Editorial Dossier
Conflicts and Resistance to Neoliberalism in Latin America

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In the history of Latin American societies, the negative consequences of colonialism, patriarchy, and violent dispossession remain in effect. For the same reason, the popular struggle and collective resistance constructed and inscribed over long periods of time are still active and booming.

Within this framework, the strides made by neoliberal policies during the 90s marked a new historical context. The Socially Committed State was finally laid to rest, making way for a full commercialization of capital. The shrinking role of the State and the widespread accumulation of capital, at an unprecedented level in the history of capitalism, took hold on a global scale.

In Latin America, the creation of financial Instruments with exorbitant private gains financed by the public treasure (for the most part, through the generation of external debt), the privatization of companies -including strategic ones for the development of national economies-, and the development of new forms of original accumulation, this type neo-extractivist, are just some of the main features taken on by neoliberalism on the economic plane.

If it is true, as Marx posited, that capitalism is a form of revolutionary production given that the means of production or constantly re-

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evolving, then it may also be provocatively suggested that the rapid transformations of agricultural technologies produced at the hand of genetic modification since the 1980s have also been “revolutionary.” And with it, the changes experienced in the rural sphere have been truly profound. Small agricultural and livestock producers, rural indigenous communities, and farmers have been forced to abandon their lands and/or resist dispossession under conditions of extreme inequality.

Within this context, Latin America has become a scenario of new conflicts and a laboratory for new forms of both rural and urban resistance, capable of revising the branding (and de-branding) of class, gender, ethnic identities, and processes of racialization. In fact, since the end of the 20th century, important social movements have surged across Latin America. The *zapatista* movement in Mexico in 1994 is often cited as a crucial starting point for this trend. But it is clear that this Mexican movement feeds upon and condenses prior experiences such as the *Movimento Sem Terra* in Brazil or Vía Campesina in Nicaragua in 1992. In the 21st century, we can see more creative and original popular struggles, including feminist, women’s and gender movements aimed at expanding rights and putting an end to patriarchal violence in different dimensions and aspects, all of which show a certain intersectionality and transversality.

The articles in this dossier propose an analysis of the conflicts and resistances to neoliberalism within a broader space-time context as that described before. Therefore, the experiences and situations under analysis, the bodies and subjectivities, appear to be anchored in a particular time and space, always intertwined with broader structures. The theoretical constructions on conflict and change are just as necessary as concrete historical research, and particularly when these are developed from and for Latin America. As Tilly (1991) says, it is necessary to return to the heart of the disciplines, “which supposes, on the one hand, identifying and conceptualizing large-scale processes of social change, and on the other, analyzing the facts ‘at the smallest scale possible’ (pg. 30).

On the other hand (Giordano, 2011), we have made a claim towards comparative historical sociology, and we have affirmed that such an appeal is not the same as (or should not be the same as) rejecting the existence of unique and incomparable facts and the fertility of stud-
ies aimed at a single case. Rather, comparison in historical sociology must seek to understand these singular and incomparable facts within models that go beyond their singularity. Without a doubt, this makes it necessary to have information sources that can generate data at this level and scale of generalization.

The spirit of the dossier presented here is aimed at contributing to the debate on conflicts and resistances to neoliberalism in Latin America, with the understanding that the present is historical, that is, part of a longer temporal structure. But it also seeks to disseminate and present for debate an analysis of phenomena situated in singular times and spaces that can feed into soundly informed perspectives as a whole.

The notion of hegemony is particularly enlightening for this task. In fact, all hegemonic constructions are an open space in the exercise of power, which is encoded in the class struggle, played out in the materiality of bodies, and situated in collective territories and spaces. Hegemony is, by definition, unstable; and to capture that instability is precisely to read it from different critical points in which disputes arise. This is why we want this edition to offer some anchoring points on a region scale in order to place the analyses provided by this dossier on a broader temporal frame.

When Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva assumed the presidency in Brazil (2002) and Nestor Kirchner did the same in Argentina (2003), an idea of regional integration began to solidify, strongly backed by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez (in office since 1998). In 2004, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) was launched as a platform in response to the free trade policy promoted by the United States’ White House. We can locate crucial events along this regional scale to understand “the progressive turn” in several countries throughout the region.

