

How Common Citizens Transform Politics: The Cases of Mexico and Bolivia

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1. Overview of project, goals

This dissertation is a comparative study of the trajectories of two recent social movements against neoliberalism: the 2000 movement that successfully challenged the privatization of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the movement that emerged in 2006 to unsuccessfully challenge the results of the Mexican presidential election. Both have shown an enduring, unique ability to create and sustain organized collective action rooted in civil society. In their own distinctive ways, both movements have made assertive demands for action, accountability, and responsiveness from political actors, and they both have influenced the national political agenda. My core argument holds that these two movements, despite emerging from quite divergent historical settings and socio-political contexts, nevertheless converged on similar structural outcomes: an organized, mobilized and politically educated movement rooted in civil society, that seeks the greater common good by changing the dynamics of State-civil society relationships in ways that will generate greater accountability of political actors and thus radically transform politics. However, there are important ways in which the two movements differ, including in their approach to reshaping the political culture of civil society in order to increase its self-awareness and potential power.

In this dissertation I seek to understand the process by which these two struggles against neoliberalism have fostered the engagement of common citizens that may be seen as a response to a State perceived as weak, ineffective and/or captured by neoliberal forces that has failed to help citizens achieve a minimum standard of living. I seek to understand the processes by which

these movements have encouraged common citizens to take active part in the public debate of issues that have traditionally been left to the decision of political elites or technocrat experts, and how they have fostered an organizational culture in which participants can imagine a different kind of State-society relationship.

2. Methodology

I utilize the comparative historical method and qualitative methods to establish the movements' emergence and trajectories, and to examine their various dimensions. I use library and archival (newspapers, television, speeches, correspondence) research to establish the historical background, the development of neoliberalism, the responses of civil society to neoliberalism, and the government's response to civil society's mobilization. I utilized semi-structured interviews to investigate people's perceptions of neoliberalism, social movements, political parties, and the political process, as well as their motivations to participate in, and their expectations of, these particular social movements. My interviewees included members of the rank and file, participants at the mid-level leadership, and politicians and intellectuals both in favor and against the movement.

Most of my fieldwork in Mexico was conducted in Mexico City, with some interviewees in Monterrey and Puebla. In Bolivia, the majority of my fieldwork took place in Cochabamba, with a few interviews conducted in La Paz. I also conducted participant observation at various events and sites in both countries. Field work took place in 2009 and it examined the period of 2006-2009 for the Mexican case and 2000-2009 for the Bolivian case (see Methods Appendix).

3. Theoretical Framework

Mexico and Bolivia share some common historical elements such as the experience of revolutionary movements and revolutionary nationalist ideologies, state crises, and the implementation of neoliberal programs. My two social movements of interests are dramatically different in important aspects such as original goals, repertoires of contention, and dynamics, but they also have some important commonalities. Both movements have emerged in the context of neoliberalism and its negative effects on society, and they have mediated, in their own distinctive ways, between civil society and the state to protect the interests of the common citizen, particularly those in the most vulnerable positions. Both have shown an ability to develop a politicized, organized and mobilized civil society that is capable of providing leverage to leftist political parties when they have needed it to pursue their goals; likewise, it is also capable of exercising pressure on the same parties to keep them true to principles and promises of protecting the well-being of people, and of social justice and revolutionary nationalism. In both settings, this organized and mobilized civil society has assertively made demands for action and accountability from the government, and proven capable of influencing the national political agenda. In Bolivia, for instance, President Morales' government created a Minister of Water as a result of pressure to address issues brought up by the water war. In Mexico, the *lopezobradorista* movement forced the federal government to open a debate about president Calderon's 2008 energy reform and the privatization of the oil industry. These are two examples, but not the only ones, of how both movements have influenced the national political agenda.

These movements do not see themselves as subordinated to political parties. They do not reject electoral politics but they do reject politics as usual, particularly the bureaucratization of political parties, their disregard for citizens, and the practice of politics as a means to acquire wealth and prestige. Both are very skeptical of representative democracy and assume a political

commitment that goes well beyond casting a vote. They understand the need, and have expressed a vehement desire, to transform the country, sharing a striking similarity in that participants are thoroughly convinced that change can only come from below. The phrase *solo el pueblo puede salvar al pueblo* (only the people can save the people) has been proffered numerous times by members of the leadership and the rank and file in both movements throughout the years.

Based on the characteristics and trajectories of these movements, I propose Gramscian theory to: 1) understand the development of neoliberalism as a case of state transition which Gramsci describes as passive revolution, and 2) explain these movements as responses to passive revolution that take the form of anti-passive revolutions with projects of radical democracy.

3.1. Neoliberalism as passive revolution

The notion of passive revolution as an historical concept highlights the capacity of capitalist production for “internal adaptation to the developments of the forces of production, a certain plasticity to ‘restructure’ in periods of crisis” (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:209). In such fashion passive revolution is “a theory of the survival and reorganization of capitalism through periods of crisis, when crucial aspects of capitalism are not overcome but reproduced in new forms, leading to the furtherance of state power and an institutional framework consonant with capitalist property relations” (Morton 2003:632). The legislative intervention of the State introducing “relatively far-reaching modifications into the country’s economic structure in order to accentuate the plan of production element” involves passive revolution, and it does not imply changes or alteration in “the profit and control of the transitional dominant and ruling classes” (Buci-Glucksmann 1979:224). Gramsci developed these concepts and notions in order to understand the emergence of fascism as the result of a situation of “catastrophic balance of

forces, in which the historical alternative takes an acute form: revolution or reaction” (Buci-Glucksmann 1980:311). Yet they describe appropriately the development of neoliberalism. The crisis of capitalism in the 1970s and the establishment of neoliberalism worldwide following the acute crisis appear to confirm this fact.

Morton (2003) and Soederberg (2001) have eloquently made the case for the two waves of neoliberalism, or two passive revolutions, that swept Mexico during the administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) and Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) under cases of state crises. Given the striking similarities with Bolivia I extend the framework to this country, arguing that Bolivia also underwent two waves of passive revolution during the administration of Víctor Paz Estensoro (1985-1989) and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-1997). The neoliberal programs in both countries included social programs that attempted to ameliorate the acute suffering while embodying “new forms of ideological and political domination targeted at preserving the hegemony of the ruling classes while excluding the majority” of people (Soederberg 2001:104). These programs provided a “sense of inclusion” amongst the most impoverished, “denying the existence of class antagonism while claiming to transcend class differences” (Morton 2003:644).

3.2. A strategy of anti-passive-revolution to counter the neoliberal passive revolution

Gramsci argues that there will always be a struggle between those who seek revolution and those who seek to maintain the status quo or concede minimum reforms; from this perspective, and focusing on the West, where the strategy of the war of position prevails over the war of maneuver, Buci-Glucksmann (1979:210) argues that what takes place is in fact two strategies, or two wars of position: “the war of the dominant class in its various forms of passive revolutions and the asymmetrical war of the subaltern classes in their struggle for hegemony and

political leadership over society.” They both take the form of war of position, but their hegemony differs in content; they play a different role. While the war of position of the dominant classes – the passive revolution – engenders small changes shaped as legal reforms, the war of position of the subaltern classes plays a “determinant role in a ‘socialization of politics’ that can activate a mass cultural revolution and can transform class relations and the equilibrium of power within society and the state.” This allows for the exploration of a new strategy for the working class in the West that is different from the war of maneuver, one based on “democratic strategies necessarily consisting in mass democratic revolutions that forge new links between representative democracy and democracy of the base, between hegemony and pluralism.” This type of struggle is an “anti-passive revolution” (Buci Glucksmann 1979:211), a strategy that should emphasize: 1) institutional pluralism; 2) mass party, with emphasis on its mass character; 3) rejection of any form of bureaucratic centralism; 4) democratic centralism that can unite the political leadership to the movement of the base; 5) development of the concepts of mass party and small elite party, and mediation between the two (p. 232). I argue that my two cases provide the opportunity to explore both the process and the product of such anti-passive revolution.

3.3. A project of radical democracy

Laclau and Mouffe’s 1985 work introduce some changes and modifications to Gramsci’s theory that make it more applicable to our time. Two of them are particularly important: the transition to a credible alternative order that may not necessarily be classic socialism, and the fact that the working class/proletariat is no longer the leading actor in this transition.

Laclau & Mouffe argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union discredited the very idea of socialism. The pervasive hegemony of neoliberalism profoundly affected the identity of the Left,

resulting in many social democratic parties redefining themselves as “center-left” and emphasizing the need for “a politics of the radical center,” blurring the lines of antagonisms and abandoning any attempt to transform the hegemonic order (1985:xiv, xv). And yet, the authors argue, the neoliberal hegemonic order can only be challenged in terms of hegemonic relations, by “elaborating a credible alternative to the neoliberal order,” which the Left should do instead of merely “trying to manage neoliberalism in a more humane way” (p. xvi).

In the hegemonic struggle against neoliberalism Laclau & Mouffe advocate a strategy of “articulation” because it accepts the “structural diversity of the relations in which social agents are immersed,” and the unity that it creates is the “result of political construction and struggle” rather than the “expression of a common underlying essence.” Furthermore, articulation is not due to any a priori structural privilege but to a political initiative on the part of the articulating class (p. 64). Politics as articulation is “a political construction from dissimilar elements” which entails the idea of democratic plurality; social identity is never fixed a priori (p. 85). Laclau & Mouffe underscore the importance of articulation and “unfixed” identities; a project of radical democracy must reject “privileged points of rupture and the confluence of struggles into a unified space,” accepting instead “the plurality and the indeterminacy of the social” (p. 152).

For a hegemonic strategy of the Left to happen it is necessary to make some radical changes, in particular we must reject the “essentialist apriorism” or “essentialist fixity” that insists on “the possibility of fixing the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice,” and by doing so it fails to understand the “themes or nodal points” that constitute a historical bloc. This means rejecting “fixities” such as classism, statism, economism, and “the classic concept of revolution cast in the Jacobin mold” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:177). Along

these lines, the authors argue that the struggle for democracy cannot be a workers' struggle for labor rights, claims, or demands. They agree that the project for radical democracy has a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to end capitalist relations of production because they are at the root of many relations of subordination. But even a project for "socialization of the means of production" in the context of radical democracy cannot simply mean workers' self-management, because at stake is true participation by all subjects in decisions about what to produce, and how to produce and distribute it. Reducing this issue to merely a workers' issue is to ignore that workers' interests may be constructed in such a way that they do not take into account the demands of other groups also affected by decisions made in the field of and by the process of production (p. 178). The bottom line of this message is that radical democracy is not solely a workers' project, it is the project of an entire society, and it can only be done through rejection of the unitary subject and fixed identities, clarification of antagonisms, and acceptance of plurality, contingency, and the establishment of hegemonic articulations.

