

ALTERNAUTAS

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter Vol.3 – Issue 1 [July 2016]

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

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How to cite:

Muñoz, G. (2016), The Exhaustion of the Progressive Political Cycle in Latin America and Posthegemonic Reflection, *Alternautas*, 3(1), 94-106. URL : http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/12/yldqiikwbsvfrkj6lfbsjofl4fdual

Editor : Alternautas <u>http://www.alternautas.net</u> London, UK. ISSN - 2057-4924

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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 politicity of Latinamericanist

² This article was originally published in:

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http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/5/12/yldqiikwbsvfrkj6lfbsjofl4fdual 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 units.³ 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 (Garcia Linera 2011). If this opportunity is lost due to the an 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 presidentalism on the other (Zaffaroni 2008).

The crisis also exceeds political institutionalization, spilling over in the active neoextractive 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 presidentalism 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 antiparty "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-20150619-0057.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 retorted 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' Kirhcnerismo, 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 Kirchenrist 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 *Clinämen* "Scioli Ilegó hace rato" (http://ciudadclinamen.blogspot.com/2014/09/scioli-Ilego-hace-rato.html). For in depth sociological analysis of security forms in Argentina, see *Temor 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 Kraniauskas), 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 "imaginalization" 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 Raul 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* (Sudamaericana, 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-fleshed 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 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 Latinamericanist 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, Raguel 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 politicity, 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: aprincipial affirmation of politicity in the times of interregnum; and second, a politicity 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 Diaz'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 principial 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 principial 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.

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

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