanza and *el loco* all aboard
 if spilling over a bit,
 by leaps and bounds.

* * *

like the devil etchevery turning back to chapare
 like che on his way back from la higuera
 like uru murato, irohito, chipaya, and even mataco
 like mbói bebe and hans staden, what a liking
 for ink, kunumi letteredly illiterate

a graphophagus, pure *at times*, already mot-tled

* * *

(oh, emma, how can we not burn el alto!)

ALLENDE, EVO, aquende
el ekeko de alasitas, señor
de las varas, allende
el indio, el falso como el ver-
dadero al decir de silvia rivera,
nadie habla aquí por ti, falso
o vero; overo, evo,
jamás lo habrás sido, antes
minero, pastor, cocalero,
dizque presidente. Pero
cada vez que el *indio* entra
en escena, el trucho
como el salmonídeo, meta-
física andina aletea; la
“metafísica andina” no fuera
giro de jesús ni de silvia
ni del vice ni de saenz sino
de denis arnold trenzando
aguayos con juan de dios
yapita (1998), tal *orden*
andino de las cosas que denis, ley-
endo y acaso nomás desleyendo
a jacques el destripador,
como silvia, reitera: metafísica
del indio, del auténtico

como del inauténtico, todo el pro-
 grama del primo heidegger, “antes”
 de la cláusula, de la de-construida
 si prefieres, del dicho “logo-
 centrismo andino” (arnold 2005)
 alias *chachawarmi*; ¿fuéramos
 a traducir eso por patria-madre?
 ¿qué fuera, pero, *patria*, y sobre todo
 hoy, en bolivia, *chachawarmi*? ¿a-
 bigarrados morosos entreveros, só-
 lo dominaciones?, ¿camba-colla
 insuperable ascensoría o inmensurables
 micro-loco-interferidos desastres?,
 la DEA jamás entendiera (la CIA acaso
 algo en ñancahuazú, con pre-venda-
 val verde en la quebrada) entre
 shinahota, okinawa, san ignacio, fortuna,
 gabriela y ernesto fidel, morón,
 de los robles, cachuela
 esperanza y *el loco* de borda
 desbordado apenas aquí,
 de vuelta en vuelta.

* * *

como el diablo etcheverry de vuelta al chapare
 como el che de vuelta de la higuera
 como uru murato, irohito, chipaya, y aun mataco
 como mbói bebe y hans staden, qué
 manera de comer, kunumi tan letrado iletrado
 grafonófago puro a ratos, ya abigarrado

* * *

(uy, emma, ¡cómo non quemar el alto!)

JON BEASLEY-MURRAY¹

Pyrrhic Victories: The Fall and Rise of the Left Turns²

All victories are Pyrrhic, to a greater or lesser extent. That is, no victory is ever complete; victors always have to concede something to the vanquished. At the very least, for instance, those who emerge victorious from a political (or other) struggle either depend upon or, worse still, have to make do without the recognition on the part of the vanquished that they have indeed won. Either, that is, the losing side sign, metaphorically or otherwise, the equivalent of some kind of document of surrender, in which case they have retained the power to determine that the struggle is indeed at an end. And this retained power forces an acknowledgement, on the part of the winners, that their victory cannot be total even if the surrender is unconditional. Or, worse still, the losers do not sign such a document, either because they refuse to acknowledge defeat or because they will not or cannot acknowledge the victors and the legitimacy of their victory. In which case, symbolically and perhaps not just symbolically, the struggle continues and victory remains elusive for the victors. All this is of course merely a variant of Hegel's famous dialectic of master and slave, itself the foundation of much postcolonial theory: either the master (the colonizer, would-be hegemon) depends upon recognition from the slave (the colonized, would-be subaltern). Or, worse still, something escapes and he has to make do without it. And in fact something *always* escapes, which leads to the frustration of any and every project for hegemony, stuck between the demand for recognition, which would be a

¹ JON BEASLEY-MURRAY is Associate Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of British Columbia.

² This article was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/8/12/pyrrhic-victories-the-fall-and-rise-of-the-left-turns> on August 8th, 2016.

form of defeat in any case, and the reality of its withdrawal, its stubborn subaltern betrayal, which makes even that defeat elusive.