The project of radical democracy is a hegemonic project that: 1) is based on a democratic logic, and, 2) must have a "strategy of construction of a new order." This means that it must not merely consist of negative demands, it should include a "real attempt to establish different nodal points" to initiate a "positive reconstruction of the social fabric" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:189). It is also crucial to identify and avoid "utopianisms" that ignore the "structural limits" imposed by, for instance, the logic of the state apparatuses, the economy, and so on, that may paralyze the hegemonic project. Equally important, however, is to avoid accepting only those changes that appear possible at the moment. Every radical democratic project "should avoid the two extremes of the Ideal City and the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project" (p. 190). The project of radical democracy and the anti-passive revolution are the main analytic themes in my

study. My two cases show that participants see the process of change as a project of the society at large, and they also illuminate the strategies that may be followed to avoid the potential pitfalls.

4. Summary of the Mexican case: the *lopezobradorista* movement

Spring 2006: Highly contested presidential campaigns.

July 2006: Highly contested elections, results are delayed, three days later the candidate of the conservative party PAN, Felipe Calderón, is announced the winner by 0.527 (check); supporters of Andres Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the leftist coalition (made by PRD, PT and Convergencia parties) demand a recount (*voto por voto, casilla por casilla*) ballot-by-ballot, precinct-by-precinct, which becomes the rallying cry of the movement. The right wing candidate, the entire political class, political pundits and the mainstream media dismiss the demand. Three large demonstrations take place on July 16, 23, and 30. On the third one, protesters staged a camp out at the Zócalo plaza and on some of the main avenues and streets of Mexico City, the camp out lasted until September 14. López Obrador camped out as well, holding daily evening assemblies. The study circles, an emblematic component of the movement, emerged during the camp out and multiplied in the following years.

September, November 2006: the Electoral Tribunal, after examining less than ten percent of the precincts, concluded that there had been irregularities in the campaign and violations of the electoral law on the part of the conservative party, PAN, but they had not affected the results; it awarded the presidency to Felipe Calderón. López Obrador and protestors at the camp out did not accept the results and vowed to remain in resistance, arguing that the movement was for the transformation of the country. On September 15 López Obrador was named legitimate president by a gathering of approximately one million protestors gathered at the Zócalo Plaza. The rationale for becoming a legitimate president rather than the leader of the opposition was that Felipe Calderón had not won the presidency, and to become the opposition would legitimize the fraud. On November 20, 2006, López Obrador was sworn in as legitimate president at the Zócalo, in front of hundreds of thousands of supporters.

López Obrador began a journey across the nation to visit each one of the counties, to learn first-hand the realities of the country; it last approximately two years. A bank account was opened to receive donations to support the Legitimate Government. The process of affiliation to the movement, called the *credencialización*, began in late 2006, where members of the movements obtained an ID that identified them as representatives of the Legitimate Government. By mid-2009 this database contained approximately 2.5 million members.

March – October 2008: the movement transformed itself into the National Movement for the Defense of the Oil Industry, opposing the energy reform proposed by president Calderón through a combination of collective action on the streets carried out by brigades and legislative action carried out by legislators loyal to the movement. The movement forced the government to change the terms of its preferred reform, and thus became a player capable of influencing the national political agenda.

March 2009: Establishment of the *Casas del Movimiento Ciudadano*. *Casas* were one of the most important elements of the new phase of the movement, now called the Movement for the Defense of the Oil Industry, Sovereignty, and the Economy. The *casas* were spaces where the legitimate government could undertake actions to ameliorate the effects of the worsening economic crisis. The *casas* focused on three main lines of activities that reflected the most overwhelming problems afflicting Mexican families: attention and advise to people experiencing credit card and mortgage debts, and to households unable to pay the increasing costs of electricity and other utilities. By the summer of 2009, attention to credit card debtors had developed in a database and the systematization of procedure to contest the usurious practices of banks. The goal was to establish sixteen *casas* in Mexico City, one per delegation, and one *casa* in each state capital.

Summer 2009: Mid-term elections; the active involvement of the members of the movement in the campaign to

renew Congress resulted in the election of twenty one representatives who were active members of the movement, and who became the voice of the movement in Congress. The elections also strengthened the smaller parties on which López Obrador could rely in case that the antagonistic factions within his own party tried to push him out.

Strategic actions: a) establishment of study circles, a strategy to fight misleading and lack of information about the movement and about politics in general and to promote a culture of political conversation; b) the process of *credencialización*, a strategy to create a database of members of the movement, it had reached 2.5 million in 2009; c) establishment of the *casas del movimiento ciudadano*, a space to explore and seek solutions to the most pressing economic issues, to invite citizens to the movement, and to encourage political education

5. Summary of the Bolivian case: the *coordinadora*

Late 1999: La *coordinadora* emerged as a coalition of social organizations, professional associations and individual citizens to challenge the privatization of the public water company in Cochabamba Bolivia; at its core, it was “a physical space for the coordination of local and sometimes national resistances,” where most of those who met belonged to or represented some type of organization (Gutiérrez 2009:93). In April of 2000, after four months of mobilizations, it forced the government to rescind the contract and to expel the company from Cochabamba. The way in which the Water War was conducted inaugurated a “new form of doing politics,” in which protesters challenged the government not from a position of subordination but from an equal position, imposing what became known as “the capacity to veto the government” (personal communication, several sources). The intention was not merely to return the water company (SEMAPA) to its original form, controlled and managed by the Municipality, but to establish a novel way of social re-appropriation and management. At the end of the water war the *coordinadora* was calling to continue the struggle against neoliberalism and for an *Asamblea Constituyente* to re-establish the foundations of the country. It opened the door to the waves of protests that unseated a neoliberal government in 2003 and led to the victory of Evo Morales in the presidential elections of December of 2005.

2001-2005: Following the victory in the water war the strength of the *coordinadora* waned, but it became a crucial referent for struggles to come; its trajectory testifies to this. It became an articulator of the various and multiple forms of struggle taking place in Bolivia, placing the “experience, knowledge and skills developed during the struggle of 2000 at the service of mobilized populations” (Gutiérrez 2009:92). The most important actions of the *coordinadora* during this period were: 1) active solidarity with the most important struggles during this time: CSUTCB’s road blockades in La Paz, forceful eradication of coca cultivation in El Chapare; 2) systematic analysis, discussion, and diffusion of information regarding government policies that sought to contain popular struggles and endangered particular sectors; 3) continuous efforts to further the culture of active public engagement and public deliberation of themes that were important for the population in general, through the organization of countless meetings, workshops, assemblies, forums, and *cabildos* (Gutiérrez 2009:93-94). In October 2003 the *coordinadora* embraced the struggle for the nationalization of gas, participating in the uprising that unseated President Sánchez de Lozada.

2005: the *coordinadora* supported the candidacy of Evo Morales in exchange for the creation of the Ministry of Water, a new cabinet post designed to deal with all things related to water. In such fashion it continued to influence the national political agenda. The ministry of water was meant to function in a novel way, with the participation of a social-technical commission which would exercise a type of social control over the ministry, a form of co-management between the government and civil society. But the ministry disagreed with this role, arguing that the social-technical commission could not be above the ministry or the executive power, and illustrating the tension between a vision of politics as civil society-centered versus politics as state-centered.

2006-2009: period marked by deep polarization of the country; right wing groups from resource-rich provinces relentlessly attacked the Morales’ administration, and social movements and organizations rallied around to defend it, putting aside any legitimate demand or grievance that they might have had. The MAS government attempted to channel all grievances and demands through government channels, rendering mobilization and collective action unnecessary. The combination of the right wing threat, the attempt of the government to channel demands through institutional channels (which many saw as cooptation), and the physical exhaustion of social movements led to a

generalized demobilization of the social organizations responsible for the great social changes of the last few years.

Throughout these years the *coordinadora* remained independent from the MAS and a voice that continued to push for a political agenda that would lead to the “dilution” (or watering down) of State centralized power and to a more solidaristic role in support of the autonomy of indigenous communities and workers’ self-management, without advocating for the disappearance of the State. By the end of 2009 it was holding regular meetings with groups concerned with water and urban issues; they are also attended by an envoy sent by President Morales to collaborate with the group.

Strategic actions: establishment of the Fundación Abril, an NGO with two main lines of action, labor and water issues. Active involvement in education and advise about water projects and management throughout the country. It also strengthened labor through direct organizing and through the *Escuela del Pueblo*, a series of workshops directed to the organization and political education of workers.

6. Comparative Analysis

The *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movements have clear and salient differences, yet they ultimately converge on some partially-similar outcomes. I argue that these trajectories have been largely influenced by the historical background of Mexico and Bolivia, hence the different ways in which they have conducted their struggles and the difference in trajectories. I also argue that the most important similarities are generating (partially, imperfectly, but importantly) new dialectic between democracy at the base and representative democracy, and thus status as anti-passive revolutions and projects of radical democracy. I also argue that revolutionary nationalism has been a catalyst in these struggles.

6.1. Differences

The striking differences between these two movements begin with their issue of contention and how it was immediately resolved. The *coordinadora* in Bolivia emerged and mobilized to stop the privatization of water, a local issue around which the majority of the population of Cochabamba coalesced. This was a struggle led by civil society, with no role or

involvement of political parties. Four months of struggle led to success: the contract was rescinded, the company expelled, and the water legislation cancelled. The *lopezobradorista* movement in Mexico emerged to challenge a controversial presidential election perceived as having cheated the candidate of a leftist coalition; the demand was simply the recount of the votes. Elections were followed by two months of protests amidst deep polarization of the country and a relentless media campaign against the movement. Massive demonstrations and a 50-day camp out in the Zócalo plaza and the main arteries of Mexico City did not succeed in forcing the recount. The electoral tribunal awarded the presidency to the right wing candidate.