Later, the election of Evo Morales as president of Bolivia (2006) and of Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007) ultimately outlined the profile that, with different meanings and emphases, would define Our America. The constitutional processes of those two countries sealed the recognition of pluri-nationality as a framework for the historical repair of societies that had been subject to grave abuse by colonialism. Of course, the social movements demanding recognition of cultural diversity had
a history of prior and even exterior struggles or confrontations with the political party identities that led said constitutional transformations. However, we want to highlight the sanctioning of new Constitutions as a regional milestone to understand processes of accelerated conflict and change in the regional perspective (or the “unity of diversity” to take from a popular metaphor in Latin American social sciences).

The process of regional integration took one step further with the signing of the 2008 creation agreement for the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). This was definitively a process express in these types of agreements, but backed by cross-border alliances. The two other progressive governments that participated in these alliances were that of Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay (2005) and Fernando Lugo in Paraguay (2008).

Across the board, opposition to these new alliances of power and the expression of new social order began to converge on the right-wing side of the political spectrum. The mensalao crisis in Brazil, the rural crisis in Argentina and, more forcefully, the coups in Honduras (2009) and Paraguay (2012), offered the first indications of the Latin America right wing’s capacity for action. While the coup d’etat nature of these forces shows different features than those deployed during the 1970s, their destructive and antidemocratic vocation remains intact. The laboratory cases of Honduras and Paraguay (two cases that could be considered “minor”) were followed by southern giants: Brazil in 2015, and more recently in Bolivia in 2019, an emblematic case due to the transformation of order deployed and condensed in the new form of the State assumed in that country.

The right’s reaction arises from a key aspect: equality. Policies aimed at strengthening social inclusion and the redistribution of wealth, the mitigation of social inequality and, in some cases, the re-nationalization of companies and our societies’ essential resources carried out by so-called “progressive” governments were targeted by this reaction. This tension operated as a strong limit for carrying out the anti-neoliberal projects proposed, with more or less fervor, by governments during the first decade of the 21st century.

In fact, to understand the success of neoliberal political forces, we must address the power of highly concentrated economic groups in
the region. These groups were the key allies of political subjects often brought together in new political parties or powerful think tanks, directed towards a single fundamental objective: to destroy the social conquests obtained in the first part of the 21st century and deepen social inequality.

With the election of Mauricio Macri as president of Argentina (December 2015), Ivan Duque in Colombia (August 2018) and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (January 2019), it could be said that the “progressive cycle” came to a close in Latin America, while at the same time—and which is even more concerning—confirming the capacity of the region’s right to reconfigure its power strategies and project itself towards the future.

One interesting aspect of the strategic reconversion is the bourgeoisie’s direct access to State structures, giving way to what has been called the “government of the business owners” or “CEO-cracy,” all expressions known in the history of Latin America based on oligarchy studies that list taking over the State as a key feature. A greater coordination with NGOs, foundations and think tanks of all types has also played an important role in this reorganization game; or also—in an attempt to “capture” spaces of legitimacy generated by feminist movements—the greater leading role of female presidents and vice-presidents in the formulas of the right-wing forces. The case of Jeanine Áñez in Bolivia is paradigmatic as the female face of the racist right, who did not hesitate to back the torture and assassination of cholas, miners and MAS political party members, and promote the formation of parapolice groups to deploy violence. While the case of Áñez is paradigmatic, no less relevant are the cases of Maria Gabriela Michetti as vice-president to Macri in Argentina or Marta Lucia Ramirez as VP to Duque in Colombia (Giordano and Rodriguez, in press).

Chile is a particularly interesting case in this scenario. There, the militarization of the police and policialization of the Armed Forces has been a historical resources for persecuting and criminalizing social protest. The violence of the Pinochet regime can still be seen in several areas. For example, in the militarization of the Mapuche territory which, increasingly since the year 2000, operates as a perverse form of management of the indigenous demands by the right (Leone, 2018; in press).
The policy of repression and death implemented by Sebastián Piñera’s administration against the overwhelming social movement of October 2019 must also be interpreted within this historical context. This is clear evidence that the right-wing militarization policy in Chile (and in Latin America) is a continuing feature of the right-wing coups of the 1970s, now clothed in democratic disguise.