None of which is to say there are not in fact winners and losers, that (say) by some kind of postcolonial ruse the colonized emerge victorious from the violent clash that is colonial rule, whether that be thanks to their mastery of mimicry, their destabilization of the signs of power, or some similar conceptual subterfuge. No. Pyrrhic victories are still victories. The toll they take on the vanquished is always worse than the toll taken on the victors, at least in the short run. (And by contrast in the long run, as John Maynard Keynes reminds us, “we are *all* dead”³. But the point is that the winning side is always frustrated by the means by which it wins: it desperately wants a hegemony that is forever unattainable. For the outcome of any struggle is always only determined posthegemonically.

So let us take for granted that, with the “Left Turns” or “marea rosada,” the Latin American Left won, in some not insignificant sense. From Venezuela to Argentina, Bolivia to Brazil, it took over the levers of state power, which is nothing to be sniffed at. Taking advantage of this victory, as well as of other contingencies such as a favorable geopolitical climate, the exhaustion of their immediate enemies, and an unanticipated commodities boom, left-leaning governments of different stripes have had almost unprecedented freedom to experiment with a variety of progressive political, economic, and social solutions to some (at least) of the problems that have long ailed the region. They helped write new constitutions that threatened dramatically to improve participation and do away with some of the entrenched hierarchies of the creole republics. They ploughed money into diverse schemes to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, and improve public services for those who most need them. And they presided over a series of reforms that increased the visibility and improved the social and legal rights of women, gays and lesbians, indigenous peoples, and others who have historically been marginalized and oppressed. In other words, there is no point denying that the Left Turns have indeed constituted an almost unprecedented achievement on the part of the Latin American Left, even at the same

³ Cited in Vincent Barnett, John Maynard Keynes (London: Routledge, 2013), 153.

time we insist that they did not go far enough, that in some way they could never have gone far enough.

But equally, we can take it as given that nothing in these victories depended on anything like “hegemony.” And indeed, that the more that these regimes sought hegemony, the more frustrated they were bound to become. But the fact that they ultimately (or even initially) failed to become hegemonic is not in itself the marker or symptom, let alone the cause, of their downfall. Rather, defeat was already inscribed in the moment of their triumph: in the ways in which they were more or less forced, upon assuming state power, to turn against the movements that established them in that power, and to find that (reciprocally) those movements then sooner or later abandoned them and escaped the scene. Or in the ways in which, as a condition of gaining state sovereignty, they had to bear the burden of renewing or sustaining a social pact that was always fictive and perpetually in crisis, and as such they had to do the dirty work for which their bourgeois opponents were no longer fit for purpose. And perhaps most damagingly, at least in the short to medium term, in the ways in which as a result they became increasingly dependent on the elusive powers of sovereignty itself, and so became fixated on charismatic leaders that soon outstayed their welcome and misread the true sources of whatever power they had indeed won.

In turn, however, the various recent victories of an insurgent Right, achieved in very disparate circumstances (from impeachment in Brazil to electoral victory in Argentina to, say, internal drift in Uruguay) are also in some way Pyrrhic, conceding something to the forces that they replace. So the apparent defeat of the Left across the region—or the “end of the progressive cycle” as this dossier puts it—is far from ushering in some kind of posthegemonic age, let alone the renewed hegemony of the Right. After all, the very phrase “posthegemonic age” is quite strictly meaningless, assuming as it does some kind of “hegemonic age” that might have preceded it. But the series of crises and transitions, from Caracas to Montevideo, Brasilia to Buenos Aires, does offer an opportunity to draw up a balance of forces, of victories in defeats and defeats in victories on all sides. It allows an assessment of what the Left has achieved, and the multiple ways in which the struggle (as always) continues.

The Left Turns won, in the first place, because they capitalized on a striking series of social mobilizations that, as Bruno Cava observes, date back to Venezuela's *Caracazo* of 1989 and include also the water and gas wars in Bolivia or Argentina's crisis of December 2001. Cava calls these "democratic mobilizations," which I think goes too far. There was nothing particularly "democratic" about the *Caracazo*, for instance. If anything, coming so soon after the triumphant inauguration of Carlos Andrés Pérez as Venezuelan president in the wake of elections that had been substantially free and fair (and attracted a turnout of over 80% of the electorate), the riots of February 1989 might better be described as *antidemocratic*. Or rather, as with the subsequent so-called *Argentinazo* twelve years later, which popularized the slogan "¡Que se vayan todos!" ("All of them out!"), they might better still be characterized as expressing that gap between politics *per se* (democratic or otherwise) and existence itself that Alberto Moreiras, among others, conceptualizes in terms of *infrapolitics*.⁴ For what was most striking about the majority of these protests was the way in which they simply did not fit within any conventional notion of the political, and did not appear to be the expression of any recognized (or recognizable) political actor. And yet they exerted immense pressure upon political processes, not least on the fiction of a social pact upon which the political compact depended--in Venezuela quite literally, as the *Caracazo* exposed the threadbare nature of the "Pact of Punto Fijo," but the impact of these various mobilizations was just as striking elsewhere. They forced a reimagining of the political and as such (and Hugo Chávez himself was one of the first to realize this) expressed a constituent power, a desire to re-found the political on new bases. But in each case, a kind of latency period followed the protests before any political organization or party could emerge or reconfigure themselves so as to capture this constituent energy, thus demonstrating that the mobilizations themselves were indeed not political in any meaningful sense of the term. It fell to the Left to recast them in political terms, by means of a constituent process that then created the