The *coordinadora* had no identifiable leader responsible for its emergence, it only had *portavoces* (spokespeople) of which Oscar Olivera, the secretary general of the Manufacturing Workers Federation of Cochabamba, was the most visible. Members of the *coordinadora* were organized groups who met and made decisions in their own assemblies and *cabildos*; these decisions were conveyed at the meetings of the *coordinadora*, where a similar democratic process occurred. The *lopezobradorista* movement, on the other hand, it is fair to say that it could have not emerged without Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Some critics in fact do not consider this a movement but rather “a large mass of people waiting for the leader to tell them what to do” (interview with Gustavo Esteva, founder of the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca and a critic of López Obrador).

The level of organization of participants in la *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movement also differed greatly. In Bolivia there is a tradition of organization and engagement in collective action: rural and urban organizations, large and small labor unions, neighborhood associations, water committees, and so on, are abundant. This level of organization allowed for a

high level of participation and success while maintaining the *coordinadora* as a lax structure, a wide horizontal space with not statutes or hierarchies. The question that people in the *coordinadora* posed to themselves was “what do we do” rather than “who do we follow.” In the *lopezobradorista* movement, by contrast, the development of a structured organization correlated with the success of its collective action; the success of the brigades for the defense of PEMEX is perhaps the biggest proof of this. But this organization had to be built practically from zero, since the majority of *lopezobradoristas* had little or no experience in collective action or political participation beyond voting. The process of *credencialización* and the formation of brigades for the defense of PEMEX were amongst various deliberate efforts to strengthen and institutionalize this emerging organization. There is definitely a hierarchical structure in this organization, yet participants did not see this in a negative light. I argue that the reasons for this is that: a) there was a convergence of interests, preferences, and goals of rank and file and leadership, and b) participants took ownership of structures and events that might have been initially suggested by the leadership: the study circles, the casas, the brigades to defend PEMEX, and the electoral campaigns for the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* in 2009.

There was also an important difference in the movements’ perceptions of the role of the state, and the type of change that they expected in this matter as a result of their struggle. Throughout the various stages of its trajectory during 2000-2009, the *coordinadora*’s struggle has never been an electoral movement, nor has it been about achieving a state that centralizes and controls all the aspects of political, social, economic and cultural life. Rather, it has always aspired to forms of governance of autonomy and self-management, and/or to achieve a government that facilitates and supports such types of governance. The most general position on the type of government that members of the *coordinadora* would prefer is one where the State

subordinates itself to the control of social organizations and civil society as a whole, or in their own terms, *control social*. For the most part, interviewees expressed a preference for solidarity, recognition and support from the State in regards to the various projects of autonomy and self-management. Likewise, they were strongly critical of representative democracy and electoral policies, and believed these to be a distraction for individual citizens and a demobilizing factor for social movements.

The *lopezobradorismo*, on the contrary, emerged as a movement closely related to electoral politics: outraged citizens protested the lack of respect for their voting rights and the stealing of a presidential election. The movement evolved into a long term struggle for the radical transformation of public life (*transformación tajante de la vida pública*, a phrase often used by López Obrador) and the defense of the principles of revolutionary nationalism, a struggle that encompasses political, economic, social and cultural aspects. Nevertheless, both rank and file and leadership of the movement are very open and vocal about their goal to achieve change through the electoral route. But *lopezobradoristas* are also openly critical of the lack of accountability inherent in representative democracy and the corruption of the political class, and they have sought all along to devise mechanisms for accountability. Unlike their counterparts in Bolivia, *lopezobradoristas* believe that organized citizens can exercise pressure to change the way of “politics as usual.” They know that this is more than an electoral movement, but they are also aware that outsiders identify it as such, and that it is a stigma that creates mistrust and deters other movements from joining; they see part of their role as changing this perception.

6.2. Similarities

Neither of the two movements came to an end with the success of the water war and the failure of the demand for a recount. They continued to engage in social struggle, transforming themselves at various stages from local to nationally relevant issues. The *coordinadora* went from a water issue of local relevance to struggles about water issues of regional and national relevance, and later on to the struggle for nationalization of gas. The *lopezobradorista* movement went from an electoral issue – the recount – to the defense of the oil industry and the defense of the popular economy and national sovereignty. Although detractors – particularly in the *lopezobradorista* case – often criticize these evolutions as mere attempts to provide oxygen to a failing movement, the transformations in fact have embraced issues that coincide with the bottom line of both movements, which is the struggle against neoliberalism and for social justice. The evolution of both movements in fact has led to their convergence on similar structural outcomes: organized, mobilized and politically educated movements rooted in civil society that seek the greater common good by changing the dynamics of State-civil society relationships, generating more accountability of political actors, and ultimately, an ongoing aspiration to radically transform politics.

Both movements also resulted in the mobilization of citizens in new forms and beyond any level of engagement or participation that they might have had in the past. The difference of this commonality must be emphasized. In Bolivia, while there has been a long tradition of organization and collective action, the water war marked “a new way of doing politics,” which Marxa Chavez, a sociologist and journalist based in La Paz, describes as an attitude that does not negotiate with but rather imposes conditions on the government, a type of politization that poses a challenge not from a subordinate position but from a position of equals. The water war established what came to be known as the capacity of social movements to “veto the

government,” which was very different from the challenges posed even by the most militant labor unions (interview with Marxa Chávez). In Mexico, the post electoral conflict took people with little or no organization or collective action experience from outrage fueled protest against the electoral fraud to building a solid organization that in three years accomplished the following: it forced the federal government to change its preferred energy reform, it stopped the privatization of PEMEX, and it achieved crucial electoral victories in 2009. It created structures (the study circles, brigades, and *casas del movimiento*) that functioned as links between the movement and civil society and encouraged the latter’s political education and involvement. It created a database of 2.5 million participants committed to attend the call to collective action as needed. As I write this (February 2012), Andrés Manuel López Obrador is again the presidential candidate of the PRD, PT and Convergencia (now under a new name, Movimiento Ciudadano) to the 2012 presidential election, and this is largely due to the *lopezobradorista* movement.

I argue that these movements are transforming their societies: in both settings, there is an organized and mobilized civil society that assertively makes demands for action and accountability from the government, and is capable of influencing the political agenda, stirring it in the direction of the common good. Both movements, in their own distinctive ways, have shown an ability to aggregate and protect the interests of poor and working-middle classes most affected by the neoliberal policies. They have done so by providing, first of all, physical spaces where people can express, discuss and seek solutions for their grievances and demands: the *fabriles* federation in the Bolivian case and the *casas del movimiento ciudadano* in the Mexican case. Both are places where help and solidarity are provided with no political strings attached. The *fabriles* federation has served this function successfully for many years; the *casas* have been functioning for a comparatively much shorter period of time, but I argue that they have the

potential to achieve what the *fabriles* federation has accomplished. The study circles and the brigades in Mexico have also become spaces of solidarity, where people “learn the tools to understand what is happening in the life of the country... where they come for information and to see themselves in the other” (interview with Malena Noriega, the coordinator of the *Círculo de Estudios del Centro Histórico*). The study circles in fact have produced the talent and organization for the brigades and for some of the *casas*. And in some cases the brigades have become ambulatory spaces of solidarity.

Both movements also have realized that political formation is essential and have taken steps to address it, a need expressed not only by the leadership and intellectuals but by the majority of the mid-level leadership and the rank and file as well. Although the dynamics and logistics are very different, the *círculos de estudio* in the *lopezobradorista* movement and the *escuela del pueblo* in the *coordinadora* each fulfill the function of political education in their own distinctive way. The large majority of *lopezobradorista* interviewees attended at least one study circle regularly. In the case of those who were no longer regular attendees, the circles had been a stepping stone to raise their level of consciousness and awareness, and had prepared them for activities that demanded more commitment. Many were organizing their own study circles or some other type of gatherings such as debates, movie debates, and so on. After outgrowing the circles, a couple of interviewees had become alternative journalists, video documenting events and writing reports that they upload to their blogs, websites, and/or facebook pages, and their internet channel: *Conciencia TV*. Others had become active in the *casas del movimiento*.

The circles are conference like events with topics that expose attendees to critical political information that makes them more likely to understand the current state of political

affairs and to question the mainstream news. The evening circles are generally scheduled for 7:00-8:00 PM, with a format of 40 minutes for the speaker to present the topic and 20 minutes for interaction with the audience. Often the circles prolonged until 8:30, sometimes 9:00 PM, due to comments and questions from the audience. Participant observation allowed me to appreciate the high level of engagement of attendees to the circles. Most of them arrived on time, and remained until the end of the sessions, listening attentively, often nodding their heads or making disapproval noises or expressions as a response to what was being said; comments and questions from the audience also were followed attentively. Attendees were genuinely interested in the topics presented and related them to the larger political landscape. The large majority of these weekly circles are transmitted by internet radio and burned in CDs that are later sold by the equivalent of 5 pesos (the equivalent of 40 cents in US dollars). In such fashion the most important talks, conference and events are available to those who miss the circles.

Similarly, the workshops of the *escuela del pueblo* exposed participant to a great deal of information not readily available to the majority of people. And even though they reach fewer people because there is only one *escuela*, those who attend make the commitment to share information with their fellow workers, their families and their friends. In fact, at a debriefing session one of the questions posed to attendees was to come up with ways to share what was learned in the workshops. "Sharing what we learned with our families, friends and neighbors" was one of the responses. The workshops so far have emphasized labor issues, but Filemón Escobar, an ex-miner and iconic symbol of the labor struggle who collaborates with the *escuela del pueblo*, informed me of his intentions to incorporate issues related to historical development, such as the history of nationalizations in Bolivia, and about the larger role that workers must play in the transformation of the nation. If social re-appropriation of factories and companies is to

work, it should push workers to work harder not only to turn the company profitable but to become a pillar of solidarity in the community, even if this means working longer hours or receiving a smaller salary. According to Escobar the main point to be taught about the nationalization process is that it is for the benefit of the nation, of the entire population, not for the benefit of the political party or the revolutionary group that carries on the nationalization. Compare the similarities between this kind of thinking and Laclau & Mouffe's argument that a project of radical democracy is the project of an entire nation.

