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Conclusion

Changing Contexts and Movement Strategies

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The upswing in the Latin American cycle of contentious politics since the 1980s has moved into a new phase. Social movements that were galvanized into action in part by the harsh impact of neoliberal policies now operate in the post neoliberal period in the context of declining hegemony of the old Washington Consensus. The return of formal democracy to most of the region after the eclipse of the military regimes of the 1960s–1980s proved inadequate for delivering substantive social justice to poor majorities in the world's most unequal region. Marginalized by the political class, popular sectors across the region mobilized outside conventional institutions to topple some governments and challenge others, ushering in a pink tide of left governments in the twenty-first century.

Just as the region's social movements were once faced with the dilemma of whether to return to the confines of institutional politics to avoid the breakdown of fragile new democratic regimes, today they struggle with the question of whether to continue to support self-proclaimed left governments to prevent the electoral return of the right. Many of those governments have advanced state-directed, post-neoliberal development strategies such as "neo-extractivism," arguing that nationalization of petroleum and mining industries can finance redistributive social programs. Yet the forces of global capital continue to operate, and the logics of electoral politics and state power comingle with the broad-based and participatory nature of the contentious politics that define social movements. With Bolivia's first Indigenous president negotiating a highway project with Brazilian capital through the

TIPNIS Indigenous territory, and Brazil's PT (Workers Party) avoiding agrarian reform and repressing protest in anticipation of the 2014 World Cup soccer games, the honeymoon between social movements and left governments has morphed into a more difficult and contentious relationship.

While the context for organizing has changed, so have the region's movements themselves. Decades of neoliberal globalization have undermined worker organizing, but in response social actors redefined their identities and alliance strategies, and they have shifted the locus of their efforts from making demands on the state to attempting the transformation of society. Zapatista autonomous communities in rural Chiapas, punks and graffiti artists sharing space with grandmothers on the urban barricades in Oaxaca, Brazilian MST land occupiers, Argentine workers running recovered factories, and Honduran LGBTTI activists staking out new conceptual terrain within a globalized framework of human rights, are all examples of transformations in the spatial organization of power that Zibechi (2012) has characterized as "territories in resistance." Within these reclaimed spaces, grassroots activists are not waiting for change to be structured from above, but are developing new anti-hierarchical and participatory dynamics from below in what Sitrin (2012) calls "horizontalism." The processes and practices of movement organizing are themselves transformative—a new way of viewing social and political change that Motta (2013a) calls "reinventing the lefts."

Indigenous activists in Ecuador and Bolivia have been at the forefront of broadening the agenda of struggle beyond policies, parties, and elections to propose a fundamental reexamination of values that would reconceptualize politics as the collective striving for a good life, or *buen vivir*. Five hundred years after the European invasion, grassroots activists are challenging hegemonic constructions of the nation-state from below. Beyond the notion of identity politics and the "politics of culture" (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998), activists are explicitly recognizing the intersectionality of their multiple dimensions of identity, and asserting their agency to define and constitute themselves as social subjects. Examples include Afro-Brazilians organizing from below on the basis of their own construction of racial identity; popular feminism in Brazil as a lens through which to view the multiple subject positions of gender, race, and class; and explicit recognition of "other ways of knowing" within the diverse transnational peasant/farmer alliance that is *Vía Campesina*.

The ideological legitimacy of the neoliberal paradigm is substantially frayed, but global capital remains powerful and adaptable. Mega-development projects across the region, fueled by the commodity boom of the early twenty-first century, pose a major challenge to community control across the region. Global capital has found ways to repackage these schemes (such as the Plan Puebla-Panamá, reborn as Proyecto Mesoamérica), or ducked behind shifting ownership structures and international institutions and "free

trade" agreements (as in El Salvador's mining controversy). Activists responded by forging transnational social movement networks, but this strategy was in potential tension with more locally based horizontal and participatory movement dynamics. Globalization from below, involving political learning and new forms of social communication within and between regions, can be seen in the twenty-first century not only in Latin America but also in movements as diverse as Occupy in the United States, anti-austerity protests in Spain and Greece, and the "Arab Spring" uprisings.

The question of the state, and the relation between social movements and state power, will continue to be key (Webber and Carr 2012; Ellner 2014; Prevost, Oliva and Vanden 2012). The Venezuelan case suggests that mobilization from below and state-supported transformation are not necessarily dichotomous alternatives. Honduran activists, in the aftermath of authoritarian regime change and intense repression under an ostensibly "democratic" regime, struggled with the issue of whether to focus on street protests or throw their mobilized energies behind an electoral effort to regain political space. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the two strategies can build on each other, but they can also distract from and draw energy away from more effective models of building political change.

Issues such as the shape of a post-neoliberal future for Latin America, the viability and merits of horizontal organizing dynamics and radically democratic political practices, and the tradeoffs of state versus movement-directed processes of transformation, will continue to figure prominently in the landscape of the region. The contours of struggle for social justice are changing rapidly.¹ This compilation is intended to highlight these comparative themes and trends in Latin American social movements, offering contemporary cases that illustrate the dilemmas, clarify the terms of debate, and explore different models for transformative praxis. A growing sense in the region (and beyond), clearly visible and audible in the marches and voices of the grassroots (Ross and Rein 2014), is that the old politics of elites acting upon the masses needs to be reversed. New radical praxis is being forged in the struggles of these movements as they interact with, and at times struggle against, the state and the forces of global capitalism. In keeping with the original meaning of the word radical, they are indeed returning to the roots for sustenance and strength. From this base, activists will build a stronger, more effective, and more successful struggle.

NOTE

1. Some useful electronic resources for keeping abreast of contemporary movement directions (in Latin America and beyond) include: <http://nacla.org>; <http://upsidedownworld.org>; <http://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com>; <http://www.interfacejournal.net>; and <http://roarmag.org>.