In this context, it is worth re-asking a question formulated elsewhere: new rights with respect to which past? (Giordano, 2014). Without intending to underestimate the lines of rupture or substantive differences, we would just like to raise awareness that in long-term perspectives arise continuities that must be addressed, so as not to dismiss as entirely novel events that, inscribed within a much longer history, may offer key explanations, and even lessons, for the present. This is also the spirit of the present dossier.

But the right turn is not unbeatable. In Argentina, Macri was unable to renew his term and lost the election to the Frente de Todos candidate, Alberto Fernandez, who claimed victory alongside the former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as his running mate. Here, too, the case of Chile is illustrative, although in the sense of revealing the political capacity of resistance. The mass social protests of October 2019 led to (after violent episodes that left a significant number of deaths and mutilations) the recent approval by referendum of a Constituent Assembly to replace the Constitution of 1980 ratified during the Pinochet dictatorship. This is encouraging, even though Piñera’s administration would appear to have put up a successful shield to limit the process of change, allowing the right-wing parties to preserve their right to veto.

Ecuador followed suit and, in the same month of October 2019, protests on the streets made it loud and clear that they rejected the Letter of Intent signed by Lenin Moreno’s government with the International Monetary Fund. In this case, the conflict was triggered by cuts to fuel subsidies and the labor rights of public servants. The demands of these sectors were immediately accompanied by groups of women, students, and indigenous communities, the latter of which wielding a valuable history and great capacity for political organization across the country.
It is clear that the social outbursts and popular struggles did not stop during the hard times brought about by the Latin American right. The current scenario has renewed the hopes of many. Recently, the Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS) party won the elections in Bolivia. Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca have already taken over as the country’s new president and vice president. Likewise, the ousted leader Evo Morales returned to his native land in an epic caravan accompanied by social leaders and movements that are the symbol of struggle in the region.

This is in addition to the meager electoral results obtained by the officialist party candidate in the municipal elections of Sao Paulo, Brazil. And in the sphere of international policy, we can also see the recent defeat of Donald Trump in the United States.

Ultimately, the neoliberal capital accumulation model, popular resistance to dispossession, the construction of political forces in the popular field and the governing strategies of the “new” right are, as a whole, different yet interrelated processes. This dossier seeks to contribute to an understanding of their complexity and multifaceted nature. The current volume consists of 17 articles. The first five present a varied panorama of governing ideas and practices in Latin American neoliberalism. They are followed by two others that offer supranational perspectives of the resistance and regional integration processes; and another three that study the issue of social protests, from a theoretical point of view and based on empirical references. The second half of the dossier is composed of five articles discussing rural space, alliance processes and the resistance practices implemented there. Finally, the dossier concludes with two more articles that address two critical segments of current social life and which are the scenario of the most brutal disputes at present: energy and food production. Below, we provide a detailed review of each of the articles included in this version.

In “Elements for a Genealogy of the Neoliberal Movement in Argentina: Intellectuals, Politicians, and Business Owners,” María Paula de Büren reconstructs a necessary genealogy of the neoliberal networks in the country in order to recover part of its initial deployment during the 50s and 60s, tracing a thread of continuity to present day. The author highlights the central position gained by Alberto Benegas Lynch at the time and the Center for Dissemination of the Free Economy (CDEL)
which he founded. With this, Büren shows that, as opposed to conventional thought blaming primarily North American influences, the original installation of neoliberal thought in Argentina as influenced by the Austrian perspective articulated around the Mont Pèlerin Society.

The work by Gina Paola Rodríguez “Think Tanks of the Right and Gender Discourses in Chile” is an excellent complement to the first article, as it opens up the path towards understanding the current importance of think tanks, decoding their ideas and addressing their potential impact on the design of public policies in the region. Rodríguez analyzes the gender discourses currently sustained by three think tanks (Libertad y Desarrollo, Fundación para el Progreso and Avanza Chile). She affirms that the strategy adopted by these actors to unleash the “war of ideas” against progressivism consisted of partially and selectively adapting the flags of feminism, while ignoring the rights of sex-gender and LGTBIQ breakaway groups.