6.3. Anti-passive nature of these movements

I have argued that the lopezobradorista movement and the water war – as well as what it transformed into later – are examples of what Buci-Glucksmann calls anti-passive revolution. I based my argument on the characteristics that Buci-Glucksmann assigns to such concept, particularly that these type of struggles “forge new links between representative democracy and democracy of the base... offer a new political dialectic between representative democracy and democracy of the base, not a frontal opposition between the two that destroys both or absorbs one into the other as a result of some new reformist policy that would identify the transition simply with a change of government.”

6.3.1 The lopezobradorista movement as anti-passive revolution

I argue that the relationship that developed between protestors and López Obrador, his cabinet and the politicians who became part of the movement, including the *candidatos del*

movimiento ciudadano illustrates what a new link between representative democracy¹ and democracy of the base could potentially look like. The relationship is clearly one of trust and closeness, which chants, slogans, and poems developed by participants testify to. In my opinion this relationship began to develop in this direction during the camp out, when López Obrador and many of the members of the FAP also camped out and endured the same discomforts as everybody else. Those FAP members who did not camp often visited and mingled with the rank and file, personally informing them of the developments in Congress. López Obrador addressed the crowd daily, at 7:00 PM, during the 50 days that the camp out lasted. The evening assembly was something that everybody in the campout looked forward to; many people who did not participate in the camp out attended these evening assemblies as often as they could. During the trying days of the camp out and the months that followed protesters identified those members of the political class who truly supported the movement and those who behaved in an opportunist fashion. In the 2009 mid-term election the rank and file rewarded the former with their support and punished the latter. The grass roots campaigns that these candidates ran – in parks, street markets, dairy farms and so on – gained them further respect from the rank and file and allowed them to develop and strengthen a relationship with the citizenry.

The articulation of collective action at legislative and street levels is another aspect of this new relationship, of which the struggle to defend PEMEX was a prime example. Legislators put themselves at risk just like the rank and file *brigadistas*, not because they were irresponsible but because it was strategically necessary. This showed that strategies that may cause bodily harm,

¹ The term “representative democracy” has been largely discredited, and the concept generates mistrust. The way in which Buci-Glucksmann uses it is indicative of the time of her work. Both movements are very critical of it and I will address this later, but for the time being I use it here as Buci-Glucksmann uses it in her work.

or may turn people into cannon fodder, were not reserved for the rank and file only, congressmen of the movement did their fair share of these as well. Participating in these activities contributed to a feeling of equality between rank and file and legislators, and it also gave rank and file a sense of pride in having representatives with such courage. For the first time people began to truly think about these congressmen and congresswomen as “my representatives.”

Such attitudes paid off during the 2009 campaign. Candidates with such trajectory were embraced by the movement and rewarded with genuine support and full involvement in their campaigns. In turn, these candidates largely fulfilled the expectations of those who voted and campaigned for them, elevating the quality of the debate and how business is conducted in Congress. Since 2009, the few representatives of the movement have unapologetically questioned budgets and reforms, presented counter proposals, defended the positions of the movement, and made sure that hearings are no picnic for those responding. Because these sessions are transmitted by the Congress Channel, hearings immediately become part of the public domain, since many people record particular sessions and upload them to the internet. So, even though there are comparatively fewer legislators of the movement, they have been able to expose the failure of federal policies, the lack of arguments of the PAN, PRI and their allies, and the mediocrity of federal officials. They also have been able to expose deals and cover-ups between parties that otherwise would have remained unknown. Exposing them has been a major achievement of the movement, sending the message that politics is no longer business as usual.

These legislators also have taken the time to stay in contact with the rank and file, often participating in public events such as book presentations, conferences, debates and so on, study circles, or visits to the *casas del movimiento*; and they are present at every rally, assembly and

demonstration of the movement. I argue that what we are witnessing is the development of a more accountable and engaged representative democracy, where representative democracy and democracy at the base are both committed to the movement and to the larger national project.

6.3.2 The water war and the coordinadora as anti-passive revolution

Throughout its trajectory the *coordinadora* remained apart from party and electoral politics, until 2005 when Evo Morales and the MAS became electorally competitive. Even then, the *coordinadora* provided its support with some hesitation and misgivings about the danger of straying from its preferred path – autonomy and self-management – by following the electoral route. These misgivings and hesitation have proved founded because the massive incorporation of social leaders into the political bureaucracy of the MAS in fact illustrates the risk of representative democracy absorbing democracy at the base.

To continue using Buci-Glucksmann's theoretical concepts, the political dialectic that emerged between the MAS and the *coordinadora* has not been a frontal opposition. Neither of the two has tried to destroy the other – although it may be tempting to think that the MAS's incorporation of the social movements to its bureaucratic structure may be at the very least a deliberate attempt to absorb and neutralize them. The way in which things have developed in Bolivia under the government of the MAS suggests a struggle between a representative democracy that portrays itself as carrying on a revolutionary process of change, and independent social movements that perceive the policies of the MAS as cosmetic changes, mere reforms that have little or nothing to do with the political agenda decided in October of 2003 (nationalization of hydrocarbons, ending neoliberal policies, and so on).

Oscar Olivera sees the job of social movements as forcing Evo Morales to fulfill this agenda, or to be straightforward about the reasons why it has not yet been fulfilled, and about “the limitations of a globalized world, the limitations of the state structure he inherited” (interview with Oscar Olivera). Yet this does not mean that Olivera is writing off the Morales government. Instead, the preferred scenario would be one in which the government had an honest conversation with the social movements about the pressures that it is subjected to and the limitations it has to work within. This conversation would facilitate a truly supportive collaboration of independent social movement, and would allow the latter to establish strategies that would help “to break those chains of domination.” Olivera’s comments illustrate what the anti-passive revolution would look like in Bolivia, and illuminate his willingness to go down that path. He sees a path to transformation when collective action takes places simultaneously in the sphere of formal politics and on the streets, which perhaps could take place if a new relationship between representative democracy and democracy at the base was forged.

6.3.3 Being critical of electoral politics, political parties, and representative democracy

In Mexico, despite people’s appreciation for and trust in those running as *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* in the summer of 2009, participating in the electoral campaigns was not a decision that *lopezobradoristas* made lightly. Disappointed at political parties, they deliberately remained outside party affiliation. Many of them did affiliate to the PRD in early 2008 in order to be able to cast a vote for Alejandro Encinas (a strong supporter of the movement) as chairman of the party, but their affiliation was a means toward the goal of strengthening the movement, and it did not involve party loyalty. Three years of struggle in Congress and the Senate, however, had taught *lopezobradoristas* a lesson: if they wanted to bring about change, and if they had

rejected the armed struggle as a means to achieve this change, then electoral participation is a crucial component of the available path to change². They also rejected politics as usual, and the experience of the brigades for the defense of PEMEX had taught them the power of organization and collective action. They were committed to use the leverage of their organization and numbers and the power of their vote to make parties and politicians work for the people and not vice versa. They were also determined not to abandon the organization and political education efforts, as well as collective action on the streets.

Interviewees expressed the following views about what the role of political parties should be: to represent, serve, work for, be an instrument of, listen to the demands of, and defend the interests of people. They also saw parties as having the responsibility to provide political formation and education to people. Indeed, these responses indicate a preference for strong and highly accountable representative democracy. But interviewees also overwhelmingly concurred that political parties did not fulfill their role; they believed that the system was designed to co-opt the leadership of political parties with money and *prebendas*, which may be understood broadly as political favors done as exchanges and rewards. President Zedillo's political reform in the late 1990s was indicated as responsible for introducing changes that facilitated the massive flow of money to political parties and accelerated their corruption, in order to keep parties happy and out of real competition with the PRI.³

² This perspective is not without criticism. Gustavo Esteva argues that this is a false dichotomy, because the electoral route is not without violence, particularly violence shaped as repression from the state against dissident social movements. For Esteva, this dichotomy serves the purpose of preserving the status quo. It also should be noted that the electoral aspect is one component of the entire strategy, which also includes high levels of citizens' organization and participation. This part however is often ignored by the movement's critics.

³ This strategy clearly did not work, considering that there was a party transition right after Zedillo's administration, from the PRI to the PAN. However, the economic system did not change with the transition, in fact it became

But interviewees also strongly believed that it was possible for common people to force political parties to go back to their path, at least the leftist parties of the FAP. They were convinced that the collective action of the brigades and the citizens' campaigns of the *candidatos del movimiento ciudadano* had been awakening calls for the PRD, the PT, and Convergencia. These parties realized the power that people had when they were organized and not constrained by party loyalty; the PT coalition had won many races that the PRD would have claimed had it been able to enforce party loyalty amongst *lopezobradoristas*. Being conscious about the power of one's own vote and making parties understand that they are an instrument of the people were key strategies to force parties back to the right path. Interviewees felt that they had done this in the 2009 election, or at least they had gotten parties to reconsider their role and their direction. Some interviewees also mentioned strategies such as the formation of citizens' committees to devise legislation to force accountability of political parties and elective representatives to civil society, and to reduce the flow of money from government to parties. While these strategies had not yet been designed or implemented by the summer of 2009, they show that participants were thinking ahead and not merely waiting for instructions, as some detractors of the movement suggested. These responses indicate that people are aware of the importance of participation, clearly suggesting that *lopezobradoristas* have a strong preference for participatory democracy.

Interviewees strongly felt that changing political parties' behavior required commitment and involvement on the part of citizens far beyond casting a vote, and they did not have any illusions about the struggle ending with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as

strengthened, which lends support to the explanation that what was being preserved was not the party in power but the economic system. The explanation is more plausible when one considers that the Fox's economic team was basically the same team of technocrats that were in charge since the Salinas' administration.

president in 2012. They were convinced that the hard work will become even harder after the electoral triumph, and they are committed to this fight and to a long term struggle. This level of commitment, however, is a tough sale for the population in general, who see their civil duty as merely casting a vote. Martha, a senior member of the group Flor y Canto with a PhD in biology, expressed that “the problem is that often we also fail as citizens... and so politicians may be a reflection of what we are as an entire society.” This is a remarkable example of self-reflection and self-criticism, and it highlights the importance that the movement places on the political education of citizens.