⁴ See, for instance, "A Conversation with Alberto Moreiras regarding the Notion of Infrapolitics. With Alejandra Castillo, Jorge Álvarez Vázquez, Maddalena Cerrato, Sam Steinberg, Ángel Octavio Álvarez Solís," trans. Jaime Rodríguez Matos with Sam Steinberg and Alberto Moreiras, *Transmodernity* 5.1 (2015), 142-158. Also, the publications in the Infrapolitical Deconstruction Collective's site www.infrapolitica.wordpress.com

social identities and actors upon which the new regimes could base their own legitimacy.

A similar process had taken place before, of course, in the ructions at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that led to the rise of populist regimes in much of the region. So it is no surprise that left-turn governments were continually characterized (for good or ill) as populist in one way or another. But the term is misleading, not least because it implies that they were little more than a throwback to some previous political form. In fact, however, the Left Turn was distinctly post-neoliberal, in that it involved attempts to deal or reconcile with specific problems (but also opportunities) that neoliberalism had put on the agenda. For the infrapolitical revolt was largely a response to the increasing colonization of everyday life and ordinary habits by political or commercial interests that is a feature of the neoliberal age. Remember that the *Caracazo* started as a protest against the rise in bus fares for commuters; the Cochabamba water war concerned the most basic of natural resources. In short, these were revolts against a particular form of biopolitics. The regimes that followed the revolts then had to negotiate with this new biopolitical horizon, whether by confronting (or allying with) more expansive forms of extraction, by adopting ever more immanent modes of communication and governance that tended to bypass established institutions, or by promoting a drastic enlargement of the domain of political conceptualization, attributing rights for instance to the natural environment. In this context, the rise to prominence of a notion such as “*buen vivir*” as a political concept is a revenge on (but also revenge of) biopolitics, in that it is a recasting of the relationship between politics and life itself that would have been inconceivable in any preceding, populist, era.

In other words, the Left Turns did not so much oppose or roll back the innovations in politics and economics that go by the name of neoliberalism, as instead build on and extend them, albeit in new, unforeseen directions. On the one hand, then, many left-wing governments of the past decade and a half have shown remarkable reverence for markets, including the stock markets. This led to a certain timidity in economic policy, visible perhaps above all in Brazil, but elsewhere, too. For all the desires for Socialism inscribed in left-wing parties’ names or rhetoric, there was little sustained

attempt to transform the mode of production. This was true even in a country such as Argentina, where small but symbolically significant steps had been taken in that direction in the fall-out of the 2001 disturbances, for instance by workers at the various “occupied” factories. But such experiments were never really supported by the state. So it is unsurprising if in many cases (again, perhaps particularly in Brazil, as Salvador Schavelzon notes) the Left in power continued with many of the economic policies that they had inherited.

On the other hand, they introduced new programs (the *bolsa familia*, for instance) that sought more equitable ways to redistribute capital surpluses. Moreover, and in contrast to the populist developmentalist regimes of the 1940s and 1950s, on the whole the governments of the Left Turns spurned protectionism and Import Substitution Industrialization, instead embracing transnationalism but putting it to work in efforts (such as ALBA, the “Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America”) to establish regional networks of mutual assistance and economic, political, and social integration. Consistently, then, rather than refusing or negating what had come to be the “common sense” of neoliberalism, left-wing governments chose rather to adapt or channel it to new ends. Or in Sergio Villalobos’s words, “without opposing neoliberalism [they] tried to radically modify its logic and produce a more humane economy.”