Next, Diana Villegas Loeza (“Analysis of the Relationship Between the State, NGOs, and Rural Populations in Mexico”) contributes elements to consider government strategies from an ethnographic and historical perspective. Upon review of the government relations articulated during the State of well-being, the author studies the reconfiguration of the State’s relations with rural and indigenous populations in the neoliberal context during the first decade of the 21st century. Her work is focused on the municipality of Pahuatlan, located in the northern sierra of Puebla and posits that the intervention of development agencies and micro-financial NGOs have sped up the implementation of banking processes in the country’s rural areas. Within these systems, she suggests that the subjects are no longer strictly beneficiaries nor, much less, holders of rights, but rather clients, partners and/or users that, through a discourse of “empowerment,” are presented as “their own business owners.”

The work of Emilio Seveso converses closely with these issues. Entitled “Commodification in Labor Inclusion Policies: An Experience-Based Approach,” this text problematizes the mechanisms of conditioned social assistance in the province of San Luis (Argentina) during recent years. The author studies the experiences and expressions of the beneficiaries of the “Concertacion con la Comunidad” Subprogram in light of three dimensions: the expropriation of cor-
poral vitality through the valuation of human capital, monetary circulation through the application of programs, and dispossession achieved through the convergence of consumer loans. The text is thought-provoking as it suggests that the energies and bodies of the beneficiaries were placed at the service of a “security” agenda, while also guided by the logic of direct indebtedness as a way to promote consumption.

The text by Emanuel Farías Carrión, “Institutional Pronouncement of Chilean Neoliberalism,” takes a look at the recent National Agreement for Peace and the New Constitution in parallel to what was the National Agreement for the Transition to Full Democracy, signed during the Pinochet dictatorship. With his proposal, the author invites us to view the current context of Chilean society with an attentive look at history. From there, he questions the “real democratizing intention” of the latest agreement, and states that it, like the previous one, carries with it dimensions that cancel out popular participation and give continuity to the neoliberal program in the country.

In the sphere of regional integration, the text “The ALBA-TCP: From Emergency to Resistance,” by María del Carmen Pérez, offers a thought-provoking question: is ALBA truly dead? The author proposes an analysis of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) from its period of growth (2004-2015) and its period of stagnation and resistance (2015 to present). The objective of this article is to situate these events in a present context that does not rule out, at least not mechanically, the possibility of resurgence or promotion of this international treaty. The argument is based on Arce’s recent election to the presidency of Bolivia, given that ALBA is one of the flags supported by the MAS political party.

Considering the global scenario, but focusing on rural struggles, Carolina Cepeda Másmela and Julián Muñoz Londoño present a study on Colombia and the relations held between the National Agrarian Coordinator and the National Federation of Agricultural Trade Unions (FENSUAGRO) on the one hand, and La Vía Campesina, on the other. The authors study the current programmatic lines of both groups, while highlighting the current coordination between the two. The text offers elements to understand the processes of global coordination of rural movements.
The article by María Virginia Quiroga and Ana Lucía Magrini entitled “Social Protests and the Social Issue in Contemporary Latin America” studies the recent uses of the notion of social protest. The authors propose a “plural” look at this phenomenon, based on its heterogeneity, and as an object of study that cannot be fully covered by any one discipline or field of knowledge. Her multidimensional approach leads to the proposal of four dimensions of “protests”: political, communicative, historical, and socio-territorial, regardless of their position along the political spectrum. The work by Quiroga and Magrini concludes with a reflection on the limitations that the pandemic scenario is imposing upon social movements, as well as the changes that can be observed in the scope of action of popular resistance within this same context.

Iván Mézquita Alonso, Laura Celina Ruelas Monjardín and Noé Hernández Cortez also propose a push towards characterizing contentious dynamics. In this case, they do so based on the social and environmental conflicts that have arisen around the construction of hydroelectric plants in Mexico (in the states of Nayarit, Guerrero, Sinaloa, Puebla, Jalisco, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Hidalgo) and Colombia (departments of Huila and Caldas) during the last fifteen years. The text entitled “Towards a Typology of Social-Environmental Conflicts Surrounding Hydroelectric Plants: Experiences in Mexico and Colombia,” analyzes the levels of citizen participation in decision-making according to levels of conflict, finding that greater levels of citizen participation in the dam construction process reduce the probability of social conflict and the intensity of any such conflict.