Perhaps the main difference in the critiques of representative democracy expressed by interviewees in Mexico and interviewees in Bolivia is that the latter in general suggest that representative democracy and social mobilization are types of political participation that exclude one another, while the former see them as complementary. Carlos Crespo, a professor and researcher at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in Cochabamba, argues that “representative democracy neutralizes social movements, when you elect a representative you are delegating your decision making capacity on him or her.” Boris Rios, who participated directly in the water war and worked for the Fundación Abril for several years, concurs with Crespo and adds that “the only moment of participation is the act of voting... this is a bad trait of the system of the neoliberal representation... [but] social mobilization allows people to participate collectively and effectively, discussing, deciding, doing.” The perception that both forms of participation are mutually exclusive was shared by several of the interviewees most closely linked to the *coordinadora* during the water war. In contrast, for *lopezobradoristas* engagement in electoral politics and mobilization is not a case of either-or, but rather and-and. In Bolivia this perception emerged during the turmoil of 2000-2003, particularly the water and gas wars when, according to

several interviewees, people realized that there were other ways of engaging in politics, of making decisions about public issues. The water war in particular

showed the possibilities of structuring certain spaces of very concrete collective action, the possibility of constructing the powers that come from below... the real power that imposes its agenda on the political power, and forces it to fulfill it... I think they [political parties, the government] are very afraid of this, and that's why they try to make people turn away from it and toward electoral politics instead, toward the electoral market... (interview with Oscar Olivera).

Indeed, a myriad of elections and referendums in the past few years appear to suggest a concerted effort to engage people in electoral politics. Some interviewees' comments indicated that being busy with the electoral process allowed people to experience the satisfaction or illusion of political participation without committing to real political work, and that the government preferred it this way. This critical view of electoral politics also may be partly a backlash against the electoral reforms introduced by President Sánchez de Lozada in the mid-1990s, which sought to discourage people's political participation through social movements and promoted instead their participation at the individual level in electoral politics.

Simultaneous to this critique of neoliberal democracy there was a profound questioning of the strong, centralized State that in many people's view the MAS appeared to be building. The general feeling of what the State's role should be was perhaps best articulated by Oscar Olivera, who argued that

[we should try to] dilute (water down) the state apparatus in such a way that power may be handed to the people, so that people can take the solution of their problems into their own hands in an absolutely participatory manner... the relationship between social movements and the state should be one where we do not ignore the State but we work [together] to make power horizontal.

Several other interviewees agreed with Olivera's statement. There was also a general agreement that the role of the State in regards to social movements and organizations should be one of respect and solidarity, supporting and strengthening the processes of autonomy and self-

management. Olivera also pointed out that diluting the State and horizontality of power had been president Morales and vice president Gracia Linera' discourse in the past, suggesting that in practice it had not turned out that way.

6.4. Making the case for these movements as projects of radical democracy

I argue that the trajectories of the *coordinadora* and the *lopezobradorista* movement have shown the potential to become projects of radical democracy that challenge the neoliberal hegemony in Mexico and Bolivia. Both movements offer completely credited critiques of the neoliberal order; furthermore, they have the potential to develop into or to create a credible alternative to this order. The *coordinadora*'s project is one of autonomy/self-management with solidaritic support from the State. The *lopezobradorista* movement seeks an egalitarian, social justice/welfare State, close to the Scandinavian model of social democracy according (interview with Cristina Laurell, secretary of health of the legitimate government and a member of López Obrador closest circle). Neither of the two movements refers to any "ism" as their goals – socialism, communism, anarchism – even though some members of the movements may have these preferences. While contentious collective action is part of their repertoire, neither movement pretends to achieve change through a Jacobin style revolution. Both of them aim at achieving change through organization, political education and consciousness raising of common people, even if it takes years. In fact, in both cases the process is taking years, and for many participants it is a lifetime project. In Mexico, López Obrador's National Alternative Project describes the programs he intends to establish and how they will be paid for⁴, providing thus a

⁴ Two radical aspect of his project are immediately perceived: 1) capturing large savings by attacking corruption, eliminating superfluous bureaucratic expenses, and reducing the offensively high salaries of the political class; and, 2) increasing fiscal revenue by eliminating loopholes and taxing large corporations and business accordingly.

“strategy of construction of this new order,” in Laclau & Mouffe’s terms. This is a crucial aspect because he is often ridiculed for being unrealistic in regards to his programs and projects.

In these movements there is, to continue using Laclau & Mouffe’s concepts, a “plurality and indeterminacy of the social.” There is no “mythical fixation,” no social identity fixed *a priori* and independent of articulatory practices, which perhaps is best reflected in the absence of any “ism” throughout the trajectories of these movements. Their struggles have not been reduced to sectorial demands, be it workers, peasant, students, and so on. They are in fact quite close to the core aspects of radical democracy as a project of an entire historical bloc representing the national interest, knitted through the acceptance of plurality, contingency, and the establishment of hegemonic articulations.

In both movements there is a wide range of ages, occupations and incomes: formal and informal workers, peasants, teachers, public servants, retirees, small business owners, and so on; indeed we can argue that these movements are formed by the popular sectors. We can also speak about articulation in the sense that Laclau & Mouffe suggest. The unity created by these structurally diverse social agents was the result of their political initiative and struggle, not of the fact that they have an identity determined by a common essence – be it worker, peasant, student, or another identity. This unity is what the authors refer to as the politics as articulation, which emerges from the political construction of dissimilar elements and leads to social movements with no predetermined social identity or predetermined direction that the struggle follows. The prevalence of these characteristics in my two cases, I argue, largely explains the directions in which the *coordinadora* has moved in its ten years of existence, as well as the changes in

direction that the *lopezobradorista* movement has followed. Thus, I argue that these two movements largely fulfill the requirements for a project of radical democracy.

6.5.1 *The lopezobradorista movement as a project of radical democracy*

The *lopezobradorista* movement is fundamentally working and middle class in terms of the range of occupations and level of income of its members. The majority of my interviewees in Mexico self-identified as such; several of them had graduate degrees, and there were a couple of medical doctors and lawyers; there were teachers, employees in the service industry and in the public sector. While three of my interviewees appeared to be in a precarious economic situation, they were by no means on the fringes of society⁵. The overwhelming majority of rank and file interviewees' age was 40-70, with a couple below and above this age. Amongst mid-level leadership there was a larger proportion of young people, people in their late 20s and early 30s, while the age range of the top echelons of the movement was similar to the rank and file. Arnaldo Córdova, the most important scholar of the Mexican Revolution, mentioned that most people think that the peasants and workers that followed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988 now make the core of the *lopezobradorista* movement, but that this is not the case. The demographics of the movement are largely small middle class, teachers, small owners, housewives, "... people from the entire range of the social stratification except perhaps the lowest and the highest levels."

The majority of interviewees had joined the movement without previously belonging to a social organization or movement, outraged first by the unjustified impeachment of Lopez Obrador in 2005 and by the mud racking electoral campaign and electoral fraud in 2006. Their

⁵ Two of them were retirees who received modest pensions, and the third did not have a full time job but his experience and training allowed him to find part-time and occasional work, which in fact he was deliberately doing at the time so he could dedicate more time to the movement.

commitment to the movement was fueled by their desire for social justice and for a better country for everyone and especially for future generations. The following is how interviewees verbalized the goals of the movement: a change toward an all-inclusive economic system; an improved social and economic policy that will benefit the majority, especially the most vulnerable people and not just a few at the top; a just redistribution of wealth; putting a stop to the neoliberal looting and transforming the model toward one that centers on people; the defense of our natural resources; a structural change to make society more egalitarian; a more just and democratic Mexico; a revolution of the conscience; making civil society an active part of the government; a transformation of the country through peaceful means; elimination of government corruption and inefficiency; putting an end to the political culture of clientelistic practices; to clean up the political class so that politicians serve citizens instead of seeing politics as spoils. A key bit of evidence for the fundamental goals of the movement is that none of the interviewees expressed that the goal was for López Obrador to be president. A few indicated that achieving these goals implied winning the presidency, but clarified that it was not the main or final goal, a testimony to the fact that this is not merely an electoral movement.

In the *lopezobradorista* movement all the interviewees considered themselves to have leftist preferences, and the term is part of the discourse of the movement at the rank and file and at the upper echelons. But they make a distinction between the pretty-and-well-behaved-left (*la izquierda bonita y bien portada*) and themselves. I argue that the pretty-and-well-behaved-left fits with what Laclau & Mouffe refer to as the redefinition of the left identity into a center-left. In Mexico it is represented by the Nueva Izquierda (NI) faction of the PRD, and it likes to portray itself as the “modern and civilized left,” fashioning itself after the Chilean social democracy – the government of the *concertación*. Several of NI’s actions place it closer to the

right than to the center-left, such as approving Calderón's judiciary reform that criminalizes social movements, or suggesting alliances with the PAN in a number of electoral races. NI condemns and disapproves the types of contentious collective action carried out by the unruly-rabble-rouser-left (*la izquierda rijosa*) which is how they refer to the *lopezobradorista* movement, distancing themselves from the actions carried out by the brigades and the legislators that occupied Congress. On the other hand, leftist movements such as the Zapatistas, for instance, consider the *lopezobradorista* movement to be too far to the right, while the right wing, the business elite elites, the Church and the mainstream media consider it too far to the left. But the bottom line is that *lopezobradoristas* consider themselves to be a leftist movement, and their responses regarding the goals of the movement and their motivations to remain engaged in the struggle after three years concurred with this.

The importance of establishing the Leftist ideology of participants resides in the fact that it is necessary to separate them from the center-left that Laclau & Mouffe hold responsible for the blurring of antagonisms, the dominance of the "radical center," and for limiting their actions to "manage neoliberalism in a humane way" rather than presenting an alternative hegemony. On this note, it is worth pondering what makes the *lopezobradorista* movement not just center-left. As mentioned above, the movement is seen as being in both extremes of and along the continuum of the ideological spectrum by its detractors on both the Left and the Right. To me, what makes this a movement of the Left is the passion with which participants express their desire and fight for a just social and economic system that works for the majority, the preoccupation they express for the wellbeing of the most vulnerable groups, the importance they place on a just redistribution of wealth, and their emphasis on the need for accountability of representative democracy to accomplish these goals. I am aware that this may not be the most

orthodox definition of what being a leftist is. But perhaps this is one of the “essentialist fixities” that Laclau and Mouffe’s suggest we should avoid if a hegemonic strategy of the Left is to flourish (see Chapter 4). I argue that the profiles, goals, beliefs and commitment expressed by participants suggest their capability to carry on a project of radical democracy as a project of an entire society.