In short, the Left Turns were built on two foundations: an infrapolitical revolt, manifested in social protests and mobilizations; and habits of thought and behavior bequeathed by neoliberalism. These two elements coexisted, in more or less uneasy synchrony, paradoxically presided over by a reinvigorated state that in principle they both opposed. And as became clear, for example when indigenous protests threatened infrastructure construction that would benefit hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia, when forced to choose ultimately the state would always favor free trade from which it could reap rents and secure its own precarious position.

At the heart of any reflection on the legacy of the Left Turns has then to be an analysis of what Villalobos terms the “question of the state form.” Villalobos argues that in “post-neoliberalism” (which signifies anything but the demise of neoliberalism), the

state may be weak by comparison to the military regime that first imposed so-called “structural adjustment” in a country such as Chile. But it continues to play a key role, in part thanks to its renewed capacity to recast popular protests in political terms, which is that of ensuring “the containment of the demands of social movements (through diverse forms of repressive and persuasive strategies)” and so “secur[ing] the macroeconomic space for flexible patterns of accumulation.” If that sounds too much like a hegemonic project, with its characterization of politics in terms of “repressive and persuasive strategies”—the old dichotomy of coercion and/or consent—Gerardo Muñoz hints at the more properly posthegemonic workings both of the *marea rosada* and of what he calls the “New Right” as the latter steps up to “exploit [...] popular cultures of identification and subjective desires that are no longer the monopoly of the populist affective machine.” Muñoz observes that, in Argentina, Kirchnerismo “orchestrated a contemporary cultural rhythm that hinged on habits and rituals long established in the Peronist sentimental fabric.” In other words, there’s a certain continuity of dispositions and customs, that have little to do with ideology (and which indeed can be paired with very diverse ideological discourses), upon which the Left Turns and their successors both build. The state then benefits from and acts these ingrained habits.

This image of the state as the conductor of a variegated and diverse orchestra, wielding little more than the symbolic power of the baton to maintain a specific tempo and ensure resonance and (relative) harmony between very distinct forms of activity and expression, all of which are the fruit of long training and practice, is probably as good a picture as any of a posthegemonic form of leadership in which neither coercion nor consent are strictly at issue. (Pierre Bourdieu similarly liked to use images drawn from sport to illustrate the workings of the habitus and to disrupt the age-old debate about structure versus agency.⁵ With the rise of the New Right, we may see (or hear) rather different rhythms—less of the frenetic bombast of a Hugo Chávez, for instance, with his injunctions for constant mobilization—but the basic

⁵“Nothing is simultaneously freer and more constrained than the action of the good player. He quite naturally materializes at just the place the ball is about to fall, as if the ball were in command of him—but by that very fact, he is in command of the ball.” Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 63.

principle of a state that seeks not to overwhelm but to orchestrate will no doubt remain in place. This is perhaps a literalization of the frequently-noted confusion of politics with entertainment, already anticipated to some extent in (what John Kraniauskas has called) Eva-Peronism, but whose latest apogee is surely Donald Trump's candidacy in the United States presidential elections⁶

Yet this same conception of the state as orchestrator also rather undoes Muñoz's over-hasty reduction of the notion of the commons to, first, "communitarianism" and, second and more quickly still, identitarianism. What is common to an orchestra has little to nothing to do with the identities of those constituting it, however much they are fully invested and embodied in the collective. An orchestra is a machinic arrangement that has very disparate parts: brass and strings; French horns and cymbals; musicians at least notionally from very diverse backgrounds. What they have in common, beyond certain habits and experience, is a score and a mode of attention directed to the conductor. None of this depends upon identity. Hence what I think is an element of miscommunication in the interview between Muñoz and Maristella Svampa. When Muñoz moves from the "turn to the commons" to a question about the extent to which "the communitarian (identitarian) [can] be a democratic horizon of emancipation," he compresses many assumptions into a very short passage. No wonder that Svampa should wish to go more slowly, to re-open the conversation: "Concepts in the process of their construction tend to be disputed concepts. So there is a symbolic debate around the new horizon of concepts and a risk of their abuse." At the same time, in turn Svampa moves too quickly in her eagerness (following François Houtart) to associate "common goods with *the common good of humanity*, in the most general sense." If the most significant impact of the Left Turns (as both Muñoz and Svampa seem to agree) has been the shift to the common or commons as one of the key areas for political debate, conflict, and strategy, then their current decline, and the rise of a New Right that seeks now to inhabit this very same terrain,