The article “Civic Mobilization, Social Media and Neoliberalism: Resistance in Mexico and Ecuador, 2018-2019,” by Daniel Javier de la Garza Montemayor and Gabriela Estefanía Riera Robles, analyzes the dynamics of social mobilization and new organizational forms through social media. From there, the authors are able to demonstrate the importance of online coordination in the electoral campaign of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, and in the generation of the Ecuadorian movements of October 2019. De la Garza and Riera Robles interpret that in both cases, the online public sphere became a space for the articulation and opposition of liberalism.

The articles by María Amalia Miano, Daniela Pessolano, Carla Sabrina Aguirre and Mariana Ortega address different experiences in
the organization of Argentinean and Mexican rural space. The work of Miano, entitled “Live, Educate, and Fight in the Fields. Actions and Coalitions of Rural Inhabitants,” analyzes two cases of community organization and rural life at present: families who participate in the Management Council of an Educational Center for Total Production (province of Buenos Aires) and an Agricultural Family School (EFA) in the northeast province of Chaco. Based on collaborative research, she observes that there are actions carried out by rural communities that, also seemingly minuscule, deserve to be interpreted as political actions, as they allow rural inhabitants to sustain the livelihoods they have chosen.

Daniela Pessolano, on the other hand, asks about the contributions being made by women in the formation of the rural social space in the province of Mendoza (Argentina). In its title, the article recovers a point question: “Are women more farmers?” Based on a solid field study, this text shows the key role played by rural women in the daily reproduction of family life and the responsibility they bear in the construction of associative processes.

In “Extractivism, Territory and Indigenous Autonomy. The Mapuche Community in Neuquen (1996-2015),” Carla Sabrina Aguirre asks about the alliances that the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquen has managed to construct outside the indigenous space across two decades. The author observes that these strategies are particularly beneficial to achieving the organization’s political objectives. She does this based on field work experiences and focusing on two communities (Paichil Antriao and Puel Pvjv) with markedly distinct historical and geographic characteristics, although both incorporated within the Confederation.

The text by Mariana Ortega (“Lands That Speak. Communication and Resistance in Northern Argentina”) is focused on the current processes of indigenous resistance in the peri-urban zone of Tartagal (province of Jujuy). For this, it analyzes an organizational process initiated over two decades ago and managed by the Wichi, Guarani, Qom and Chorote populations, and which led to the Organization of Indigenous Women, Regional Association of Developing Workers (ARETEDE) and the La Voz Indigena Community Radio (inaugurated in 2008). Ortega invites us to recognize resistance strategies within these experiences, which bring together territorial, environmental and gender struggles.
in a context of the fast progression of extractivist capitalism and widespread poverty.

“Temacapulín: Threat of Dispossession and Resistance to the Construction of the Great Dam,” proposes a social psychological analysis of the ways in which the Mexican community (in the state of Jalisco) experienced and overcame the trauma generated in 2007, with the threat of evacuation for the construction of a hydropower dam. Its author, Susana Elvia, suggests that collective resistance can be used to mitigate the psychosocial trauma in question, as a form of reinstating trust, recovering social cohesion and the community’s social fabric, and compensation psychoemotional damage.

The dossier ends with the works of Domingo Rafael Castañeda Olvera and Luis Blacha. The first studies the “Ecosocial Impacts of Wind Power Parks in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico.” Although wind power is considered to be “cleaner” than other energy sources like oil or coal, the installation of wind parks leads to consequences that cannot be overlooked. In this text, Castañeda Olvera offers a detailed account of the technical impact caused by wind power projects - implemented in the region since 1997, in an area whose vast majority (80%) of the population is indigenous - and denounces their failure to consult with the communities and misleading nature, their failure to comply with labor, economic and energy expectations, etc., the privatization of energy resources, and biocultural dispossession, among others.

Finally, the text by Luis Blacha is entitled “Risk, Inequality and Flavor. Sociological Tools to Explain the ‘Dorito Effect.’” Its title takes from the commercial name of an ultra-processed product in the food market and invites us to reflect on the economic and social inequalities currently reflected in the differing capacities to access the right to health and nutritional sustenance. The author re-situates the old sociology question of taste in an updated and broad-based system of reflection that brings together the scenario of single-crop farming, the reality of the global food industry, the “false sense of abundance” reflected in the supermarket displays and the popular consumption of “Doritos” products: increasingly less nutritious yet more flavorful, to guarantee the “capture” of the consumer.
References


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