The *lopezobradorista* movement has not yet had the chance to prove what it could achieve once in power at the national level, and whether pragmatism will direct it to a reformist project within the limits of what is possible instead of pursuing a hegemonic project of radical democracy. However, I argue that it has already proved its willingness to reject accepting only what is merely possible. After the 2006 electoral fraud, the PRD found itself in the position of being the second political force in Congress, a position that many in the party found comfortable and also to be the best platform that the party had ever had from which to pursue its agenda. López Obrador, from his defiant position, could have negotiated an important position in the cabinet, for him and for his closest allies, and attempted to bring about change from there. Many *perredistas* from the Nueva Izquierda faction were pushing him in this direction, arguing that this was the biggest victory that the PRD could have hoped for, and that the party was in the best place to become the opposition. But the movement argued that being “the opposition” was a legitimate role within a legitimate government; Calderón’s was not a legitimate government, and the movement was not going to legitimize it by taking on such role. López Obrador did not name himself Legitimate President, about one million rank and file members voted to confer him that title at the National Democratic Convention in September 2006 at the Zócalo Plaza.

The 2008 struggle for PEMEX is another example of rejecting what is merely possible at the moment. The reform approved by the Senate was hailed by the NI faction of the PRD as a good reform that included all the changes that they had suggested, and pushed hard for its approval. Even the FAP's advisory group had approved it with caution. López Obrador did not make the final decision unilaterally but put it to the vote of about 15,000 *brigadistas* gathered at the assembly. The overwhelming majority refused to approve the reform and decided to remain in state of alert, arguing that there were still too many loopholes that allowed for privatization. Taking such position did not change anything and the reform was approved, but it conferred the movement the moral authority at any time to engage in collective action regarding issues related to PEMEX, and to attempt a counter reform in the future. This is indeed a clear example of: 1) having a project that is not merely satisfied with what is possible at the moment, and, 2) a representative democracy and democracy at the base engaged in a dialectic relationship where neither tries to absorb or destroy the other.

6.5.2 The coordinadora as a project of radical democracy

Although I was not present at the 2000 water war in Cochabamba, the abundant use of images in printed stories and TV footage allowed me to appreciate the diversity of people engaged in the struggle: men and women, young and old people barricading the streets, urban and rural people marching together. Images and headlines other than those of mobilizations also show this diversity: middle class-looking people expressing their outrage at the water hikes and their support for the issues being addressed by the *coordinadora*, sharing food with protesters in the most intense days of the struggle. Some interviewees from my 2004 fieldwork specifically referred to the “phenomenon” of middle class women bringing food to protestors in the plaza.

Carlos Crespo also refers to the demographics of the *coordinadora* during the water war: groups of professional people, workers teachers, peasants, people associated to the university – faculty, students, employees – retirees, and even soccer fans, all of the them with a wide spectrum of political ideologies⁶. Diversity was also present at the level of groups and organizations, which could be appreciated in the many letters of support and pleas to join the struggle sent by organizations of teachers, vendors, neighborhood associations and so on. The various *coordinadora* meetings that I attended in 2004, 2005 and 2009 showed also this diversity of organizations: attendees were members of a wide variety of organizations – peasant, labor, teachers, tenants and so on – civil servants, professional people – architects, engineers, and so on. This diversity is also represented in the demographics of my interviewees.

Members of the *coordinadora* in general do not use the term Left to refer to themselves, but their discourse, the goals they have pursued, and the struggles they have engaged in, have been quite revolutionary, in the sense of having represented profound, radical transformations. Demands such as the expelling of the transnational Bechtel and the social re-appropriation of SEMAPA during the water war, and nationalization of gas resources during the gas war were indeed much more than attempts at mere reforms. I should clarify that the use here of the term revolution/revolutionary does not refer to the Marxist sense of overthrow of capitalism for the establishment of socialism. The meaning of revolution and revolutionary actions in this dissertation refers to radical transformations of the system that may or may not lead to socialism, and that stand in contrast with small, cosmetic or mere reforms.

⁶ Essay by Carlos Crespo dedicated to Oscar Olivera, titled “The *pueblo*, humble and working: the Coordinadora as a New Social Movement,” unpublished document in the Cordinadora’s archives.

La coordinadora has been quite critical of many of the policies that the Morales administration is following and the projects that it is pursuing, which they considered similar to those of the Left that dominated the 70s-80s with *políticas desarrollistas*. Several of the interviewees referred to the MAS as *la izquierda desarrollista*, which pursues industrialization based on indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. Oscar Olivera, Carlos Crespo, and Rocio Bustos believe that many of the larger and more important development projects are in fact projects that originated with President Sanchez de Lozada, who eventually abandoned them because of the strong opposition against them. One example was the Minera San Cristóbal, an open sky mining project that, besides the environmental damage to the region, also threatened agricultural production and even human life in the area due to its very large water requirements. At the time of my fieldwork (late 2009, early 2010) I learned of President Morales' plan to revive another old Sanchez de Lozada's project, a super highway set to divide the TIPNIS indigenous reserve in the Bolivian Amazon which also had faced strong opposition. But Morales decided to implement it, and in 2011, the project was defeated by collective action reminiscent of the 2000-2005 period, with indigenous people of TIPNIS walking hundreds of miles and forcing the government to back down.

The level of critical questioning and opposition on the part of the groups like the *coordinadora* and the TIPNIS locate them in a category that Aymara sociologist Pablo Mamani calls *afuera-afuera*, or outside-outside (interview with Pablo Mamani). This category refers to those groups that remain independent from and outside of the government, and maintain a critical discourse. In a way, Mamani argues, they become the moral and political vanguard that will struggle to bring the Morales' administration to the right path if and when it is taken in

inappropriate directions by the leadership, or to defend it if it comes under attack by the right wing oligarchy. In 2010 Oscar Olivera had the following scathing critique:

What this and other governments are doing is simply applying neoliberal recipes in small doses, if in the past neoliberalism was applied in a brutal fashion, today they are using discourse, images, and a whole series of things. But in the end they are applying neoliberal economic and political models, and all of us who have lived through the dictatorships, the neoliberal times, the times of struggle, and the times of [perceiving] the capacity of people to change things and formulate our own agenda, we fully realize this. I mean, all the supposedly progressive governments are very nice but they are not revolutionaries, and we have to underscore that.

Clearly, Olivera believes that the Morales government is engaging in mere reforms, and he sees the role of the *coordinadora* and other independent social movements as taking a critical stand and pushing the Morales government to the radical transformations of the October 2003 agenda, toward the hegemonic project of radical democracy. In Pablo Mamani's terms, this would be a case of *afuera-afuera* social movements exercising their moral authority to push the government to the right path. In terms of Buci Glucksman, this would be a case of democracy at the base trying to engage representative democracy in a political dialectic, resisting the latter's attempts to absorb or neutralize it, but without attempting to destroy it.

In regards to the Morales administration pursuing neoliberal projects that may be economically profitable, it is not difficult to imagine the types of pressure that an economically strapped government is subjected to. During my fieldwork, for instance, I learned that 80 percent of the budget for water needs of the entire country comes from international aid, mostly European. Indeed, it is not surprising that Morales' first trip as president was to Europe. Under these circumstances, it is more likely for a government to fall into what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as "accepting only the changes that appear possible at the moment... the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project," rather than engaging in a project of radical democracy. But notwithstanding the difficulties faced by this cash-starved government, the argument can be

made that a project of radical democracy still could have been pursued had the Morales' government chosen to rely on critical independent movements with power of mobilization.

But in Pablo Mamani's view, President Morales appears to have decided to consolidate his administration's relationship with social movements categorized as *adentro-adentro* (inside-inside), which are largely subordinated in practice and discourse, because he may feel that this facilitates the functioning of his government. Mamani underscores that this path is rather risky: the three categories of social movement, *afuera-afuera*, *adentro-adentro*, and the combination *adentro-afuera*, are all necessary for the government to carry the process of change that it promised. Under these circumstances, an anti-passive revolution, which is necessary to defeat a neoliberal project, is not possible because there is no political dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base. This would clearly be a case of representative democracy trying to absorb democracy at the base. Nevertheless, independent social movements like the *coordinadora* continue to resist absorption and neutralization, pursuing a project of radical democracy and seeking to hold the MAS accountable and to engage it in a dialectic political relationship with democracy at the base.

6.6. Revolutionary nationalism as a catalyst in both struggles

In both Mexico and Bolivia, like in most Latin American countries, the appropriation and exploitation by foreign companies of the nation's natural resources and the parasitic role of the domestic oligarchies were largely seen as the main causes of underdevelopment and standing in the way of a just and balanced society. Some defining attitudes and postulates of revolutionary nationalism have been: the lack of trust toward great powers or anti-imperialism, affirmation of or nationalization of natural resources, and a widely interventionist state.

There is no doubt that the 1910 Mexican revolution and the 1952 Bolivian revolution had different immediate results and long-term effects. It is also true that the political elites in both countries appropriated and manipulated the discourse of revolutionary nationalism for their own political gains, while pushing back many of the gains made by the revolutions. However, the need to shake off the chains of foreign exploitation and the longing for social justice has remained in the popular imagination and the national conscience as something still worth fighting for. Thus, it is not surprising that neoliberalism, with its “frontal clash with the predominant values of the 1952 Bolivian Revolution,” (Rubin 2000:55) and its difficulty to establish “a meaningful relationship to national conscience in Mexico” (Powell 1996:40), ignited struggles with demands that echoed the most basic principles of revolutionary nationalism.

6.6.1 Lopezbradorista movement

The defense of PEMEX carried out by the brigades, especially the female *brigadistas* in their role of *adelitas* (females revolutionary soldiers) has been perhaps the most epic and spectacular moment of the movement so far, but it is not the only one with a clear revolutionary nationalist theme. In fact, such themes have been prevalent from the beginning of the movement. The demand for a recount in the 2006 election echoed another revolutionary demand, effective suffrage, which was a rallying cry against the electoral frauds that Porfirio Díaz committed during three decades in order to remain in power. When the electoral tribunal ruled that Felipe Calderón had won the presidency, the movement announced that the struggle now would be for the transformation of the nation. Throughout, the *lopezbradorista* discourse has been filled with elements found in revolutionary discourse, such as social justice, equality, and so on. The 2008 transformation of the movement into the *Movimiento por la Defensa de la Economía Popular, el*

Petróleo y la Soberanía Nacional (Movement to defend the economy of the popular classes, the petroleum industry and national sovereignty) underscored issues that continued echoing the main themes of revolutionary nationalism.