⁶ 4. "From the point of view of Eva Perón, the Peronist state may be approached as a peculiar combination of tactics and entertainment, in which, on the one hand, the military institution met a working class in the process of (Peronist) re-organisation and, on the other, the exercise of state power passed through the formats of the culture industries." John Kraniauskas, "Porno-Revolution: El fiord and the Eva-Peronist State," *Angelaki* 6.1 (April 2001), 147. Obviously, the key difference between Eva-Peronism and Trumpism is that it is business (specifically, property development) that takes the place of the military in this equation.

shows that there is nothing necessarily progressive or noble about the concept. In this sense, the better comparison is not between the commons and communitarianism but more simply with community. The weakness or blindspot of communitarians is that they believe all communities, intrinsically, to be of value. But (to put it most bluntly) everybody knows that some communities are better than others.

Some, perhaps most, communities are exclusionary in one way or another. They can be violent both towards other communities and towards those who have no community, as well as imposing various forms of internal hierarchy and oppression on their own members. In other words, there is no particular normative dimension to community. And perhaps we should say exactly the same thing about the commons. It is not unusual to see the common (or the commons) praised for some inherent virtue it is assumed to possess. But surely this is but a legacy of the fact that the initial stages of capitalism involved the enclosure and privatization of common land. Hence the somewhat nostalgic subsequent drive to “reclaim” the commons. But there is no need even to subscribe the notion of the “tragedy of the commons” to recognize that some commons are better than others. The so-called “common cold,” for instance, or indeed any other endemic disease, is common, and yet hardly to be desired. And there are plenty of instances of common resources and the networks structured around them that are rightly denigrated: these days, for instance, the characteristic of decentralized Islamic terror is that it is organized around just such common sites of information and inflammation that any would-be jihadi can access. Or (to take another extreme) the databases and image collections of paedophile networks are likewise held in common and as far as possible at arm’s length from any named individual. So we may want to fight to expand and preserve the commons, but not *all* commons, or not all equally.

No doubt it would be nice to live in a world with more certainties. A world in which there were straightforward virtues to champion and vices to condemn. Surely this is the attraction of the “decolonial” option in contemporary Latin American reflection: as soon as you have managed to categorize a given phenomenon according to the dichotomy colonizer/colonized, then effectively the work of thinking comes to a halt and a form of Puritanism takes over. The rest is either celebration or castigation. But

the decolonialists are not the only ones. For all his disagreements with them, John Beverley offers a similar gesture in his call to defend the Left Turns, and the achievement of left-wing governments in power.⁷ But to point out that the victories of each and every such government are inevitably Pyrrhic is not “ultraleftism”. It is simple realism, and a refusal to abdicate thought in the name of politics. Such abdications demean politics and thought alike.

But life is messier than that. And Diego Valeriano points us to the messy promise of what he calls “*runfla* capitalism” as one of the legacies of the past fifteen years. Valeriano explains that “Runfla capitalism entails a new superior stage of consumption, of popular stability that is both festive and inclusive. The ‘good government,’ parallel to this stage, was its necessary accomplice by unleashing a populist rhetoric that took great efforts in sustaining and fomenting its participation in this process.” These “good governments” are now going or gone, but “*runfla* vitality” continues in the impure admixtures of forces, affects, and habits associated with “the youth, the thieves, the immigrants, the *cholas*” of (especially) metropolitan Latin America.

Surely there was already something of this vitality way back in the festive redistribution of stockpiled goods that characterized the *Caracazo*, the event that serves as the Ur-moment for the entire Left Turns cycle. And if something always escapes, then what escapes (in the dual sense both that it was not fully captured and that it was also produced or further fomented by) the *marea rosada* is perhaps precisely this irreverent, decidedly un-Puritan, transversal attitude to consumer culture that opens up a “micro-politics of life, where consumption, the feast, and the new conflict open worlds to come.” If, as Michela Russo’s reading of Ticio Escobar suggests, we are finally witnessing the full de-auratization of the aesthetic, for both good and ill, then any new options arise from the habits established in “that liminal zone where the political and the aesthetic” and, I would add, the economic “enter a threshold of indecidability.” And where the New Right may discover that its victories, in turn, are as Pyrrhic as those of the Left half a generation ago is in the fact that the real

⁷ John Beverley, *Latinamericanism After 9/11* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

subsumption of society by capital is far from being capital's ultimate triumph. If anything, the fact that capital is now invested in everything, everywhere, makes it more vulnerable than ever. Meanwhile, the players who currently play in tune with the state's sense of rhythm may sometime discover that they do not really need a conductor at all.