While the argument can be made that this could still be a case of the use of RN discourse to manipulate the masses, there are important differences in the timing and in those who currently use this language. RN discourse in Mexico was perhaps last used as a manipulative tool by the PRI during Miguel de la Madrid's administration (1982-1988), which ushered in the first neoliberal reforms. Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) and his team of technocrats all but discarded RN discourse except for special occasions, such as decrying the intervention of foreign actors who insisted in monitoring PRI rigged elections. RN was not the discourse of the PRI in 1994-2000 or the PAN during 2000-2012. The discourse of RN has not been brought back by a political party but by common citizens whose interests, preferences and beliefs have converged with the leadership of the movement, and who regard the social contract emerging from the Revolution and many other achievements as partial, incomplete, and still worth fighting for.

Interviewees' discourse was also filled with similar themes. The goals of the movement as expressed by rank and file interviewees suggested common themes linked to revolutionary nationalism: a just redistribution of wealth, a more egalitarian society, the defense of our natural resources. Responses from some of the intellectuals and politicians of the movement also link the origins of the movement to principles of revolutionary nationalism. *El Fisgón*, a famous political cartoonist and writer, and a member of López Obrador's closest circle, explains that

the movement is very novel and peaceful, it touches people deeply, it has profound roots in the Mexican liberal current of XIX [referring to the Reform carried out by President Juárez], in the social part of the Mexican revolution and in the *Cardenista* movement of the 30s and 40s... I am convinced that the movement recovers demands that gave birth to the Mexican Revolution which were enshrined in the 1917

Constitution and that are still prevalent... we have lost many rights, [for instance] the right to reasonable minimum wages has been destroyed, it violates the spirit of the Constitution [because] minimum wages should be enough to provide for the family... [Another goal is] reconstructing the social pact/contract to have peace and justice.

It seems almost out of place, in this day and age, to link the current *lopezobradorista* struggle to periods of Mexican history when the nation had to be defended. Yet Tere Lupe Reyes, a congresswoman for the PT, responded along these lines:

We would have to include [within the goals of the movement] defending the fatherland (*defender la patria*), which you would think that it was a goal in XIX, not in XXI... We continue to struggle for fair and democratic elections, which may be an absurd demand in other countries but not in ours. We are also defending the strategic resources of the nation such as petroleum, electrical energy, water, biodiversity... in this sense the electoral part of the movement is a path to access these goals, not a demand in itself...

It is striking that these goals could have been verbalized by those who fought wars as far back as Juárez's Reform Wars in the 1870s. Congresswoman Reyes mentioned other goals that also seemed out of time, such as self-sufficiency in the food supply, which is something that Mexico had achieved in the 1960s-1970s. Jacobino, an engineer who works as a consultant and volunteers at the *Casa Benito Juárez*, explains that the movement "retakes the bases of the benefactor state that the PRI tried to build and on which it governed for many years." This attempt to build the benefactor or welfare State, and the forging of the social contract, came out of the Mexican Revolution. But they both have been eroded by the neoliberal system, with the active participation of a representative democracy that has been largely benefitted by the system and has become indifferent to the demands and grievances of democracy at the base. The *lopezobradorista* movement, with representative democracy and democracy at the base engaged in a dialect relation, seeks to establish a hegemonic project of radical democracy that among other projects will reclaim and institutionalize the gains of the Revolution.

Because of these goals and discourse the *lopezobradorista* movement is often criticized and ridiculed by journalists, intellectuals, and pundits from the entire political spectrum,

including people from the Left. Pedro Miguel, a columnist for *La Jornada* and a recurrent speaker at the study circles comments that, during the defense of PEMEX, “the mass media went [with everything] against us, calling us violent, reactionary, antiquated, enemies of progress.” Soledad Loaeza, a political scientist of the Colegio de México and perhaps the intellectual who has best documented the history and trajectory of the PAN, has this to say about the movement:

It is to a certain extent a restoration movement, it is not a movement that looks forward but rather looks backwards... it is a movement that identifies itself more with nationalist and traditional banners of the discourse of the Mexican revolution than with principles of the Left... its goal is the restoration of an interventionist State... to modify the economic policy, surely to expand the public expense...

Marco Rascón is a well-known leftist figure from the 1980s neighborhood movement *Asamblea de Barrios*, and with *Subcomandante Marcos* perhaps one of the harshest critics of López Obrador and the *lopezobradorista* movement. In regards to the mobilization to defend PEMEX, he argues that:

It was a very strange thing, the conservative sectors – the PAN and the neoliberal groups within the PRI – were the ones who had proposals to reform the country, while the Left, under the discourse of resistance and especially the *lopezobradorista* discourse, became the defender of the past, and the conservatives were the ones who wanted to transform and generate changes in the country... Now it appears that the conservative sectors stole the concept of change from us [the Left], and now we [the Left] laugh at and make fun of changes, we refuse to change... Because at the end of the day it was as if Calderón’s proposal was the only one, and we were against it, we were defending that PEMEX remained the way it was... the PEMEX of the PRI which was absolutely corrupted...

A few key points may be rescued from these excerpts. First, Rascón’s comments illustrate the misinformation conveyed in most attacks against López Obrador’s. He and his team did not advocate leaving PEMEX in the same situation; it was *lopezobradorista* legislators the ones who pushed for provisions in the reform that would take power away from the corrupt union, and to establish a fair taxation system that would allow for its capitalization. All these proposals were rejected by the PRI and the PAN, who counted on the corruption and clientelism of the union to keep a hold on PEMEX. Second, the comments also illustrate the type of attacks

that López Obrador and the movement are subjected to by members of the Left. *El Fisgón* sums it up in the following fashion: “There are sectors in the Left that do not want to understand that López Obrador effectively constitutes a reasonable and well-reasoned option to the neoliberal barbarianism. For some he is not sufficiently leftist, but for the oligarchies he [sure] is.” Third, the position taken by the media, the conservatives, and even members of the Left to criticize the *lopezobradorista* movement on the basis of its posited reactionary and backward positions speak volumes of the pervasive nature of the neoliberal discourse and its promise of modernity. It also speaks volumes about how good a job neoliberalism did at discrediting the discourse of revolutionary nationalism. While it is true that PEMEX became a symbol of corruption, largely under the complaisant eye of the PRI and later on of the PAN, the truth is that oil production under PEMEX has sustained Mexico’s economic development – public education, healthcare, infrastructure, and so on – for decades. There is no doubt that the privatization of PEMEX stroke a nationalist cord, but just as importantly, *lopezobradoristas* understood that to hand it over to the private sector was equivalent to economic suicide. This economic argument was clearly articulated at the debates in the summer of 2008.

The nationalization of PEMEX, combined with other achievements of the Revolution, facilitated a certain level of welfare that remained in place for a sufficiently long period of time, and reached a sufficiently large number of people, to provide the opportunity for popular appropriation of the revolutionary nationalist ideology, laws and institutions (Aiken 1996). We perceive the symbolic value of the political and social components of the Revolution (Powell 1996) in the most salient themes in interviewees’ responses about the goals of the *lopezobradorista* movement. The need to protect the poorest and most vulnerable people, the need for a just redistribution of wealth and an egalitarian society, and the need to stop the

neoliberal looting, defend our natural resources and use them as leverage for development, clearly embody the ideology of revolutionary nationalism.

Finally, the point of *lopezobradorismo* being a restoration, backward movement merits a more nuanced reflection. I have argued that neoliberalism is an encompassing political project that was established widely, and especially in underdeveloped and less developed countries, as a project of modernity to replace the old system of state-centered development project, which was perceived as utterly corrupt, inefficient, and exhausted. Only a few years later, however, the neoliberal system began to show its limitations: rampant corruption, increased poverty and inequality, and minimal economic growth. A decade later, the economic collapse of countries like Mexico and Argentina showed the exhaustion of the neoliberal model beyond any level of exhaustion that the state-centered model might have shown after decades of sustained economic growth. Three decades later, the signs of exhaustion of the neoliberal model in Europe are even worse.

I also have argued that neoliberalism is a political project and a powerful ideology in a similar fashion to fascism, which in a certain historical analysis was also introduced as a forward looking political project in Italy. But the first fascist government did not have an economic project beyond reducing the role of the State in the economy (Corner 1979:241), and what emerged was a very unhealthy, regressive and undemocratic capitalism (ibid p. 267), a system that also created positions of privilege and largely depended on them (ibid p. 240); the combination of these things caused terrible economic stagnation. The similarities of the economic projects of both neoliberalism and fascism are striking. Mexico and Bolivia certainly can relate to them. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the *lopezobradorista*

movement and the *coordinadora* seek to fight a political regime that is theoretically forward looking but deeply anti-human in nature by reclaiming rights and demands that may seem a thing of the past, but that are actually progressive in the face of how neoliberal policies have caused social conditions to regress. This does not mean that these movements propose to go back to the way things were before neoliberalism, as if nothing had been learned from past mistakes, like many detractors argue. The dialectic between democracy at the base and representative democracy that these movements are trying to build, which would be a radical improvement over relations of clientelism, paternalism, and subordination that characterized the interaction of democracy at the base and representative democracy in the past, is an example of how the movement would do things differently.

6.6.2 *La coordinadora*

The situation is different in Bolivia, where it is likely that the uncompleted Revolution of 1952 (Malloy 1970) led people to experience the process differently, both qualitative and quantitatively. And yet there is a certain “political imagery inherited” from the 1952 Revolution (Gutiérrez 2009:171) that influences the demands made by even the most autonomous social organizations. For the *coordinadora* in the 2000 water war, the theme that most resonated from revolutionary nationalism was the struggle to liberate Bolivia from the anti-national elements, to let go of the tutelage of foreign powers (Rubin 2000).

Several letters of support from individuals and organizations sent to the *coordinadora* during the water war strongly condemned the privatization of SEMAPA at the hands of a “transnational company,” deploring the fact that the government defended “foreign interests” at the expense of the “nation’s own interests” and “obeyed the orders” of the United States. Others

expressed disappointment at the “conservative mentality” that believed that development was only possible with “foreign capital” that drowns the country in debt, and at the World Bank that was trying to impose the privatization of SEMAPA. The words in quotation marks, taken from these letters, illustrate the type of discourse expected from the nationalist sentiment described above. The majority of my interviewees in 2004 also had expressed outrage at the privatization of water, but the fact that it was being privatized by a foreign company seemed to add insult to injury. Abramham Grandydier of Asica Sur put in a succinct way “that it [the privatizing company] was foreign... that hurt.” In August of 2004, at a political rally in Cochabamba, some of the young members of the *coordinadora* had dressed in costumes of vampires and vultures to represent the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Simultaneously, the *coordinadora* was praised as “honest, patriotic, and knowing the meaning of democracy.” Another letter from the Association of Manufacturing Retirees of Cochabamba recalled the many struggles that they (the retirees) had fought in the past to “defend the fatherland,” comparing their patriotic actions to those of the *coordinadora* by saying that “they also engaged in actions to defend the natural riches of the nation, seeking national independence in socioeconomic and political aspects.” In their Communique No. 21 dated April 24, 2000, the *coordinadora* stated that

“... we want to build a present and a future different from [the one built by] those who govern us and their foreign partners... We [people of Cochabamba] want water, abundant and cheap water, we want to manage and administer the water services in a transparent and honest fashion, and we want the poor to be the first to obtain this right”

What the above communique conveys continues to define the struggles that the *coordinadora* has been involved in until present times, struggles that go beyond water and articulate themselves to larger issues related to the environment and quality of life.

7. Conclusions

I have shown that these dramatically different movements have converged on similar structural outcomes: organized, mobilized and politically educated movements rooted in civil society that seek the greater common good by changing the dynamics of State-civil society relationships in ways that will generate greater accountability of political actors and thus radically transform politics. They are doing so by generating new dialectic between democracy at the base and representative democracy, and thus developing status as anti-passive revolutions.

I have also shown how these movements differ in a variety of important ways. One crucial difference is the view that members of these movements have of electoral politics and representative democracy. While for several members of the *coordinadora* participation in electoral politics seems to exclude social mobilization, a type of either-or situation, members of the *lopezobradorista* movement see it as a situation where both are complementary. This difference in perspective may have to do with the fact that members of the *coordinadora* have been disappointed by the performance of the MAS government. Having the actual task of governing creates a difficult situation, because clearly governments face constraints that civil society normally may not be aware of, and this may lead to a more limited dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base. This illustrates the importance of communication, which appears to have been problematic in the Bolivian case. *Lopezobradoristas* see electoral politics as complementary with social mobilization, and it is clear that they have developed a comparatively stronger dialectic between representative democracy and democracy at the base. The strength of this dialectic, however, has yet to pass the test of governing at the national level.

I find it necessary to expand on the issue of the project of radical democracy and the limits of the merely possible. Laclau & Mouffe suggest that true projects of radical democracy avoid utopianisms and recognize the structural limits – the economy, the logic of state apparatuses, and so on – that they may be against. The authors argue that they also avoid falling into the situation of accepting only the changes that appear possible at the moment. When the latter happens, even the most revolutionary, the most radically transformational projects have fallen into the trap of what the authors call the “positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project.” In this day and age, when the dichotomy revolution/reform still conjures caricatures of violence and chaotic change⁷ versus orderly bureaucratic maneuvering resulting in the maintenance of the status quo, I believe that the project of radical democracy is an appropriate yardstick to measure revolutionary projects, understanding revolution as radical or profound transformation, against mere reformist projects.

From here, I believe that we can safely conclude that a revolutionary project is a project of radical democracy when, once utopianisms have been put aside and structural limits have been recognized, important changes within the project are executed in the immediate or short term, while simultaneous work takes place to create the conditions that will allow for the remaining changes of the project to be executed. This, however, is not something that can be carried out only at the level of formal politics, or by representative democracy. The moment that the anti-passive revolution achieves power, and representative democracy is posed to carry on the project of radical democracy, the participation of the rank and file, or democracy at the base, becomes even more crucial, providing the strength, the muscle, and the leverage needed by representative

⁷ I am not denying that this happens, of course, as the 2011 uprising in several parts of the world, and in Bolivia itself during 2000-2005, show.

democracy to carry on the project. Furthermore, the active participation of democracy at the base will be even more necessary to keep representative democracy true to the democratic project when political representatives inevitably face the temptations of holding power and/or face powerful obstacles to the project of deepening democracy or pressure to derail it.

Key questions emerge from the above paragraph: How will these decisions be made? Who will decide what utopian and merely possible is, what changes will take place first and what groundwork will be laid out to carry on the project of radical democracy? These decisions must be made jointly by both democracy at the base and representative democracy, since it is a project of an entire historic bloc. At this point we can appreciate the crucial importance of structures where shared deliberation takes place and that facilitate the enforcement of commitments made by such deliberations. We can also appreciate that perhaps the most important aspect of the relationship forged between democracy at the base and representative democracy is communication. Communication must be open, honest and fluid in both directions, so that democracy at the base is not merely receiving updates of what is being decided at the top. Mechanisms and structures of communication and deliberation must be in place and functioning long before the anti-passive revolution achieves power. Representative democracy cannot separate itself from democracy at the base, and must not try to absorb it or neutralize it, and democracy at the base must not try to destroy or do away with representative democracy. The support of a democracy at the base that remains strong, mobilized, independent, and highly critical is the most important leverage for a representative democracy that faces a hostile situation, because its support cannot be assumed or taken for granted. This means that the powers that be cannot push representative democracy into accepting changes that may not be part of the project and assume that democracy at the base will merely follow suit. In short, a strong,

organized, independent and critical democracy at the base eliminates, or at least largely decreases, the risk of representative democracy's cooptation or submission, because the latter must respond to democracy at the base. It is also a deterrent against a forceful imposition of a different project.

These movements also show the crucial importance of spaces of solidarity where common citizens can: 1) freely discuss grievances and demands and where joint solutions can be found; and, 2) learn, get informed, become politically educated and find people with similar ideologies and or political interests. These spaces have been the *fabriles* federation and the *escuela del pueblo* in the Bolivia case, the *casas del movimiento*, the study circles and the brigades in the Mexican case, although there is the potential for the emergence of others. The accomplishments of the two movements have been largely facilitated by these structures. They have fostered the political engagement of democracy at the base, and in some cases have been stepping stones for more assertive participation. This is particularly important in the Mexican case, where many participants began with little or no experience in political participation and collective action.

While these spaces emerged separately and independently from electoral politics, at various points and on certain occasions they also have been a link to connect democracy at the base with representative democracy. This speaks of the importance that these movements are placing on developing a relationship of mutual support between democracy at the base and representative democracy, without compromising their independence. That the *coordinadora* is participating in this fashion is even more remarkable, considering the misgivings it had prior to the election of Evo Morales, the disappointing experience it had with the government's

cooptation of many of its members, and the disappointing results of the social-technical commission in the Ministry of water.

In his 2009 book *Pensar el Estado y la Sociedad: Desafios Actuales* (Thinking the State and Society: Current Challenges) Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues precisely that the challenge today is “to invent new forms of democracy without refusing the principles of liberal democracy... to widen democracy without rejecting the electoral aspect... and to develop new forms of participatory democracy” (ibid p. 31). De Sousa also suggests the need for an articulation between social movements and political parties, but argues that prior to this articulation political parties “must transform themselves from within” (ibid p. 33).

I argue that the spaces of solidarity that these two movements have created have the potential to do precisely what de Sousa Santos suggests. So far they have fostered political engagement, solidarity and organization, and in many cases they have been stepping stones for more assertive participation. They have also functioned as points of connection between representative democracy and democracy at the base. These spaces should remain active and engaged on regular bases, so that they gradually transform themselves into spaces for proactive collective action rather than becoming or remaining spaces for reactive mobilization. They should continue to provide links with representative democracy, not in a way that they become spokespeople for particular candidates, but instead to foster the dialect of representative democracy and democracy at the base beyond the electoral moment.

The two cases provide examples of seeking new forms of participatory democracy. The *coordinadora*'s reclaiming of the public water system in 2000, and the establishment of the social-technical commission in the Ministry of Water in 2006, are remarkable actions in this

direction. In Mexico, the defense of PEMEX that the brigades engaged in is also an example. These actions show the determination of common citizens to have a voice in the decision making process about public issues, it shows that democracy at the base does no longer think that these issues are of exclusive concern of representative democracy.

But these cases also show that democracy at the base has indeed shown more willingness and creativity to democratize the political system, while political parties have lagged behind or refused to participate in this democratization process, hence the difficulty of articulation between social movements and political parties. This was very clear in the case of Mexico, where the rift between the NI faction in the PRD and the *lopezobradorista* movement became wider as the movement grew and members made very clear that they were in this struggle not to provide votes to the party but to democratize politics. Likewise, the social-technical commission did not work because representative democracy had yet to transform itself and be on the same page as democracy at the base. Being on the same page does not guarantee agreement or that the tension between civil society centered-politics and State-centered politics will disappear, but it may allow for this tension to be resolved in creative rather than destructive ways.

Finally, the themes of revolutionary nationalism that echo in these two movements should make us seriously reconsider and analyze in a critical way the causes that led to the demise of strong state institutions and the role of the state as a guiding economic motor. I am not advocating an uncritical return to the past, where the omnipresent State created the conditions for the perception and exercising of political work as a source of personal wealth, as well as the conditions for clientelistic, corporatist and corrupt relations with civil society that became entrenched and prevail to these days. Neither of these two movements is advocating a return to

this past; recall that in fact some members voiced strong rejection of this, particularly Bolivian interviewees. Nevertheless members in both movements realize (even if they do not verbalize it in such terms) that there are goals from prior struggles that were not quite achieved and that are still worth fighting for: the defense of national natural resources, a just redistribution of wealth, a social contract that includes everyone, the right of indigenous people to autonomy, and so on. These goals cannot be achieved within the profoundly anti-human nature of the neoliberal system, they require strong institutions designed and built jointly by a strong, organized civil society and a strong solidaristic State.

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